

## Contingency and Loss in *Marido e Outros Contos*

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In the fall of 1997, Lúcia 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, Lúcia 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 Lúcia 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 viessem, 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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*,<sup>5</sup> 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 (“Antônio,” *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.<sup>6</sup>

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. “Antônio,” “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 Antônio, 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 Antônio, 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 rhythmized 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 desprender-se 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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*.<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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).

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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.

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