

GODA PALEKAITĖ

SCHISMATICS

PH MY S E ST W H BR SA DA

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[skiz'matiks, siz'matiks] — leftovers of history, futurists from the past who were considered by their contemporaries to be dissidents, heretics, fanatics, and perverts — liminal minds who succeeded to break through deep-rooted knowledge.

*Schismatics* consists of 10 short stories, in a fictitious way dealing with forgotten historical personas. Among them, artist Goda Palekaitė includes Mary Anning — an amateur discoverer of dinosaurs, Emanuel Swedenborg — a mystic who empirically explored the architecture of heaven, and Essad Bey — a Jewish-Muslim writer and orientalist. Here their lives are revived and balance between the lines of *history* and *story*.

*How to cure the present from nostalgia?*

*Throughout her work, Palekaitė explores how history can become 'sick' by being infected with hegemonic discourses and restrictive academic methods of validating truth, corruptions and pure inventions. [...] In this book, the artist has established an extensive archive of the lives of marginalised historical figures, who resisted and questioned cultural clichés and political ideologies.*

*Curator Valerio Del Baglivo*

The book fuses elements of fiction, academic writing, and artistic research, and intertwines with rumours, forgeries, and inventions. Previously, its characters and narratives have already appeared in Palekaitė's performances and installations, which are presented in the middle of this bilingual edition. In the introductory essay, Valerio Del Baglivo analyses the author's exploration of facts and fiction, the mechanisms of knowledge production, and the trans-chronological perception of time. At the end of the book, Monika Lipšic's 'Riddle' reflects on a 'schismatic poetics'.

Goda Palekaitė is a contemporary artist and researcher whose work combines visual, literary, performative and anthropological practices. Exploring the politics of historical narratives, the agency of dreams and collective imagination, and social conditions of creativity, her work evolves around long-term projects that manifest as performances, scenographies, installations, and texts. Her performances, solo and group shows are being presented internationally. In 2019 Goda Palekaitė received The Golden Stage Cross and the Young Artist's Prize for her artistic contributions across disciplines.

## SCHISMATICS

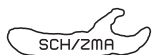
GODA PALEKAITĖ

SCHISMATICS

SHORT  
STORIES

| LAPAS |

Goda Palekaitė  
SCHISMATICS



**apass** | advanced performance  
and scenography studies

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SCHIZMATIKAI  
Lithuanian  
on the other side

# INTRODUCTION

# SPECULATIVE COMMITMENT

by Valerio Del Baglivo

Counter-memory

I as homeopathy

In 1796, while translating the recently published *Materia Medica* by the preeminent medic William Cullen, physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) speculated about a new method of medical treatment. He would later call it ‘homeopathy’. Not completely satisfied with his colleague’s scientific explanations of how to treat malaria, he decided to consume a large quantity of quinine, at the time the only substance that was known to cure the disease. To his great astonishment, he then began to experience the very same symptoms associated with having contracted the disease. This led him to develop new principles and methodologies in its treatment. In fact, following this experiment, Hahnemann concluded that ‘likes are cured by likes,’ which is to say, that diseases are cured by prescribing drugs or other treatments that would produce in healthy persons symptoms of the diseases being treated. He continued his studies and experiments, ingesting a broad range of



drugs in large quantities to prove his theory. Ultimately, he understood that a moderate quantity can help the body of the sick to heal — and vice versa, a big quantity would cause even worse effects. Accordingly, in homeopathic treatments, the curative substance (known as ‘potency’) is highly diluted and dosed to the patient over a long period of time to gradually promote and favour the body’s resilience.

Physician Samuel Hahnemann is a historical figure that artist Goda Palekaitė would be interested in digging up. Not just because of his extraordinary biography, but also because she would undoubtedly identify with his persistent questioning of scientific dogmas and the kind of pseudo-scientific ones associated with homeopathy too. Recently, the artist was primarily concerned with two main questions in her inquiry into history and its categories and classifications: how to cure the present from nostalgia? And how to review the past from the point of view of a historical character without glorifying it? Like the German physician, Palekaitė explores these questions by embracing the principles of the ‘law of the similar’ (*similia similibus curantur*). Throughout her research, she explores how history can become ‘sick’, by being infected with hegemonic discourses, restrictive academic disciplinary methods of validating truth and accuracy, corruptions and pure inventions. But rather than highlighting the cracks in the system, the artist draws on the liberty of inventing new facts, producing fictional archival documents, interrogating imaginary witnesses, and forging new objects as evidence. In other words, she cures the patient with the same substance that would generate the symptoms of the sickness in the healthy. In her practice, *forging* becomes the *diluted potency*, or the

