



Female, grief and Romanticism: a reflexive art history approach to a widow sculpture

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Abstract. This paper aims to reflexively tackle a specific artwork: *The Widow*, the most renowned, yet under-studied, sculpture of António Teixeira Lopes, a prominent artist of the Portuguese nineteenth century. Therefore, the analysis of this piece, based on several inquiring procedures believed useful to all art historians, is converted into an epistemological exercise. Firstly, the Romantic sensibility is characterised, alongside the ponderment of the widow's representational allure. Women and death's perception in the nineteenth century is thus brought into question. Moreover, the social condition of widows and their identity codification is considered so that the relationship between reality and representation is critically appraised. Secondly, the focus shifts to the sculptor himself and his creative process. At the time living in Paris, his potential connections with death experiences, his professional goals and the pressure of the artistic environment contribute to explain Teixeira Lopes' selection of this subject. Finally, the sculpture itself is thoroughly examined, questioning every formal choice and its meaning, searching for secular and contemporary visual stimuli which could have deliberately or unconsciously interacted within the creative process. To conclude, the need to approach an artwork simultaneously as unique and as a historical object in its turn chronologically transversal is stressed.

Keywords: Widowhood; Romanticism; sculpture; art history methodologies; António Teixeira Lopes.

[es] Mujer, dolor y Romanticismo: una aproximación reflexiva de la historia del arte a una escultura de una viuda

Resumen. Este artículo analiza pormenorizadamente la pieza escultórica *La Viuda* de António Teixeira Lopes, que, aunque es una de las más famosas de este autor ha sido, a su vez y de manera sorprendente, una de las menos estudiadas hasta la fecha. Así, hay que señalar que en este texto no sólo se ofrece un estudio analítico de la citada pieza, sino que se presenta también con una visión epistemológica de la historia del arte. *La Viuda* se caracteriza por su sensibilidad romántica por la elección del tema, del que destaca la consideración de la condición social de las viudas y la codificación de su identidad, pero, al mismo tiempo y de manera crítica, se evalúa la relación entre arte y realidad. Así, se justifica que esta obra, que fue concebida en París, tenga un significado especial en relación a los episodios biográficos del autor y su relación con la muerte, así como sus inquietudes profesionales y circunstanciales del entorno artístico que explican la selección del tema. Para completar este análisis, en este artículo la escultura es examinada a fondo, cuestionándose las autoras el significado de cada opción formal, buscando estímulos visuales que pueden haber actuado deliberada o inconscientemente en el proceso creativo. Para concluir, se enfatiza la necesidad de abordar una obra de arte como única y, simultáneamente, como un objeto histórico cronológicamente transversal.

Palabras clave: Viudez; Romanticismo; escultura; metodologías de la historia del arte; António Teixeira Lopes.

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1. Introduction

Every artwork tests the one who intends to decode it, that tries to pin down its interpretative key. Discarding the ingenuous belief that ultimate answers can be found, art historians ask questions which in their view act as devices to better understand the history and the meaning of the work. The challenge lies in the questions themselves. It is not a matter of their degree of suitability since ultimately there are no wrong enquiries. It is about the degree of insight achieved by each interrogation, as well as the number and variety of queries that an art historian chooses to embrace. Questions, for better or worse, have no end, thus guaranteeing that an artwork is never definitely studied. Different researchers, within diverse timeframes or/and with dissimilar backgrounds will, literally, experience the artwork in a distinct manner, hence pursuing non-identical lines of examination. Furthermore, the limits of the answers must be taken into consideration. The boundaries between the fruitful testing of an interpretative hypothesis and overinterpretation are fragile. There is no manual book to avoid the latter, apart from being aware of the risk – even if at times flirting with it – and critically examining both the outcome of an investigative route and the operativeness of the question in its origin. Paraphrasing Heinrich Wölfflin, we would argue that not every question is possible at all times (Fernie, 2011, p. 136).

The present article relies on this very same exercise. It will present the different routes explored in order to shed light on a specific sculpture: *The Widow* (a plaster from 1889, executed during an academic period in Paris and carved in marble in 1893), the most awarded and famous artwork of António Teixeira Lopes (1866-1942), one of the prominent sculptors of the Portuguese nineteenth century. Simultaneously, the underlying reflexive process of self-monitoring and scrutiny, taken as far as possible, of the viability of the proposed explanations will be exposed. Henceforth, the methodological nature of this text can hopefully be useful to other researchers who study different artistic disciplines, authors and epochs.

