

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

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In 1972, the publication of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* marked a watershed in Portuguese women's writing. Ten years later, the literary landscape had changed beyond recognition. Widening the ranks of a select number of already consecrated sisters, unprecedented numbers of talented women writers were making highly acclaimed literary debuts, usually with works of fiction. They included Lília Jorge, Teolinda Gersão, and Hélia Correia among others. A significant proportion of them, however, rejected the label of "feminist" and feminist militancy,¹ and even the concept of "escrita feminina." For, as Hilary Owen observes, "Many contemporary women writers in Portugal rightly mistrust the inverted sexism and potential ghettoization that creating an alternative women's canon could imply."² This unease notwithstanding, women's fiction does clearly display female-specific traits and concerns.³

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

*Notícia da Cidade Silvestre*⁴ is a remarkable work that centers on the profound but increasingly conflictual friendship between two women, Anabela Cravo and Júlia Grei, in the context of their struggle for survival in the inhospitable urban environment of Lisbon in the late 1970s. The novel follows the two women over a period of several years and bears witness to the

transformation of the “heroine” Júlia. To that extent, *Notícia* conforms to the pattern of a nineteenth-century *bildungsroman*, as the naive Júlia gradually becomes more streetwise and world weary.⁵ Despite Júlia’s transformation, literary reviews from the male establishment have tended to center on the figure of Anabela Cravo, described by João Gaspar Simões “a rompante mulher que é essa aventureira dos novos tempos, os tempos da sociedade feminista,” “ao pé dela a Júlia Grei não é nada, humanamente falando.”⁶ Gaspar Simões is fairly scathing in his analysis of the last quarter of the novel, a revealing fact in itself, since it coincides with the time when Júlia, up to then the weakling of the two friends, gradually begins to come into her own.

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

1. Júlia, the Powerless Female

When the novel begins, Júlia, a recently widowed young woman, has to fend for herself and her son and struggles to make ends meet. Therefore, when the strong and determined Anabela comes onto the scene, Júlia soon becomes dependent on her as provider of both emotional and material support. Right

from the very opening lines, there is no doubt as to who “wears the trousers,” metaphorically speaking: “Se morássemos numa casa com janela na manhã do encontro, eu teria ido por-me no parapeito à espera de Anabela Cravo” (19). Aside from the shocking realization that Júlia’s home (which turns out to be her deceased husband’s workshop) is devoid of proper windows, making her a prisoner in her own attic, this incipit positions Júlia in the traditional and passive female occupation of waiting at the window for the arrival of a miraculous “prince charming.” Júlia lives in a limbo, literally as well as metaphorically, since she is surrounded from all angles by her dead husband’s sculptures.

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

Unlike Anabela, the self-effacing and self-abnegating Júlia is a truly caring companion in adversity. When Anabela discovers her unwanted pregnancy, Júlia through sheer intuition manages to locate her friend’s dwelling. She handles enquiries to secure a back-street abortion and foots the hefty bill (fourteen contos, a sum nearly equal to her monthly wages). Since abortion was still illegal at the time, Júlia was risking imprisonment. Furthermore, she remains by Anabela’s side for a week despite risking dismissal from work (120-37). The roles of carer and provider are thus completely reversed as Anabela temporarily becomes mute, regressing to a childlike state, while Júlia nurses her back to life with unconditional love. This selflessness is all the more admirable given the fact that, in the process of tracking her down, Júlia had discovered that her friend lived under the same roof as her married sugar-daddy figure, *Padrinho*.⁹

Anabela, initially perceived as a positive, resourceful woman, is therefore soon revealed as simultaneously devious and deceitful. She is a classic example of the predatory woman who uses men sexually on her way to the top, to pay for dental treatment for instance, or to do her articles with a renowned lawyer.¹⁰ Furthermore, she is unable to act any differently in the context of a relationship based on female friendship. She lies shamelessly to Júlia, patronizes and uses her, her atelier and subsequently even her new home, as a part of her self-promoting strategy. More ruthlessly still, when Jónia inadvertently interrupts a particularly important sexual encounter, Anabela abruptly severs all contact with her (195).

