in other words
por outras palavras
LÍDIA JORGE

lídia jorge

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por outras palavras
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Paulo de Medeiros
Portuguese Literature is currently enjoying an unrivalled and long overdue revival outside the Portuguese-speaking world. For instance, in the United States, Harold Bloom paid tribute to the outstanding originality of Fernando Pessoa by citing him among the ten greatest twentieth-century poets in the world in his *The Western Canon* (London: Macmillan, 1995). In Europe, meanwhile, the Frankfurt Book Fair, where Portugal was featured as a special theme country in 1997, placed Portuguese writers in the limelight. But surely the most fitting and coveted recognition came when the 1998 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to José Saramago, an honor bestowed for the first time to a writer whose native tongue is Portuguese.

Despite this recent “boom,” people in English-speaking countries are still visibly less familiar with foreign literature in general, and the literary output of a perceived small country such as Portugal in particular, than their continental European counterparts. In countries like France or Germany, for instance, a significant number of major contemporary Portuguese authors seems to have warranted translation and dissemination alongside the obvious giants (Eça de Queirós, Pessoa, and lately Saramago). It comes as no surprise, therefore, to note that several of Lídia Jorge’s novels are currently available in translation in those countries. By contrast, to cater for an English-speaking audience, only her best-known work, *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, has been translated so far (*The Murmuring Coast*. Trans. Natália Costa and Ronald W. Sousa. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

This special thematic issue of *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* hopes to redress the balance, for Lídia Jorge is undoubtedly one of the foremost Portuguese novelists to have emerged since the April 1974 Revolution. Like other prolific post-revolutionary writers, she has ten titles to her credit in
the space of two decades. “Amazing” is probably the right word for an author whose fertile imagination has tackled such varied topics as the impact of the April 1974 Revolution and that of the African colonial wars at one end of the spectrum, and the all-encompassing nature of an elusive father/daughter relationship in a small village at the other. The relevance of her work is unquestionable, for her fiction explores the contradictions present in contemporary Portugal, taking in the differences between rural and city-based experiences, between various generations, and between men and women. Her thematic spread, moreover, is matched by a remarkable stylistic virtuosity. Her unconventional prose can be precise or it can swell in a lyrical mode. Her narrative strategies are just as versatile: her prose oscillates between collective and more individual narrating voices, including the occasional use of male narrators.

In 1980, her first work, *O Dia dos Prodígios*, was immediately hailed as a revelation for its incomparable stylistic and thematic originality and was awarded the prestigious Ricardo Malheiros prize. The writer Vergílio Ferreira may be cited here to represent the views of the critical establishment, as he confidently proclaimed the “afirmação poderosa e súbita de um grande escritor.” What was sincerely meant as the ultimate accolade, “the appearance of a great writer,” nevertheless encodes a stark and intrinsic contradiction. Can a woman writer be a great author irrespective of her gender? Or is it rather not the case that she was considered great at the expense of her gender? I would argue, and so do the majority of the contributors to this issue, that it is impossible to read Lídia Jorge without reference to her gender. Indeed, part of her originality lies precisely in being a voice from the margins, in providing a fresh and female perspective on major (or so deemed) historical events, and in engaging in the process of recovering events, voices, and positions often considered minor by the dominant order.

The present volume features an array of essays on some of her best-known fiction. Special attention is devoted here to *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, undoubtedly her most celebrated novel at home and abroad. The importance of its central theme—a personal recollection of colonial wartime in Mozambique that engages in dialogue with the highly fictionalized account featured at the outset of the book—would amply suffice to justify the interest it has elicited. But the original treatment which Lídia Jorge affords to her chosen theme enables her to problematize a wide range of issues close to the heart of modern readers (be they Portuguese or not), including personal and
collective identity, memory, history, language, and representation itself. Here in the present volume, this novel is the focus of three pieces that develop incisive and insightful parameters of analysis focusing on the role of memory and the portrayal of women to cast a new light on this seminal text.

Three further essays consider some of her other more accomplished novels: *O Dia dos Prodígios* (1980), *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre* (1984, awarded the Cidade Lisboa prize), and finally *O Jardim sem Limites* (1995). The latter received mixed reviews when it first appeared, but it is nevertheless crucial to our understanding of Lídia Jorge’s perception of contemporary Portugal. *O Dia dos Prodígios* brings to life the collective voice of rural Portugal. By contrast, her third novel, *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre*, takes place in the urban environment of Lisbon and signals Lídia Jorge’s departure from the collective to a more individual, and even intimate, perspective. A decade later, *O Jardim sem Limites* revisits the capital city in the 1990s, using again a collective gaze to inscribe the tremendous changes which have occurred in people’s way of life and outlook, insofar as modernization, membership of the European Union, and a new cult of the image have all contributed to a sense of fin-de-siècle emptiness in the new generation. In so doing, the novel looks back to that other novel that in the Portuguese imagination stands as the emblematic fin-de-siècle masterpiece *par excellence*, *Os Maias*. This is her most “realist” work to date, a fact which may account for the mixed reviews it initially attracted.

Only three of Lídia Jorge’s novels are not analyzed in detail here. *O Cais das Merendas* (1982), her second novel, provided a complementary perspective on *O Dia dos Prodígios*. In fact, Lídia Jorge has been the first to acknowledge that they were conceived in parallel. Much has been written on *O Cais das Merendas* already (see bibliography), unlike *A Última Dona* (1992), which critics have somewhat neglected. Perhaps not coincidentally, the latter is her only work to date to make predominant use of a male perspective. Nevertheless, Ana Paula Ferreira makes sufficient references to it in the course of her essay on *A Instrumentalina* to emphasize that it occupies a significant place in Lídia Jorge’s literary production. One novel which would have most certainly warranted a full-length article here, were it not for reasons of space, is Lídia Jorge’s most recent and prodigious tour de force, *O Vale da Paixão* (1998). We have included, however, a perceptive and in-depth critical review by Elfriede Engelmayer, who gives us a flavor of this outstanding work, showing it to be one of Jorge’s most powerful
and symbolic novels built on intimate and haunting memories.

Although Lídia Jorge’s reputation rests primarily on her novels, one should not forget that she has also published successfully in other genres. She has briefly ventured into the theatre, with a play, *A Maçon* (1996), that centers on Adelaide Cabete, one of the leading figures of Portuguese feminism during the first two decades of this century. Despite this foray into drama, Lídia Jorge remains above all a prose fiction writer. In this context, due credit should be given to her not only as a novelist, but also as the author of a number of short stories published in book-form under the titles *A Instrumentalina* (1992) and *Marido e Outros Contos* (1997) respectively. The two essays on her short stories which are included here reveal without a doubt that while these tales may productively be read to cast light on her novelistic works, they also deserve to stand as masterpieces in their own right. Ellen Sapega, in particular, lucidly argues that far from being a minor genre, the short story, by virtue of its very “shortness,” is able to do things differently from longer narratives. Indeed, this genre seems lately to be attracting renewed interest from writers and critics alike, a tendency to be applauded given that Portuguese-speaking countries have long since boasted outstanding practitioners of the genre, including the Brazilian Clarice Lispector or more recently the Mozambican Mia Couto.

Since this issue of *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* focuses on the multifaceted literary achievements of Lídia Jorge, most readers will surely agree that the article section closes with a chave de ouro by foregoing academic criticism in favor of Jorge’s own words, firstly in a piece entitled “O Romance Contemporâneo,” followed by Stephanie d’Orey’s interview with the writer. The essay, originally read aloud in London in June 1996, analyzes the resurgence and vitality of the novel as a genre in the context of post-revolutionary Portugal. In so doing, the author situates herself within a generation intent on using the novel (as opposed to poetry) as a privileged medium to reflect (on) contemporary reality and makes an impassioned case for the genre’s potential. Jorge’s own ability to realize, challenge, and stretch the potential of the novel in her own work makes her one of the most distinguished and versatile writers of fiction in contemporary Portugal.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the contributors and editors who have been so willing to devote themselves to this common project. In particular, I should like to acknowledge Paulo de Medeiros, who initially inspired me
to produce this volume, and Victor Mendes, who took over thereafter. And my gratitude goes to Lídia Jorge, too, for her receptiveness to my numerous requests and, above all, for being the writer she is.