The method chosen for the study of this sculpture comprehended the consideration of the following aspects: the reasons that explain the widow's attractiveness as a theme for Romanticism; the changes of the perception of death in the nineteenth century; the social condition of widows and the codification of mourning at the time; the relationship of António Teixeira Lopes with the subject of death and, particularly, with widowhood; the professional goals of the Portuguese sculptor and the Parisian artistic milieu which surrounded him; the creation process set in motion by the author; the multitude of formal references, from different times and media, which this sculpture may invoke. Since the research questions interacted with each other, their analysis was thus an organic procedure, with a fluidity similar to the one that the diverse interpretation levels distinguished by Panofsky also bared. The artificial

sequence adopted in the writing outcome displayed in the next pages comes from the need to clarify the examination process.

The attention paid to the historical context did not relegate the artwork to a secondary position. The study of the formal treatment of the sculpture implied careful consideration regarding its horizon of possibilities: the cluster of potential different visual stimuli that belonged to multiple art media and time frames which could have interacted within the creation process. Our research approach is henceforth indebted to Aby Warburg's recovery by visual studies theorists, in particular Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood's emphasis on the "plural temporality of a work of art" (2010, p. 7) and Georges Didi Huberman's position regarding what he proposes as the impure temporality of every work, since "in each historical object all ages meet, collide, melt into each other in their forms, branch out, or overlap one another" (2000, p. 43).

2. The widow in Romanticism

Neoclassicism and Romanticism are no longer perceived as opposed cultural movements (Rosenthal, 2008). The classic nature of Romanticism as well as the development of key Romantic sensibility aspects from the seventeenth century on, such as emotion, sentiment and spirituality, have been increasingly underlined by scholarship (Berger, 2009). This awareness should be especially acute when studying a sculpture seeing that, in the West, this artistic discipline was notably indebted to the legacy of classical antiquity and maintained the same phases of the manufacturing process largely unchanged until the second half of the nineteenth century.

In parallel with the necessary questioning of the fixed and impermeable character of stylistic labels, one should acknowledge that changes do occur. In fact, variations on the artist's identity and role, his relationship with art demand, the perception of the ultimate purpose of an artwork, the height of each genre, the refocus of the attention on certain subjects to the detriment of others, and the evolution of technology and technique differentiate the artistic production of each epoch.

Romanticism, as a critique to modernity that fully developed in the nineteenth century (Löwy & Sayre, 2001), gave a new emphasis to emotion, although it cannot simply be regarded as a plain anti-rationalist reaction. Sharing with Neoclassicism the same disregard for what was perceived as the Rococo frivolity, Romantics proposed to go further than logic and reason. They chose to pursue an inner truth, which in their view could only be reached by soul-searching, while granting personal significance and interpretation to every subject (Rosenthal, 2008, p. 49). Individualism was not just a way to treat a certain topic, but it interfered in its selection too. Escapism, isolation, solitude, intimate melancholy, the progressive absence of idealisation, an appreciation for a non-catalogued and undefinable beauty, as well as the shift from mythology or celebrated historical figures to common people struggling with common dramas document this thematic relocation (Heath & Boreham, 1999, pp. 15-18). In addition, the questioning of the Enlightenment normative worldview drove the artist to seek the once marginalised side of reality and human behaviour. This led to an attentional transference from heroes to victims (Heath & Boreham, 1999, p. 44), from the easiness of a pedagogical communication to the realization

of its failure (Löwy & Sayre, 2001, p. 42), from role models to the bizarre, mad and sordid (Vaughan, 1994, pp. 244-258). Finally, the artist embraced an engagement with contemporary issues, not by adopting an educative stand or a position of social critique, but by believing he was particularly well equipped to translate the modern dramas.

The widow matches all the aforementioned thematic preferences. Her gender was sufficient to grant her certain features – mysteriousness, unfathomableness, overly sensitiveness and sentimentality, prone to passion and madness (Ariés & Duby, 1990, p. 125) – which, although not classified as positive became, precisely for this reason, regarded as interesting dimensions to explore in art. Therefore, the vast fascination with women in the nineteenth century was absolutely compatible with their discrimination and their maintenance in a submissive position in relation to man.