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

Despite her precarious circumstances, Júlia shuns Anabela's advice of a lucrative marriage with the eligible Saraiva, following her heart instead into a relationship with Artur, the penniless sculptor, footless and free and intent on remaining so. But when Júlia becomes pregnant, he reacts as if it were a curtailment of his freedom. In a desperate bid to save their love, Júlia decides to have an abortion. In telling contrast to Anabela's abortion, Júlia will be entirely by herself, without a shoulder to lean on, since by then Anabela has gone entirely her separate way and Artur is shielded from the grim truth with the explanation of a miscarriage. Even so, Artur eventually leaves her.¹¹

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

After she has been abandoned by her nearest and dearest, Júlia decides to become more pragmatic and coldhearted like Anabela, whose success she is able to contemplate from afar. She had tried to survive through the socially acceptable activity of sewing rag dolls, but now, spurred on by the vision of Anabela's success, she adopts a utilitarian view of men. She arranges to meet

with Saraiva, a bachelor clearly intent on putting her on a pedestal. Júlia acts as the virginal, demure woman without a past that he longs for, but this role-play places her in an impossible situation because of Jóiá's existence, since Saraiva is unable to accept her as a woman with family commitments. Her relationship with Mão Dianjo, a long-standing family friend, also undergoes changes. At a time when she was at her most vulnerable and in need of comfort, they had sex once. Now it just becomes an expedient means to fill the coffers. Eventually Júlia also names her price to her boss, Sr. Assumpção.

Both Mão Dianjo and Sr. Assumpção have incongruously angelical names, since they are in fact lecherous old men who take advantage of Júlia's emotional and financial vulnerability. Saraiva, who shuts Jóiá off from their future as a couple, is no better. The name Saraiva "era o mesmo que granizo (...) água congelada caindo em grãos contra a janela" (61), an apt reminder of his lack of humanity behind the façade of his orderly life as an employee in the ironically named insurance company *Tranquilidade*. Unlike the men in her life, who have both certainty (*tranquilidade*) and centrality (*apótema*),¹² Júlia is emphatically condemned to the margins, a fact strikingly brought home when she tries her hand at prostitution for a couple of months (285). She only gives up this degrading but lucrative activity after a close brush with death (in a hallucinatory scene, she is nearly run over by a psychotic male driver), realizing that Jóiá needs her alive (286-87).

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

Jóiá's near death constitutes a turning point in Júlia's life. While in hospital by his bedside, she is overcome by an irrational and all-pervasive need to carry a knife with her (296), a tangible symbol of her pent-up aggression. She also has an uncontrollable urge to write and starts scribbling in her diary. Significantly, we learn that she had been writing for years and it may have been the only way for her to keep her sanity. Earlier in the novel, Júlia had confessed to Mão Dianjo that she was incapable of hatred, an admission of failure by male standards, since Mão Dianjo firmly believes in the need to

learn how to hate in order to be free: “Só ele [o ódio] é capaz de defender, de preservar, robustecer a pessoa” (264).

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

If hatred becomes profoundly liberating for João Mário, it proves to be equally so for Júlia, in what constitutes a ritual initiation similar to the trajectory of the central female character in Clarice Lispector’s story “O Búfalo,” from *Laços de Família*. Jóia’s suicide attempt constitutes her “epiphany,” a point of no return. She starts carrying her knife around, ready for use, and decides to sell her diary. These twin acts gradually transform her, eventually giving her sufficient strength to stand up to the various persons who have used and abused her: Saraiva, Mão Dianjo, Sr. Assumpção and finally Anabela. Her symbolic victory over Mão Dianjo, whom she threatens with the knife (303), boosts her self-confidence¹³ and enables her to encounter Anabela to exorcise old ghosts.

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

In other words, Júlia has been like a rag doll at the hands of the unscrupulous Anabela Cravo, bought and discarded when no longer needed, and

never really treasured. As Hilary Owen puts it, “Nothing that Júlia does is undertaken independently of the uterine strings that make her Anabela’s puppet. This is finally underlined when she confronts the rag dolls who reflect herself” (422). Therefore, in order to free herself from this stifling umbilical cord, Júlia must throw the knife that she carries with her as a display of (phallic) potency. Again, in Hilary Owen’s words, “Júlia must symbolically knife her in order to be free of her, just as Dorian Grey kills his own portrait” (429).

In the lead-up to this climax, Anabela is rather relentlessly caricatured as a tyrannical man who expects “his” submissive “wife” to bring newspapers, cigarettes, drinks, and food at her every call and beckon, and then to sit adoringly at her feet. But at last Júlia can now see through her former friend and is appalled by what she stands for. Anabela is metaphorically sterile, and the *mancha negra* on her face, which (rather problematically) is attributed to the pill, makes her look as though she had a moustache. She is a mutant, a monstrous creature: “uma nova raça, um outro sexo e uma outra natureza se anunciava em Anabela Cravo como se a terra se movesse para dar à luz uma outra espécie de pessoa” (320). Júlia’s rejection of Anabela’s model is uncompromising, but it does not force her back into the passive victim role since, by drawing out the knife, she shakes off the yoke and breaks free of this abusive relationship. Her own strength and power do not rely on the same strategy of oppression as Anabela: “Anabela teria de saber que a Terra se move de vários modos” (321).¹⁴ This is confirmed beyond all doubt by Júlia’s inner reflections after leaving a terrified Anabela, as she looks at the crowd of night workers on their way to and fro:

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

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

3. The Subversion of Gender Polarizations

By positing the victory of Júlia over Anabela as the novel draws to a close, and by crowning it with Júlia’s complete rejection of the model of power

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

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

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

treats Jónia as a real person, giving him his undivided time, love, and attention.

