

The Insurgent Body Poetic of Luiza Neto Jorge

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Abstract. The rigorously inventive lyric of Luiza Neto Jorge (1939-1989), one of the most distinctive voices in Portuguese poetry since the 1960s, cultivates as its substantive and instrumental fulcrum a consistent emphasis on gendered corporeality. Neto Jorge's textualization of the body (particularly of the sexual body) gives substance to the complex discursive reflection on the gendered construction of cognition and experience that takes place in her poetry. At the same time, the poet's attentiveness to the physicality of language—manifest in her adroit use of deconstructive wordplay and precisely engineered syntax—brings into focus the reciprocal permeability of linguistic (and therefore also social) and corporeal matter.

One of the most distinctive voices in Portuguese poetry since the 1960s, at the time of her death in 1989 Luiza Neto Jorge left behind a body of work as compact as it is intensely and rigorously inventive. According to Luís Miguel Nava, in an essay published shortly after Neto Jorge's untimely passing, it is precisely “pela forma como em tão exíguas proporções pôde atingir uma das mais intensas fulgurações do que se fez na sua época” that her poetic legacy “deverá desde já ser posta a par da de um Camilo Pessanha ou da de um Mário de Sá-Carneiro” (49). Her work relies on an intimately woven discursive alliance between an acutely inquisitive and contestatory existential

outlook, a distinctive rhetoric in which the vocabulary of passion and violence and an overarching drive toward the deconstruction of verbal matter are harnessed into morphologically and syntactically precise articulations—hers is a “gramática ... que explode sem se desarticular” (Cabral Martins 41)—and, last but not least, a consistent emphasis on corporeality, situating the body (the body that is always both gendered and sexed) as the privileged vantage point of the poet’s lyric *Weltanschauung*. It is particularly this latter aspect—recognized but generally undertheorized in the majority of critical comments on Neto Jorge’s poetry—that emerges as her perhaps most distinctive legacy, at the same time anchoring her firmly in the still largely unwritten history of the specifically female and feminist lineage in modern Portuguese poetry.¹ Contrary to Maria Teresa Horta, her *Poesia 61* companion and the future member of the Three Marias collective, Neto Jorge was never in danger of being classified by the critics of her work as a “feminista, apenas”²; on the other hand, however, only very recently has she begun to be addressed as a poet whose work’s feminist scope did not need to be tiptoed around or, put more bluntly, swept under the carpet of critical validation.³

Having debuted in 1960 with the volume *A Noite Vertebrada*, Neto Jorge came into the public spotlight as a member of the group of young poets whose joint publication, in 1961, of five individual brochures assembled under the common title of *Poesia 61* earned them at the time the collective status of a new generational vanguard in Portuguese poetry, a designation that the protagonists themselves both guardedly claimed and self-consciously questioned. In an extensive interview published in the “Vida Literária” supplement of *Diário de Lisboa* on 25 May 1961, the five poets—Neto Jorge, Casimiro de Brito, Fíama Hasse Pais Brandão, Gastão Cruz, and Maria Teresa Horta—described themselves as a group whose coming together, while clearly not arbitrary, should not, at the same time, be viewed as predetermined by a well-defined common artistic program.⁴ In her characteristically concise and blunt contribution to the interview, Neto Jorge was ironically dismissive of the hypothetical perception of *Poesia 61* as a distinctive poetic movement:

Isto de 5 pessoas se reunirem e publicarem, em conjunto, 5 folhetos de poesia, e o próprio título—*Poesia 61*—pode fazer surgir, nos espíritos mais impermeáveis à inércia, qualquer ideia de “movimento” (parece que já há tempos não há nenhum!). Bem, eu acho que, acima de tudo, há entre nós afinidades que só indiretamente têm a ver com a poesia! (14)