Cláudia Pazos Alonso
(Re)Telling History: Lídia Jorge’s *O Dia dos Prodígios*

Lígia Silva

To the memory of my friend Maria Luís

All historical evidence is but the partial *visibilia* of an entire invisible world.¹

*O Dia dos Prodígios*, written in 1980, was Lídia Jorge’s first novel and is a celebration of as well as an ironical perspective on the 25 April 1974 Revolution. Lídia Jorge, who belongs to what Eduardo Lourenço called “a geração literária da revolução,”² did indeed write about the revolution and its consequences, but not from the point of view of “official discourses,” that is, of those who write History, but rather from the point of view of those who in one way or another make up the unwritten reality of History. Through fiction, Lídia Jorge recovers that “entire invisible world” mentioned above, the world of the oppressed and the silenced. *O Dia dos Prodígios*, according to Lourenço, is “exigência de ‘fala,’”³ (a demand to speak) in opposition to the silence imposed on Portuguese people for almost fifty years of Salazar’s dictatorship. In this sense the novel can be read as a “metaphor for April 25,” as Jorge herself remarked in a lecture at the Universidade de Lisboa in March 1986.⁴ In *O Dia dos Prodígios* and in Lídia Jorge’s subsequent novels such as *O Cais das Merendas* (1982), *A Notícia da Cidade Silvestre* (1987), or *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (1988), the privileging of the word and the world of the dominated men and women suggests the possibility of multiple discourses that reflect the diversity of experiences where issues of class, gender, and race intermingle. It also opens up a space for a reading of the different experiences of women in a variety of social relations, contradicting the essentialized notion of women as a homogeneous entity.
In this paper I will attempt to show how Lídia Jorge brings to her text a diversity of languages or “world views” in a way which recalls Bakhtin’s conceptualization of each language as “a kind of ideology brought-into-speech.” In this way, Lídia Jorge opens up possibilities to read *O Dia dos Prodigios* as a site of conflicting and possibly liberating “languages-in-use,” which unsettles the patriarchal myth of one monologic language of truth.

**Prodigious writing against silence**

Bakhtin, in his theory of the novel, contends that heteroglossia are an amalgam of socio-ideological languages, where

(…) all languages are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.

This dialogical and dynamic conception of language implies a constant tension between two opposing sets of forces, which Bakhtin terms the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language. The centripetal forces work towards unification and stability of meaning, while the centrifugal forces introduce multiplicity and decentralization. This constant struggle defies “ideological unification and centralization,” and as Herndl has suggested “is political and raises questions of power.” Insofar as it acknowledges the existence of different experiences mirrored through different languages and transforms each and every speaking subject into an “ideologue,” Bakhtin’s concept of the novel as a “social heteroglossia” offers the possibility for a better understanding of the different relations between the different social subjects in a particular society.

Lídia Jorge, in choosing to depict the rural, almost illiterate people of a small village in the Algarve, is deliberately constructing for us what I would call a “partial heteroglossia” as an act of resistance to centralizing tendencies and as a political accusation pointing to the marginalization of the rural poor. Lídia Jorge brings to her text the real atmosphere of the village with its smells, its habits, and especially the transcription of the oral speech of the villagers with their regional dialect, their jargon, and their swear words. Lídia Jorge also transcribes into the text the typical way they speak in the Algarve, where the vowels at the end of the words are closed: that in the text is transcribed
by the past tense of the verbs ending in “i,” such as “salti, pegui, di, atiri” (22). *O Dia dos Prodígios* conveys the idea that communication is impossible, not only between the urban and the rural world, but also between men and women, by drawing on specific techniques that remind us of oral discourse, with the continual shifting of narrative perspectives and points of view. I would suggest, then, that this struggle or dialogical relation between different discourses works as a reply to the homogenizing idea of the authoritarian discourse of Salazar’s dictatorship, where people had no voice at all. These voices can be considered as “centrifugal forces,” and what could be perceived as monologues are in fact dialogues in a Bakhtinian sense in that they resist and are acts of opposition to a monological discourse that wants to silence them. *O Dia dos Prodígios* starts with a brief introduction where we read, “E falamos todos ao mesmo tempo. (…) Seria bom para que ficasse bem claro o desentendimento.” Characters will all talk at the same time; that is, no one will have a dominant voice. Each of their discourses, as well as the discourse of the heterodiegetic narrator, will interpenetrate each other in a dialogic relationship. The third-person narrator, controlling the development of the story, gives insight into the lives and interior of the characters, assuming the position of different narrative voices, and so participates in the polyphony of the text.

According to Bakhtin,

(…) the word... exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own.¹¹

If, as Bakhtin claimed, one’s own discourse emerges from other discourses and eventually will be able to free itself, Lídia Jorge, by bringing to her text “o desentendimento” of all characters’ different ideas and intentions, is granting them the possibility of liberation through discourse. I will analyze *O Dia dos Prodígios*, arguing that in her construction of the novel as a “patchwork” of different discourses, or a “polyphony of voices,” Lídia Jorge adopts an aesthetic form that uses representations of language to explore and denounce different forms of oppression in terms of class and gender, and thus also constitutes a form of liberation.

*O Dia dos Prodígios* is set in Vilamaninhos, a small remote village in the Algarve, where nothing ever happens. As a result, “A povoação vai ficando um
ovo emurchecido. Que fede, gorado, e não gera” (21). Vilamaninhos does not produce anything anymore, and “nada avança” (139) because the young have been forced to leave, “Todos tinham abalado para as suas pátrias” (75), since there was no future for them in the village. Those who have stayed were tired of being voiceless, ignored by the politicians in the capital; the only way to survive was to seek refuge in their own dreams and hopes. These dreams and hopes, which are different for each of them, are reified in the sudden and mysterious appearance of a flying snake, which they see as “O pressentimento que antecede os grandes acontecimentos” (43). We are transported into an atmosphere of magic and fantasy to account for their daydreaming, their belief in the possibility that one day something would happen to change their lives, because although they feel powerless to change their own destiny, they see the snake as an omen, as a sign of “(...) crença (...). Não de surpresa (...) Antes de inconformação” (69). This resistance towards a fascist authoritarian politics that advised them to adopt “resignação” (81) and thus, silence, “(...) tão pequena é esta terra. E tão grande o seu silêncio” (170), is registered by bringing their voices to the text as a way of asserting themselves as autonomous subjects.

The leitmotiv of O Dia dos Prodígios is a need for change, but they have to wait, “Vão tão lentos os dias nesta espera” (150), a slow and painful expectation that is soon going to descend into disillusion and frustration. The news of a revolution that has taken place in the capital is brought by the only radio in the village, belonging to Pássaro Volante, and Maria Rebôla breaks the news saying, “(...) em Lisboa os soldados fizeram uma revolução para melhorarem a vida daquela gente? Uma revolução” (133).

Later on, Jesuína Palha also talks about the revolution as if it were happening far away and was going to have no consequences for them at all. Jesuína’s double-voiced discourse, because it expresses simultaneously two different intentions, that is, the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author, towards Carma and Carminha, not only stresses the gap between the rural people and those living in Lisbon, but also criticizes this situation. Jesuína with her strong voice says that in Lisbon there are

...
It is interesting to note that she answers herself with a bitter remark: “Aqui é uma tristeza” (143).

For these people the revolution is a mixture of fantasy and reality, because in the end they want to believe in something, as they believe that the soldiers are now visiting all the villages in Portugal in order to “ouvir todas as queixas” (134) and to free them of their misery. When the soldiers arrive, the people of Vilamaninhos scream and shout of joy “porque o espectáculo era o mais arrebatador das suas vidas” (155), but they soon find out “Que se tinham alvoroçado por um nada” (157) since “Esses que aí vieram mostrar-se nem chegaram a ouvir a voz da gente” (157). They did not visit Vilamaninhos to hear the people's stories and complaints, but to bring their own empty discourses, full of ideals but devoid of meaning, for these people. In the end they came, “Mas ninguém compreendeu as palavras” (161), because although they came to speak about freedom, freedom of speech, and unity between all the people, they in fact did not allow the villagers to use their own words. Therefore, the realities of the two groups were too far apart for them to be able to communicate.

