Donning the “Gift” of Representation: Lídia Jorge’s A Instrumentalina

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Nothing is more difficult than to accept a gift.1 Among the writers of fiction who emerged during the period following the “revolution not of the gun, but of the word,”2 otherwise known as the “Carnations Revolution,” Lídia Jorge is perhaps the one most in tune with what post-structuralist thought has variously denounced as the “violence of representation” (Armstrong). Ostensibly drawn from her life experiences as a self-fashioned writer, each of the author’s prose works published to date evokes contemporary realities with more or less localized historical, social, and geopolitical specificity.3 Whether by means of allegory or, as is increasingly the case starting with Notícia da Cidade Silvestre (1984), through simulacra of “private” realities predicated especially on cinematic, metonymical images, such fictional scenarios resist enclosure in the “effect of the real” (Barthes).4 They problematize representation by calling attention to its complicity with power and by insisting on the provisional, discursively contingent, and overdetermined status of all figurations of history, community, identity, and otherness.5 Oscillating between the questioning of any truth claim bearing the imprint of the metaphysical, humanist logos and a renewed political and ethical imperative of referentials, Jorge’s fictions, somewhere between John Dewey’s philosophy of “instrumentalism” and Richard Rorty’s “pragmatism,” put into play ideas as tools for living within a postmodern episteme. In this manner, they pay back, further incur, in and bring the reader to bear witness to the debt of representation crystallized by the April 1974 revolution’s “greatest gift”—language freed from censorship.6

Any writer’s work is always something more or something other than what any given pretense of interpretive mastery can take it to be. Far from what
would amount to a sweeping gesture of signification, the foregoing is but an attempt to poise the short story *A Instrumentalina* (1992) on the philosophical, aesthetic, and political pragmatics proper to but exceeding the open-ended textuality, or *écriture*, practiced by Lídia Jorge. As Maria Alzira Seixo has suggested, the author’s short stories “may be considered arguments of a more extensive fiction,” that neither “describes” nor “recreates” the real, but “cites” it. In all their brevity and expressive force, these narratives are eminently citational, inciting the reader to take part in the “textual dialogue” or “interdiscursive passage” that they enact (Seixo 1998; emphasis in the original; my translation). The density of meaning commanded by such an art of intertextual and intratextual “in-citation” is particularly exhibited in *A Instrumentalina*, arguably the best example of the meta-representational dimension of Jorge’s fiction. Hence its “instrumentality” for refracting the salient theoretical-practical features of the greater textual corpus, published before as well as after it. In fact, Jorge’s latest novel, *O Vale da Paixão* (1998), continuously “cites” the setting, figures, narrative threats, and themes first presented in the short story, so much so that what may be said about the latter may function as an introduction to the longer text.7

Notably, Seixo’s review of *Marido e Outros Contos* (1997) does not mention *A Instrumentalina*, published separately in 1992 although also included in this volume. As the imaginary bicycle of its title, the forty-one page story is both too grand and too delicate, too fleeting to easily stand a swift, even if interpretative, productive “in-citational” reading as just one story among others. Its original publication the same year as that of *A Última Dona* is in itself indicative of a uniqueness demanding a more pondered, special treatment. And this is obviously not just due to the status of the book as an editorial investment in an “isolated piece, endowed with its own autonomy and with a fascination that the reader will not forget.”8

Similarly, to a precious, intractable gift enveloped in layers of superimposed tissues (or texts), *A Instrumentalina* occupies a privileged position among Jorge’s other “writerly” attempts at figuring representation as an impossibility, as nothing else than a “gift [that] is not,” a “poisonous” gift.9 This position, as will be subsequently demonstrated through a series of detailed analytical un-wrappings, is one that momentarily suspends the circle of economic exchange in which every “gift” of representation, including every means to that end, is implicated. While nonetheless offering historical, political and aesthetic testimonies of such (“poisonous”) deadly exchange, the
preciosity (if you will) of *A Instrumentalina* shines through those textual folds and contours, pointing to a liberating ontological and ethical elsewhere: a genesis-like stance of writing not as representation or reproduction, but as semiotic productivity. This anti-idealist (and anti-humanist) stance parallels Jorge’s other thematizations of writing, as evinced, for example, in *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre; A Costa dos Murmúrios; O Jardim sem Limites*; and, most particularly, in *O Vale da Paixão*. Writing is thus shown to emerge—to use the author’s own deliberately vague, though citational formula—from that margin of the margin “where the writer finds himself” waiting in silence and circumspection to be saved by “the angel of language” (Jorge 1994: 93; my translation).10

That such an evasive, life-saving margin is closely associated to the childhood world of dream, a world still relatively innocent of utilitarian, logocentric thought, is first of all suggested by the contrapuntal relation established between *A Última Dona* and *A Instrumentalina*. Calderón de la Barca’s renowned Baroque drama, *La vida es sueño*, constitutes an appropriate intertextual framing (explicitly, in one case, and implicitly, in the other) for both texts, and thereby bringing to light the polarity of their respective dream worlds. If the novel attests to the annulment of the humanist Cartesian subject in a world reduced to simulacra and simulations (Baudrillard), the short story points to a vital, non-specularized and, therefore, non-objectified beyond; a space that may be said to revisit a generative, pre-symbolic locus of “significance.”11

Bearing the historical and philosophical lesson of Seguismundo’s existential dilemma in the form of an epigraph—“Não me despertes se durmo e, se estou acordado, não me adormeças,”12 *A Última Dona* can be described as a postmodern thriller, an obscenely sinister nightmare staged by omnipresent image-making interests. Death, in the form of suicide by soporifics—that of Ana Palma, alias, Anita Starlet—becomes the ultimate sign of “life” in this all-too-cinematically planned charade of empty figures and depthless images; of intricate, though flat background scenarios; and of successive cuts. The intrigue lies precisely on the degree to which the latter occur because neither the figures nor the space they inhabit necessarily fulfills the director’s expectations—as if some remnant of human agency and of natural forces disturb the order of the shiny, uni-dimensional screen.13 Symptomatically so, the Engineer is the first to find himself impotent to perform; he is literally taken by the ludicrous but ultimately tragic picture that he only apparently
directs, confident that his buying power can fulfill his libidinal capitalist fantasies. Thus the gift he buys himself, for his would-be sexual delight, (the image of) a woman richly donned in a white wool coat and whom he calls “Anita Starlet,” cannot but turn out to be a sacrificial offer (gift/don[a]) made to a world devoid of transcendental values, and where the only guide for living are cinematic referentials.\footnote{14}

*\textit{A Instrumentalina} provides a direct contrast to this adult, eerie dream world reminiscent of a post-modern “late picture show,” engulfing all in the ubiquitous fateful reign of representation—a scenario more complexly developed in *O Jardim sem Limites* (1995). As a glimpse of light rising above the image-making machinations going in *A Última Dona’s “Casa do Leborão”* (the prototype of which may be Calderón’s Baroque palace/prison), the short story evokes a time-space of childhood innocence carved in the imprisoning “long nightmare” of Portugal’s dictatorship. Such a time-space is created through a representation—the homonymous bicycle of the story’s title—that is an instrument of freedom but also of emotional maturing resulting from trauma, from loss of a dream. Neither bought nor sold and destined nowhere, it is only in retrospect that such a privileged event is recognized as possessing the quality of a gift of knowledge, one bearing a kind of supernatural grace escaping the economics of exchange.\footnote{15}

The text opens with an epigraph that may not be as much a justification for its minute dimensions as it is a hermeneutic appeal: “Um conto breve faz um sonho longo.” Capturing the reader from the start in the lingering vital dimension of that dream, or gift, whose apparition the text re-presents, *A Instrumentalina* compels the interpretative articulation of those other representations (and instruments thereof) dictating over the nightmarish historical world against the odds of which the liberating dream/gift emerges.

A fictional autobiographical memoir, the narrative presents itself as an intimate, affective re-collection of a distant fragment from the past prompted by an incidental trip turned narrative “voyage” (9) through personal and collective time.\footnote{16} Waiting at the bar of the Royal York Hotel in Toronto for an uncle whom she has not seen in thirty years, the narrator-protagonist finds herself in a position of geographical, temporal, and ontological distance. Suspended in disbelief, she evokes the uncle’s bicycle, “\textit{A Instrumentalina},” bringing together into a nostalgic new metaphorical whole—“\textit{o simulacro duma imagem que foi mas o tempo já fez vã}” (10)—the part images which had previously sheltered her from confronting a lost plenitude of being.\footnote{17} Her
narrative enfolds, then, as a recuperative (and therapeutic) transit between the present, fragmented subject that she is, sitting in the dimly lit bar of the Royal York, and that foundational imaginary scene, whereupon an ideal “I” had been transported and constructed by the uncle’s bike, his words, his picture-taking.

The objective is not to mis-recognize herself in the cinematic frozen frame of the little girl sitting in a field of daisies and interpellated as “Greta Garbo,” a fantasy image of the uncle’s “proof” or “gift” of love, subsequently shattered by the disappearance of both vehicle and owner.\(^{18}\) Rather than an alienating monument to a love gained and lost, the narrative (re)invention of “A Instrumentalina” becomes a practical instrument of discursive quest through which the subject looks for her whereabouts not as a temporally continuous individual, but as a signifier-symptom of the transindividual experience that constitutes it in language heteronomically through the workings of the unconscious.\(^{19}\) In other words, the “I” that recollects here—as that reappearing in O Vale da Paixão—is nothing other than a necessarily transitory pretext (a signifier) through which emerge those other texts (signifiers) that determine its position in social discourse. This is eminently the discourse of a people, a nation, metonymically displaced across space and time due to the symbolic, dictatorial power of perpetuating representations that let no beyond-the-frame, no “outra margem do tempo” (12) be phantomed. The glimpse of this “other margin”—as the other side of the city in Notícia da Cidade Silvestre—is the (non-symbolized) gift moving the narrative towards the scene where memory-writing delivers life to the endless flux of signification.

Although no precise chronological references are given and the only mention of the spatial location of diegesis is an ambiguous “ao sul do meu país” (13), later recalled as “terra da poeira” (40), the narrative “in-cites” (Seixo) an allegorical historical reading. The grandfather’s house, where women and children are deposited by sons who emigrate is, obviously, a picture reminiscent of the collective experience of those “guarded”—or confined—in the Portugal of an increasingly moribund, but still standing, dictatorship. That something is about to instill a “desequilíbrio inevitável” in this “tragédia obscura” (13) is sensed only subliminally. Only much later would the source and means of such a political “imbalance” be recognized, in association with a symbolic vehicle of flight. Meanwhile, mothers go on miming the traditional, atemporal domestic gestures commanded by the paternalistic-fascist ideology of “happiness in the hearth”: they cook, sew, write letters to absent husbands, sing and dance to the sound of the
phonograph but, underneath it all, they secretly cry their solitude, their abandonment (14). In contrast to the women's resigned obedience to the family and national law emblematized by the figure of the old, symptomatically invalid, patriarch, their children run freely, “como uma matilha indomável, sem dono” (12). And, although ordered to continue the old man’s role as master of the family’s estate, the only young man left in the house rides around on a bike, apparently with no other objective than to escape his father’s dictum.

It is no wonder that his vehicle of flight, derogatorily called “A Instrumentalina” by the enraged patriarch impotent to stop it (17), becomes an extension of the rebellious son. Both he and his bike represent that space of freedom, play, and dream barred to those who, either for moral or economic reasons, are obliged to and further reproduce the old father’s dictates—the women who stay and write letters, and the workers with fantasies of leaving (33). Thus, the children, particularly the female ones, devote a “fanatic” fascination to the cyclist (19-20); and thus the “instrument” poses an increasing threat to the adults who see it as a means of undermining the social order. As mothers write longer and longer letters and as the patriarch goes on asserting his authority, sitting immobile in his own prison (18), uncle and children take flight in “A Instrumentalina.” Their destination, if any at all, is unimportant; what matters is that they go, that they displace themselves—even if only by touching part images of the bike (19).

Interestingly so, two distinct paradigms of representation and their consequent historical, political, and aesthetic implications are contrasted in this scenario. On the one hand, linguistic expression is shown to support and reproduce what exists by virtue of its representation: the signifier of Law, or the family-nation abandoned to the lasting agony of a paternalistic regime frozen in time. This circular movement is, on the other hand, halted by the continuous eruption of non-mimetic representations that allow for fluid, non-binding imaginary identifications.

As suggested before, mothers not only occupy the center stage of the representational space of hearth but, in effect, they are the guardians of its self-reflecting, unchanging image. Their songs echo (i.e. reproduce) those they hear in the phonograph; their partners of dance are none other than themselves; the letters they write seem to have no response. Such representations of “voice,” movement, and self-recreation where, in reality, there are none constitute not only testaments to the women’s emotional and physical devastation, but,
principally, to their complicity in upholding the frail, decrepit representation of the fascist institution of “the Portuguese home.” It is logical, then, that as instruments-executors of the patriarch’s word, the women-mothers are expected to suppress any threat, any sign of disorder in a home (-nation) left to wreckage or “ruin” (33) by the men-fathers who had abandoned it. This explains why the old man first approaches the little girl in love with her uncle—the miniature of a would-be wife-mother—with a gold coin in exchange for the bike’s disappearance (27-29). And that is why then he offers a generous dowry to any young woman who would snatch the cyclist uncle to marriage (31-32). One never knows what and if he pays the daughters-in-law for hiding and ensuring the destruction of the uncle’s bicycle (34-36)—the symbolic vehicle of resistance against the seemingly eternal order which their reproduction of domesticity guarantees.