Although nearly each of the five statements that compose the collective interview expresses some form of distancing from the notion of programmatic unity that might be postulated to exist among the poets, Neto Jorge's reply is unique in not counterbalancing her dismissal with a compensatory declaration of an identifiably aesthetic affinity with her companions in *Poesia 61*.⁵ In her further comments on modern Portuguese poetry, she looks instead towards surrealism as the one bona fide poetic movement (without quotation marks) that may be hoped to continue to inspire the Portuguese cultural milieu, although such inspiration is seen as desirable also for reasons "only indirectly having to do with poetry"

Parece-me que, entre nós, o surrealismo ainda terá a sua razão de ser—como total destruição de cânones bafentos, como reacção a um ambiente social rígido. Depois será talvez mais fácil, mais possível, a total reconstrução, formas e ideias novas. (14)

Neto Jorge's indebtedness to surrealist aesthetics has been registered with some regularity in the (relatively few) published critical accounts of her work.⁶ In the present context, it is worth noting that the primary function of the surrealist intervention in the Portuguese reality of the early 1960s was expressed, by Neto Jorge, as a revolutionary overthrow of stale and rigid structures, of social and political as well as intellectual and aesthetic frameworks. Concomitantly, her inaugural volume of poetry, *A Noite Vertebrada*, adopted as its leading motif the rhetoric of spatial and temporal immobility destabilized by breaking loose into a freer, more fluid and unpredictable time and space. One such escapee is the speaker of the long prose poem, "Subitamente vamos pela rua":

Saí de casa ontem. Vou correr mundo, vou matar-me. Emancipada da noite, livre indoloridamente, minha angústia despediu-se, lambeu-me as mãos. (31)⁷

The enslaving night from which the speaker frees herself may be read here as an extension of the "unchanging night" featured in the initial sequence of the volume, "5 poemas para a noite invariável." The first of the five poems belongs to the prehistory of the emancipation, the alliterative monotony of its repetitive affirmations barely prefiguring the rebellious violence to come (23):

Posso estar aqui
 eu posso estar aqui perfeitamente pobre
 um círio me acendi espora aguda
 o vento ritmo negro assassinou-o

 que eu posso estar aqui perfeitamente pedra
 insone
 e um longo segredo impessoal
 bordando a minha solidão

The fact that Neto Jorge's "unchanging night" is also the "vertebrate night" of the volume's title indicates, however, the escape route by which this perfectly inert (if also insomniac and latently rebellious) woman-stone is able to become, somewhat later in Neto Jorge's oeuvre, the raging, anarchic woman-goat of "Metamorfose" (64-65). For the time being—that is, by the fifth poem in the sequence—the lyric body lets her hair down, so to speak ("Degrenho cada minuto calmo— / basta de tranças imóveis dobradas sobre mim") and offers an amorous welcome to the newly unpredictable world she has endeavored to bring into existence (26):

e agonio-me de perigos escondidos
 a terra imprevista sob a terra
 o mar imprevisto sobre o mar

Beijo as espáduas do espaço
 desfeito

This deconstruction—and the attendant corporealization—of established space are followed, in both *A Noite Vertebrada* and *Quarta Dimensão*, by further inquiries into topographic and temporal frameworks of consciousness. "Porque ficou oceânico / o escasso momento de nós?" (28) asks the poem "Introdução ao tempo" (*A Noite Vertebrada*), while "Quarta dimensão" and "Exame" (both in *Quarta Dimensão*) revisit the pedagogical origins of received knowledges:

Decerto que é isso que o senhor me diz
 ao princípio é mundo

ao princípio é deus
 ao princípio é homem
 ao princípio é fim
 ("Exame" 51)

In a characteristic move toward qualifying particularization of abstract models, this lesson is then immediately put into perspective by its recipient's self-aware apprehension of her own gendered body and of its place in the scheme of things proposed above:

Passam aviões o céu está vermelho
 que será de mim

 Uma mulher nua
 perdição do homem
 ao princípio é ela
 e depois sou eu

It is, in fact, in "Exame" that the construction and transmission of knowledge are presented as dialogic social practices carried out by human agents and profoundly shaped by their respective, mutual (mis)perceptions, which in turn are rooted in often unacknowledged preexisting patterns of representation; the male examiner and the female examinee examine and categorize each other as they progress, in a ritualistic dance of pedagogical validation, through the dense web of "a ciência inteira casqueando ideias / puzzles legiões de ideias / que são novas velhas" (50):