This miscommunication, or non-communication, is ironically depicted when one of the soldiers is addressing the community and says, “Oh amigos. Que aquela era a hora dos humilhados e dos oprimidos” (154), and one of the villagers, Manuel Gertrudes, showing his lack of political consciousness asks, “E quem são esses?” (154). The representation of these socially asymmetrical discourses has a strong satirical and political effect, especially if we take into account that the majority of these soldiers were coming from the lower strata of society. What could be understood as differently empowered discourses is in the end a kind of parody of the “official language,” because the soldiers are just appropriating another discourse, the discourse of the so-called truth, “Da pura verdade” (134), that in reality is not theirs.

Lídia Jorge seems to want to convey the idea that the revolution “for the people and with the people” was just “(...) ilusão dos sentidos” or “assombração” (162), and she points out the failure of the revolution to transform relations of power. Although these country people might be called “a alavanca dos prodígios” (154), in reality they were and remain impotent after the revolution, and their lives will have to go on as ever before. The title,
*O Dia dos Prodígios*, when “afinal nada aconteceu,” simply reinforces the satirical view of the revolution as a site for the liberation of the oppressed and the fulfilment of their dreams and wishes. The villagers soon find out that the change they were hoping for will not happen because of the snake or a revolution, but it is something that they have to look for inside themselves.

**The discursive construction of gender**

Bakhtin’s sociolinguistic approach to the novel enables us to look into *O Dia dos Prodígios* as a discursive representation of the antagonism not only between the rural “margins” and the urban “center,” but also between women and the patriarchal cultural hegemony. Although Bakhtin has been accused of being gender blind and of neglecting the existence of female writers in his work, his theory provides some useful insights for feminist criticism.\(^{12}\)

I would like to suggest that the struggle or dialogical relation between different voices or particular ways of viewing the world allows for the deconstruction and the undermining of discursive authoritarian practices, founded on binary oppositions, where the category “woman” is always grounded in an essential identity and takes the position of an alien “other.”

The narrative sequence built as an entanglement of different stories told by men and women who reveal different ways of perceiving the world shows Lídia Jorge’s insistence on the significance of gender. This is well expressed in the chatter between the old couple, Esperança and José Jorge Júnior, in which each of them goes on and on speaking without really listening to each other, “(...) os dois aqui de palestra sem se ouvirem” (33). It is important to remark that while Esperança talks about the thirteen children she had, remembering all the details of when they were born, José, standing on a bench, in a position of superiority as if giving a speech, talks about his ancestors and how brave they were.

Whereas José recalls images of a glorious past, as a form of asserting himself as a man, through the patriarchal history of the family, Esperança’s memory is firmly grounded in the materiality of the everyday and is etched in her consciousness as well as in her body, “porque afinal depois de tanta lágrima, nenhuma dor lhe atingia o corpo” (73). José’s words can be identified as what Bakhtin calls “the authoritative discourse,” because “it is connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers.”\(^{13}\) Esperança is the stereotyped image of the self-sacrificing, submissive mother and wife, the only role the patriarchal society envisaged
for her and to which she must conform. As Sadlier has pointed out, “Their speeches represent an archetypal male and female discourse aimed ‘outward,’ towards the reader.” Therefore, Esperança’s double-voiced discourse towards herself and an “absent addressee,” or the reader, is subversive because it offers itself to be read in opposition to that official, masculine, phallocentric discourse.

**Jesuína Palha: Parody through discourse**

According to Holquist, “Heteroglossia is a plurality of relations, not just a cacophony of voices.” Lídia Jorge illustrates this with the layout of her narrative, dividing the text into columns to represent unbalanced relations of power. There are two such moments in the narrative—when Jesuína Palha tells Carminha Rosa and her daughter about the snake, and later on about the revolution. Whereas Jesuína Palha’s words are on the left column, the column on the right presents gaps to express the silence, the ostracism enforced by the community on Carminha Rosa and Carminha, “(...) banida dentro dos muros da própria vizinhança” (56). The mother is depicted as a sinner and described in terms of moral evaluations, as Carminha is the daughter of a priest, an illegitimate child, “uma condenação” (17). By analogy with her mother, Carminha is also a sinner, expressed by the fact that they have the same name.

Jesuína functions here as the “spokeswoman” of the community and reinforces their marginalized position, calling them “Suas enteadas do diabo” (141) and “gente que sempre foi empedernida e consporcada” (145), supported by a first-person plural voice on the left, “a gente,” or the voice of the community, that works like a chorus. Jesuína, making them publicly responsible for the incident with the snake, is just a pretext for “Uma acusação pública e bem testemunhada contra as suas pessoas” (145). She speaks in the name of a community which needs a scapegoat in order to reinforce the cultural rules and the stability of the community.

Although Jesuína is not conscious of her alienated speech, she is a kind of leader of the community, and she identifies with those “virile” women that Kristeva in “The Terror of Power or the Power of Terrorism” identifies as the “guardians of the status quo, the most zealous protectors of the established order.” Kristeva argues that even if some women are now in leadership positions in government and industry, the problem of the power structures remains the same. These women end up identifying with the power struc-
tures, and instead of a change towards democratization, there is conformism and stabilization.

Jesuína embodies the moral values of Vilamaninhos and by extension of a society that condemns women for threatening the imposed social codes and the stability of the “Law of the Father.” By discursively reinforcing the monologic, Jesuína undertakes the role of a centripetal figure in the novel.

Carminha Rosa is a double sinner, because she not only had a child out of wedlock, but also the child of a priest, thus challenging the values and morals of one of the ideological pillars of patriarchal society, the Catholic Church. Jesuína is depicted as a very strong woman: “Nem homem, nem mancebo conseguiu jamais fazer o que fez essa mulher valente.” However, she is empowered only by ventriloquizing that same discourse that oppresses her as a woman, the authoritative discourse of patriarchy. She assumes the attitudes usually attributed to men “cospe no chão” (145) and also their language when she incriminates Carminha with the question: “a quantos tu já deste a pinquinha?” (144). Jesuína also accuses Carma and Carminha of opening their door to any man, implying that they are whores, and says, “Mas quem vem nem olha à cara. Nem sequer às pernas. Antes ao fundo delas, para se aviar depressa” (144).

Bakhtin relates parody to the tradition of carnival, which he sees as an occasion for temporary inversions of the power hierarchy and “the feast of becoming, change and renewal.” The attitude of Jesuína “dez vezes mais varonil que um homem” (156) leading the mob, formed only by women and children, may be associated with carnival rituals. It may be read as a mockery, pointing to the parodic fiction of gender identity as immutable. Jesuína is a “mulher-homem,” and so she carnivalizes cultural idealizations of the feminine. Pointing to the fluidity of gender identity, where features of masculinity and femininity are not rigid, it questions the concept of a fixed gender identity. As Bakhtin argues about carnival, “It absolutises nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything.” Although Jesuína assumes the dominant role in relation to Carminha Rosa and her daughter, reinforcing the culturally repressive rules defined by patriarchy for “unruly” women, she can only assert her position as a speaking subject by mimicking a masculine discourse. Having internalized a discourse that is not hers, the authoritative discourse of patriarchy, she unconsciously conforms to it as she embodies a masculine attitude and language. If on one hand Jesuína points to the possibility of “renewal” and “change” as she unconsciously debunks cultural
mystifications of women’s identity, on the other hand she reinforces the established order. Her ambivalent figure points to the ambivalence of carnival itself as a form of liberation. As Herndl suggests when discussing the restricted space of carnival for a true subversion of the structures of power, “Carnival represents an event staged by those with power to subvert any potential power which might be developed by the oppressed.”

Branca: a textual strategy of liberation

In her article “Irigarayan Dialogism: Play and Powerplay,” Schwab defends Irigaray against accusations of being essentialist. She argues that Irigaray’s identification of a certain textual praxis with the morphology of female sexuality has to be read metaphorically and as a dialogical textual strategy. She also contends that “the battle against women’s oppression begins at the level of language, of textuality, and will be fought out there.” I suggest, then, that Lídia Jorge’s writing practice can be identified with Schwab’s concept of dialogical textual strategy, which by forcing a dialogue with monologic positions, attempts to disclose and shatter them.