Against this model of representation, the narrative suggests what may be a non-mimetic, perpetually unstable way of (re)presenting not what is but what is not, or in other words, what can only be inferred as a liberating, utopian time-space. Named by a figure reminiscent of god-the-father, giver of all names, the bicycle “A Instrumentalina” in actuality backtracks the “poison” incurred in the “gift” of its name. Thus the anger and confusion that leads the shaken patriarch to name his son’s transgressive vehicle fall upon none other than himself, delivering the present of a signifier-image that escapes symbolic fixation.

Remaining “indiferente a terras e mulheres,” uncle Fernando is only “prisoner” of the bike (34), of its supernatural quality as gift outside the market of exchange. In this way, “A Instrumentalina” cuts through the “realism” of the allegorical narrative outlined above. As a perpetually moving signifier, it—both the bike and the uncle—point to the outside of its signifying frame. At this level, both the instruments and the ways of representation become denaturalized; they no longer serve any other objective than playing up the mobility of the signifier, its necessarily absent anchoring point.

Conjoining the linguistic and ontological free play put into motion by the uncle/bike, two mediums of representation highlight and, in a way, take further the narrative’s liberating scene of signification postulated by “A Instrumentalina.” They are the uncle’s only other prized possessions: a Kodak camera and a typewriter. Instead of taking on the responsibilities of the family’s estate as a paterfamilias, which would be tantamount to upholding the reigning patriarchal law, the uncle bicyclist is an amateur photographer; and he pounds away at his typewriter throughout the night (26). No identified
purpose for his writing is given until after the uncle sees his bike destroyed; from then on he appears to write letters in desperation to leave, to run away (36). Like “A Instrumentalina,” the Kodak and the typewriter are, then, used against their functional purposes; they may be considered artistic mediums of imaginary leaps to a sublime world devoid of the rule of reference.

In this regard, the scene in which the little girl, who had silently and subserviently demanded to be recognized by the absolute, fascinating Other, receives from him the gift of a “voyage” to a field of daisies, is emblematic. Here, posing for his Kodak and transfigured by his words, she is not only made to feel like a “queen”; she is led to visualize herself in the image of Greta Garbo: “uma mulher divina cujo olhar tirava o sono a quem a visse. Um dia, também eu haveria de vê-la e aprender com ela a fixar o olhar numa coisa distante que não havia” (25). Despite the “destino inevitável” that awaits her at the grandfather’s house, where eight cousins dispute the transporting figure of the uncle/bike, the protagonist is forever touched by the “mágica das fotografias” (37). A non-verbal, non-rationalized feeling that compounds knowledge about the self as Other with the liberating, transforming power of non-mimetic representations, that “pressentimento” reemerges thirty years later as a shield against the pretense of quotidian or representational language: “[A]quelas surpreendentes linhas não me pareciam ser verdade,” she notes in response to the handwritten message in which the uncles evoke their past affect in order to summon their present encounter (40). His former interpellation—“Isso, isso, não te mexas, Greta Garbo” (25)—appears, thus, not only to stand in direct opposition to the written message but, in fact, to have deflected (for the protagonist) any symbolic mandate of order-bound identification. The turn away from “real” reference to a cinematic one, of which the protagonist is originally unaware, is what constitutes the pictures’ lasting “magic.” Its memory may be understood as the “instrumentalina” that the protagonist herself rides as she constructs from literal and figurative shadows an uncle who, perhaps, never was: “Acaso o dono d’A Instrumentalina não teria sido um sonho destinado apenas a fazer crescer pessoas indefesas?” (40-41).

The doubt overtaking the narrator about the very physical existence of her object of representation is, of course, the most concrete proof of the pure, non-exchange value of the gift that he had unwittingly granted her. This is, in part, because the donor’s photographs, words, and gaze evade the ploy of verisimilitude; their fantastic meaning, if any, cannot be intelligible but as a
presentiment. In addition, the uncle, as will also happen with the almost
mythic father-uncle who draws births and constantly displaces himself in *O Vale da Paixão*, does not follow the path of any other representative of the socio-economic and political order that dictates the exile of thousands of Portuguese. The uncle does leave the patriarch’s home-nation as a character-istic clandestine, aided by an automobile rider go-between (38). Yet, he does not settle in any one particular place as his emigrant brothers do; he simply “disappears.” All that is subsequently known about his whereabouts is limited to hearsay, and thus “[o] nosso tio fora-se transformando assim numa figura dispersa pela Terra como um espírito.” Presumably moving from city to city and continent to continent, he dies, “tal qual um Deus que se não mostra” (39). Escaping representation, with no wife, children, or possessing affects to imprison him to the demand for recognition and return (i.e. exchange), the uncle is transformed in an idea abstracted from corporeal materiality as well as from the contingencies of time and place. This idea may be conceived as the very spirit of resistance to the Father’s (any Father’s) representational mandate. Nevertheless, its analogy with the lake (Ontario) that the protagonist faces with a cold and skeptical heart as she brings up the uncle’s presence (41) is suggestive of the mimetic trap built into that idea-turned-representation.

Invoked through the written word, such a presence threatens to kill the short story’s “long dream.” For when the uncle fashioned out of the ashes of memory returns to address the mature woman waiting upon/writing the “gift” that the narrative recovers, he personifies the very “poison” of reference. The middle-aged, well-garbed figure who rushes through the (symptomatically) “transparent” glass door can, at best, speak as though he has just dismounted from a common “bicicleta”: “Cresceste, miúda, cresceste. Mas a tua cara é ainda a mesma...” (41). In other words, the “long dream” mentioned in the epigraph, the non-congealing, fleeting meaning of “*A Instrumentalina*” as a vehicle of transport to “uma coisa distante que não havia” (25) is, in the end, destroyed by the fate of language. The lines on the card and, subsequently, the uncle’s words impose sameness, continuity, and identity where (for there to be the flux of life) there should be none. Here is the “destino inevitável” (op. cit.) that the marginal and detached, but still desiring, memorialist’s “heart” must face.

Closely related to the confining trap and, simultaneously, the redeeming, emancipatory potential of representation, Lídia Jorge’s skepticism with the
question of sexual difference in her writing finds here an “instrumental” illustration. In tune with a deconstructive notion of “femininity” in its possible linkage to the condition of “gift” (in the sense that femininity as well as the gift respond to what is not), the story suggests how destructive is the temptation to name, to categorize, what should remain unsymbolized. To use language for the purposes of pinning down the flux of time and of identity is the work of those who are (or become, like the mature uncle) the instruments of the pervasively dictatorial, logocentric, socio-cultural order. Or, to recognize the “miúda” of yesteryear in the face of the woman voyaging through the necessarily foreign, marginal space of writing-memory, is tantamount to withhold from her the discovering, productive stance that constitutes her textually. Thus, the narrative riding on a kind of “instrumentalina,” the process of writing as begetting the infinite mobility of self, others, the world, thrives on the eminent threat of objectifying, falsifying and ultimately killing the movement of life that it is due to (re)create.

This impasse of representation is fully dramatized in O Vale da Paixão, following the evocation or, better, “convocation” of a female autobiographical narrator who bears the unsettling reminder of a father who is not. Overwritten with other memories, other voices, all profusely referenced spatially and temporally, the protagonist pieces together the textualized fragments of her father’s memory, incorporating and, at the same time othering herself along with them. The movement back and forth from the “I” of enunciation to the “she” of the enoncé (as also happens, for example, in Eva Lopo’s narrative in A Costa dos Murmúrios) emphasizes the fragmentation and discontinuity that the narrative in vain tries to foil. More importantly, however, that process of constant doubling and displacement gestures towards the gift of sorts that the father represents for the writer of the memoir, ultimately because what he gives her remains (for him) an unfulfilled promise, a debt: “Tanto que te devo!” This paradox is the ideal condition rendering possible the “gift” of representation that the narrator indeed beholds—the father’s drawings, originally enmeshed in the duplicitous interchange of donnees (her mother and uncle/stepfather) who assign her an ambiguous place in the social order. From these drawings, or the ontological and socio-cultural margin that their tracings entail, the narrator can at will call upon “O filme de Walter Dias…um filme onde ninguém entra nem saía que não fosse por vontade dela.”

Just like the amateur uncle photographer of A Instrumentalina, the father
roams around, delivering himself to the “ocupação inútil” (234) of drawing birds as an escape from the authoritarian, reproductive environment commanded by a land-owning patriarch who administers his estate as Salazar is known to have administered the nation. Subsequently, the father may ride boats, trains, and automobiles, but he goes on sending home drawings of whatever species of birds he finds abroad. Such literal and metaphorical traces recalling previous traces (as opposed to the representational memory of the man himself) are, however, repeatedly tainted by others’ narratives, and especially by “cartas envenenadas” sent by the father’s siblings to inform the family back home of his doings and whereabouts (191). Like missiles, these missives insist on representing, on endowing with “realist” physical materiality, and demonized at that, what amounts to an emblem of unconventional or artistic flight from the deadly submission to socio-cultural referents.

In the face, then, of an over-represented, spoiled memory on the mirror of which she finds herself, the writer-protagonist must at once honor the father as open, polyvalent text and kill its possible “reality” in order to survive:

Ela queria visitar o interior de Walter. Queria assaltá-lo por dentro, sem ruído…destruir-lhe a pessoa, conspurcando-o, transformando a doçura da sua imaterialidade evanescente numa parábola de natureza carnal para que desaparecesse (210-11).

Having become increasingly identified and recognized by others as a direct descendant of the man, the thirty-year-old woman thus coldly converts the memory of her father in a “caso interessante,” treating and analyzing it as if it were a corpse. Her aim is to throw upon such a textual corpus/corpse the “rede da aranha explicativa” with the intention of capturing, of smashing, and thus of freeing herself from the lingering phantom-signifier “Walter” (212). One never knows what are the contents of the three narratives that she hands to her reluctant father in his shady Buenos Aires dancing hall, not surprisingly named “Bar los Pájaros.” What the daughter, and the reader, is given to know is how futile, if not dangerous, representation in fact is in a political atmosphere commanding reproduction and representational terror: “Sí, sí, no necesito dibujarlos para encontrarlos. Los pájaros…” (220). While the mature man has learned to free the birds from his own fixing gaze, the daughter’s narrative, in the end, may accomplish just the opposite. Walter finally dies, leaving her his last, sole possession—the soldier’s blanket whereupon he had
presumably delivered himself to the “useless” activity of drawing births (235). Accompanying this testamentary monument to his life and works, he leaves his daughter the grace, or “miracle,” of a handwritten card that ultimately recovers the image of “a inocência da criança, quando a criança estende as palmas das mãos para mostrar a inocência” (237). On and all, and with perfect circularity, the novel captures and inscribes this depthless, virtually cinematic show of innocence, rehabilitating the father’s gift from all “poisoned” representations to the domain of fantasy—this running counter to and ironically commenting on the simulacra of historicism propelling the narrative movement.

Notwithstanding the metatextual tour de force of O Vale da Paixão, it is all there already in the “short story that makes a long dream,” A Instrumentalina. This text indeed may be considered Lídia Jorge’s most “instrumentalist” reflection of her creative investment in the complex issue of representation through the apparently unpretentious narrative form of a parable. As a simple story relating an ordinary occurrence of greater philosophical (and pedagogical) appeal, the text is exemplary in terms of the author’s alleged “survival through [the art of] writing.”25 At the same that it illuminates both earlier and later novels’ representational arrests, it plays up that margin of the margin—to use Jorge’s formulation once again—where “the angel of language” saves the flux of life through the written word. This double movement of evoking or, if you will, citing the multi-layered and multi-voiced texts that go by the name of socio-cultural, local, and historical “reality” and, simultaneously, of hinting at something else, at a beyond the frame of symbolic reference constitutes the irrecoverable “gift” of the author’s works. If these don the Revolution’s “greatest gift,” they also consistently engage figurations of “gifts” of representation that can only be not, lest the economics of exchange give way to yet another mere simulacrum of utopia.

Notes

1 Derrida, in Kamuf 410. I wish to express my gratitude to Lídia Jorge for giving me A Instrumentalina in the Summer of 1994, with the dedication, “Para que o mar que separa, uma, através de cais imaginados.” Coincidentally, a first draft of the present paper was presented at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto (an “imaginary pier” featured in A Instrumentalina), where the Annual Convention of the MLA was held in December of that year.