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

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

4. (Re)-Creating the World through the Act of Naming

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

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

Her dramatic transformation, which does not entail her becoming a new Anabela, is marked by the fact that she is willing to surrender her knife to

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

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

In other words, Júlia gives her blessing to the final product, satisfied that it does not falsify her experience. In fact, it could be argued that the occasional diary entries (marked by italic print and separated from the main text) which intersperse the main narrative and chart Jóia's slow progress on the road back to recovery are endowed with a special meaning. In some sense, these diary entries mirror Júlia's own slow surfacing from suicidal silence through the self-defining act of naming/writing in a striking "mise en abyme." Indeed, Júlia had been voiceless and silenced throughout, unlike Anabela, who was as vocal as Tarzan in an early episode. At this early stage, Júlia had been manifestly unable to emulate her (chapter 1). But now, she has access to language in the form of her written memoirs.¹⁸

It is also crucially important that writing, for Júlia, is posited as the non-violent alternative to carrying a knife. If the latter was a symbol of male aggression, the pen, by contrast, may be "a metaphorical penis" to recall Gilbert and Gubar's (in)famous definition. But, in a remarkable inversion, attention here shifts to the paper, which is endowed with qualities commonly

associated with the feminine: “o papel em branco parece-me um tecido doce, humano e envolvente como uma pele. Passivo, vegetal e outros adjectivos que não vale a pena enumerar” (305). More radically, writing may even break down binary oppositions: “O papel é um tecido doce, humano e envolvente como uma pele. Passivo, activo, e outras qualidades que não preciso de nomear (...) Como se, a partir dessa frágil matéria, sentisse e pudesse dar notícia da outra realidade” (322).

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

Esta personagem misteriosa (...) parece ser o resultado da masculinização, por acção dos pastores, de uma figura feminina que tanto poderá ter sido a Moira, a Magna-Mater dos antigos, Maria ou ainda Diana (...) A sua masculinização não está ainda completa: Mamede é andrógino, representado como uma mulher viril ou como um homem adulto efeminado, imberbe e de cabelos longos.²¹

The building thus marks the institutional power of a patriarchal Church and points to the “outra realidade,” the concealed female signifier buried beneath the surface, which Júlia can begin to restore in her narrative through the act of remembering.

Conclusion

According to Annis Pratt, “The woman’s novel asks questions, poses riddles, cries out for restitution, but the synthesis occurs in the mind of the reader, who, having participated in the narrative reenactment, must put its message into effect in her own life.”²² The possibility of reader identification is indeed one of the keys to the success of this novel, since the reader, initially drawn to the strongly delineated Anabela, is likely to feel defrauded when she turns out to be irrecoverable for feminism. Thus, identification with Júlia becomes not merely the only possible, but the only productive, way out.

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

Notes

¹ In the case of Spanish America, Debra Castillo explains that fear of feminism stems from its perception as an euphemism for “lesbianism” in *Talking Back: Towards a Latin American Feminist Criticism* (Cornell and London: Ithaca University Press, 1992) 22.

² Hilary Owen, “Um Quarto que Seja Seu: The Quest for Camões Sister,” *Portuguese Studies* 11 (1995): 179-91, citations from pp. 191 and 186.

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

Mundo," in *Gender, Ethnicity and Class in Modern Portuguese-Speaking Culture*, ed. Hilary Owen (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996) 49-62.

⁴ *Notícia da Cidade Silvestre* (Lisbon: Europa-América, 1984).

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

⁶ João Gaspar Simões, "Os Prodigios de Lídia Jorge," *Diário de Notícias* (24 January 1985): 31.

⁷ Regina Louro, "Lídia Jorge: Este 3.º Livro É o Primeiro," *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias* (18-24 December 1984): 2-3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

diferença,” in Álvaro Cardoso Gomes, *A Voz Itinerante* (São Paulo: Edusp, 1993) 152.

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

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

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

²⁰ Regina Louro, *op. cit.*, 3.

²¹ Moisés Espírito Santo, *A Religião Popular Portuguesa*, 2nd ed. (Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 1990) 124.

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