Jorge in a recent interview with Stephanie d’ Orey said that

(…) my novels describe Mediterranean women as powerful, but at the same time apparently submissive. The world of politics is not their concern—their natural arena is the family and the home—about which nonetheless they often complain.

Although this naturalized point of view may be arguable, Lídia Jorge’s writing shows what Spivak terms “a strategic use of positivist essentialism” framed “in a scrupulously visible political interest” against patriarchy. Spivak identifies the “subaltern” with the female body, contending that the experience of the female body has to be examined in its cultural and economic context. This is the only way to recover the enormous gap in History concerning women, whose bodies were always taken for granted and exploited. I will argue that although Lídia Jorge in O Dia dos Prodigios conveys an essentialist conception of gender, identifying women as victims of patriarchy who conform to their fixed roles as wives and mothers, she introduces the possibility of liberation from the symbolic order through Branca.

Although she complies with sociocultural dictates by becoming a wife and a mother, she always remains skeptical of her role in society. Branca, always
“submissa e obediente” (88), is going to assert herself through speech and by the linguistic assimilation and consequent refusal of her role as wife, mother, and “mula.” Her husband, Pássaro Volante, always associates her with his lost mule “(…) contra a insolência de uma mula tão louca como a mulher, e como ela perversamente misteriosa e cínica.” Pássaro not only calls her a mule, but he also has sex with her as if she were a mule: “Pássaro cavalga. Branca é um dorso macio de aragem pelada” (48). Pássaro uses his wife “para se libertar das forças inúteis do seu corpo” (128), seeing her only as an object and depriving her of her own sexuality, because as “an angel woman,” she has no sexuality anyway. She is not only abused, but also deprived of her body and her own voice: “E eu mais do que submissa, acobardada. Caladinha” (88). In Pássaro’s mind she is a working-mule, someone who was born only to work for and serve her husband and children. But a mule may also mean someone false or deceitful. Pássaro is both aware and afraid of his wife’s subversive potential to deceive him. Ironically, it is through a traditional feminine task used by Branca’s husband “para controlar a minha pessoa no próprio espírito” (88), that Branca will start her process of breaking free, embroidering a flying dragon.

Turning her submissiveness and her silence into transgression, because “Um silêncio (…) nunca é bem um silêncio absoluto” (147), she starts what in Bakhtinian terms is a “re-socialization” of an inner conflict.

As Emerson explains, Bakhtin does not deny the reality of internal conflicts, but he does socialize them, thus exposing their mechanisms to the light of day. If enough individuals experience the same gap, it is re-socialized: there develops a political underground, and the potential for revolution.

This gap may be understood as the lack of words women have to express their particular experiences within a patriarchal discourse. Branca, recognizing her inevitable place within the patriarchy, creates an alternative position to assert herself, seeing through people and reading their minds. Branca not only speaks out against her oppression, but her discourse, expressing her wishes and powers, can only be expressed in a language no longer defined by masculine meaning. Branca starts to sleep with her eyes open and to hear sounds at a distance, “havia tempo que ouvia os sons à distância” (46), like a premonition. To reinforce the recognition of her role as a woman, as biology is understood as destiny in a patriarchal society, she recalls the first time when
she had her period and “se renderá à evidência de uma preparação inexorável para um ciclo” (59). Although her first reaction was “Oh não” (59), Branca knew that after she had had her period, she was ready to accomplish her function as a woman, that is, to marry and have children, according to the same decree that rendered women blind to men’s sexual aggressions and that made them accept the authority of fathers and husbands.

Branca never stops thinking about her life: “Ardem-me os olhos dos pensamentos” (87). She dreams of the day when she will be able to free herself and when she will no longer need to “cortar as coleiras que me amarram a língua” (85). When she tells Pássaro about her powers, he says, “Ficou louca” (91) and he does not understand her anymore: “Esta fala latim (…)” (166). The fact that Branca starts to gain consciousness of herself and starts to speak confirms her position as a subject in discourse, in active dialogic relation to others. Branca, asserting herself as a subject, is denying her position as an object to be battered, possessed, silenced, and abused. For Pássaro, this can only mean that she is mad, because she is expressing a reality that is beyond his own discourse and understanding. According to Bakhtin, “The ideological becoming of a human being (…) is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others.”

Branca’s transformation, or “ideological becoming,” gradually happens inside herself, by absorbing and then opposing her husband’s words, as Pássaro stands for the discourse that she refuses and that oppresses her. Pássaro did not realize that “quanto mais a prendera mais a soltara para um recanto escondido da liberdade” (148). The change that she achieves is inside herself, “eu própria fiz mudança, porque nunca consegui dizer tantas palavras junto de ti (…). Ou seja da noite, da revolução ou de mim mesma” (148). But this change is expressed in words, and it occurs through the assimilation of the road sweeper’s words as well. The road sweeper states that “Ninguém se liberta se não quiser libertar-se. Empedernidas as pessoas criaram o jeito de olhar a pila como centro do mundo” (91).

Her transformation suggests, then, that identity, like discourse, is constructed in the relationship between speaker and addressee. Unlike Pássaro, who does not feel the need to change because he is “in the center of the world,” Branca is tired of being the “escravazinha” (66). Living in a house “onde apenas tinha feito de parideira de meninos machos. E servindo as coisas que serviam as bestas” (88), she realizes that even in a phallocentric world there are ways of contradicting and subverting that same world. Her desire to break free, expressed through gaining powers to predict people’s future, is
the alternative she finds when she realizes that total freedom is forbidden to
her, so she has to create for herself something else as a weapon of survival.
Even if Branca is just producing a moment of utopian freedom, it relativizes
the authoritative norm, contradicts the idea of the single subject-centered
reason, pointing to the need for a reconception of the self. Through Branca,
Lídia Jorge found a way to underscore the idea that it is possible to escape
the confining dichotomies that ground masculine representations of reality.

Ultimately by reaccentuating the dialects and discourses of the
disenfranchised, be they a rural community or women, Lídia Jorge is
denouncing authoritarian power structures whether they are fascist,
patriarchal, marxist, or Lisbon-centred, and she is making a stand against
totalizing concepts of History. O Dia dos Prodigios is a struggle of words with
words which represents the conditions of existence of those subjects, men and
women, who are muted or absent in dominant discourses. Lídia Jorge, in a
“breve tempo de uma demonstração” (13), creates a style whereby the
relationship between reality and mimesis is problematized, which calls into
question the concepts of fiction and truth, and serves to demystify demagogic
concepts of fictional truths, such as identity. Even if the acknowledgement of
a proteiform concept of female identity is only possible in fiction and through
anti-mimetic representations of language, it challenges the institutionalized
norm. By defamiliarizing literary and social norms, Lídia Jorge introduces
the possibility for women like Branca, “autora de nada”(66), to be the authors of
their multiple identity.

Notes

All italicized quotations of O Dia dos Prodigios are my emphasis.
1 Nancy Partner, unpublished paper presented at the 1984 American Historical Association,
Chicago, cited in Caroll Smith Rosenberg, “Writing History: Language, Class and Gender,”
Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
1986) 31-52, citation from p. 31.
3 Lourenço 15.
4 Sadlier, The Question of How 49.
5 Wayne C. Booth, “Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist
Criticism,” Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago and
6 Diane Price Herndl, “The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic,” Feminism, Bakhtin and
The Dialogic, eds. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Mackinstry (Albany: State University of New York


10 Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” 333. Nancy Glazener argues that the importance Bakhtin gives to Dostoevsky is due to his depiction of characters as “ideologues” who “interact with each other, who attempt to persuade each other, who represent certain values for each other” (117). See her article “Dialogic Subversion,” Bakhtin and Cultural Theory, eds. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).


14 Sadlier 65.

15 Michael Holquist, Dialogism 89.


18 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 125.

19 Herndl, “The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic” 20. According to Mary Russo, carnival has its limitations and is especially dangerous for women and marginalized groups precisely because of its complicity with the dominant culture. See Mary Russo, “Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory” 213-27.