In the nineteenth century, the experience and perception of death changes. Apparently more intimate, mourning is nevertheless more exaggerated, an emotional turmoil with no precedent. However, a major shift is found on the greater struggle to accept one's death which, above all, implies a physical separation and the deprivation of the other. Consequently, as Philippe Ariès emphasised, “the death of the self-had lost its meaning. The fear of death, born of the fantasies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was transferred from the self to the other, the loved one” (2004, p. 45).

The figure of the widow blends the concepts of womanhood and death, thus becoming even more attractive to Romanticism. Understood as a social anomaly, her status required the observance of rules of conduct and rituals, in order to cope with this new identity and make it clear and visible to society (Bremmer & Van Den Bosch, 1995, pp. 236-237). She was perceived as a mismatch, a member of the unfortunate of the world (Bremmer & Van Den Bosch, 1995, p. 6), a hybrid character between life and death, a soul shattered by the separation of a loved one, helpless and alienated in her own world of sorrow. Furthermore, widows represented a contemporary social plight which the development of instruments for demography studies began to account for and demanding, as the welfare state asserted itself, a more structured response.

Although she is not a Romantic invention, in the sense of an absolutely original appearance in the western nineteenth century, it is within this chronology and geographic span that she becomes a stereotyped character with a significant presence in the visual arts. In fact, until then, the portrayed widows always referred to specific women with a particular name. Furthermore, previous depictions of this theme had the husband as their core. Even in the absence of a concomitant representation of the male spouse (a common feature in this genre), the goal of a widow's portrait in Early modern Europe was the husband's commemoration and the perpetuation of his memory (Helt, 2003; Levy, 2003a; Levy, 2003b).

Romanticism, despite assuming the important absence of the husband (reflected in the woman's pathos), placed the emphasis on the widow's emotional distress, which became a topic with its own worth and legitimate space. The purpose of this mourning female in the visual arts – not a specified woman, now potentially any female facing similar circumstances – was not to serve as a vehicle for the transmission of a moral exemplary conduct towards death, exhibiting a neoclassical superhuman strength which would allow her, for instance, to

immediately reassume her maternal role to her full capacity. The Romantic sensibility dwells on the suffering which asks for the fellow-feeling or sympathy of the viewer. It explores the irrational paroxysm, the senseless event, the over-emotional response and the alienated attitude resulting from a complete discredit of the laws of reason and justice that should govern reality. However, notwithstanding the transformations that the nineteenth century brought to the widow's representation in the visual arts, the perception of the woman as an inferior being – from science to politics – persisted. Therefore, as in previous centuries, it is the husband's death that dissolves the family, it is his passing away that is depicted and/or motivates the widow's portrait. On the other hand, the woman dies alone, discreetly, old and as a burden on her children (Ariés & Duby, 1990, p. 129). In light of this, widowhood presents, as Allison Levy stresses, a complex and complicated relationship between reality and representation (2003, p. 5).

3. The *Widow* of António Teixeira Lopes

3.1 The interpretative paths opened by the subject choice

In 1889, the year of the Universal Exhibition in Paris, António Teixeira Lopes mentions for the first time his undergoing work on *The Widow* (1968, p. 69). He had been in Paris, at the time the epicentre of European artistic life, since 1885, in order to improve his sculpting skills by attending the Academie des Beaux Arts and frequenting the rich *milieu* of museums, salons and cafes, which he later remembers as crucial educational complements in his *Memories*, written from 1917 on. Born in Vila Nova de Gaia, a small town in the North of Portugal, he took the first steps in modelling practices at his father's workshop, also a sculptor who, between 1864 and 1865, was himself a student in Paris. Teixeira Lopes completed his artistic formation in 1885 at School of Fine Arts in Oporto and left the same year for Paris with a loan and the financial support of his family and friends.

The Widow, a plaster depicting a woman and her baby, was submitted to and accepted for the Salon of 1890, where it was praised among critics and awarded with the third-place medal. The marble version of this artwork, with just a few small details altered, was completed in 1893 and exhibited in the Salon where it “did not go unnoticed” (Lopes, 1968, p. 135). Although Teixeira Lopes was not particularly satisfied with this marble which, in his eyes, fell short and did not exceed the previous plaster (1968, p. 134), it nonetheless received the first-place gold medal in an International Exhibition in Berlin in 1896, when the sculptor had already returned to Portugal.



Figures 1 and 2. *The Widow*. Left: plaster, 1889, 156x94x105cm, House Museum of Teixeira Lopes. Right: marble, 1893, 154x93,5cm, House Museum of Teixeira Lopes. National Museum of Contemporary Art. Authors' photography.