Pode
 pode sentar-se senhora

Eu não sou senhora eu não sou menina
 sem olhos sem ouvidos fala

Sento-me
 evidentemente
 circunspectamente

irremediavelmente
senhor professor doutor

Eu não sou senhor professor doutor
minha não-senhora minha não-menina
e se estou de pé é ilusão de óptica
eu estou sentado todos nós sentados
isto é não rígidos não equilibrados

The professor's egalitarian claims are, however, contradicted by the student's ironic awareness of their asymmetrical relationship and by the weight of her inescapably bodily presence among the snatches of knowledge exchanged and scrutinized in the examining room ("não vale a pena dizer que me sinto / homogéneo átomo / como um voo sem asas"). In the end, it is the recognition of the professor's authority as also, at least in one respect, physical that produces the long-sought release when the honorific "senhor professor doutor" becomes reduced to a single syllabic particle, which happens to be the requisite inaugural morpheme of intellectual inquiry, "se" ["if"]—and when, at that point, the examiner promptly declares the exam finished:

senhor professor doutor
senhor professor
senhor
se

Já passa da hora (53)

As "Exame," among other poems, demonstrates and as António Guerreiro rightly noted in his review of the poet's last, posthumously published volume *A Lume* (1989), Neto Jorge favored an understanding of the poetic process as a move toward materialization and solidification, never toward sublimation (21-C). This predilection may help explain her success both in assimilating the surrealist legacy and in escaping the peril of perpetuating some of its more clichéd formulas and facile venues of expression. It is the emphasis on the physicality of language, approached as the first cause and ultimately the exclusive medium of poetry that, according to Joaquim Manuel Magalhães, allowed Neto Jorge to surpass the potentially deleterious temptations of sur-

realist ideation and diction: her poems “propõem-nos uma nova intenção verbal, construída na distribuição sintáctica inesperada e calculada nos versos, aliada a uma pontuação que é muito mais prosódica, do que, como no caso dos surrealistas, psicológica” (208). For Neto Jorge, as for Mallarmé, poems are made of words, and illumination lies in grammar: in language’s own rules and in their corresponding misrule, in the careful arrangement and agglutination of morphemes, lexemes and clauses and in their no less careful—if often also exuberantly violent—demolition.⁸

A particularly illustrative example of the poet’s finely plotted progress that takes the physicality of language as the point of departure toward a revisionary upheaval of abstract categories imposing orderliness and proper conduct upon the material world—including, in particular, the world of human bodies, male and female—may be found in the sequence “As revoluções da matéria,” first published in the volume *O seu a seu tempo* (1966). The wordplay on which the titles of the five poems in the sequence rely (“A esferidade: a ferocidade,” “A condutibilidade: a contabilidade,” and so on) carries over into the at first epigrammatic intimations of more serious signifying upsets to come:

A ESFERIDADE: A FEROCIDADE

qualidade perigosa a de alguns
sólidos quando perdidos se viram
para nós (116)

The double meaning on which the effect of the poem hinges (“se viram” may be read both as “saw themselves” and “turn”) forces the reader to view the solidly spherical objects it evokes as endowed with a sudden self-consciousness of their volatility—and, at the same time, to see him/herself as dangerously implicated in the scenario of the objects’ release, in the manner of Rilke’s imperative punchline in “Archaischer Torso Apollos” (“Du mußt dein Leben ändern” [You must change your life]). The extent of this implication becomes fully realized in the last two poems of the sequence, when Neto Jorge’s ingenious permutations of material states—gaseous, fluid and solid—are applied to human objects of scrutiny. The male addressee of “A sublimação: a sublime acção” fulfills the promise of the poem’s title in his flight through the atmosphere, ecstatic but also overshadowed by a menacing, if implicit, recollection of Icarus, “como um espelho / a aproximar-se do sol” (119):

Sem passares pelos líquidos
 sais do teu sólido
 e corres directamente,
 saindo de cima do solo.
 Não desces àquela cave
 onde estão os oceanos
 e os juramentos líquidos.