21 Interview with Stephanie d’Orey, Cultura 12.

22 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds 205.

23 This is a term used by Caryl Emerson in her article “Outer Word and Inner Speech,” Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

24 Emerson 33.

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Sex and Success in *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre*: A Tale of Two Cities

Cláudia Pazos Alonso

In 1972, the publication of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* marked a watershed in Portuguese women’s writing. Ten years later, the literary landscape had changed beyond recognition. Widening the ranks of a select number of already consecrated sisters, unprecedented numbers of talented women writers were making highly acclaimed literary debuts, usually with works of fiction. They included Lídia Jorge, Teolinda Gersão, and Hélia Correia among others. A significant proportion of them, however, rejected the label of “feminist” and feminist militancy, and even the concept of “escrita feminina.” For, as Hilary Owen observes, “Many contemporary women writers in Portugal rightly mistrust the inverted sexism and potential ghettoization that creating an alternative women’s canon could imply.” This unease notwithstanding, women’s fiction does clearly display female-specific traits and concerns.

Among recent women writers, the fiction of Lídia Jorge is exemplary not only for its interrogation of issues such as history and its re-presentation, common to many post-revolutionary writers, but also for its unmistakable engagement with sexual/textual politics from a woman-centered perspective. The purpose of this paper is to examine her third work, *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre*, awarded the Cidade de Lisboa prize in 1984, in the light of the equality versus difference debate, arguing that through creative practice, Lídia Jorge is able to negotiate, or at least envisage, a conceptual framework that constructs a new and powerful position for women as subjects.

*Notícia da Cidade Silvestre* is a remarkable work that centers on the profound but increasingly conflictual friendship between two women, Anabela Cravo and Júlia Grei, in the context of their struggle for survival in the inhospitable urban environment of Lisbon in the late 1970s. The novel follows the two women over a period of several years and bears witness to the
transformation of the “heroine” Júlia. To that extent, Notícia conforms to the pattern of a nineteenth-century bildungsroman, as the naïve Júlia gradually becomes more streetwise and world weary.\textsuperscript{5} Despite Júlia’s transformation, literary reviews from the male establishment have tended to center on the figure of Anabela Cravo, described by João Gaspar Simões “a rompante mulher que é essa aventureira dos novos tempos, os tempos da sociedade feminista,” “ao pé dela a Júlia Grei não é nada, humanamente falando.”\textsuperscript{6} Gaspar Simões is fairly scathing in his analysis of the last quarter of the novel, a revealing fact in itself, since it coincides with the time when Júlia, up to then the weakling of the two friends, gradually begins to come into her own.

By contrast, when Lídia Jorge is interviewed by Regina Louro, a rather different emphasis emerges.\textsuperscript{7} Lídia Jorge clearly sympathizes with Júlia and passionately defends her character against the (male) misconception that she is a doormat, deserving to be trampled on: “[Anabela] faz mimetismo do homem; Júlia é talvez a personagem por onde a mudança passa realmente” (2). A little later, she elaborates on this point: “Júlia é uma figura reivindicativa, não concorda? Achei que fazê-la de uma forma mansa era mais eficaz do que fazê-la de uma forma revoltada e excessiva […] Traz em si o desejo de equilíbrio do ser” (3). Indeed, Júlia reaches an unprecedented degree of power and autonomy through the act of writing, given that the novel ends with her about to give up her day job in a bookshop to devote herself to full-time writing. In other words, there is a momentous shift from Júlia’s role as passive consumer and guardian of the written word to active productive agent in her own right. In this context, it is significant that the novel is written in the first person in a language akin to what Lídia Jorge describes as “a reprodução livre de uma intimidade falada,” enabling the protagonist to tell herstory. It is also noteworthy that this “intimidade falada” is addressed, in the first instance, to an anonymous interlocutor whom Júlia, the narrator, meets at a time of great stress, following the suicide attempt of her son Jóia, a point to which we shall return. For, in so doing, the narrative draws attention to the central role of dialogue in the construction of identity and self-definition.

1. Júlia, the Powerless Female

When the novel begins, Júlia, a recently widowed young woman, has to fend for herself and her son and struggles to make ends meet. Therefore, when the strong and determined Anabela comes onto the scene, Júlia soon becomes dependent on her as provider of both emotional and material support. Right
from the very opening lines, there is no doubt as to who “wears the trousers,” metaphorically speaking: “Se morássemos numa casa com janela na manhã do encontro, eu teria ido por-me no parapeito à espera de Anabela Cravo” (19). Aside from the shocking realization that Júlia’s home (which turns out to be her deceased husband’s workshop) is devoid of proper windows, making her a prisoner in her own attic, this incipit positions Júlia in the traditional and passive female occupation of waiting at the window for the arrival of a miraculous “prince charming.” Júlia lives in a limbo, literally as well as metaphorically, since she is surrounded from all angles by her dead husband’s sculptures.

However, by the end of the first chapter, there are already signs that Anabela, far from being a prince charming or even a good fairy who can rescue Júlia from her predicament, is selfish and builds her self-confidence at the expense of her friend. As the friendship develops, Anabela becomes increasingly manipulative. For instance, she persuades her friend to lend her the atelier for illicit sexual encounters with her sugar-daddy, Padrinho. The inequality in the two women’s positions is encoded in the fact that Júlia does not even know where Anabela lives, whereas Anabela owns a key to the workshop. The key, a phallic symbol of penetration according to Freud, pinpoints the fact that Anabela can enter Júlia’s intimate territory while remaining in complete control of her own space. Anabela rings and visits only when it suits her. As Hilary Owen points out, in time she even takes on characteristics of “the traditional breadwinner” when she compensates for broken promises to Jóia with material goods, such as a “borrowed” television.\(^8\)

Unlike Anabela, the self-effacing and self-abnegating Júlia is a truly caring companion in adversity. When Anabela discovers her unwanted pregnancy, Júlia through sheer intuition manages to locate her friend’s dwelling. She handles enquiries to secure a back-street abortion and foots the hefty bill (fourteen contos, a sum nearly equal to her monthly wages). Since abortion was still illegal at the time, Júlia was risking imprisonment. Furthermore, she remains by Anabela’s side for a week despite risking dismissal from work (120-37). The roles of carer and provider are thus completely reversed as Anabela temporarily becomes mute, regressing to a childlike state, while Júlia nurses her back to life with unconditional love. This selflessness is all the more admirable given the fact that, in the process of tracking her down, Júlia had discovered that her friend lived under the same roof as her married sugar-daddy figure, Padrinho.\(^9\)
Anabela, initially perceived as a positive, resourceful woman, is therefore soon revealed as simultaneously devious and deceitful. She is a classic example of the predatory woman who uses men sexually on her way to the top, to pay for dental treatment for instance, or to do her articles with a renowned lawyer. Furthermore, she is unable to act any differently in the context of a relationship based on female friendship. She lies shamelessly to Júlia, patronizes and uses her, her atelier and subsequently even her new home, as a part of her self-promoting strategy. More ruthlessly still, when Jóia inadvertently interrupts a particularly important sexual encounter, Anabela abruptly severs all contact with her (195).

Unlike the childless Anabela, who is free to sell her body, Júlia incessantly has to juggle conflicting demands as a single mother with significantly less room for maneuver. In order to secure her and her son’s material survival, she works for a pittance in a bookshop. Her lack of qualifications and her precarious financial situation echo that of another widow, Dora Rosário, in Maria Judite de Carvalho’s Os Armários Vazios (1966). As a result, she has little “quality” time to devote to her son. Whenever there is an unforeseen event, she either has to arrange makeshift childcare or risk leaving Jóia on his own. Because his mother is so busy trying to secure the household’s financial survival, Jóia is largely left to his own devices, ultimately with disastrous consequences.

Despite her precarious circumstances, Júlia shuns Anabela’s advice of a lucrative marriage with the eligible Saraiva, following her heart instead into a relationship with Artur, the penniless sculptor, footless and free and intent on remaining so. But when Júlia becomes pregnant, he reacts as if it were a curtailment of his freedom. In a desperate bid to save their love, Júlia decides to have an abortion. In telling contrast to Anabela’s abortion, Júlia will be entirely by herself, without a shoulder to lean on, since by then Anabela has gone entirely her separate way and Artur is shielded from the grim truth with the explanation of a miscarriage. Even so, Artur eventually leaves her.