Figures 3 and 4. *The Widow*, marble, 1893, 154x93,5cm, National Museum of Contemporary Art. Authors' photography.

Despite its success, this sculpture occupies, in comparison to other works, a very small place in his *Memories*, which can be regarded as strange for two reasons. Firstly, for him, the Salon was seen as *the* international artistic validation arena and the major preoccupation for any artist leaving in Paris. Every participation in the Salon throughout his career is henceforth thoroughly recorded. Secondly, the artist was keen to write about his creation process³, being particularly keen on documenting it when the work demanded a model with specific features or a combination of body parts from different models. Even though he usually solely explains the works that were commissioned, the same behaviour could be expected regarding one which received several foreign praises. In the case of *The Widow*, a piece of high responsibility, the paragraphs dedicated to the work do not relate the sculpture itself, its expressive intentions and goals, to the detailed description of the model, a joyful and well-built, cheerful, naive and feminine Roman woman, named Teresa, who was living at the time in Paris with her husband, also an Italian model (Lopes, 1968, p. 69).

The various references that the sculptor makes to the light-hearted nature of Teresa – always bubbling around during session breaks in the atelier, at Rue Denfert-Rochereau – should not be interpreted as contradictory in the face of the subject that the artist had in mind: a woman at one of her most tragic life moments. In truth, this procedure was not only common, as it also reveals Teixeira Lopes' creation method. From the model, came the anatomical characteristics which, for the sculptor, better served to depict a certain character or situation. By condemning the artists who strictly directed their models to be in a static position for hours, he encouraged his models to walk freely, talk and gesticulate around in his atelier. The quest for the truth and sincerity which Teixeira Lopes, as a typical romantic artist, pursued side by side with his disregard for the “school conventions” and the “established methods” (Lopes, 1968, p. 138), was still valid despite the use of one, two or three models – when the work was not a portrait - for their physical appearance, so that the sculpture could be credible, as if the marble had life itself. Nonetheless, the technique, the descriptive accuracy and the right model could only persuade. To move was something different. In his opinion, when the work was not the depiction of a specific person, the inner truth which gave the model the right expression, capable of moving the viewer, came from the artist himself. To produce art was not copying, but “translating” the truth, for the sculptor's heart should “take a role in the work” (Lopes, 1968, p. 104, 195). Therefore, empathy must be felt with the theme or, in his own words, “in order to make the sculpture of a saint it is indispensable to be a religious person” (Lopes, 1968, p. 164).

Faced with the imperative identification between the artist and its subject, one should wonder what was happening in the sculptor's life that could justify the inclination for a widow's representation at this moment. The death of five of Teixeira Lopes' younger brothers (they were a total of eleven children) and his very close connection with his mourning mother turned the artist, from an earlier age, into someone with added sensitivity to the drama of losing a loved one. Moreover, the mourning of a child was, from the second half of the nineteenth century, identical to

³ Query to the sculptor's own personal documentation was denied since the House Museum of Teixeira Lopes has not yet inventoried. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the possibility that there may be, in particular within the artist's personal correspondence, information which in the future may shed light on the manufacturing process as well as the choice of the widow as the theme.

that of an adult (Ariés & Duby, 1990, p. 161). Parallel to his domestic experience of the loss of a loved one, days after he arrived in Paris, in 1885, the funeral of the key literary figure of the century, Victor Hugo, took place, leaving a strong impression on the Portuguese artist. These contacts with grief made him certainly susceptible to the subject – indeed, his first submission to the Salon, in 1887, was an orphan –, but did not necessarily determined the thematic selection of a widow years later.

One must thus look to 1889, the year he started *The Widow*. In February, António Soares dos Reis (1847-1889), his most significant Portuguese sculpture professor at Oporto, killed himself in his atelier, leaving a wife and two children. Although Teixeira Lopes did not consider him a friend, they knew each other on a personal level since they were neighbours in Vila Nova de Gaia. In addition, Teixeira Lopes' father was responsible for modelling the mask and one hand of the deceased. This death was deeply lamented in Teixeira Lopes' writings (1968, p. 65) and it is plausible to deduce that his family kept track of the struggling widow, Amélia Macedo Soares dos Reis. Her situation certainly moved António Teixeira Lopes. But was it responsible for this artwork's choice of topic? There is no evidence to support either answer. In this manner, the link with his personal experience remains in the sphere of speculation.