The association of sublimity—as well as of sublimation—with maleness is a notion well entrenched in Western culture, along with its corresponding and contrasting classification of “the beautiful” as female, to follow the terminology of Edmund Burke’s influential *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). As Christine Battersby notes, Burke “seems to have deliberately adopted the language of sexual power to explain the psychological thrill that comes from the sublime By contrast, the ‘beautiful,’—small, smooth, delicate and graceful—is claimed to be what men (= males) love in the opposite sex” (74-75). Carried over into the realm of artistic, and particularly literary, creativity, this attribution is what ends up anchoring Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s peremptory (and often evoked) dismissal of any claim to greatness on the part of women writers: “the celestial fire that emblazens and ignites the soul, the inspiration that consumes and devours . . . these sublime ecstasies that reside in the depths of heart are always lacking in women’s writing” (qtd. in Battersby 36). Neto Jorge’s critical engagement with the concept of sublimity—an important reference in Surrealism’s neo-Romantic configurations of aesthetics and ideology—resurfaces with some regularity in her work.⁹ In the present context, it is worth noting that the poet’s gloss on the elemental symbolism of maleness, which privileges “direct” transcendence from the solid into the gaseous realms of sublimity, is *not* followed by a poem reinforcing the association of femaleness with fluidity, implicit in the differential characterization traced in “A sublimação: a sublime acção.” Such a step—at once acknowledging and potentially undermining the stereotype—could have led the poet along a path parallel to that laid out by Luce Irigaray in her essay “La ‘mécanique’ des fluides” [“The ‘Mechanics’ of Fluids”], where the French philosopher has linked the implicit association of fluids with femininity to their cultural unrepresentability within prevailing philosophical models of ontology, which privilege the self-identical unity of the solid. In her words, “Solid mechanics

and rationality have maintained a relationship of very long standing, one against which fluids have never stopped arguing” (113). As Toril Moi has claimed, however, in this particular essay Irigaray’s strategy of specular mimicry of patriarchal discourse “seems to fail entirely as a political device . . . due to her figuring of fluidity as a *positive alternative* to the depreciating scopophilic constructions of the patriarchs”: “When the quotation marks, so to speak, are no longer apparent, Irigaray falls into the very essentialist trap of defining woman that she set out to avoid” (142, original emphasis).¹⁰

It is precisely the threat of essentialist reiteration and reification of sexual identity that Neto Jorge skirts by following the poem “A sublimação: a sublime acção” with the final installment of her “revolutions of matter,” “A divisibilidade: a visibilidade a dois.” The poem’s wonderfully synthetic title homes in on the crucial insight that any symbolic meaning attributable to male and female bodies needs to be predicated on the following recognition: the signs “man” and “woman” signify only insofar as they report to each other across the semantic divide that separates them in any referential system. If, in Gayatri Spivak’s epigrammatic formulation, “the discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman” (169), the woman’s feminine identity is also conceivable *as such* only in a relational sense, as the site of the difference between itself and the male (a.k.a., “universal”) paradigm of selfhood. Sexual identity derives from sexual difference in the same fashion that Saussure’s notion of pure difference creates the conditions for the emergence of linguistic value (Grosz 209). So, too, in Neto Jorge’s “A divisibilidade: a visibilidade a dois” (120):

A mulher divide-se em gestos particulares
o homem divide-se também. Se o átomo é
divisível só o poeta o diz.

.....

A divisibilidade da luz aclara os mistérios.
A mulher tem filhos. Descobrem-se
partículas soltas um dedo mínimo
o peso menos pesado da balança
um cabelo eloquente em desagregação.