2. The New Júlia or What it Takes to Beat Anabela at her Own Game

After she has been abandoned by her nearest and dearest, Júlia decides to become more pragmatic and coldhearted like Anabela, whose success she is able to contemplate from afar. She had tried to survive through the socially acceptable activity of sewing rag dolls, but now, spurred on by the vision of Anabela’s success, she adopts a utilitarian view of men. She arranges to meet
with Saraiva, a bachelor clearly intent on putting her on a pedestal. Júlia acts as the virginal, demure woman without a past that he longs for, but this role-play places her in an impossible situation because of Jóia’s existence, since Saraiva is unable to accept her as a woman with family commitments. Her relationship with Mão Dianjo, a long-standing family friend, also undergoes changes. At a time when she was at her most vulnerable and in need of comfort, they had sex once. Now it just becomes an expedient means to fill the coffers. Eventually Júlia also names her price to her boss, Sr. Assumpção.

Both Mão Dianjo and Sr. Assumpção have incongruously angelical names, since they are in fact lecherous old men who take advantage of Júlia’s emotional and financial vulnerability. Saraiva, who shuts Jóia off from their future as a couple, is no better. The name Saraiva “era o mesmo que granizo (…) água congelada caindo em grãos contra a janela” (61), an apt reminder of his lack of humanity behind the façade of his orderly life as an employee in the ironically named insurance company Tranquilidade. Unlike the men in her life, who have both certainty (tranquilidade) and centrality (apótema),

Júlia is emphatically condemned to the margins, a fact strikingly brought home when she tries her hand at prostitution for a couple of months (285). She only gives up this degrading but lucrative activity after a close brush with death (in a hallucinatory scene, she is nearly run over by a psychotic male driver), realizing that Jóia needs her alive (286-87).

Sadly, Jóia has become increasingly psychologically disturbed and has problems at school. It will only take one more thing to make him tip over the edge, and this occurs when Saraiva redesigns aloud Júlia’s flat in a way such that the boy would be dispossessed of his own room. Saraiva and Júlia go out for a romantic meal, leaving a devastated child behind. The result, predictably, is Jóia’s suicide attempt. His death is only narrowly avoided because Júlia, out of sheer instinct, abandons Saraiva in the middle of the meal to rush back to the flat.

Jóia’s near death constitutes a turning point in Júlia’s life. While in hospital by his bedside, she is overcome by an irrational and all-pervasive need to carry a knife with her (296), a tangible symbol of her pent-up aggression. She also has an uncontrollable urge to write and starts scribbling in her diary. Significantly, we learn that she had been writing for years and it may have been the only way for her to keep her sanity. Earlier in the novel, Júlia had confessed to Mão Dianjo that she was incapable of hatred, an admission of failure by male standards, since Mão Dianjo firmly believes in the need to
learn how to hate in order to be free: “Só ele [o ódio] é capaz de defender, de preservar, robustecer a pessoa” (264).

When stating the necessity of hatred, Mão Dianjo had primarily Jóia in mind, implying that in order to survive, it was imperative for the youngster to establish his identity by distinguishing himself from his mother. Certainly, as he lies in his hospital bed mute, powerless and without hair, Jóia reverts back to an infant-like stage. His healing can only occur through successful self-affirmation, a fact that becomes clear when the first words that he writes are his full name “João Mário Matos Grei.” His recovery is further ensured by the presence of a “father” figure, Fernando, who gives him a Dalmatian dog. The dog acts as a transitional object, as the (grammatically female) diminutive of Jóia is transferred to the animal, while the boy assumes the more virile name of João Mário.

If hatred becomes profoundly liberating for João Mário, it proves to be equally so for Júlia, in what constitutes a ritual initiation similar to the trajectory of the central female character in Clarice Lispector’s story “O Búfalo,” from Laços de Família. Jóia’s suicide attempt constitutes her “epiphany,” a point of no return. She starts carrying her knife around, ready for use, and decides to sell her diary. These twin acts gradually transform her, eventually giving her sufficient strength to stand up to the various persons who have used and abused her: Saraiva, Mão Dianjo, Sr. Assumpção and finally Anabela. Her symbolic victory over Mão Dianjo, whom she threatens with the knife (303), boosts her self-confidence and enables her to encounter Anabela to exorcise old ghosts.

In the intervening years, Anabela has made it to the top. She has obtained her law degree, boasts an enviable job, has several people working for her, and owns a luxury flat, which is part of her divorce settlement from her former boss, Atougia Ferraz. Anabela, however, readily acknowledges the emptiness of her life. But, sadly, far from begging Júlia’s forgiveness for treating her appallingly throughout their relationship, she carries on in exactly the same vein. This disregard culminates with her humiliation of Júlia by showing her the discarded dolls so patiently sewn by the latter over the years. Anabela had been secretly buying these back as a token of her commitment, as if friendship was no more than a mercenary transaction, an exchange commodity that money can purchase.

In other words, Júlia has been like a rag doll at the hands of the unscrupulous Anabela Cravo, bought and discarded when no longer needed, and
never really treasured. As Hilary Owen puts it, “Nothing that Júlia does is undertaken independently of the uterine strings that make her Anabela’s puppet. This is finally underlined when she confronts the rag dolls who reflect herself” (422). Therefore, in order to free herself from this stifling umbilical cord, Júlia must throw the knife that she carries with her as a display of (phallic) potency. Again, in Hilary Owen’s words, “Júlia must symbolically knife her in order to be free of her, just as Dorian Grey kills his own portrait” (429).

In the lead-up to this climax, Anabela is rather relentlessly caricatured as a tyrannical man who expects “his” submissive “wife” to bring newspapers, cigarettes, drinks, and food at her every call and beckon, and then to sit adoringly at her feet. But at last Júlia can now see through her former friend and is appalled by what she stands for. Anabela is metaphorically sterile, and the mancha negra on her face, which (rather problematically) is attributed to the pill, makes her look as though she had a moustache. She is a mutant, a monstrous creature: “uma nova raça, um outro sexo e uma outra natureza se anunciava em Anabela Cravo como se a terra se movesse para dar à luz uma outra espécie de pessoa” (320). Júlia’s rejection of Anabela’s model is uncompromising, but it does not force her back into the passive victim role since, by drawing out the knife, she shakes off the yoke and breaks free of this abusive relationship. Her own strength and power do not rely on the same strategy of oppression as Anabela: “Anabela teria de saber que a Terra se move de vários modos” (321). This is confirmed beyond all doubt by Júlia’s inner reflections after leaving a terrified Anabela, as she looks at the crowd of night workers on their way to and fro:

gente baixa, gente gorda, gente negra, gente de poderosas varizes como rios de sangue, gente anã, gente coxa, gente torta carregada de sacos de plástico (...) gente igual a mim, gente minha irmã. Gente ainda por meter medo a alguém pelo menos uma vez na vida. (321)

In other words, despite her newly acquired strength, Júlia’s solidarity still lies with the downtrodden.

3. The Subversion of Gender Polarizations

By positing the victory of Júlia over Anabela as the novel draws to a close, and by crowning it with Júlia’s complete rejection of the model of power
offered by Anabela, *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre* challenges the notion that equal rights feminism is likely ever to solve the problem of women’s fundamental inequality in society. Anabela is, of course, a grotesque parody of the liberated woman. She is determined to compete on an equal footing with men, but it is clear that the world that surrounds her is still visibly far removed from a world of equal opportunities. The only way to the top for a woman of her background is to sleep her way up, discarding friendships as soon as they have served their purpose. In order to succeed, she has to be “worse than a man,” denying herself any feelings. Finally, being successful and having a child are perceived as wholly and mutually exclusive. Anabela succeeds in reproducing the male pattern of dominance, but only at the expense of utter emotional and physical sterility.