On the other hand, the way Teixeira Lopes characterised the Paris Salon, as well as his need and eagerness to assert himself in this artistic *milieu*, could have been responsible for the selection of an impactful theme capable of engaging the middle-class public and defying the lingering expectations and notions of high art. A melancholic and absorbed ordinary woman facing a particular, yet universal, drama was not the most suitable subject for a commercial destination, as the artist would later realise. His attempts to produce and sell a series of bibelots reproducing *The Widow* in order to mitigate his financial difficulties were met with rejection due to the sadness of the theme. The bourgeois buyer, as he later recalls, enjoyed cheerful themes and discarded any pain or misery (Lopes, 1968, p. 114). The commercial success of an artwork did not necessarily mean thriving in the Salon. And between the two, there seemed to have been no alternative in the eyes of an artist committed to triumph in the Parisian *crème de la crème* artistic showroom. In fact, he considered the Salon a platform where the artist's drive was to become noticed, in such a way that, if necessity arises, he would put aside his own "temperament and consciousness" (1968, p. 106) in order to produce something that could stand out for its size or subject. The *Widow* could do just that.

The strategical nature that stems from this line of thought seems to invalidate the pursuit of the truth systematically defended by Teixeira Lopes as the only path for the absolute artist. However, we must come to terms with the puzzling, ambivalent and often multi-layered nature of both the artist and the artwork of the Romantic era. Whereas the coexistence of antagonistic elements within the career of one sole artist, or in the making of a single piece, is not exclusive of this cultural movement, it is their presence, side by side with a strong longing for genuineness, self-expression, sincerity and truth in art that distinguishes the nineteenth century (Barker, 2012; Heath & Boreham, 1999). But to label this duality as an incongruity would be an overreach. The reunion of conflicting dimensions was perceived as a route for grasping reality as a whole, a unified/organic yet multisided world, whose translation in art was a common goal among Romantic artists. For its part, the capture of spontaneity, a virtue in itself in the light of this era's sensibility (Ferber, 2010, p.

17), would very often resort to a theatrical pose or situation, even if the theme – folk people, for instance – was itself simple, devoid of any pretence or pomposity. Be that as it may, it would not be an overstatement to point out the development of conventions (or, at least, some overused compositional strategies) regarding the treatment of the intended capture of naturalness, randomness and authenticity in an artwork⁴, which, in turn, affected the success of the work amongst the public or the general demand. In the eyes of the Romantics, the consistency of their mantra was not affected by the composite and/or artificial layout of an artwork, nor by the awareness of or consonance with the art world procedures.

3.2 The interpretative paths opened by formal features

One of the most fruitful exercises to put into practice when studying a specific artwork – ideally by people both with and without art history education – would be to confront it with other artworks. The profound proximity between the work and the researcher who studies it for a long period of time makes the latter more susceptible to the disregard of obvious features. On the other hand, it opens the door to overinterpretation, driving the too familiar observer to see things and to recognise connections that were never there to begin with. Each conversation with a fresh viewer can henceforth act as a recalibrating device by questioning our most basic assumptions, in addition to other more predictable analytical advantages that concern the awareness of different audiences, layers of meaning and effects on the spectator that one single artwork can have.

When seeing *The Widow* for the first time, one immediately identifies the figure of a mother with her baby. In its turn, an eye educated in the field may recognize, on a second level of meaning, according to a Panofskyan model, a Madonna and Child. This connection is particularly meaningful since the genitalia are not visible and were not represented by the sculptor. The exposed breast, which the child eagerly tries to reach, is critical to identify the type of relationship between the two. All the compositional lines cross each other at this body part, stressing its importance. However, it is exactly the way the woman endures breastfeeding that soon reveals that the connection between the two figures is distressed. While the mother's arms and chest are leaning towards the child, the rest of her body adopts a different direction. In this manner, by motionlessly moving away from her infant, the woman's detachment is made clear to us. Her absorbed posture is aggravated in the marble version since the sculptor suppressed the tears present in the plaster, slightly lifted her face and half-opened her lips, reinforcing her sense of suspension in time. The mother's disinterested look is buried in her inner world, even alienated from one of the most primitive and primordial links, the connection between mother and child. This causes discomfort to the viewer since it is not the expected behaviour of a maternal figure and even less of the Virgin. In a sculpture made in a time where a woman was still regarded as being, above all, a Madonna (Duby & Perrot, 1994, p. 146), this affirmation of the female as a widow challengingly overcomes her identity as a mother, even in the presence of a crying baby.