2 Riegelhaupt 3.

3 Throughout numerous interviews and public presentations about her work, Lídia Jorge
often recalls how writing has been for her a form of survival since she was a child. “Não imagino sobreviver sem ser através da escrita,” she affirms with respect to her novel *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, adding the self-explanatory note, “África é um mapa de recordações ligadas à escrita nas minhas experiências da vida” (in Vitorino 23, my italics). For the early formative years of Jorge’s “writerly” life experiences, see especially Ambrogi 9-10; for a broader panorama of the author’s persistence to go on writing against all personal and political odds, to write as a form of (feminine) survival, see particularly Luís Almeida Martins.

4 *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre* (1984) may be considered the point of transition from the allegorical mode exploited in *O Dia dos Prodígios* (1980) and *O Cais das Merendas* (1982) to the shiny, “more real than real” part-image characteristic of postmodern culture and aesthetics in their eminently cinematic underpinnings. This latter tendency, as well as its social and ethical implications, comes obviously to the fore in *O Jardim sem Limites* (1995). *A Última Dona* (1992) is, however, in my view, an emblematic narrative about the literally suicidal precipice faced by the subject-turned-surface, cinematic image by what Fredric Jameson calls the “cultural logic of late capitalism.”

5 I have demonstrated this at length elsewhere. See especially my “Lídia Jorge’s *A Costa dos Murmúrios.***

6 The phrase “a grande dádiva” to describe the freedom of expression brought about by the April 25, 1974 Revolution appears in a 1983 interview of Lídia Jorge as part of the post-revolutionary scene encouraging the emergence of new prose writers and the more general yearly increase of publications in prose. See Valdemar 12.

7 For reasons of space, I will limit myself here to point out briefly at the end of this study how the latter narrative text echoes the representational impasse sketched in *A Instrumentalina*. I focus on *O Vale da Paixão* in a separate study currently in progress.

8 I quote from the editorial blurb on the book’s back cover; my translation.

9 Here I use Derrida’s argument about the gift analogously, by bringing it to bear on the issue (or the “gift”) of representation as something that “is not. One cannot ask, ‘what is a gift?’; yet, it is only on that condition that there will have been, by that name or another, a gift” (in Kamuf 410; italics in the original). Derrida’s concept of the gift draws on the suggestion that the German homonym for “gift” is the adjective “poisonous.” The same can be said about the “gift” of free representation in the context of post-revolutionary Portugal.

10 Typically ambivalent with regard to the gender specificity of her writing, in a paper delivered in the congress “Le scritture delle donne nelle culture iberiche,” held in Venice in Jan. 25-27, 1993, Lídia Jorge ends up by defending the ontological marginality that commands the genesis of any writing (Jorge 1994). Although, of course, no mention of theoretical sources is made, Jorge’s formula echoes in part Hélène Cixous’s concept of the writer as an “exile” (12) and Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments about the nomadic or gypsy-like position that “minority” writers occupy in a dominant literary language (18-21).

11 I use the term here in a Kristevian sense to mean the infinite generational and combinatorial play of meaning characteristic of textuality, as opposed to a quotidian, representational use of language. See, in this regard, Ducrot 356-59.

12 The quote is extracted from *La vida es sueño*, Act III, Scene IV, when Seguismundo, who has learned a lesson in humility and skepticism, responds cautiously to the soldiers who go to his prison to hail him as their master and Prince: “A reinar, fortuna, vamos; / no me despiertes si duermo, / y si es verdad, no me duermas. / Mas sea verdad o sueño, / obrar bien es lo que importa: . . .” (Calderón de la Barca 158).

13 In this analysis, I loosely follow Jameson’s concept of postmodern space.

14 When asked about the filmic references present in her work, especially visible in *O Jardim
sem Limites (1995), Lídia Jorge explained that her use of cinema obeys a non-premeditated “impulso” in following “os sinais do presente.” She states, “Não é no cinema que encontramos o pensamento, mas é nele que encontramos os pontos de referência que balizam a nossa vida” (in Maria João Martins 15, my italics).

15 As Derrida states, “A gift, if there is one, does not destine itself” (Kamuf 507).

16 This “voyage” has all the characteristics of a therapeutic psychoanalytical narrative, as the following reading will suggest. Whether deliberately or not, Lídia Jorge’s texts owe much to a Lacanian concept of the subject in language, that is, the subject of desire. See, in this respect, my study of O Cais das Merendas, “Lídia Jorge’s ‘Strategies of Navigation.’”

17 Lacan associates the metaphor to the question of being and the metonym to its irrecoverable loss—what he calls the “manque à être” throwing the subject in endless (narrative) displacements through the defiles of the signifier. See, for example, Lacan, 174-75.

18 What characterizes the little girl’s demand for the uncle’s attention and recognition, that is, for his unconditional love, is the illusion that the Other (the uncle) possesses “the ‘privilege’ of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love.” In this way, “The very satisfactions that [demand] obtains for need are reduced to the level of being no more than the crushing of the demand for love” (Lacan 286, my italics).

19 I here follow Lacan’s concept of the unconscious as “that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (49).

20 Here I follow Derrida’s famous argument in “Des Tours de Babel” regarding the origin of language in God’s name and its consequent dismemberment in tongues, sowing confusion among men, and poisoning the gift of language (Kamuf 246).

21 Jorge’s standing on the question of sexual difference may be read in Louro, 1984; Ambrogi, 1985; and, especially, in the author’s own essay, “Sobre o gênero,” about Greenway’s adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s Orlando to cinema.

22 In “Choreographies,” Derrida briefly addresses the “im-pertinence” of the question of sexual difference in relating it to the condition of “gift” (Kamuf 446-47).

23 In this respect, see also Jorge, 1994: 93, mentioned in note 10 above.

24 “O dono de Vamares achava que a sua casa era uma empresa sólida, uma unidade de produção à semelhança de um estado, dirigindo-a como um governador poupado gere o estado” (46).

25 See note 3 above.
Para Maria Fernanda Henriques

Raphael—(... there’s no room at Court for philosophy.
Morus—There’s certainly no room for the academic variety, which says what it thinks irrespective of circumstances. But there is a more civilized form of philosophy which knows the dramatic context, so to speak, tries to fit in with it, and plays an appropriate part in the current performance. That’s the sort you should go in for. Otherwise it would be like interrupting some comedy by Plautus, in which a lot of slaves were fooling about, by rushing on to the stage dressed up as a philosopher, and spouting a bit of that scene in the Octavia, where Seneca is arguing with Nero. Surely it would be better to keep your mouth shut altogether than to turn the thing into a tragicomedy by interpolating lines from a different play? For, even if your contribution were an improvement on what had gone before, the effect would be so incongruous that you’d ruin the whole show. No, do the best you can to make the present production a success — don’t spoil the entire play just because you happen to think of another one that you’d enjoy rather more.

Thomas More, *Utopia*
Este texto pretende descrever o que considero ser a dimensão filosófica de *O Jardim sem Limites*,\(^1\) de Lídia Jorge. Para isso entenderei que “toda língua natural é susceptível de produzir filosofia,”\(^2\) o que considero insofismável, embora tenha de precisar que, para produzir filosofia—ou ter mínima natureza filosofante—é preciso que a língua natural se organize em discurso com duas ou três características obrigatórias.

A primeira dessas características é o *uso repetido*, sobre o qual diz Lausberg a seguinte e interessante coisa:

O discurso de uso repetido é um discurso que é pronunciado pelo mesmo orador, ou por oradores que respectivamente se alternam, em situações típicas (festivas) que se repetem periodicamente ou não periodicamente (...). Cada sociedade de suficiente *intensidade social* conhece esses discursos de uso repetido, os quais são um instrumento para *manter conscientes a complexidade e a continuidade da ordem social* e, frequentemente, o caráter forçosamente social da *existência humana em geral* (...). Do uso repetido resulta a necessidade de se conservarem os discursos pela escrita ou, então, na memória de uma classe de funcionários disso mesmo incumbidos. Desta conservação nasce uma ‘tradição de discursos de uso repetido’ que, no tocante à literatura e à poesia, aparece como ‘tradição literária.’\(^3\)

Essencial à literatura, o discurso de uso repetido é imprescindível também à filosofia.\(^4\) Tanto a literatura quanto a filosofia precisam, para existir, daquilo que se chama “circulação alargada” no espaço e no tempo. A circulação alargada propicia o surgimento de novos discursos exegéticos e hermenêuticos, que enriquecem, por complexificação de vários tipos, a proposta do discurso inicial. A cadeia de discursos que a partir de um primeiro se produzem é de natureza histórica e de formulação metonímica, tornando contíguo o meu pensamento com o pensamento alheio, sobre o qual me debruço, entro em processo de diérese, abertura (que tende ao infinito) das evidências e das subjacências da palavra de outros. Escusado será dizer, mas sempre se vai dizendo, ser a metonímia o princípio retórico essencial da complexificação do pensamento. Ela permite não apenas a compatibilização dos incompatíveis\(^5\) mas também, o que tem mais fundo interesse, a criação de incompatíveis artificiosos, lugares possíveis do exercício de todas as re-escritas daquilo que foi posto em texto como quase forma do absurdo.\(^6\) Nessa perspectiva, a circulação alargada, de cuja existência
dependem a literatura e a filosofia, é soleira—ou será uma realização?—do infinito. Mais ainda, a circulação alargada, implicando a infinitude do discurso, faz com que todo labor exegético e, sobretudo, toda prática hermenêutica sejam sempre próximos do encontro com o sagrado. Talvez sejam mesmo qualquer coisa muito próxima da mística.

**Suspeitas e intranquilidades**

Diérese e infinitização do pensamento que interpreta textos (mundos e Mundo) são incompatíveis com o entendimento literal da palavra. Filosofia e literatura dependem da intranquilidade e da suspeita. Nascem quando a palavra se constitui não como “veículo de ideia” mas enquanto “problema para se entender a ideia que apesar de tudo se aponta.” Já a ironia socrática encena o drama do homem com a palavra—e toda a cultura ocidental tem repetidamente posto em palco, pelos séculos fora, a mesma história que, aliás, goza de particular visibilidade nos discursos filosófico, teológico e literário.

Junto com o discurso de uso repetido, a metonímia e as posturas exegética e hermenêutica, um outro traço é necessário para a produção de discurso filosófico: a definição clara de um tema. Sem esse recorte da área de interesse, sem uma fronteira que defina o campo de preocupações onde me movimento, torna-se impraticável qualquer observação, qualquer ponderação lúcida de um problema. Torna-se, aliás, impossível a existência de problema. A observação (necessariamente demorada), levantando a epiderme do discurso, constrói a única via para a suspeição sem a qual não existe postura especulativa. Para olhos ingênuos, toda a palavra é translúcida e todo discurso diz o que parece querer dizer. Só quando paramos e olhamos é que damos tempo ao verbo pulsar, propiciando aberturas de horizontes de entendimento e indagação.

Realizam-se na obra literária os traços da escrita filosófica que acima apontei, mas realizam-se intimamente associados com o ficcionar, de tal maneira que a filosofia cabe no literário não porque se arranje um lugar para ela estar, mas porque a filosofia acontece naturalmente, pelo modo como as questões se põem e o binómio metonímia-complexificação (alargamento de horizontes) toma existência. O jeito de a filosofia estar no literário tem de ser, assim, natural, casual e necessário.

Barbara Hardy define o modo de ser da ficção nos seguintes termos: “The novel is an affective form. Not wholly so, or simply so. While it expresses, shapes and analyses feelings and passions, it also expresses, shapes and analyses
ideas and arguments (...). At its best, the novel uses emotion to investigate emotion.”8 Reconhecendo na narrativa a capacidade de “conformar e analisar ideias e argumentos,” Barbara Hardy aponta o lugar preciso onde aquele tipo de discurso se encontra com a filosofia, o lugar preciso onde a metonímia e a hermenêutica se fundem para criar discursos complexos e problemáticos. Parece, ainda (ou poderá parecer) que, em havendo perfeito equilíbrio entre conformar e analisar sentimentos e conformar e analisar ideias, a ficção narrativa poderá constituir, para além da concretização diegética, e como correlato natural da discursividade filosófica, uma dimensão alegórica. Será preciosa (ou simplesmente precisa, necessária?) a alegoria para reforço do teor suspeitoso, problemático, do texto, e isso porque enquanto representação de um universal, a alegoria contradita as suas próprias representações dos particulares, permitindo-nos ver a esses últimos em diálogo com um pano de fundo que tanto os enquadra quanto lhes confere existência no campo das categorias.9

Lisboa, à beira-Tejo

*O Jardim sem Limites* conta a história de um grupo de pessoas que, por razões várias, vai viver para quartos alugados numa casa à beira-rio, em Lisboa. Os donos da casa também estão lá, embora preservem com certo cuidado as distâncias que devem existir entre locatários e locadores, mormente em situações que poderiam tornar entre locatários e locadores, mormente em situações que poderiam tornar-se constrangedoras.