Early on in the novel, Anabela had exploded conventional notions of biological determinism. She had developed a pioneering sexual theory that distinguished between biological sex and inner gender. According to her, the world is divided into two species: those who have knowledge (saber) and those who have (only) intimate understanding (conhecer) (54). These two categories can be roughly approximated to traditional gender polarizations such as (male) reason versus (female) sensitivity. Anabela thus forcefully undermines the preconception that people are gender-bound by virtue of their biological sex. However, in practice, she also reinforces the masculine/feminine hierarchy, by equating “masculine” knowledge and know-how with sought-after power and action. By contrast, it is clear that “feminine” perceptiveness/insightfulness/empathy does not grant any straightforward access to a position of power in the realm of the Symbolic. Anabela, of course, belongs to the former, the law of the Father, whereas Júlia struggles in the latter. Yet, significantly, Júlia seems to come out better than her in the end.15

If we apply these categories of “saber” and “conhecer” to the men in Júlia’s life, all of them, apart from Artur, have a place in the Symbolic order. As such, like Anabela, they belong to the realm of those who have knowledge and power. Artur is the exception, living like a rebel on the margins of society, and we are repeatedly told that he and Júlia belong to the same “raça interior” and are thus intertwined in an “incesto de almas.” There is, however, another momentous exception, Fernando, the only man who remains on the scene at the end of the novel. Arguably, he is the only man who did not use Júlia sexually, even though she offered herself to him as a token of gratitude for his unfailing support of Jóia (299). More importantly, he is the only man who
treats Jóia as a real person, giving him his undivided time, love, and attention.

What is remarkable about Fernando is his slow transformation in Júlia’s eyes. Much in the same way as Júlia, he was initially positioned as a “loser.” At the outset, dwarfed by Artur’s physical presence, he was viewed as feminine and almost childlike before gradually coming into his own. By the end, his height is no longer perceived negatively, for his stature has certainly grown in Júlia’s eyes. Because Júlia has gained self-confidence, she is arguably better able to revalue the “feminine” Fernando. Through sheer persistence, Fernando has also grown into a talented artist. Halfway through the novel, even Artur applauds one of his works. At the end, when Fernando’s exhibition takes place, it is a public success. He has taken to painting mares that seem to fly like the wind. The symbolism of the mares becomes apparent when one of his female co-workers explains to Júlia that, according to an old legend, “na Antiguidade as éguas de Lisboa eram tão velozes que tinham fama de engravidar do vento. Durante a corrida” (306). The legend thus encodes a symbolism of female freedom, as the female animal is not dependent on a male to reproduce. It also re-signifies female identity through the power to give life. Fernando, silently working in the margins, is able to sense and inscribe through allegory the full potential of femaleness.

Therefore, Fernando is an enabling, not a castrating, presence in touch with his “feminine” side. It is thanks to his love and care that Jóia is able to run freely again. His angelic androgyny is arguably difficult to reconcile with the traditional paradigm of “masculinity,” but this goes precisely towards showing how difficult it is to explode century-old stereotypes in a “machista” society such as the Portuguese one. In the closing scene, the breakdown of his car, the ultimate symbol of virility, succinctly encodes his failure to conform to old models of masculinity. In that light, it may appear doubly ironic that the car in question is a Zephyr, a name that suggests the speed of the wind, since the old banger is hopelessly slow. But the car’s name also looks back to the (androgynous) wind which had the power to make mares pregnant and simultaneously calls up the image of Zephyr, the God of the West wind, a powerful image as both wind and west conjure up the idea of change, therefore deconstructing the surface reading which would seem to confirm Fernando’s ineffectual masculinity. The novel thus appropriately ends with a new beginning, hinting at the reconstitution of a new family unit. Together, the three “survivors” may be able to build a better future, where the pattern of male dominance would be eschewed in favor of cooperation between the sexes.16
4. (Re)-Creating the World through the Act of Naming

As is often the case in Lídia Jorge’s novels, names can be interpreted on a variety of symbolic levels. In fact, in the preface, the author herself draws attention to the meaning subjacent to Júlia’s name: “Júlia porque é nome de paixão e Grei porque significa gente e povo.” The ambiguity of a name that signifies “paixão” is important, since passion signifies both love and suffering. Júlia is undoubtedly both long-suffering and loving. The name of Anabela Dias Cravo is also readily decodable, being inextricably linked with her identity as a belle dame sans merci. She is beautiful (bela) but simultaneously as tough as a nail (cravo). Of course, the word “cravo” also means carnation, a symbolically masculine flower, and also, furthermore, the symbol par excellence of the “25 de Abril.” On a metaphorical level, therefore, as Ana Paula Ferreira incisively speculated, the relationship between Júlia Grei and Anabela Cravo can be interpreted as that of the gradual disenchantment of the Grei with the Cravo, that is, of the people with the Carnation Revolution.17 The “25 de Abril” promised access to power to all, but in practice equality was slow to come, causing considerable disillusionment.

The failure of the Revolution to fulfill its promises of equality is even more stark in respect of the position of women in society. The promised land of equality for women, symbolized by Anabela Cravo, turns out to be a mirage and at any rate is certainly not available to Júlia Grei, symbol of the grei, the silent majority of working women with childcare responsibilities. Júlia thus rejects the mirage of Anabela Cravo, but in so doing, she is not necessarily forced back into the powerless position of the victim, or only if we do not read her full name. For her full name, Maria Júlia Matos Grei, casts her in a different light, given the significance of her (presumably) maiden name, Matos. Phonetically linked with the verb “to kill,” Matos (“mato-os”) translates as “I can/will kill them.” Júlia’s aggression and negative feelings, initially suppressed, eventually surface. But they do so in a liberating, rather than destructive, fashion since she does not allow hatred to take over in the process of self-assertion. Most revealingly, however, the surname “Matos” also evokes a wild, uncultivated field (mato), signaling in no uncertain terms the fact that Júlia, in the end, will not be tamed or co-opted by the existing patriarchal order. Her complete name, therefore, points to the need for self-assertion while embracing love and compassion for others.

Her dramatic transformation, which does not entail her becoming a new Anabela, is marked by the fact that she is willing to surrender her knife to
the anonymous person with whom she had been meeting in the (aptly re-
named) Bar Together/Tonight. We do not know who this person is, nor do
we know whether the person is male or female. Perhaps it doesn’t matter.
However, contrasting with Anabela/Júlia’s friendship, this relationship devel-
ops into something above and beyond the immediate financial transaction
involved, as the anonymous figure seems to take on the role of a
confessor/psychoanalyst in a “talking cure.” The potential for abuse of trust
is of course enormous, since having bought the caderno amarelo containing
Júlia’s “memories,” the mysterious person has effectively bought the “rights”
to the story, risking the appropriation of someone else’s life-story. However,
this person, whoever he or she may be, is scrupulously honest in
acknowledging publicly that s/he unilaterally chose to “rewrite” the tale in a
way that downplays the caderno amarelo. As such, the final result can perhaps
still be viewed as collaborative, given that ultimately Júlia is reconfirmed in,
not stripped off, her identity as an author:

[Júlia] haveria de vir a admirar-se que o caderno de capa amarela tivesse tido
tão pouco destaque e que, pelo contrário, os papéis que me ia mandando pelo
 correio, ou por quem calhava, aparecessem com tanta importância. Mas
acrescentou que se revia e achava, por inteiro. (17, my italics)

In other words, Júlia gives her blessing to the final product, satisfied that
it does not falsify her experience. In fact, it could be argued that the occasion-
al diary entries (marked by italic print and separated from the main text)
which intersperse the main narrative and chart Jóia’s slow progress on the road
back to recovery are endowed with a special meaning. In some sense, these
diary entries mirror Júlia’s own slow surfacing from suicidal silence through
the self-defining act of naming/writing in a striking “mise en abyme.” Indeed,
Júlia had been voiceless and silenced throughout, unlike Anabela, who was
as vocal as Tarzan in an early episode. At this early stage, Júlia had been
manifestly unable to emulate her (chapter 1). But now, she has access to
language in the form of her written memoirs.