Neto Jorge’s insistence on “divisibility” (of humankind into male and female, resulting in a “visibility for two,” as well as of each living entity within itself) is further qualified by her description of female identity as an agglom-

eration of “loose particles” and characteristically tempered by an ironic double (or triple) take brought on by a reiterated enjambment (the poem dividing within and against itself):

Dois homens são duas divisões de uma
 casa que já foi um animal de costas
 para o seu pólo mágico.

This equivocal, self-dividing woman-house-animal, at once prone on her back and with her back turned against her hypothetical “magic pole” is a recurrent presence in Neto Jorge’s poetry, fulfilling the likewise double and likewise contradictory postulate of feminist theory and politics in the 1970s and beyond: on the one hand, in Julia Kristeva’s famous words, “la femme, ce n’est jamais ça”; on the other, according to Hélène Cixous, “Il faut que la femme se mette au texte” (39). Or, to quote Neto Jorge’s own, equally concise formulation registered, toward the end of her life, in one of her most indelibly memorable poems, “Minibiografia”:

Diferente me concebo e só do avesso
 O formato mulher se me acomoda. (254)

The insistence on the view of femininity—as well as masculinity—as a “format,” a kind of layout or template for the production of psychological and social meanings that attach themselves to human bodies, was already the leading theme in “Os Corpos Vestidos,” the longest sequence in Neto Jorge’s third volume of poems, *Terra Imóvel* (1964). The organization of the sequence proceeds from the recognition of what Elizabeth Grosz calls “an essential internal condition of human bodies,” their “organic openness to cultural completion”: “Part of their own ‘nature’ is an organic or ontological ‘incompleteness’ or lack of finality, an amenability to social completion, social ordering and organization” (xi). Thus, the opening texts of “Os Corpos Vestidos” offer a progressive charting of male and female coming into gendered signification, from “Homem / não escoado ainda / pelas costuras das ruas / e dos fatos” (60) through (presumably) the same man who “enquanto corpo vestido / seca descora ao sol” (61) to the powerful, quasi-Ovidian “Metamorfose” (64-65), in which the woman, previously shown as an “espaço / habituado a fêmea” (63) that lives buried in man’s shadow, becomes a raging, rebellious she-goat:

A mulher se transformou cabra
 ritual de emigração
 em resposta à raiz
 constante das árvores
 ao grande silêncio
 empastado nas letras
 de imprensa

The animal disguise serves here as a “ritual de emigração,” an escape valve permitting a release from the oppressively stagnated status quo and a starting point in the quest for an “outra genealogia” (the title of another sequence of poems by Neto Jorge, included in *O Seu a Seu Tempo*). In the poem’s conclusion, the goat’s “resurrection” to femininity is envisioned, but it is presented merely as a *parenthetic* afterthought, a postscript both laconic and hypothetical to the earthshaking workings of “Metamorfose”:

(Quando a cabra
 voltar mulher–
 –ressureição)

Thus, the gradual “dressing” of male and female bodies in patterns of recognizable signification is interrupted by the metamorphic and contrarian instability claimed by the woman-goat. Her disruptive (non-)identity may be viewed as prefiguring such later presences in Neto Jorge’s poetry as the Ur-Woman addressed in the thirteenth segment of her sprawling, often densely cryptic, pseudo-epic sequence *19 Recantos* (1969): the woman (“Ila, irmã de llo o mundo, a minha irmã”) is imagined as a “repouso vasto enfurecido / [...] / da cintura irrompendo como de um jardim / para uma espécie de corpo inenarrável” (194). In “Os Corpos Vestidos,” the woman-goat’s irruption marks a pivotal point within the sequence: it is with “Metamorfose” that Neto Jorge’s attention turns away from the scrutiny of bodies as surfaces to be inscribed with socially readable meanings—from the relatively commonplace view of the body as a blank page—to an exploration of corporeal figurations endowed with the degree of dynamic autonomy that places them far beyond facile intelligibility. The culmination of that poetic investigation may be found in the much-quoted “O corpo insurrecto” (79-80), in which the eroticized body is revealed as a dynamic and evolving universe unto itself,

akin to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of the body as "a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations" (Grosz 164):