Quase todos os moradores da casa à beira-rio se ligam à problemática da representação, em algum tipo de texto, daquilo que costumamos chamar “realidade.” O cineasta representa a realidade em filmes, o fotógrafo em fotografias, o dono da casa em escrita contabilística (já que outros vôos, infelizmente, lhe estão vedados). Enquanto isso, a narradora10 vai colocando em texto literário o que se passa à volta, dando especial atenção a um *performer*, o que plenamente se justifica, pois nele a questão de representar/parecer e a questão do ser poriam problemas sérios a qualquer intérprete e, por maiores e mais ponderáveis razões, àquela lúcida intérprete que nos conta a história, questionando obsessivamente os modos de a contar—e os modos do contar em geral.

Espero ter ficado claro, a partir da pequeníssima descrição que acabo de fazer, que *O Jardim sem Limites* coloca reiteradamente o tema da representação, desde logo circunscrevendo, para personagens e leitor, um espaço de potencial reflexão filosófica. Essa reflexão faz-se, contudo, e é
fundamental que isso se diga, dentro do mais estrito critério de necessidade e de naturalidade. Quero eu dizer que, sendo a representação uma preocupação (e uma vivência a todos os títulos dramática) das personagens, natural e necessário se torna que a narradora, sujeito de observação dos vários dramas (inclusive do seu próprio), acabe por ser conduzida a pensar organizadamente sobre o que é “representar.” Até aqui temos, então, dois dos aspectos que apontei no início da exposição como necessários a uma escrita filosófica: circunscrição nítida de objecto a ser observado (o objecto é a representação de realidades) e revisitação (por desmultiplicação das personagens ocupadas em representar) do mesmo objecto em perspectivas diferentes e mutuamente enriquecedoras. Circunscrição e revisitação necessitam absolutamente de uma retórica de repetições, mais exactas ou mais abrandadas.11 As repetições concentram o nosso olhar sobre o mesmo problema que já exigiu concentração por parte da narradora. Elas educam-nos para o ritmo compassado e paciente que toda reflexão deve ter. Não consta que se faça filosofia a correr, nem parece ter jamais constado que o pensamento de natureza filosófica se possa constituir sem retorno a pontos fulcrais de irradiiação de sentidos e de novas questões. O discurso filosófico é eminentemente revisitativo, porque substancialmente hermenêutico. Hermenêutico e revisitativo é todo o discurso ficcional de Lídia Jorge, não apenas o que encontramos em O Jardim sem Limites.

Todas as personagens que, nesse romance, se ocupam de representações, sabem que o “mundo concreto” a trasladar para discurso é um sistema, sem dúvida, mas é, sobretudo, um sistema com subsistemas dentro. Essa espécie de dupla sistemática inextricável, a que todos no romance são sensíveis, configura um outro tema a ser filosoficamente tratado. Esse tema é o do mundo enquanto espectáculo de sintaxe.

Apercebendo-se de que o mundo a ser representado em qualquer tipo de texto ou discurso é espectáculo de sintaxe, é ordem consistente (embora não necessariamente apreensível, na sua lógica de fundo, a um primeiro olhar), as personagens preocupam-se com o modo de transportar a “realidade do mundo” (em retórica se dirá res) para o meio que a representa e certamente —como todos no livro sabem—lhe confere autonomia de existência. Os modos de transportar (que, para a narradora, são modos verbais) têm de ser tão consistentes quanto consistente é a realidade transportada: as muitas conversas entre as várias personagens, incidindo sobre as diferentes artes que praticam, documentam a preocupação com o que se costuma chamar
verosimilhança. Obcecados pelo modo de representar, todas as personagens de *O Jardim sem Limites* estão construindo uma arte poética, numa linha de informações que se vai aos poucos adensando, até que o poético (no cinema, na fotografia, na escrita, na performance) se torna o assunto fundamental do romance—e de tal maneira assim é que podemos entender (sem prejuízo de outras interpretações) ser a arte, qualquer arte, *o jardim sem limites*.

**Persona, história e pensamento**

Representar a realidade é, assim, a tópica onde mais claramente se vê a dimensão filosofante do romance de Lídia Jorge. Faz-se a reflexão sistemática, aqui, por personificação e por historicização: isto é, o texto vai pensando enquanto conta a história ou, o que é ainda melhor, o próprio jeito de contar a história e de traçar as personagens é um jeito de pensar. Personificação e modos de representação aparecem nitidamente relacionados com a tópica da inexpressibilidade, mas ao contrário do que afirma Barbara Hardy. No livro de Lídia Jorge, as realidades são sempre expressáveis, embora não seja fácil expressá-las. Assinale-se que a confiança na expressibilidade sinaliza entendimento positivo das relações homem-mundo, enquanto a dificuldade no expressar aponta para a necessidade de trabalho consciente e árduo para conseguir dizer.

Sendo difícil, porém possível, dizer, a expressão pertinente tem de ser procurada em vários tipos de linguagem, ou em territórios diferentes da mesma linguagem, tendo ainda de ser procurada na *confluência* de muitas linguagens — que é precisamente o que o romance nos ensina dever existir. Procurar a expressão apropriada em muitos tipos de linguagem, em confluências de linguagens, põe em campo com a maior clareza a dinâmica metonímica do discurso, dinâmica compatibilizadora de diferentes elementos e produtora da necessária nitidez que, num discurso, pode criar a consistência filosófica. Desmultiplicando as personagens que se servem de variados modos de representar, reunindo-as nas conversas em que falam do assunto e reunindo-as, sobretudo, na fala da narradora que as conta, *O Jardim sem Limites* complexifica o seu próprio campo de observação filosófica, sem perder a disciplina de olhar nem rarefazer o objecto específico de questionamento.

Diz-se a confiança na expressibilidade pela confiança na possibilidade de transpor conteúdos, o que equivale a dizer pela confiança na tradução, que é o modo como os conteúdos do mundo tomam forma (repetem-se, diria J. Hillis Miller), transformando-se em discursos (em quaisquer linguagens, não
apenas na verbal) susceptíveis de excitar, de modo sistemático e adequado, a inteligência do interlocutor. O tema da tradução — recurso retórico chamado repetição abrandada — enquadra todo o texto de *O Jardim sem Limites*, em cuja abertura e fecho nos informam estar tudo sendo dito (e poder ser infinitamente de novo dito) “por outras palavras.”

Exibindo a ficção enquanto retomada/tradução de uma realidade também existente em si mesma, a repetição é ainda responsável pela dimensão filosofante do discurso, pois só repetindo se constitui a espiral de retornos sistemáticos aos mesmos tópicos, assim se colocando, naquela espécie de palco textual onde se concentram os olhares dos leitores, a *biografia* de uma filosofia em conformação. Sempre que as informações retornam—e talvez muito particularmente as informações sobre a narradora e o *performer* mais a sua companheira—complexifica-se o tecido informativo geral e muda de qualidade a exigência em relação a nós, intérpretes.

A primeira vez que uma informação aparece, ela *indica*, ensina a retórica. Repetida, a informação *afirma*—o que devemos entender como “torna firme, consistente,”—assim fazendo problemática e cada vez mais problemática—a realidade cuja denominação/exibição se reitera. Ao conferir natureza de problema ao que se diz, a repetição nos encaminha para o aprofundamento do nível escritural do texto, e somos compelidos a perguntar-nos por que razões se escreve assim. Simultaneamente, a repetição obriga-nos a enriquecer o nível proposicional do mesmo texto: tanto mais somos compelidos a interpretar quanto mais insistem em nos dar, com maiores ou menores variantes, as mesmas informações.

Uma última observação deve ser feita sobre o princípio repetitivo-tradutivo em *O Jardim sem Limites*. Da tradução-repetição pode dizer-se o mesmo que dizia Calvino da metáfora: é uma acomodação do incomprensível às limitações da nossa inteligência. Acomodar à inteligência é preocupação dominante em Lídia Jorge e isso tem a ver com a *superioridade* das questões pelo seu romance colocadas. Relembra Alister E. McGrath ser a acomodação o princípio geral que parece subjazer à natureza da linguagem teológica. Evoca a sugestão de Orígenes de que “God faced much the same problems in addressing sinful humanity as those experienced by a human father trying to communicate to small children. God condescends and comes down to us, accommodating to our weakness, like a schoolmaster talking ‘a little language’ to his children, or like a father caring for his own children and adopting their ways (…). This approach was taken up (…) by John Calvino who developed
the theory usually referred to by the term ‘accommodation’ (...) that here means ‘adjusting or adapting to meet the needs of the situation to the human ability to comprehend it.’ In revelation, Calvino argues, God accommodates to the capacities of the human heart and mind.”

Parece obrigatório alargar a qualquer discurso e a qualquer campo retórico a ideia da acomodação: não existe comunicação verbal que não traduza, para as capacidades do interlocutor, aquilo que se está querendo fazer chegar a ele.\(^{17}\)

Em *O Jardim sem Limites* muitas acomodações, sempre ligadas ao paradigma repetitivo, reiteram a preocupação de tornar o que se diz apreensível, tangível e concreto. Dessas acomodações, duas são crucialmente importantes: a que se faz por antropomorfização — quando se “transformam” ideias e questões em personagens, dentro do espírito do que observa Barbara Hardy — e aquela que nos chega por materializações outras, sempre, porém, ligadas ao campo de acção e aos modos de comportamento das personagens. Estão nesse último caso todos os artefactos produzidos pelos moradores da casa à beira-rio (fotografia, filme, texto narrativo) e está neste caso muito particularmente o *performer*, em cujo corpo de pessoa se pode corporificar outra realidade.\(^{18}\)

Corporificando e antropomorORIZando, *O Jardim sem Limites* põe questões do foro da estética não apenas literária mas também de outras artes, tratando ainda reiteradamente o modo como nos apropriamos, por meio dos sentidos, do concreto à nossa volta. Corporificando e antropomorORIZando, manipulando-nos sentidos e inteligência, *O Jardim sem Limites* propicia o nosso entendimento e a nossa interpretação de coisas a que acedemos pela palavra narrativa, mas que nos chegam como se delas tivéssemos apreensão imediata, como acontece no mundo real onde vivemos e sobre o qual Lídia Jorge nos quer ensinar a pensar e a agir.

**O manto diáfano**

Parece perfeitamente legítimo dizer-se que, em *O Jardim sem Limites*, Lídia Jorge realiza, sob diáfana capa ficcional, uma reflexão sistemática sobre aquilo que, com R. Howard Bloch, podemos (e talvez mesmo devamos) entender como a perda da universalidade da ideia inseparável da expressão da mesma ideia.\(^{19}\) É essa a paradoxal conjuntura a partir da qual—e a despeito da qual—tem de nascer o discurso, nomeadamente aqueles dois discursos que denominamos “ficcional” e “filosófico.”

A narradora de Lídia Jorge sabe que não tem hipóteses de testemunhar
sobre o seu mundo sem o auxílio da palavra, e sabe também, perfeitamente, quão perigosa a palavra é e quão capaz é de esconder em vez de mostrar, de perturbar em vez de esclarecer. Revisitando o _topos_ da palavra _traíçoeira_, Lídia Jorge incursiona em campo simbólico interessantíssimo na nossa tradição: aquele onde a retórica — que é o próprio discurso verbal, como diz Paolo Valesio — se iguala, nos seus “perigos” e “mentiras,” ao feminino.

Pensando sempre sobre quaisquer modos de representação da realidade, a narradora de _O Jardim sem Limites_ pensa talvez, sobretudo, na problemática da representação por palavras. Temas de retórica discursiva aparecem então, permanentemente, como os verdadeiros antagonistas da narradora e dos personagens e é, de facto, na sua relação com a palavra enquanto problema que a narradora de Lídia Jorge assume a categoria de pessoa ficcional e de pessoa _tout court_.

Um primeiro tópico retórico sobre o qual se debruça—pensando por interpostas concretizações dramáticas—a nossa contadora de histórias é o da credibilidade do seu próprio discurso. Essa credibilidade é procurada de duas maneiras. Primeiro, pelas reiteradas garantias de que tudo o que nos está sendo dito aconteceu mesmo, sendo a narradora testemunha directa dos factos. A credibilidade aqui é, então, conferida pelo facto (que aceitamos no pacto de leitura) de a narradora nos garantir que está _repetindo_ a realidade para que nós a conheçamos. Sendo a natureza documental o primeiro suporte da credibilidade discursiva nesse romance, outra fonte de credibilização há e mais importante: a configuração discursiva do texto, o modo como a retórica da narrativa dá consistência a questões estéticas que são questões humanas, o modo como as sensibilidades das personagens transformam questões estéticas em questões pessoalmente assumidas enquanto existenciais, e muito particularmente o modo como os problemas da _res_, da _elocutio_, da _inventio_ e da _dispositio_ se constituem como as alteridades com e contra as quais a narradora constitui o próprio percurso dramático.