It is also crucially important that writing, for Júlia, is posited as the non-
violent alternative to carrying a knife. If the latter was a symbol of male
aggression, the pen, by contrast, may be “a metaphorical penis” to recall
Gilbert and Gubar’s (in)famous definition. But, in a remarkable inversion,
attention here shifts to the paper, which is endowed with qualities commonly
associated with the feminine: “o papel em branco parece-me um tecido doce, humano e envolvente como uma pele. Passivo, vegetal e outros adjectivos que não vale a pena enumerar” (305). More radically, writing may even break down binary oppositions: “O papel é um tecido doce, humano e envolvente como uma pele. Passivo, activo, e outras qualidades que não preciso de nomear (...) Como se, a partir dessa frágil matéria, sentisse e pudesse dar notícia da outra realidade” (322).

Júlia no longer needs a knife, as she can find autonomy and a voice through the female paradigm of writing her story. Thus, she is now ready to give up the bookshop, where she had been at the receiving end of male-dominated culture and where the printed word was regularly used by Sr. Assumpção to proposition her.19 Júlia lives to tell her tale or, as she puts it, to “dar notícia da outra realidade” (322). The “outra realidade” is undoubtedly, at least to a large degree, the reality of women so often untold. For the flash of inspiration which signals Júlia’s liberating “venue à l’écriture” while her son is lying in his hospital bed is the haunting certainty that beneath the savage reality of the world as we know it lies an uncharted and wild territory full of promises: “experimentava a certeza, ao mesmo tempo alegre e dolorosa, de que a outra margem da rua principal era uma zona silvestre de que este lado era apenas uma lembrança selvagem” (297). According to Lídia Jorge in her aforementioned interview with Regina Louro, “Notícia é a lembrança de um tempo primordial que a vida nesta terra recorda.”20 It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that after moving to her new house and acquiring a room with a view, the sight/site that Júlia can see from her window (presumably when looking at the other side of the main road, “a outra margem da rua principal”) is the Church of São Mamede (164). The building becomes the visible embodiment of the “lembrança de um tempo primordial,” which she is so actively engaged in re/uncovering. This fact is all the more remarkable considering that São Mamede, like many other Portuguese saints, is androgynous:

Esta personagem misteriosa (…) parece ser o resultado da masculinização, por acção dos pastores, de uma figura feminina que tanto poderá ter sido a Moira, a Magna-Mater dos antigos, Maria ou ainda Diana (…) A sua masculinização não está ainda completa: Mamede é andrógino, representado como uma mulher viril ou como um homem adulto efeminado, imberbe e de cabelos longos.21
The building thus marks the institutional power of a patriarchal Church and points to the “outra realidade,” the concealed female signifier buried beneath the surface, which Júlia can begin to restore in her narrative through the act of remembering.

Conclusion
According to Annis Pratt, “The woman’s novel asks questions, poses riddles, cries out for restitution, but the synthesis occurs in the mind of the reader, who, having participated in the narrative reenactment, must put its message into effect in her own life.” The possibility of reader identification is indeed one of the keys to the success of this novel, since the reader, initially drawn to the strongly delineated Anabela, is likely to feel defrauded when she turns out to be irrecoverable for feminism. Thus, identification with Júlia becomes not merely the only possible, but the only productive, way out.

In choosing to cast Júlia as her unlikely heroine, Lídia Jorge is making a truly outstanding contribution to the ongoing gender debate in Portugal. For approximately a decade after both the publication of Novas Cartas Portuguesas and the April Revolution, her novel suggests that the way forward for feminism does not necessarily lie in equality feminism, valuable though that may continue to be, but in a new brand of difference feminism, which must revalue women’s role as mothers without ascribing them to silence. Her compelling tale alerts us to the need for change in the structures of society at large and also tentatively takes on board the importance of the de/reconstruction of masculinity. Last but not least, she shows that femininity and masculinity are fluid attributes, available to both sexes, but that as long as they remain locked in a hierarchy of power, the “cidade silvestre” of her title will more readily continue to evoke a urban jungle than a promised city.

Notes


3 Following Isabel Allegro de Magalhães’s pioneering work O Sexo dos Textos (Lisbon: Caminho, 1995), more recently some of these women writers may be more willing to consider the possibility of “escrita feminina.” See article by Hélia Correia, “O Surpreendente Pequeno


5 As Annis Pratt argues, however, the traditional pattern of the *bildungsroman* is problematic when the heroine is female cf. Annis Pratt, *Archeypal Patterns in Female Fiction* (1981).


8 Hilary Owen, “[W]Rites of Passage,” diss., University of Nottingham, 1992, 408.

9 Padrinho’s nameless wife is confined to a wheelchair, a fitting symbol of her victim status under patriarchy (125-26).

10 In her defense, her ruthless behavior must be contextualized by the fact that, as a thirteen year-old girl, she was raped by Padrinho. In a merciless world, where the law of the jungle prevails, the survival of the fittest required her to turn it to her advantage. Therefore, she demanded that he finance her law studies, the successful completion of which would mark her entry into the Symbolic order. Furthermore, while most of the time Anabela uses men as a means to an end, she claims to be in love with her boss, Atougia Ferraz. Her hopes of a non-abusive relationship are, however, shattered when he demands a kind of sex, sodomy, which she regards as unacceptable in the context of a loving exchange, (which ironically takes place in Morocco, in the city of Rabat, phonetically akin to rabo). Her vulnerability also briefly comes to the fore at the time of the abortion. But thereafter she becomes evermore ruthless, cynically casting aside her romantic ideal in time to resume a profitable liaison with her boss.

11 Although he may genuinely have loved her, he is ultimately no different from the other men in her life who want her solely for sex and readily edit out of the picture her cumbersome child. He will subsequently beg Júlia again to leave Jóia behind and join him abroad (244), but needless to say this request is unacceptable to her. Artur’s attitude is all the more ironic given that his main goal in life is to help liberate those oppressed by capitalist society, yet he is completely unable to recognize that the person he loves is a victim of both class and gender. Ironically, at the end, Artur is reluctantly made to fall into line. He marries Celina, a previous girlfriend, and acquires in the process a neat haircut (symbolizing his castration).

12 Indeed, Mão Dianjo’s workplace is appropriately called Apótema, a word that denotes a mathematical straight line: “the perpendicular from the center to the sides of a regular polygon.” In other words, he is firmly at the center, she is “a bit on the side,” condemned to remain in the margins.

13 Immediately after she leaves Mão Dianjo’s flat, her “castrating” power is metonymically encoded by the presence in the street of a blind and mutilated man (304).

14 Critics have accused Lídia Jorge of giving a dismal picture of female friendship. In her interview with Regina Louro, however, Jorge counters the criticism arguing that it stems from the paralyzing (it is implied) “ideia idílica que se tem da amizade feminina.” If female solidarity is only part of the picture, ignoring competitive/destructive instincts is ultimately counterproductive. Regina Louro, *op. cit.*, 2.

15 We may observe, in that connection, that “emotional intelligence” has recently begun to be revalued.

16 In that light it is also probably not a coincidence that Fernando is a man who is able to work collaboratively. In fact, in a recent interview, Lídia Jorge implicitly pinpoints the need for collaboration between men and women: “Não gosto muito de brandir o tema das diferenças entre os homens e as mulheres. Gosto de brandir o da complementaridade mais do que o da

17 This interpretation was put forward by Ana Paula Ferreira during the discussion in a parallel session devoted to Lídia Jorge, Congesso da AIL, Oxford, September 1996.

18 Júlia’s close association with the domain of the pre-verbal Semiotic is apparent in the language she uses with Mão Dianjo (153). Her subsequent self-assertion through language gives her access into the Symbolic order.

19 Admittedly, we do not know how she is going to be able to make a living. We can only hope that through a collaborative relationship with her newfound literary agent she will have “a room of one’s own and five hundred a year,” to recall the words of Virginia Woolf. The other two possibilities open to her are far bleaker on an individual and collective level. She could be irrevocably silenced, like the Czech poet Milena Jesenská, a victim of the Holocaust, in which case “um tempo muito triste se aproxima do horizonte” (63). Alternatively, she could collude with masculine power by taking up the knife again. In this scenario likewise “um tempo muito violento se aproxima do horizonte (304).

20 Regina Louro, *op. cit.*, 3.


22 Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* (1981) 177. By contrast, for the heroine in the novel, the journey very often ends in “disjunction” rather than “reconciliation.”