Ainda antes que pegue
 aos cinco sentidos a chama,
 por um aceso acesso
 da imaginação
 ateam-se à cama
 ou a sítio algures,
 terra de ninguém,
 (quem desliza é o espaço
 para o corpo que vem),

labaredas tais
 que, lume, crepitam
 nos ciclos mais extremos,
 nas réstias mais íntimas,
 as glândulas, esponjas
 que os corpos apoiam,
 zonas aquáticas
 onde os órgãos boiam.

The at once precise and savage, non-teleological archaeology of the (sexual) body undertaken in "O corpo insurrecto" is carried to its logical extreme by the next poem in the sequence: "Exorcismo" (81) concentrates on corporeal fluids and on the ultimate challenge they present to the mind's desire for controlling dominance over bodily matter. As Grosz comments,

[Body fluids] affront a subject's aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity. They attest to a certain irreducible "dirt" or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a testimony of the fraudulence or impossibility of the "clean" and "proper." [...] They are engulfing, difficult to be rid of; any separation from them is not a matter of certainty, as it may be in the case of solids. Body fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. In this sense, they betray a certain irreducible materiality; they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity; they demonstrate the

limits of subjectivity in the body, the irreducible specificity of particular bodies. (194)

Neto Jorge's approach to the question emphasizes precisely the uncontainable and unspecifiable permeability of the body as seen through the prism of the fluids that it produces, exchanges and discharges—while at the same time, as the poem's title indicates, foregrounding the controlling impulse toward the separation of the dirty and the profane from the clean and the sacred that the "problem" of bodily fluids has historically provoked. I quote the poem in its entirety:

o sangue o suor
 a água lustral
 o leite do sol
 retido na mama
 o sangue sangrando
 com o vinho
 o pranto o rito
 líquido o vinho
 tinto no mijo
 de deus no sangue
 descendo na urina
 subindo água
 benta no sangue
 o filtro do amor
 filtrando o suor
 um licor dividindo
 o choro do pus

The poem's conciseness and apparent playfulness—in the manner of surrealist poems-catalogues—belie the density and the complexity of its insights. Neto Jorge's deft deployment of the enjambment—a favorite device in her prosodic repertory, as has already been demonstrated on more than one occasion—endows "Exorcismo" with a kind of internal permeability: its verses are fashioned as communicating vessels through which apparently incompatible liquids flow back and forth, mixing and blending with scandalous promiscuity. Although the poem can hardly be said to be "about" the Christian Eucharist, it clearly emphasizes its own engagement with the fluid element of the sacred ritual, in which red wine is transformed into God's

blood and then ingested by the faithful. While properly religious discourse tends to steer clear of examining further physiological implications of the Communion, it is the poet's prerogative to do so, as she traces the (literal) descent of the blood-wine in the urine counterbalanced by the (symbolic) ascension of the holy water in the blood. The final (but likely inconclusive) separation between another clear and noble fluid (tears) and a cloudy and disgusting one (pus) that concludes Neto Jorge's "exorcism" may be interpreted in the context of Mary Douglas's anthropological meditation on the social and psychological connotations of bodily fluids in *Purity and Danger* (1980). Douglas (following Sartre's analysis of the viscous in *Being and Nothingness*) focuses precisely on the unassailable purity of tears, which she distinguishes radically from other corporeal fluids, particularly those "related to the bodily functions of digestion and procreation" (125); it is by virtue of being exempt from productive and reproductive processes of the body that tears can be elevated to a higher symbolic status than its other, less superfluous secretions. In Neto Jorge's poem, however, the distinction is less absolute and the separation of fluids presumably provisional—the poem's flow becomes temporarily arrested, but this stoppage does not bear the marks of a strong rhetorical closure, an irrefutable punchline. Whether by the force of a religious exorcism or by the magic of a love philter, tears and pus become distinct substances, but, as the poem has already implied, both religion and love also provide ample ground for the confusion of these and other effluences of bodily matter.