⁴ For example, the construction of a distracted attitude in a female portrait, vaguely looking at the horizon, apparently unaware of our presence.



Figure 5 (left). *The Widow* (detail), marble, 1893, 154x93,5cm, National Museum of Contemporary Art. Authors' photography.

Figure 6 (right). *The Widow* (detail), plaster, 1889, 156x94x105cm, House Museum of Teixeira Lopes. Authors' photography.

While looking for a justification for the mother's apparent absence, the empathic spectator's gaze turns to the crying, naked and helpless baby, regarded as unfairly demanding for a kind of attention that should not have to be claimed. The realization that the mother in question is a widow can either come after the consideration of possible explanations or simply by reading the title nearby, a procedure that became an increasingly automatic and unconscious part of the experience of an artwork. Despite the way the explanatory key for the strangeness of the work is obtained, two outcomes should be stressed. Firstly, the viewer's empathy finally reaches the mother and the harmony between both of them is re-established. Secondly – following a very Romantic way of producing an artwork and conditioning its relationship with the public – when the spectator deciphers what is not obvious or emotionally linear in the sculpture, he or she experiences inward gratification. As William Vaughan observes in the writings of the nineteenth century scholar and critic A. W. Schlegel, Romantics valued “a special way of responding to a work of art, finding in its appeal the suggestion of a deeper and otherwise unknowable reality behind what can be perceived” (1994, p. 11).

The aforementioned harmony re-gained between *The Widow* and the spectator in light of the awareness of the emotional drama in progress is, however, shaken when furthering the analysis. What is completely valid and justifiable in our 21st-century worldview – the detachment of a mother from her child after learning of her husband's death, a state of alienation or automatic behaviour in response to a traumatic event – was not commonly exploited in painting and sculpture of the nineteenth century. This raises the possibility either of a personal contact with a mourning mother (due to the death of a husband or even one of her children, as his own mother) or the report of a very close observation of such a painful moment, in which Teixeira Lopes could have based his work. In fact, although the nineteenth century embraces the theme of the death of a loved one, when the representation of a widow includes her

child, despite the sadness or despair of the former, the presence of the latter is still normally acknowledged, as if a mother's self-denial could overcome any hardship.

That being said, the nineteenth century celebrates the primacy of romantic love between a man and a woman, the kind of profound connection which can turn an emotional shut down due to the death of a loved one into something reasonable. António Teixeira Lopes knew what great love was. In 1889, the year he started working on *The Widow*, the sculptor became deeply infatuated with Adelaide Lucinda Fontes, an educated woman, and daughter of an architect (Moncívio, 2017). It was an intense and troubled relationship which remains until today wrapped in mystery. After cross analysing the artist's *Memories* and official marriage registrations, we came to the conclusion that the two got married in their twenties, in 1893, against the will and without the blessing of friends and family. The union did not last long and, although Teixeira Lopes continued to financially support Adelaide until the rest of her days, he remembers the wedding as a "mistake" and writes about his unhappiness with the same intensity used to describe his former passion (1968, p. 91-94).

The above-mentioned disharmony latent in *The Widow* is reinforced by a set of options that, in closer analysis, demonstrate the intentional inconsistency with which Teixeira Lopes wanted to dress this work in. Nonetheless, this should not trouble the global reading of the artwork, nor its peaceful experience for a more passive observer. The widow's simple clothing belongs to a lower-middle social standing while the baby's bassinet – too small for the child's body and thus acting mainly as a device for the setting of the scene in a domestic environment – would have clearly belonged to an upper-class household due to its rich design. Whereas the woman is barefoot, has a minor rip in her dress (that only appears in the marble version) and does not bear any ornament, the bassinet is pristine. The author is able to convey this contrast by carving with additional detail this part of the piece.

Furthermore, *The Widow* does not exhibit the expected mourning clothing, even considering its diverse stages, progressively softening the severe appearance, and resulting in the disappearing of the veil (Ariés & Duby, 1990, p. 260). As a result of this wardrobe choice, the identity of her new social condition is not assumed. By the account of the sessions where Teixeira Lopes used models in specific garments for the execution of other artworks, one can safely infer that the sculptor bore this aspect in mind. We can only speculate about the reason behind the absence of a mourning outfit which could, however, be simply explained if this particular woman had just learned that her husband passed away. Finally, it should be noted that the hairstyle of the widow (the hair simply tied back with a few loose strands), albeit absolutely common in a working-class woman, can also be found on Teixeira Lopes' mother Raquel, in a portrait he made of his parents. This fact should not be dismissed since the sculptor devoted the marble version, completed in 1893 (the year the sculptor married, which represents another form of loss for a female parent), to his mother, to whom he was particularly close, placing at the base of the piece a dedication that read "To my Mother".