A esse propósito é interessante evocar o que diz Lausberg sobre as categorias retóricas acima arroladas. A _elocutio_, diz ele, “traslada al lenguaje las ideas halladas en la _inventio_ y ordenadas en la _dispositio_.” Enquanto isso, a _inventio_ “es un proceso productivo-creador; consiste en extraer las posibilidades de desarrollo de las ideas contenidas más o menos ocultamente en la _res_.” A _res_ que, diz Lausberg, é “contenido conceptual,” apreende-se pelo processo da _intellectio_. Finalmente, a _dispositio_ é a escolha e ordenação dos elementos da _res_ e dos meios verbais que a podem veicular.
Qualquer leitor atento de *O Jardim sem Limites* se dá conta de que, embora contracene com as outras personagens no plano intelectivo, afectivo e mesmo na partilha de preocupações estéticas, a narradora, na verdade, entra em contraposição dramática não com as pessoas que tem à volta, mas com as categorias retóricas da *res*, da *elocutio*, da *inventio* e da *dispositio*. Com elas tem a narradora problemas éticos a resolver, problemas sobre como actuar para as coisas serem como devem ser: ordenadas em verbo narrativo e, por isso mesmo, capazes de se nos mostrem como o corpo vivo de uma alteridade aprensível, acomodada ao entendimento.

Trazendo a retórica para a boca de cena do paradigma reflexivo e filosófico do romance de Lídia Jorge, a exploração sistemática do tópico do “como expressar” carreia outras tópicas: como observar-captar-compreender para pôr em discurso, como interpretar o discurso que se fez e como utilizar a interpretação que se vai fazendo para novas interpretações a vir. Num quadro como esse, de desafios à verbalização de uma realidade e de maiores desafios à compreensão desta mesma realidade tem de surgir, é fatal, a problemática do feminino. Retórica como palavra e discurso verbal, retórica como organização discursiva de imagens e corpos humanos (fotografia, cinema e *performance*) e feminino estão, com efeito, tão ligadas em *O Jardim sem Limites* que, sentindo embora existir relação metafórica entre uma e outra, é difícil ao leitor decidir se é a retórica que metaforiza o feminino ou se as coisas se passam ao contrário—e, nesse caso, o feminino metaforizaria o retórico. Talvez seja de fugir a ambas as soluções, optando por uma terceira: retórica e feminino se metaforizam mútuas e simultaneamente, o que faz, nesse livro, que a dinâmica de transposição da realidade seja tão substancial como inextricável nos seus muitos meandros. Se for assim, todo o imaginário de Lídia Jorge, em *O Jardim sem Limites*, assenta no entendimento do mundo como diferenciação e variedade—e a noção da diferença e da variedade fundamenta o princípio metafórico, tanto quanto, aliás, constrói alicerces para todo o discurso de natureza histórica, o que também o romance é.

Falar da equivalência entre retórica e feminino é mergulhar de cabeça em tempos remotos da nossa cultura. Podemos fazer isso com o auxílio de R. Howard Bloch, no livro que já citei. Comentando a “Dissuasão de Valério a Rufino o Filósofo,” onde Walter Map enuncia, em discurso cheio de manhas, as inconveniências do casamento por serem as mulheres falsas e enganosas, assinala Bloch que “the author tries to do to his interlocutor precisely what he accuses women of doing: to deceive with words, to provoke contradiction,
and to seduce with that which is defined as the essence of the feminine, the ruses of rhetoric.”

Ora, argumentara antes Bloch, “if woman is defined as verbal transgression, indiscretion and contradiction, then Walter Map, indeed any writer, can only be defined as a woman.”

Dentro desse quadro, assinala ainda Bloch a ligação entre mulher e matéria, mulher e sensorialidade, mulher e superficialidade dos sinais captados pelos sentidos, tudo fundamentos, argumenta Bloch—e não há razão para duvidarmos—da identificação radical entre o feminino e o literário. Para o que me interessa aqui, ainda uma citação é necessária: “The seductiveness of the feminine is for the medieval Christian West virtually synonymous with delusiveness of language embodied in rhetoric, whose seduction, that of ‘mere words, worse than that of empty noises’ (Augustine) recapitulates the original sin — that ‘she,’ in the words of John Chrysostom, ‘believed in the one who professed mere words, and nothing else.’”

Em O Jardim sem Limites, o problema de dar corpo à ideia é crucial e se liga, como não podia deixar de ser na nossa tradição, à tópica do feminino. Para além da narradora do romance, duas personagens são particularmente importantes para compreendermos a questão: refiro-me à inseparável dupla constituida por Paulina e o performer. Esse último encena, em grau máximo, a mesma questão da corporificação da ideia, que a narradora encena com o seu próprio corpo, assentado ao canto de um quarto, escrevendo, com as suas mãos a baterem no teclado de uma máquina um texto, e este último é o corpo que ela vai produzindo e que nos chegará sob a forma de livro.

Se o caso da narradora-escritora já nos poria por si só, e com clareza, a tópica da constituição da ideia em corpo (textual), o caso do performer ainda é mais interessante. Ele é um homem, mas o seu trabalho é produzir uma mensagem com o corpo, através de meios (em arte verbal falaríamos de “recursos retóricos”) muito precisos: a postura, a expressão, a caracterização. Transformado em texto, vai o performer oferecer-se ao seu público, desejando fasciná-lo, como fascinar desejam as mulheres e o escritor, com a preciosa ajuda das “artimanhas” verbais para as quais alerta Walter Map. Deseja, ainda, o performer em acção, ser objecto do discurso hermenêutico dos seus espectadores. É esse mais um aspecto, e importantíssimo, da sua convergência na tópica do feminino: tomaremos consciência disso se nos lembrarmos ter sido a mulher, na nossa tradição cultural, o primeiro desafio à interpretação e o mais permanente, ao longo dos séculos, objecto de discurso hermenêutico sistemático.
Escrevendo mensagem com o seu próprio corpo, o *performer* transforma em ícone—e rigorosamente em “estátua”—a tópica da linguagem como construção e como engano. Mas trata-se de um engano muito especial, conatural de toda criação artística, um engano sem o qual não podemos representar o mundo. Sendo ao mesmo tempo verdadeiro porque existe e enganoso porque está por outra coisa (está por uma interpretação do mundo), o corpo *performativo* do *performer* é realidade e ilusão, verdade e mentira, frontalidade e manha. Ele encarna a natureza de qualquer arte—está lá, num canto da rua Augusta, oferecendo-se para ser visto e apreciado mas, mais ainda, para ser indagado e interpretado. Por todos esses aspectos—e, sobretudo, por ser materialização de ideia e desafio à interpretação (porque a perda de universalidade de uma ideia materializada pode e deve ser anulada pelo discurso hermenêutico)—o corpo-retórica do *performer* metaforiza a própria natureza do feminino.

Uma natureza feminina tem de provir, ao que parece (ou ao menos ao que propõe o romance de Lídia Jorge), de outra natureza feminina. E assim acontece, efectivamente, com o nosso *performer*. Ele nasce para a *performance* com a ajuda de Paulina, a mulher que o treina e lhe transforma o corpo em espectáculo de discurso, de retórica, de manhas e subterfúgios imprescindíveis para se constituir, pela interpretação, um tipo superior de saber. Criando o texto-homem ou o homem-texto, provocando com ele o olhar, a indagação e o pensamento de outros, Paulina espelha, de modo muito claro, a figura da narradora de *O Jardim sem Limites*, com ela inteiramente partilhando as preocupações quanto aos modos de dar forma textual à realidade e de apontar onde, naquilo que se representa e se (re)constrói em arte, podemos encontrar um dos rostos possíveis da verdade.

**Notas**


2 “Toda língua natural é susceptível de produzir filosofia. No seu entender, em que tipos de texto melhor se produz filosofia na literatura portuguesa contemporânea?” foi o tema que me propôs o Professor Joaquim Cerqueira Gonçalves, da Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa, para um seminário que conduzi numa sua turma de Mestrado em Filosofia.

intensidade social,” suficiente “complexidade de ordem social” e, ainda, consciência tanto da intensidade quanto da complexidade. O discurso de uso repetido funciona, então, como discurso de sistematização das relações grupais, porque constitui um corpo estável de referências onde se vai buscar desde a memória colectiva (a história) até as configurações simbólicas (religião, literatura, filosofia), passando por tópicos preferenciais para observação científica do mundo.

4 E, naturalmente, à ciência.

5 É pela diérese do pensamento—pela metonímia—que podemos, por exemplo, explicitar discursivamente o processo de dupla sinédoque necessário à formulação da metáfora que, sendo tropos de salto, junta o que não deveria ser juntado, exactamente o incompatível: o divino com o humano em “essa menina é um anjo,” ou o animado com o que não tem alma, caso de “essa menina é uma flor.”

6 Os incompatíveis artificiosos—as mais das vezes metáforas, mas frequentemente também oxímores—acabam por ser nítidas provocações ao filosófico e a eles só se pode responder por discursos com satisfatória sistematização.

7 Já pode o leitor ver a razão da epígrafe deste texto.


9 Parece lógico referir alegoria a propósito de filosofia na ficção narrativa—e muito especificamente na de Lídia Jorge. Figura de pensamento, a alegoria exige formulação complexa e discursivamente extensa. Tal como a filosofia e a ficção, a alegoria pede-nos actuação hermenêutica, pois não prescinde do aprofundamento de sentidos dos sinais que a conformam, por recurso a intertextualidades de vário tipo. Trabalha a alegoria sobre estruturas alargadas de sentido, assim se afastando da metáfora que manipula unidades semântico-discursivas isoladas ou muito reduzidas. Para além disso, a alegoria se encena claramente como discurso narrativo-interpretativo, podendo ainda funcionar na interpretação de outro texto, alegórico ou não, tal como se vê na hermenêutica cristã e, sobretudo, na judaica.

10 Quando apresentei a primeira versão deste trabalho, num seminário do grupo de investigação sobre Filosofia e Feminino (Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa), informou Lídia Jorge que tinha sido sua intenção não fornecer quaisquer indicações sobre o género do sujeito de narração em *O Jardim sem Limites*. O facto é, contudo, que dois adjectivos (“exausta” e “culpada,” respectivamente nas páginas 21 e 375) põem uma mulher como narradora. Não se trata de um descuido, no meu entender, mas de uma dasquelas situações em que a pena foge para a verdade: todo o clima discursivo de *O Jardim sem Limites* é feminino––e muito da feminilidade do texto se deve, como tentarei pelo menos sugerir, à obsessiva encenação do tema da representação.

11 A repetição serve, ensina a retórica, à amplificação afectiva, pois “detém o fluir da informação,” dando “tempo para que se ‘saboreie’ afectivamente a informação apresentada como importante” (Lausberg. *Elementos* 241). É preciso notar-se, contudo, não a amplificação afectiva a única função (e o único efeito) da repetição. Interrompendo o fluir da informação, a palavra ou expressão repetidas também propiciam o aprofundamento da intelecção: surgem assim condições para construir pensamento, naquela dinâmica espiralada em que todo pensar se faz. Sobre os tipos de repetição lembre-se que a *exacta* retoma precisamente o que já foi dito, a *abrandada* retoma-o com modificações. O romance de Lídia Jorge abre-se justamente sob o signo da tradução, que é repetição abrandada. As primeiras palavras que lemos são justamente “Ou por outras palavras.”

12 “Personification and the topos of inexpressibility are twin aspects of a mimetic representation of emotional crisis, conflict and continuity” (Hardy, op. cit. 13).

13 A repetição integra plenamente o modo de ser narrativo (não apenas o poético, como frequentemente somos levados a pensar), justamente por causa do pensar por antropomorfização/dramatização (cf. Barbara Hardy) e, ainda, por causa da *amplificatio* sem a
qual não se faz pensamento. Sobre a repetição na narrativa veja-se J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition. Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

14 Esta existência, no romance de Lídia Jorge, ultrapassa os muros de uma casa de quartos em Lisboa, e alarga-se para a experiência histórica portuguesa ao longo, pelo menos, do período fascista.

15 O mais evidente exemplo da obrigatória convivência, repetição—interpretação (abertura dos horizontes do texto para outros horizontes, sobretudo para os horizontes interiores do leitor) é o texto poético. Nessa perspectiva, uma leitura apropriada da poesia equivale a exercício de pedagogia de intertextualidade e de interdiscursividade. Mas no romance também é essencial a intertextualização e a interdiscursividade: o ponto está em que nem sempre a ficção narrativa encena, com a mesma força que o faz a poesia, os mecanismos repetitivos.


17 O caso da ironia é, nessa perspectiva, interessante: uma ironia acomodada, traduzida, perde quase tudo do seu valor. A “tradução” do enunciado em valor irónico deve, então, ser potenciada por índices discretos, mesmo correndo o risco de esses mesmos índices escaparem ao leitor ou interlocutor oral menos treinado. Caso para se dizer que não apenas o produtor do discurso deve preocupar-se com acomodações, mas que também o consumidor do discurso deve saber adaptar-se—por prática sistemática de observação de artefatos verbais—aquilo que é costume, numa tradição cultural e literária, tomar existência discursiva. Por outro lado, a escrita hermética traduz para o leitor a impossibilidade (ou a falta de vontade) de traduzir, criando um paradoxo comunicativo em si mesmo irónico, e ironicamente sempre susceptível de ser de algum modo traduzido.