Where "O corpo insurrecto" and "Exorcismo" offer a sort of microsymbolic dissection of the (undressed) body as a culmination of the cycle "Os corpos vestidos," in "As casas," another cycle of poems from the same volume (*Terra Imóvel*), domestic spaces are made to converge with female bodies to form intricate machinic connections that structure intimate functional alliances between women's existential experience and various socially situated aspects of domesticity. The poems of "As casas" form a series of exemplary tales whose protagonists are women-houses (houses behaving as women and/or women imagined as architectural formations, in the indirect manner of Neto Jorge's own metapoetic self-portrait in "Uma arquitetura" [*O Seu a Seu Tempo*]). Some of the poems evoke stereotypical figures that are easily recognizable in the context of a traditional rural or urban neighborhood community; for instance, "the shameless one" (103):

Desta falaram os jornais diários
 A sem vergonha
 Despe-se a desoras para o amante
 mostra sentinas esconderijos camas negras
 Tem logo pela manhã
 roupa de baixo nas varandas

Further stock characters among “As casas” include a madwoman (“Louca como era a da esquina / recebia gente a qualquer hora” [101]) and overprotected young girls (“Podiam brincar aos domingos / Avançar um pouco pelo passeio / nunca atravessar-a-rua” [100]). Other “house poems” escape such ready identification, while consistently featuring anthropomorphized and female-gendered protagonists. Notwithstanding this constancy of their semi-otic configuration, Neto Jorge’s women-houses offer anything but an updated version of the traditional association of domestic space with femininity, in which both the house and the woman—or, more precisely, the woman *quoad matrem*—tend to figure, in the emblematic words of Gaston Bachelard, as “un corps d’images qui donnent à l’homme des raisons ou des illusions de stabilité” (34).¹¹ While Bachelard does not explicitly gender the house as feminine in this portion of his commentary on the “poetics of space,” his even more succinct definition of the house as “le non-moi qui protège le moi” (24) points to such an identification, as it fails to account for the symbolic hypothesis of the human “moi” perceiving itself as coextensive with the domestic “non-moi”: a cognitive predicament expressed commonly enough in the work of women writers, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued in their critique of Bachelard’s discussion.¹²

Neto Jorge’s poetic conjugation of femininity and domesticity is, like Bachelard’s, both unmistakable and indirect: the poems of “As casas” do not appear, at first glance, to have a feminist agenda or even to insist on foregrounding their gendered perspective, which is why a critic like Fernando Cabral Martins is able to dismiss the femaleness of the houses in a cursory aside: “Estas casas não são (apenas) metonímia da cidade, ou metáfora do corpo feminino, ou da infância” (40). His is a helpful misreading, however, in that it allows us to perceive the nature of Neto Jorge’s strategy of displacement directed against the stereotypical metaphoric equation woman = mother = home. In addition to noting a nearly complete absence—with one significant and subversive exception—of maternal symbolism from her poetic

congregation of women-houses (the presence of such a symbolism being the unspoken condition *sine qua non* of the commonplace evoked by Cabral Martins), it is important to register that the figurative conjunction between the two aspects of the compound corresponds instead to a metonymic relation of existential contiguity: the houses are women insofar as they situate and surround female bodies within the domestic enclosure; the women are houses by virtue of an identification (or of a refusal to become identified) with diverse facets of domesticity. The metonymic continuum does extend beyond the house, embracing not only the neighborhood street but also the political organism of the city, as demonstrated in particular by the somber monologue of the woman-house whose function is that of a political prison (104):

Maldita sou e me lamento
 Os fantasmas circulam as caveiras
 olham-me sentinelas escarram para o chão
 o meu chão é de cimento armado