When analysing a sculpture, the worldview of visual references of the author should be taken into consideration and its potential effects on the work, even if in an unconscious way, pondered. It is a slippery exercise, based mainly on the tracking of iconographic sources and formal comparisons between artworks of different media. Nevertheless, it can shed light not only on the network of potential stimuli in the creative process, but also on the immediateness with which the observer recognizes

certain meanings in the piece of art. In order to avoid overinterpretation, one aspect that must be borne in mind is the creative process of the artist in question.

Regarding the sculptor in question, when António Teixeira Lopes resorts to bibliographical research for the preparation of a sculpture (mainly for historical figures), he proudly documents such an effort in his *Memories*. On the contrary, when there is a clear formal influence of a work belonging to a different artist in his own sculpture, he completely omits such connections (as an example, his portrait of General Bento Gonçalves and its relationship with François Rude's *Marechal Ney*). Therefore, in the absence of a detailed account about *The Widow's* composition, the sculptor would hardly have conceived the piece in a complex or over erudite manner, which then excludes interpretative hypotheses that, regarding iconographic sources, are more labyrinthine and far-reaching. In our view, it would be off target to relate the tears in the plaster *Widow* with a hypothetical camouflaged representation of Mary Magdalene, also known for this attribute. It would also be overdrawing to ascribe exaggerated importance to *The Widow's* right foot pending over the circular base, seen as a possible metaphor for the interruption of time or the life cycle. In fact, this type of base, as well as the position of the foot, were utterly common at the time, being used for a variety of subjects. In addition to what has been said, the Bible had been, since the nineteenth century, the object of a renewed appreciation as a "work of literary art" (Ferber, 2010, p. 76). Taking into account Teixeira Lopes' daily contact with the scriptures ever since his childhood, one might feel tempted to force an affiliation with the widow of Zarephath, often depicted in English porcelain bibelots as estranged from her son. However, this is quite a fragile linkage, since none of the distinctive features of this character is present, and the Christian iconography is never mentioned by the sculptor regarding the artwork. In this manner, the existence of formal links with other works, either unconscious or not admitted, may be more plausible.

The prominent falling left arm of *The Widow* is the constituent of the work where we believe the formal solution adopted owes the most to a visual tradition. In fact, an arm in such a position refers directly to the arm of Christ in *Pietà*, a theme that Teixeira Lopes, known for his religiousness, also depicted. The Virgin Mary's portrait as a grieving mother, which during the Middle Ages overcame the representation of the Madonna Enthroned (Grabar, 1981), was well suited for the mourning situation of a widow. But is it the pendulous arm of her son, Jesus, that became itself a sign of death, as can be detected in Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat*. If in the famous *Pietà* of Michelangelo Buonarroti, considered as the ultimate master by Teixeira Lopes, the right arm of Christ is the dangling one, in other representations of the same scene is the left arm that falls, as seen, for example, in Peter Paul Rubens' or Paul Delaroche's *Lamentations*. By choosing to depict this expired arm, with the same elbow angle as Christ's in Michelangelo's *Pietà*, in Caravaggio's *Entombment* or as *Marat*, Teixeira Lopes' *Widow* is not only expressing the pain of losing a dear one, but becomes death herself, thus displaying content associations, a procedure which is frequent in Romanticism.

Other contemporary visual stimuli could have conditioned the choice of theme or formal solutions that oriented the creation of *The Widow*, although no exact parallel was found. The works displayed at the annual Parisian Salon exhibition demand special attention given the importance of such an event at the time as well as for the

artist in question. After examining the Salon's catalogues from 1885 (year he arrived in Paris) to 1889 (starting point of *The Widow*), there is no doubt that the subject of a sad or helpless woman, so cherished by the nineteenth century in its various declinations (such as Mary Magdalene mourning the death of Christ, the Forsaken, the Sorrow, the Grief, the woman mourning the death of her child, being some of these themes based in contemporary French literature) is present at this event, although no widow was found in sculpture apart from the one in analysis. On the other hand, among the works of his French professors (Pierre Jules-Cavelier and Louis Ernest Barrias), of the sculptors for whom his admiration is documented (Michelangelo, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, François Rude, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, Auguste Rodin, the latter two also close friends) and of the Museums which had a greater impact in Teixeira Lopes (mainly the Prado and the Louvre), no direct and unequivocal link has been found at present.