homeopathic medicine. The processes of forging begin at the borders of history, where unclassified materials and left-over articles are abandoned. There, she does not look for goods or items, but for historical characters. In recent years, Palekaitė has established an extensive archive of the lives of marginalised historical figures, who resisted and questioned cultural clichés and political ideologies. These figures share the same destiny: they were banished and ostracised by their contemporaries, and consequently from the official annals of history. Through a complex body of work that comprises performances, texts, and artefacts, the artist brings the fragments of their lives back into public attention. As with homeopathic treatment, Palekaitė distils new portions of their accounts and shares elements of their chronicles to create an echo of narratives that have been commonly forgotten. In Palekaitė’s practice, the diluted homeopathic potency produces new reminiscences of the past. New, because they are not yet ‘encapsulated’ into collective memory, not least because the figures she deals with are often minor ones, purposefully erased from collective memory. She takes these minor figures, their non-illustrious and quotidian lives, to rewrite ‘major’ historical themes and periods. By doing so, she personifies historical language, placing it in a new here and now that gives rise to counter-narratives and counter-memories where public and personal memories are interwoven. As an artist she re-examines the mechanism of production and dissemination of memory, exploring the role of memory formation in resistance to acts of political subjectification and historical suppression.

ST

## ST. THECLA

(sometime between 30 and 100 AD)

Sexuality and desire have always been of public interest — often encouraged, sometimes enforced, other times forbidden. They have been debated throughout times and across civilisations. The reasons for such disputes spanned from questions of health to ideology, and their implications included a wide range of convictions and prohibitions that sought to define whom one's body and pleasure belonged to: God, oneself, or someone else. For example, celibacy, or sexual abstinence, provoked heated debates in a range of contexts: in Brahmanism and Buddhism celibacy was insisted on for spiritual purposes, while both ancient Greeks and Jews prohibited sexual continence. Lesbos island, the homeland of the poetess Sappho, was famous for female sexual freedom where noble parents would send their young daughters to 'release their energy' before committing to the constraints of marital life. Pythagoras, for one, recorded that sex should be practised in the winter, but not in the summer because the loss of semen is harmful for male health, while, he was certain that sexuality had no effect on female life.

Yet, in the early Christian tradition, the dispute on sexuality developed into the emergence of a unique set of narratives around virgin martyrs. Unlike Greeks with their pragmatic approach or Romans with their militant laws, Christian stories, spreading through word of mouth in the cracking Roman Empire's underground, arose and stimulated sexual desire in a new and hitherto unheard-of way. Through declaring and detailing the very absence of sex, the rebel storytellers accessed it in largely frustrated societies. These stories succeeded to masterfully capture the intensity of love, or rather its lack, and to transcend it towards the universal — of course, all in the service of consolidating the Church's power over passion and desire.

This is a story that happened almost two thousand years ago, sometime in the mid-1st century AD. It was around the time when the legend of a young man, who had been cruelly crucified near the city of Jerusalem by the local authorities, spread throughout the empire. He was responsible for a peaceful love-spreading movement, a hippie revolution of the times if you like, which had a growing number of followers organising themselves in secret and informal activities throughout the Roman world. It occurred in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Iconium, then governed by the Romans and today known as Konya, the seventh-most-populous city in Turkey. Iconium was the hometown of a young, noble, and beautiful Roman virgin named Thecla. At that time, she was busy with embroidering the gown for her own wedding with Thamyris, whom her mother Theocleia had promised her. We do not know whether she was excited by the prospect of

marital life. In fact, in Roman society, marriage was seen as a civic duty and a moral responsibility. Virginity, on the other hand, was considered an abnormality, and celibacy was legally punishable by fiscal penalties. Respectable women were fully subordinated to their husbands and fathers. In general, femininity was associated with weakness, powerlessness, passivity, limited intellect, and numerous other deficiencies.