22 H. Lausberg 260.


24 Não resisto a colocar aqui a mais pertinente definição de ética que jamais me caiu nas mãos, e cujo autor completamente esqueci: “A ética vê uma diferença entre o que é e o que deveria ser. Essa diferença constitui um espaço e dentro dele o sujeito actua.”

25 R. Howard Bloch 57-58.

26 R. Howard Bloch 56.

27 R. Howard Bloch 49.

28 Sobre a mulher como objecto privilegiado de interpretação, cf. Howard Bloch, *op. cit. passim*. 
Contingency and Loss in *Marido e Outros Contos*

Ellen W. Sapegá

In the fall of 1997, Lídia Jorge published a volume of collected short stories under the title *Marido e Outros Contos*. Bringing together seven brief narratives that had been previously published in magazines, anthologies, or independently as individual stories, this collection was welcomed by Jorge’s readers who saw it as providing a new opportunity to partake of the author’s imaginative process and, perhaps, to find new approaches to assessing her previous work. Indeed, much of this volume’s initial critical reception focused on the manner in which these stories could be understood as complements to the novels that have made Jorge’s literary reputation or as a practice ground for future literary endeavors. In a review published in the weekly newspaper *Expresso*, José Nobre da Silveira offered such general observations as “o conto é, de facto, (...) lugar de acumulação de tentativas que, de uma ou de outra forma, ilumina a obra maior do romancista,” and that “ele será, na maior parte das circunstâncias, o espelho da obra do romancista.” Maria Alzira Seixo, on the other hand, commented in the *Jornal de Letras* that the incidents captured in the author’s short stories seemed to beg for treatment in lengthier, more fully developed fictional forms: “Por um lado, Lídia Jorge escreve contos que podem considerar-se argumentos de uma ficção mais extensa, sem que por isso tenhamos que lamentar a sua brevidade” (24).

In seeking to interpret these stories as comments on Jorge’s fictional universe, as reflections of her novels, or as experimental terrain for future projects, these approaches to Lídia Jorge’s short stories move beyond a simple comparison of specific texts written by a single author to participate in a conceptual exercise that focuses on the difference between or hierarchy of genres. More specifically, these critics, like many before them, implicitly privilege the novel genre over that of the short story. In an essay entitled “The
Short Story: The Long and the Short of It,” Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out that “both the conception and the practice of the short story are conditioned by its relation to the novel, as the smaller and lesser genre” (181). While practitioners of short story theory and criticism traditionally attempted to distinguish the shorter narrative form as an autonomous genre, Pratt’s objective was to approach the modern short story as a “dependent countergenre to the novel” (185). This, in turn, led her to outline a series of propositions regarding short fiction that are based on the assumption of an asymmetrical relationship between the novel and the short story.

I shall refer to several of these propositions as I now briefly describe the contents of *Marido e Outros Contos*. Pratt’s first three propositions highlight the fragmentary or incomplete nature of the short story’s contents. As opposed to the novel, this shorter genre typically does not attempt to narrate a full-length life, and often it does not even pretend to capture the psychological complexities of an individual character’s personality. Thus, we come to expect that the “novel tells a life, [while] the short story tells a fragment of a life” (182), or that the short story deals with “a single thing, the novel with many things” (184). In *Marido e Outros Contos*, several of the stories do focus on a single, defining moment in the characters’ lives—“A prova dos pássaros” narrates a Professor’s quest to prove or disprove God’s existence by means of a simple exercise of counting birds in flight; “Espuma da Tarde” is the tale of an unnecessary death which comes about by the characters’ desire for something (anything) to happen to change the course of their mundane lives; and “O conto do nadador” describes the near drowning of a young woman and the response of the anonymous onlooker who attempts to save her.

In a slight variation on the short story that captures a fragment or the excerpt of a life, “Marido,” “A Instrumentalina,” and “Testemunha” are short stories that seem to fulfill Poe’s requirement of a “single effect to be wrought” (Pratt 184). The first of these stories accompanies in frightening detail the thoughts and evasions of a porteira in Lisbon who, as a battered wife, prays (unsuccessfully) to protect her husband from the temptation of drink, thereby lessening the likelihood that he will return home inebriated and beat her. “Testemunha” and “A Instrumentalina,” on the other hand, are based on each story’s narrator’s recollections of childhood, thereby entailing the juxtaposition of two times (adulthood and childhood) and two places (rural Portugal and North America). Finally, Jorge’s story entitled “António,” which treats the often harrowing experience of being beholden to one’s (despotic) hairdresser, seems
to belong in Pratt’s third category, that of the “short story as a sample,” whose point “is not just the events themselves, but their supposed typicality” (185).

Moving our discussion of the short story’s contents and organization to the question of its interpretation, I should also note that, given the “incomplete” nature of this genre, the short story often requires the active participation on the part of the reader, whose job is to supply what the author has left out. By saying less than what is “expected” of it, the short story begs for the reader to use his or her subjectivity to fill in its blanks. This meaning-supplying gesture can often gain impetus from the larger whole in which the text in question is to be found. Therefore, when we examine the short story’s status as a published text, we must remember that it usually depends upon its relation to this larger whole. As Pratt notes in her fourth proposition, “The novel is the whole text, the short story is not” (186). By its common inclusion in a larger reading experience, be it a collection of short stories, an anthology, or a magazine, the short story’s already fragmentary nature is greatly reinforced. Rarely does a short story constitute a complete book, and its “meaning” is often derived from or enriched by the texts that surround it.

In order to illustrate better the manner in which a short story’s relation to other texts helps to condition its interpretation, I turn now to the specific example of “Marido,” the story that opens Jorge’s volume and lends the collection its title. A table that appears at the end of the volume identifies this story as originally having appeared in the review *Vértice* in April, 1989. We are also informed that it was subsequently republished in a supplement to the women’s magazine *Elle* in August, 1994. Now, it is true that these two publications enjoy at least one reader in common (myself); it is also true, however, that the contents of each publication presuppose a different type of reading experience. *Vértice* is what we may consider a “serious” publication comprised of articles that belong to the academic fields of history, sociology, literary criticism, and so on. *Elle*, on the other hand, is directed toward a middle-class female audience who may be as interested in reading about fashion, the home, and their jobs, as they are in reading “serious” fiction.²

It goes without saying that the experience of reading “Marido” will vary according to these two divergent contexts. This is a simple, yet moving, story of a working-class woman who, while systematically battered by her husband, cannot conceive of life without him. I contend, nonetheless, that its perspective and, ultimately, our interpretation of the protagonist’s fate hinges on the other discourses that surround it. As this story enters into a dialogue with
these framing texts, certain elements come to the fore while others recede into the background. In the first case, the readers of Vértice might identify more readily with the perspective of the porteira’s well-intentioned neighbors (the lawyer, the doctor, and the social worker) who urge her to leave her spouse. In the second context, it is quite possible that some female readers might have an easier time recognizing the protagonist’s inability to imagine a life without her husband, sympathizing, initially at least, with her position that:

para além do sacramento, seria triste a vida de porteira sem um marido que viesse da oficina-auto com o seu fato-macaco por tratar. Com quem ralharia, por quem iria ao talho, de quem falaria quando fosse às compras, para quem pederia protecção quando cantasse à janela por Salve Regina, a quem pertenceria quando os domingos viesssem, e cada mulher saísse com seu homem, se ela nem mais teria o seu. (17-18)

In this latter case, for the readers of Elle, the story’s shocking ending (in which the husband sets his spouse on fire with a lighted candle) would take on the proportions of a cautionary tale whose principal meaning is derived, perhaps, from their failure to appreciate the gravity of the situation. It is quite possible to identify the original context of the other stories found in Marido e Outros Contos and, similarly, to try to imagine the readers’ responses to the texts in question. Once they were bound together in the volume, however, this original context was lost and, simultaneously, a new, different context, that of a short story sequence, was provided. It is within this new context that “Marido” acts, first and foremost, as the introduction to the volume as a whole. In effect, the violent dénouement of the porteira’s story introduces the intertwined themes of contingency and loss that Maria Alzira Seixo has identified as constituting a unifying thread for the stories contained in Marido e Outros Contos. Seixo observes that these stories, while evoking “toda a literatura do desejo e da união,” actually tend to register “a separação do par (...) e a emergência do desejo insistente e sensível” (25). This desire, moreover, is specifically identified as female desire. As we have seen in the case of the story that opens the volume, the protagonist’s strong feelings of loyalty and her desire to maintain her union with her husband at all costs actually provoke the accident that occurs at the story’s end. In choosing to open the collection with this particular story, Jorge prepares the reader for the repetition and development of its themes, which Seixo has identified as en-
tailing “a articulação do feminino com a contingência e com a perda.” In the loosely-knit sequence of intertwined narratives that follows, we will find the recurring portrayal of the female characters’ desire for unity, union, or freedom, which is then either satisfied by chance or eliminated through sudden violence.

While the most salient qualities of a short story sequence are not in evidence in Marido e Outros Contos, a quick look at the table that identifies the stories’ original place of publication reveals, nonetheless, that these stories have been judiciously arranged in a progression that differs from that of a mere chronological ordering according to their dates of publication. In fact, the story that is ascribed the earliest date (“António,” Jornal de Letras, August 1988) is actually the third text to appear, and “Marido” is identified as having first appeared one year later. The remaining five stories were all published between 1992 and 1996, but they, too, are not presented in any discernible chronological order. This sequencing leads me to believe that it is legitimate to attempt to discern an underlying pattern resulting from their juxtaposition and to assume, furthermore, that the author herself was responsible for this ordering.

As is the case in any sequence of intertwined narratives, one may discern various relationships that link the stories in question, thus opting to trace several different geometries within the text (Luscher 154). One of the first patterns to emerge is the counterpoint that arises from the variation between the use of first-person narrators and a recurring omniscient narrative perspective. “António,” “A Instrumentalina,” and “Testemunha” (which are found respectively, in third, fifth, and sixth place in the volume’s sequence) are all told from the point of view of women who make no effort to mask or to hide their identity as the texts’ narrators. The first of these stories is narrated by a voice of a mature, urban woman whose perspective could easily be equated with that of the author herself. As she subjects herself to her hairdresser’s “test,” wondering whether she will be accepted by him, this narrator remarks, “Dentro de momentos, vou saber por mim mesma. Sei, porque me contaram por acaso. Contou-me uma joalheira que na idade se localiza entre mim e a minha mãe” (46). Upon being rejected by António, the narrator exits his salon and passes through the shopping center, noting that all of nature is on display in the shops’ windows. In a fitting close to the story, the narrator’s desire is then capped by an observation in which António, the hairdresser’s name, is substituted with that of the Greek Antinous, symbol of a tyranny
exerted by extreme physical beauty: “Eles não sabem, porém, como esse todo está representado até na secção de beleza. Elas não sabem o que se passa no salão de António. Ignoram, desconhecem. Até sempre António. Para sempre, Antínoo” (49).

In contrast to this personal/autobiographical focus that uses a banal trip to the hairdresser’s shop to present an exemplary narrative on the nature and role of female beauty, the narrators’ status in the latter two stories more closely resembles that of imagined, fictional characters. As these narrators encounter figures from their childhood and adolescence, they are reminded of a past which in both cases involves a return to a rural setting during the second half of the 1950s. Upon meeting with her long-lost uncle in a Canadian hotel, the narrator of “A Instrumentalina” is returned to the “nesga de campina ao sul do meu país” (80), where she first experienced affection, betrayal, and loss. “Testemunha,” as its title indicates, does not recount the narrator’s own past, but rather summarizes the experiences of a female acquaintance, parts of which have been witnessed by the narrator, and parts of which are told to her. In recalling her friend’s family’s difficulties, one particularly painful and humiliating childhood episode comes to the fore:

Então uma das meninas disse, apontando para Zuzete. Aquela, aquela não tem calças. Laurentino deu um estalo com a língua como os ladrões de alpergata a chamar a chusma. E todas à uma. Distribuíram-se pelos pulsos e pelos braços, pelos artelhos de Zuzete, baloiçaram Zuzete como se fosse saca, atiraram--na dentro do trigo, e porque afinal Zuzete usava uma roupa interior amordaçada de elástico, a luta foi demorada e entrecortada de grandes brados, até que Laurentino atirou a cueca ao ar, por cima da cabeça de todos. Zuzete de coxa aberta no meio do trigo, Zuzete sem bolsa, Zuzete sem laços, Zuzete de choro alto, magoado, palhetas de aço a meterem-se pelos ouvidos dos colmos. (113)

However traumatic, this event belongs to the past, and it is the narrator who recalls this episode. At the time of narration, the vicissitudes of Zuzete’s childhood have apparently been overcome while the memory of them, embodied in a concern for the aunts that she left behind, persists. The story ends, nonetheless, with a rather ironic, yet optimistic, observation regarding the distancing effects of time and space: “para lá voltar é necessário atravessar meio século de vidas, na asa de uma avião americano” (115).
While “Testemunha” counts on the presence of a clearly identified narrating subject, the story that is told belongs to another character. The narrator thus assumes a dual role, capturing and recording the voice of Zuzete speaking of her present situation while also allowing us to witness her past. This temporal alternation enables her to focus on the forces that contributed to the social formation of the character while at the same time registering Zuzete’s conscious and unconscious reactions to these forces. In addition to providing an excellent example of Jorge’s skill in vividly rendering the workings of her characters’ consciousness, this alternating point of view between self and other enables us to link this story to the volume’s other four narratives.

