

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 geocultural 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 “*signifiance*.”¹¹

Bearing the historical and philosophical lesson of Seguisundo'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.¹⁴

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.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.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, “*A Instrumentalina*,” bringing together into a nostalgic new metaphorical whole—“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.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 “desiquilíbrio 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 emblemized 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.²⁰ 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 characteristic 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.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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 *énoncé* (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!’” (22). 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 (23). 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 entrava nem saía que não fosse por vontade dela” (25).

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.²⁴ 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.

Norwithstanding 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, una, 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 scrittura 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 Kristevan 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; Ambrogio, 1985; and, especially, in the author’s own essay, “Sobre o género,” 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.