Regarding the aspect which strikes the viewer the most – the detachment of the mother –, it is necessary to map the possible weight of such a visual tradition. Once again, carefulness is crucial. What may be recognised, according to our contemporary perception, as a disinterested posture was not necessarily the intended message of an artwork of the sixteenth century (certainly not in the examples cited below). Moreover, the stylistic trends of certain epochs can affect the degree of expressiveness which, in turn, do not necessarily translate the feelings of the characters portrayed. With these precautions in mind, one can verify that a disassociation between a mother and her child (distracted and/or looking away from the baby) occurs frequently when the painting of the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus includes the representation of one or more figures. As illustrative cases of what has been said, one might mention the *Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Sebastian* (Pietro Perugino, 1493), the *Madonna and Child with Saints Liberale and Francis* (Giorgione, 1505) or the *Madonna and Child with Saint Elizabeth, the Infant Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Catherine* (Paolo Veronese, 1565-1570).

On the other hand, photography, as a contemporary source of visual references should also be taken into consideration. It is, we would argue, a mandatory reference. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that Teixeira Lopes made use of it, particularly regarding the design of deceased people. Usefulness of the technique notwithstanding, since, in his view, photography was unable to capture the essence of the theme, it should only be used as a work tool. This lingering bias towards photography, which is far from being exclusive of the Portuguese sculptor, can explain the resistance in crediting this art form as an inspiration source. Nonetheless, parallels can be detected between *The Widow's* composition and the widowhood portrait photography of the time. Furthermore, one can highlight the resemblance with the emergent documental photography exposing the unprivileged of society at the end of the nineteenth century, such as Jacob Riis's work (his "Italian Mother and Baby" photograph, ca 1889, can be pointed out as an illustrative example). The impact which followed Riis's New York exhibition prompted his participation in the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris (Pascal, 2005, p. 145). Executed with a markedly artistic approach, the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron, which was displayed at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1867 (Cox & Ford, 2003, p. 539), explores Shakespearean and Biblical characters, often depicting her models lost in their thoughts. Provided that the detachment of a mother regarding her child came from a photographic source, its undocumented use

as model for *The Widow* could be explained either due to the necessity, inherited from his academic training, to support the modelling of a living subject, or due to a prejudice which maintained that a sculpture could not arise entirely from a photograph.

4. Conclusion

The Widow sculpted by António Teixeira Lopes brings into play some of the most distinct features of the Romantic sensibility: the attraction for the marginal, for the unfortunate; the capture of emotionally charged subjects and the attention to the common drama; the artist's thematic fascination with solitude and alienation, melancholy and reflectiveness, absence of control and helplessness. Moreover, it encapsulates the nineteenth century's specific experience of death, the dreaded loss of a loved one. In visual arts, the Romantic focus on the widow sheds light on the woman's emotional anguish, thus going further than the previously well-established commemoration of the husband's memory. Nevertheless, the lingering gender bias of the time remains unquestionable in this artwork. In truth, it is the absence of the male spouse (and not the contrary) what justifies the female's aimless posture and the exhaustion of the meaning of life. This position is particularly uncomfortable in the eyes of the viewer, because of the presence of a simultaneously crying and vulnerable child. The ability to develop a strong emotional connection was not perceived as something exclusive of the feminine nature. In an epoch characterised by the celebration of romantic love, men also felt deeply. Notwithstanding having experienced such sentiments, as well as written about his suffered incursion in love, the representation of a man in a helpless condition due to the loss of a woman is hardly found in the works of António Teixeira Lopes, as in the general field of the visual arts itself.

The interpretative hypotheses of the thematic and formal options gathered in Teixeira Lopes' *Widow* and explored in this article remain in a speculative stage. Their thorough consideration is henceforth not a manifest in support of total relativism in visuals studies, but the recognition that a researcher of this field must critically take into account the artist's "world" and all the sedimented cultural layers within. As suggested by Norman Rockwell's Triple Self-portrait, every artwork, even when depicting a unique subject, is always in between two opposite poles, although never precisely coinciding with just one: on the one hand the absolute originality, on the other its reduction to a cluster of references, either conscious or unconscious, first-hand experienced or fictionalized.

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