In these remaining narratives, multiple points of view are captured by an unidentified, third-person narrator. The style that is employed in the first, second, fourth, and seventh stories of the volume has been aptly described as emerging from “uma omnisciência formal, (...) que se esbate e se desdobra em múltiplas formas de cumplicidade, pelas pausas, pelos silêncios, pela indeterminação do olhar ou pela súbita aceleração do ritmo” (Silveira). While the sex of the narrator of these stories is not identified as specifically female, I believe that one can make a case, borrowing from Isabel Allegro de Magalhães, in favor of an approach that posits the “sex of the texts” as clearly feminine. In her gloss of Julia Kristeva’s description of the “semiotic elements” employed by writers to challenge the prevailing (male) symbolic order, Magalhães explains that these are elements that “não estando embora expressos no discurso logocêntrico são visíveis por exemplo através do ritmo, da estrutura, do tom, dos silêncios ou de outros elementos” (23).

This narrative strategy based upon silences, incomplete utterances, and shifting points of view has the effect, of course, of challenging, destabilizing, or subverting the patriarchal order which, as Kristeva reminds us, is present in the very enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending). Female subjectivity, as it rejects this notion of linear time and gives itself up to intuition, rests on “anterior temporal modalities: cyclical or monumental” which, according to Kristeva, are revealed in “a problematic of a time indissociable from space, of a space-time in infinite expansion, or rhythmmed by accidents or catastrophes” (192). It is this female subjectivity, I believe, that Jorge sets out to capture in her stories. However, as Toril Moi reminds us, Kristeva’s “emphasis on the semiotic as an unconscious force precludes any analysis of the conscious decision-making processes that must
be part of any *collective* revolutionary project*" (170). While I do not pretend to posit *Marido e Outros Contos* as a socially revolutionary text per se, I do believe that this collection does make an attempt to identify and investigate various contradictory positions occupied by female subjects vis-à-vis society as a whole.

Moving now from a theoretical discussion of the disruptive language employed by Jorge’s narrators to the analysis of the thematic preoccupations evident in her narratives, it is interesting to note that three of Jorge’s stories quite literally focus on accidents or catastrophes. While only the first (“Marido”) entails the main character’s death, the death that is witnessed in the second (“Espuma da Tarde”) and the death that nearly occurs in the third (“O conto do nadador”) reflect a dynamic of female desire that is initially expressed in the wish to protect, to please, or to seduce. This desire is ultimately resolved, however, “numa epifania da consagração ritualizada na morte por acidente” (Seixo 25).

As we have seen in the case of “Marido,” the *porteira*’s desire to protect her husband and to remain loyal to him ultimately costs her life. “Espuma da Tarde,” the fourth story in the volume, recounts a young man’s shooting by the police which is witnessed by his two friends and their waitress at a beach-front snack bar. While the story’s opening focus is on the three men who debate whether the monotony of their lives is due to a lack of space, of money, or of interest, surprise, and action, the narrative perspective soon slides over to that of the girl whose seductive powers seem to have the effect of subtly challenging the most aggressive of the three men to action. By the story’s end, after the *primeiro rapaz* is shot, the narrative focuses exclusively on the girl and on her reactions to the death that she has witnessed.

If at first she is incredulous (“Não, ela não tinha pensado que fosse assim, que não houvesse prolongamento, intervalo, continuação e um fim, renascidos doutro modo. Era aquilo que ela havia desejado ver? Só aquilo?” 73), she begins to feel a certain order fall over the afternoon and to turn herself over the silence let loose by the waves. The girl then realizes that “para que essa ordem fosse completa, para que aquilo que pudesse restar de incompreensível ou injusto fosse apagado da face da areia, ela apenas tinha de cumprir um pequeno rito que ainda não sabia qual iria ser,” and we are told: “Apetecia-lhe desprenderselas das meias, desprender-se da sedução. Pelo menos, para já, durante alguns dias ia ficar assim, pois nunca se sabia se aquele não ia ser o único gesto heróico que teria ocasião de presenciar durante toda a vida” (73-74).
If the epiphanic nature of this story’s ending brings to mind certain aspects of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s collection *Laços de Família*, Lídia Jorge’s own description of the dynamics that shape Lispector’s stories also seems equally applicable to “Espuma da Tarde”:

Tem personagens, tem aventura, acidentes e desfechos. Só que (...) os personagens começando por ser comuns, logo se revelam incomuns, avançando como se não tivessem olhos para ver, e quando quisessem ouvir, não tivessem ouvidos. Ou inversamente, se têm ouvidos não têm sons, e se têm olhos não há paisagem que se veja. (n. p.)

In Jorge’s story, the surviving rapazes remain as blind to what they have witnessed as they were at the story’s opening:

—‘Pois bem. O que é que falta aqui? Em concreto, ninguém sabe, mas eu sei. O que falta aqui é um bocado de terra...’ Estava-se diante do mar. Da orla da praia o Oceano partia na direcção duma lonjura sem limite e por isso não deixava de ser insólito que um tipo se pusesse a dizer que faltava um pedaço de terra diante de tanta água. (54)

At the end, the narrator observes, no less ironically, that they can explain “em profundidade” all that happened, while the girl, on the other hand, becomes aware of the precariousness and fragility of both knowledge and desire. As a result, she opts, momentarily at least, to remove herself from the game that had reserved for her a role based solely on the powers of seduction. 7

In “O conto do nadador,” the final story of *Marido e Outros Contos*, the desire to seduce also plays a central role in the events that unfold. This story narrates a young girl’s near brush with death by drowning that takes place as she attempts to distinguish herself from her girlfriends before the gaze of a male onlooker. As they grow accustomed to “o calor do olhar” (124), the girls become more and more daring, venturing to a distant, almost deserted beach where they shed their clothes and play in the sea. Attempting to attract the attention the anonymous “voyeur” who watches them, Delfina, the most courageous and the only girl who almost knows how to swim, braves the ocean on the day following a storm. When she begins to drown, the other girls, tragically, are unable to assess the “reality” of the situation, and as the
onlooker saves her life and administers resuscitation, they believe that they are witnessing a movie-like scene of conquest and the consummation of love:

E aí o voyeur entrou na água, mergulhou, segurou ao peito a rapariga corajosa, abraçou a rapariga, ergeu no ar a rapariga, nadou com a rapariga para fora, atravessou as ondas estupidamente em rebentação, correu para o cascalho, depositou a rapariga de bruços na areia. Afagou-lhe as costas com as suas grandes mãos, virou-lhe o corpo, retirou-lhe o cabelo da cara, descobriu-lhe a boca, colocou a boca sobre a sua boca, voltou a massajar-lhe as costas e a comprimir-lhe o peito. E depois voltou a beijá-la. Beijou-a. Beijou-a como nos filmes que então se viam, sem se ver a língua nem os dentes. O amante respirava alto, soprava durante o beijo. Durante um instante, todo o seu corpo cobriu o dela. Tal e qual como todas e cada uma havia sonhado vir a acontecer consigo, em imaginação. (137)

The girls' dependence on references borrowed from popular culture as they seek to understand the real-life situations and emotions that they are experiencing brings to mind, of course, Jorge’s highly acclaimed second novel, *O Cais das Merendas* (1982). There, the reader is frequently told of the characters’ use of cinematographic images as a means of helping them to make sense of their actions. Likewise, the physical setting of “O Conto do Nadador” (the events I have been discussing take place in the Algarve in 1955 and are recalled in a contemporary present by João Desidério, proprietor of the Hotel Paraíso) also bring to mind several thematic elements of *O Cais das Merendas*.

This reference to Jorge’s earlier novelistic production brings me back, of course, to the discussion of the short story and its dependence on the novel with which I opened my reading of *Marido e Outros Contos*. Like both the critics whom I quoted in my introduction, I believe that a great number of useful comparisons can indeed be made between these stories and Jorge’s novels. In addition to clear affinities in both plot and setting with *O Cais das Merendas*, parallels may be drawn between several of these stories and the experience of isolated, rural life that is evoked in *O Dia dos Prodígios* (1980), and with the emotionally charged, allegorical space that serves as the background of *A Última Dona* (1992). The author’s use of language, moreover, is strikingly similar to that which we find throughout her work. Finally, I should note that, if we are to assume that these stories represent the sum total of the author’s efforts within the short story genre, we must
conclude that Lídia Jorge continues to work and publish first and foremost as novelist. The seven stories that I have been discussing appeared in print between 1988 and 1996; during that same period, Jorge also published three novels and, in the summer of 1998, immediately following *Marido e Outros Contos*, she published her eighth novel, entitled *O Vale da Paixão*.

That is not to say, however, that the stories of *Marido e Outros Contos* can or should be read as examples of a “minor” genre which only serves as a reflection of Lídia Jorge’s “major” works, or as rehearsals for forthcoming novels. On the contrary, I believe that it has been both fruitful and illuminating to approach the collection as an integrated whole. I am reminded, in fact, of Robert M. Luscher’s observation that, “As in a musical sequence, the short story sequence repeats and progressively develops themes and motifs over the course of the work; its unity derives from a perception of both the successive ordering and recurrent patterns, which provide the unity of the reading experience” (149). The stories contained in *Marido e Outros Contos* were not initially conceived as belonging to a short story sequence, but our experience of reading them has undoubtedly been enriched by examining them in the context of a collected volume.

As I have shown, the narratives positioned at the volume’s opening, middle, and end highlight the collection’s focus on multiple manifestations of female desire and draw explicit attention to this desire as both controlled and conditioned by the prevailing male hegemony. Traces of the same thematic may also be found in the other narratives contained in *Marido e Outros Contos*. In fact, the other male figures who appear throughout (the hairdresser “António,” both the uncle and the grandfather in “A Instrumentalina,” and Laurentino, Zuzete’s tormentor) similarly participate in an almost ritualistic determination of female identity as determined by the forces of violence and chance. We can read these stories individually, of course, as textual fragments that record fragments of a series of lives torn away from routine by the intrusion of contingency and loss. When taken together, however, they provide us with a much more complex view of female experience—that of the female subject’s precarious positioning within a symbolic and social order that is beyond her control and that often places her in a direct collision course with the forces of that order.
Notes

1 In addition to presenting a series of propositions regarding both the form and the contents of the modern short story, I find Pratt’s article very useful due to the complete historical treatment that she accords to short story theory. As she sums up previous critical approaches to the short story, Pratt’s article will serve, in the present analysis, as my principal source for a general theory of the genre.

2 So as not to hinder the flow of my analysis, I will leave any discussion regarding Vértice’s readers’ relationship with “serious” fiction for another occasion.

3 Two of the stories contained in Marido e Outros Contos—“A Instrumentalina” and “O Conto do Nadador”—were originally published as separate books. The former is listed by Jorge’s editor (Dom Quixote) as volume six of her Obras Completas. The latter was published in 1994 by Contexto and in its original version was accompanied by Alain Corbel’s illustrations.

4 Following Robert M. Luscher’s lead, I have opted for the term “sequence” rather than “cycle.” As Luscher defines it, a short story sequence is “a volume of stories, collected and organized by their author, in which the reader successively realizes underlying patterns of coherence by continual modifications of his perceptions of pattern and theme” (148).

5 The book contains no preface, prologue, or epilogue, for example. Likewise, the title of the volume does not differ from that of the stories, nor are we presented with related characters or narrators (Luscher 150).

6 As there is no evidence to the contrary, I believe that it is safe to assume that Lídia Jorge was responsible for the ordering of the volume’s contents.

7 The nature of the girl’s “epiphany” sets her apart, I believe, from the protagonists of Lispector’s short stories. In her introduction to Laços de Família, Jorge observes that “toda a obra vive do influxo do seu tempo histórico e a prosa de Clarice não se mantém asséptica em relação ao mundo mental em que viveu.” This leads Jorge to identify points of contact between Lispector’s writing and that of other well known Modernist writers—Kafka, Joyce, and Woolf. The characters and events narrated in Jorge’s story, on the other hand, seem much more at home in a contemporary, post-Modern world, where emotions seem to have been exhausted and epiphanies, when they occur at all, are registered in a minor key, as indeterminate and of a decidedly immanent nature.

8 Two of the most cited passages of this novel that deal with this epistemological dependence on the movies read: “Já alguma de vocês teve notícia de um party terminar assim? As amigas olharam umas para as outras e realmente ninguém tinha ideia, por mais que puxasse pela memória dos filmes, os olhos perdidos no fim do mar” (41), and “estávamos todos desmemoriados, sem sabermos, por exemplo, se as segas se faziam na primavera se no outono. Eu tenho uma ideia de ver num filme colorido mulheres a ceifarem com uma luz alaranjada própria da queda da folha entre nós” (244).