Around that time, let us imagine a man with a beautiful voice who arrives at Iconium and begins delivering feverish speeches, particularly concerned with marriage and virginity. His name is Paul and he claims to be a direct disciple of Jesus Christ or the Son of God — the one who had been crucified. Paul is not an innocent figure in early Christian history — some say that he exploited his status of being a Jew, a Roman, and later a Christian. Prior to his conversion he had persecuted the early disciples of Jesus, yet, by the time he arrives at Iconium, he preaches the Lord's word:

SP Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be pleasing unto God and shall not lose the reward of their continence.

It happens that Paul preaches in the neighbourhood where the young Thecla lives with her parents, and through her window, she can hear him speak. She remains seated at the window for three days and three nights, neither eating nor drinking or sleeping, until she determines to follow Paul's message. The major document describing what occurred then is laid out in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the 2nd-century scripture by an anonymous author:

MA

MARY  
ANNING  
(1799–1847)

Not so long ago most Europeans were convinced that the earth was created in six divinely ordered twenty-four hour time-slots. It happened around 4000 BC, as was concluded by tracing biblical genealogies. First God created the Sun, the Moon, the land, mountains, and oceans, then inhabited them with a variety of creatures and, finally, on day six conceived his most magnificent and most complex creation — man. The first people, Adam and Eve, harmoniously lived together and shared a garden with animals, where all were vegetarian until the couple sinned and then got mired in promiscuity, meat eating, and general brutality. Until the 19th century, most people had absolute faith in the fact that species never changed or evolved, or became extinct — everything that exists had always existed.

Not even vastly recorded animals from the pre-Christian era and hardly ever encountered later, were considered extinct by European science. A typical example of a ‘forgotten’ animal is a *griffin* or the lion-bodied, eagle-headed and winged chimera, which has appeared in numerous cultures and civilisations for thousands of years. Griffins have been recorded flying around in ancient Egypt and

Persia, and then later in ancient Greece and Rome. To this day, they are amongst the most popular creatures portrayed in the heraldry. Griffins were good at fighting horses, guarding secrets of the earth, hating one-eyed men, and symbolizing power. Aristeas tells us that during his time (7th century BC) griffins had lived in the north-east of Greece in a hardly accessible wasteland where the Huns searched for gold, which the griffins would fearfully guard. Yet, they must have become extinct around 2000 years ago as there is no documented evidence since.

If we come back to Christian times and the cradle of modern science — England — we can travel to its southern coast, in order to find a town called Lyme Regis. It was in the late 18th century when the area became popular among the newly developed social class — tourists. Tourism developed partly thanks to a dissertation by a prominent doctor, Richard Russell, who wrote on the therapeutic effects of the ocean. The therapy was simple:

**RR** Fully immerse your body in the sea. Straight after, drink at least 1 litre of the seawater.

The procedure was intended to ward off a range of diseases, starting with gonorrhoea and ending with tuberculosis. The coastal towns of England were becoming popular destinations for high society Englishmen because only they could afford the travel. Interestingly enough, tourism spread earlier than indoor bathing.

There lived a man in Lyme Regis named Richard Anning, who soon noticed that peculiar stones, which one could find on the beach, were easily sellable to tourists as souvenirs. Locals used to call them *fossils*, and they were there as long as anyone could remember. They came in

all forms and sizes and had endless explanations. Some people were convinced, for example, that fossils were so pretty that they must be God's decorations, just like flowers, plants, and trees. Others thought they must be the remains of the victims of a global flood recorded in The Book of Genesis. A plethora of theories and opinions grew around them — powdered fossils were able to clear up infections, for instance, ammonites — extinct marine mollusc species — were believed to be particularly powerful, and could cure snakebites and impotence. Richard Anning was one of the first people who taught himself how to collect fossils on the rocky coast, mostly in extreme conditions after a storm, clean and preserve them, and sell them to tourists. But unfortunately, Richard died young from tuberculosis caused by impoverished living conditions, leaving his knowledge and business undeveloped. He also left his eleven-year-old daughter, a curious child.

By destiny, Mary Anning should never have grown up to be a famous scientist. In addition to being from a family of extreme poverty, Mary was also marginalised by her dialect, lack of formal education, and adherence to the protestant dissenter faith, known as Congregationalists, a religious strain that did not conform to the teachings of the established Church of England. And, of course, by her gender. Women were not allowed to hold any official position, attend a university, and were prohibited from entering a number of professions, including scientific ones. Mary's education consisted of two or three years of elementary school, after which she had few books to read, few discussions to engage in, no lectures to attend, and not even one museum to visit.