9 A possible exception to this emphasis on female desire can be found in “A prova dos pássaros,” which I have opted to exclude from my analysis. In this story, it is the male protagonist who desires to find proof of God’s existence. His needs are met, however, as the result of his interaction with a young woman and her baby, thereby leading me to interpret his quest as fulfilled by means of his symbolic encounter with the maternal.
Works Cited

On the cover of this issue of Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies is a photograph of Lídia Jorge taken by Luís Ramos in 1991. This photograph and others of her by the same photographer were first published in A Imagem das Palavras,¹ a book which featured photographs of contemporary Portuguese writers according to a set of conventions which included a portrait of the writer, the writer’s study or place of work, and the region or immediate environment of the writer.

In his portrait picture, Ramos presents Lídia Jorge not once, but twice in the same photograph, both as an adult and as a child of eighteen months. This simultaneous, repetitive, and double representation of the writer was achieved with her collusion in an event staged for the occasion, much as a director might locate an actor. She holds the photograph of herself up for the viewer to inspect, pressing it towards the camera eye. More correctly, she frames the photograph with her hands, cupping its left edge in one hand and securing its right edge with the other. The photograph of the child is in sharp focus; the adult writer, fixed in planar recession, is blurred, and she gazes back at the spectator, her eye just grazing the top deckled edge of the photo. Underneath are the words of the title of this issue: Lídia Jorge in Other Words/por Outras Palavras. Image and text work here to reinforce one another in the way that the title lays claim to the photograph by giving a name to what is represented, the two Lídias. Even more, the photograph, and the discourse that circulates around it, is presented as another language, “in other words,” a visual language.

There are several conventions with which the photograph plays. The most immediately striking is the commemorative photograph where a political adherent or family member carries a large photograph in a public setting either to eulogize the heroic virtues of the leader or to immortalize and mourn the dead. We think of the mothers whose children disappeared for their acts
of political resistance, marching year after year around the central plaza in Buenos Aires. Or funeral processions in India, where the deceased is honored with a photograph taken in the prime of life. Or the photographs of those killed by drunk drivers held up for all to see. Or figures who by their heroic acts, have been elevated to the status of martyrs in the service of the State. Presenting the photograph to the viewer, pressing it forward to the very front of the picture space is a visual command that requires the spectator's acknowledgment. Yet this photograph of the writer re-presenting herself as a child is commemorative only in the sense that it registers a passing of time. The child is still alive in the adult, and the location of the photograph in public space only becomes so with its publication. There is nothing here of public mourning, of parades or processions or protest, but rather a quiet sense of shuffling through the family archive and the passage of years. Picturing time is measured as a physical trace in the residue of what is left over: only a photographic record of what once was.

Childhood, it could be argued, is a physical reality located in the past. But according to a psychoanalytic model, there is no “past reality,” only continuity. As Freud pointed out, there is no time in the unconscious. There is only the present, constructed all at once by past events, actual or imagined, and their effects in the present. The intervening space between Lídia Jorge as adult and Lídia Jorge as child is collapsed into the present. Lídia as a child is Lídia at eighteen months, the end of that crucial period which begins at six months when the child completes an image of the unity it will achieve and what it will become. Catherine Clement describes it as that “moment when one becomes oneself because one is no longer the same as one's mother.”

Lacan, who formulated this notion, called this the “mirror phase,” a concept well known in discussion of the formation of the subject. It begins somewhere between six and eighteen months and ends with self-recognition and the acquisition of language. This recognition of Freud’s “body ego” emerges from the idea of a disorganized state of the body in pieces, that is to say, from a pile of fragmented parts into a bounded identity. And it is exactly this moment that the photograph records, the moment when the child will begin to speak.

When Lídia Jorge was asked in an interview whether as a woman she was conscious of writing in a manner that distinguished her from other Portuguese writers, she replied that within the peculiarity, or even a certain style which is her own, she recognizes herself in the memory of the girl she once was, of
the books she read which touched her the most, and of the music and words
that she was storing away. “Having been a girl must have marked my mode
of expression,” she told the interviewer. Her women are, as she describes
them, powerful, invisible, subversive, and as a writer she records (“echoes” is
her word) the violent changes that have taken place since she has begun to
write. She does not claim her writing as that of a traditional feminist, and she
does not claim to write feminist texts. Elizabeth Grosz, writing on “Feminism
After the Death of the Author,” has recently reevaluated the criteria by which
a feminist text is determined. The gender of the author, she claims, does not
guarantee the text’s position as feminist or not, and the reader can’t know the
author’s intentions, emotions, psyche, or interiority. None of these can fix or
control the meaning and inherent ambiguity of a text. Nor does the content
of the text insure its status either. There can be no assumption that women
are a homogeneous group, or even that they share common experience given
the cultural, geographic, political, and historically diverse backgrounds from
which they come. There is no particular topic, content, or issue that belongs
only to women’s writing. Neither the gender of the reader nor the style of the
text can be claimed a priori as a schema or mode of classification. “Indeed,”
she writes, “it seems that there is no one characteristic which could ensure a
text’s feminist status.” Instead, for a text to be regarded as feminist, it needs
to make visible the patriarchal or phallocentric presumptions that govern its
contexts, and it needs to shake up and unsettle the phallocentric equation of
masculinity and humanity. New styles, new modes of analysis, and new
arguments need to be generated. “Being a woman and being called Lídia,”
says Lídia Jorge, mark her as female and her writing as produced by a woman,
but they do not mark her work as feminist texts.

A photograph can, however, say something about the writer in the same
way that other photographs of other writers say something about their work-
ing habits, the rooms in which they write, the houses in which they live and
so on. Photographs of writers writing or artists painting constitute an entire
genre as familiar in painting as in literature. But they don’t tell us much.
Certainly they don’t reveal the secrets of artistic production. A photograph of
an artist at work or on holiday, as Barthes confirmed, operates on the level of
myth. The writer who joins leisure with the prestige of a vocation is part of
our time, a worker like the rest of us, yet also singular and different. Although
he fraternizes with other workers on holiday, unlike them he doesn’t cease to
work. Writing is his “natural” activity; the writer is always writing, like an
involuntary secretion. No matter where the writer is (on the beach, in the country, going down the Congo, in the Algarve) the writer is still a writer. So, Barthes concludes, the photograph of a writer participating in a prosaic spectacle operates as an effort to demystify, but works in exactly the opposite direction. If she's part of everyday life, her art is even more divine. If Lídia Jorge’s simple, polished *escritório* appears to be stripped any attributes of a writer, it enables us to believe even more in the internal noise that goes into the writing. We want to elevate our artists, and we resist de-sanctifying them in the most mundane of terms, in their dress, their eating habits, or the places in which they work. What we want from photographs of writers is evidence: evidence of difference and evidence of likeness.

The other photographs in this issue taken by Luís Ramos of Lídia Jorge draw on this genre which represents artists and daily life. But these are photographs, as I have said, that play with the very conventions in which they participate. The *escritório* is empty, with hardly enough light in its cool interior to illuminate a page. The writer walks along a stone wall that forms a backdrop. The writer digs into a coat to resist the wind. These images tell us nothing about how her texts are achieved or what is contained in them, nor should we ask them to. If there is an “effect of the real,” photography’s effective claim according to Barthes, it issues from the look of “non-art” and the studied spontaneity that aligns the first two of these to documentary photographs, and the third photograph to the genre of the portrait. Yet, like the others, this portrait of the writer works against the traditional sense of the genre, in this instance the sitter posed in the studio. Nor is the writer pictured with anyone else (other than herself). The social network is effaced, and the way opened for the operations of myth: the writer producing in isolation, when in fact the stories and novels of Lídia Jorge point to a way of working that is with and through the voices of others. In *O Dia dos Prodígios* the voices of the women are woven into a relentless litany of opinion and comment: “E Macário disse… E Matilde disse… E Manuel Gertrudes disse… disse Carminha Rosa… E Jesuína Palha disse.”

It was precisely this location of the human subject in a network of social relations that Walter Benjamin thought was photography’s smartest achievement, a point he argued in his early essay of 1931 on “A Small History of Photography.” Portraits, in their early historical incarnation, could and did place the individual in the social formation according to the professions they chose or the class to which they belonged, visually legible by the dividing lines
of dress or professional attributes as in the hat the sitter wore, such as the cloth cap of the working class or the bowler favored by middle class professionals. “Stamped on the photographic portraits made during the first decade of the medium’s existence,” writes Rosalind Krauss, “was the aura of both a human nature settling into its own specificity…and a social nexus exposed in terms of the intimacy of its relationships” by these amateur practitioners (Hill, Cameron, Hugo) who were making portrait pictures for their friends. These intimate relationships are the stuff of Lídia Jorge’s writing, the links, the voices both modern and mythical, the sense of social space that marks her work.

How we interpret the photographic portrait depends to a large extent on the photographed subject’s gaze. How and where the look is directed has a bearing on what message is sent. A direct gaze into the camera eye can be considered in several opposing ways. In doing so, the subject acknowledges the presence of the photographer and the camera, but what are we to make of this? (It must be said, however, that the photographer and the camera eye aren’t always synonymous. In Wim Wenders’ *Lisbon Story*, the filmmaker hangs his camera on his back from which vantage point it records everything that he doesn’t see.) Film theorists take differing positions on the meaning of this gaze, with the question of voyeurism as the central issue. If the subject meets our gaze, so the argument goes, voyeuristic peeping is diminished. Or, as Christian Metz argues in relation to cinema, the return gaze can be considered as the subject’s permission to be watched. Lídia Jorge not only gives us permission to look, but in her returned gaze and the offer of the photograph, she actively invites the spectator to do so.

That offer is literally framed by the writer’s hands, which surround the photograph of the child. This frame, all frames, call attention to the picture, while at the same time separating it from the world that it reproduces. The hands section off the past from the present, childhood from adulthood, and hollow out a deep space between the face of the adult and the body of the child, as though to emphasize temporal distance. In the physical gap between the two resides human memory, the sense of what was and what is, what one has become. C.S. Sherrington, writing in the nineteenth century, referred to a sixth sense to which he gave the name “proprioception,” described as the individual’s consciousness of the body that confirms physical identity. The adult memory of this child (Lídia Jorge remembering Lídia Jorge) is a physical, corporeal memory, as well as that imagined and handed down by others. Memory might be thought of as a seventh sense, as a record of antecedent
existence upon which our intellectual identity depends.\textsuperscript{11}

So, movement circulates between the active subject, the writer who offers the image of herself, the writer who produces meaning by writing, and the passive object of the photograph which receives the meanings constructed by the spectator in looking. Many acts inform the ways in which we see and the ways in which we remember our photographed past: projecting our own meanings onto photographs, voyeuristic looking, fantasy, and desire. In this instance, the camera doesn’t present us with visual facts of the writer’s life that are “simply there.” Neither the photographer nor the spectator is disinterested. Each works with frames already in place to construct some particular picture according to a stock of available signs. That is why the figure of the writer framing herself adds yet another layer to available meanings.

Painters, of course, have long known the value of frames, both in the economic terms of their potential material richness and as a means of regulating the gaze. “Frame the work,” Poussin commanded, so that “the gaze is contained and not scattered outside receiving other neighboring images pell-mell and confusing them with what is in the painting.”\textsuperscript{12} So as not to call attention to the frame itself, Poussin insisted that it be simple and not overly ornate. Matisse claimed that the frame was an important part of the picture in that it signaled the edge of the work, and that beyond the frame the continued movement of the picture could be implied. And Picasso, always alert to the ways in which common objects could be drafted into the service of art, looped a thick piece of rope into a frame surrounding the oval of his 1912 \textit{Still Life and Chair Caning}, a gesture that revised the notion of the frame by using common materials that suggested the local vernacular of everyday speech. Framing is another way of controlling what is framed.

Finally, we might want to think of the role the family archive of pictures has in constituting individual memory, and how one is framed by that archive. Here is Roland Barthes, as he searches for a photograph of his mother after she died.\textsuperscript{13} He is searching through the archive, and he begins in this way by working “back through a life, not my own, but the life of someone I love. Starting from the last image taken of his mother before her death, he arrived, traversing three-quarters of a century, at the image of a child. He stares at what he calls “the Sovereign Good of childhood.” And what he finds in her first photograph, the photograph of the child, is also the last one that he finds. Perhaps this can tell us something about our photograph of “Lídia Jorge and Lídia Jorge,” about the “Sovereign Good of childhood” and its survival in the adult.
Notes

I would like to thank Lídia Jorge and Luís Ramos for their generous permission to publish the photographs in this issue of Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies.


3 Stephanie d’Orey, Interview with Lídia Jorge. In this issue of Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies.


A Imagem das Palavras.
Comissariado Português Para a Europalia 91.
Luis Ramos, "The Writing Room in the Algarve," 1990
A Imagem das Palavras.
Comissariado Português Para a Europalia 91.
Luis Ramos, “Lidia Jorge in the Algarve,”
_A Imagem das Palavras_
Comissariado Português Para a Europalia 91.