Incidentally, it is in this first-person lament of the prison house that we encounter Neto Jorge's only oblique reference to motherhood in the lyric space of "As Casas"; its portent stands, however, in direct contradiction to the traditional reassuring symbolism of house-as-uterus:

Nunca de madeiras tão rijas fosse feita
 Sob o meu tecto espancam grávidas
 nas câmaras soluçam toda a noite

Furthermore, the fact that the poem quoted above avails itself of the direct discourse—its speaker is the house-woman herself—brings into focus yet another challenge to the distinction between the (poet's) "moi" and the "non-moi" of the house that the cycle "As casas" sets out to upset. The initial discursive framework, in which the houses are evoked in the third person (with an occasional recourse to quoted direct discourse) is first destabilized by the poem number twelve, with its anxious irruption of free indirect discourse ("que não que não queria paredes / que não queria postigos frestas / clarabóias // que entrasse ou saísse o mar as marés / dos evadidos" [104]). The woman-prison's anguished monologue further blurs the distinction between the active discursive presence of the speaking subject of the cycle

and the essentially passive role of its “protagonists.” When, after this dramatic testimonial, the discursive “I” of the poet returns to the scene, it is to address directly the composite entity of woman-house—the “casa dúctil de cal viva” (105)—as if in an implicit recognition of its/her recent discursive emancipation.

This form of a subtly dialogic relationship, gendered in the feminine, between the poet and the object/interlocutor of her lyric discourse resurfaces on increasingly frequent occasions in Neto Jorge’s later work. Its most eloquent example and, at the same time, explication may perhaps be found in the poem “A lume” from the homonymous, posthumously published last collection of the poet’s writings. “A lume” begins by reexamining the asymmetric relationship between the sexes that Neto Jorge has repeatedly glossed throughout her work, among other instances in one of the poems in *19 Recantos*, where her adroit and inventive handling of the enjambment once again yields highly rewarding results:

tal era a corrida de um homem para mim e a minha
fuga para o lado da sua liberdade (195)

In “A lume,” an almost identical asymmetric breakdown of the verse similarly reinforces the notion of male-female dissonance (a productive and not necessarily negative circumstance in Neto Jorge’s agonistic universe):

Olho-me nos olhos
do meu gémeo
(seus olhos nos meus
ausentes)

The continuation of the first stanza (“e sempre vislumbro / fixo e refulgente / um lume”) and the poem’s further development suggest the possibility of reading “A lume” as an understated gloss on the metaphoric scenario of Baudelaire’s famous sonnet “La mort des amants”:

Nos deux coeurs seront deux vastes flambeaux,
Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières
Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux. (94)

As Michael Riffaterre observes in his analysis of Baudelaire's poem, "[the] insistent variation on *two*" in the above lines indicates that "the description aims only to unfold the duality paradigm, until the duality is resolved in the next stanza by the oneness of sex ('nous échangerons un éclair unique')" (4, original emphasis). In Neto Jorge's slanted version of an analogous scene, the image of twin mirrors, male and female, reiterating *ad infinitum* the same luminous reflection, is undermined in its symmetric perfection, even as the poem introduces a compensating and stabilizing third term:

Porém o resplendor
no espelho alastra
como na pupila
a luz da Mestra

The luminous resplendence shared by the all-female coupling of "pupila" and "Mestra"—Neto Jorge's dexterity at wordplay is here once again manifest—is an image as affirmative as it is discrete in its implications.¹³ The poem's closure foregrounds the grammatical gender of its key terms in a way that echoes retroactively throughout the poem, bringing out the semantic relevance of the gendered opposition between "um lume" in the first stanza and "a luz" in the final verse. This opposition may even be said to be operative in the poem's (and the volume's) title: "A lume," which evokes, in the first place, such expressions as "dar a lume" (= to publish) and "vir a lume" (= to become known, public), could also be read as an instance of an intentional "ungrammaticality," the distortion of mimetic perspective theorized by Riffaterre as central to the production of the poetic text and to the emergence of an independent network of semiotic relationships within the poem.¹⁴ The charge of semantic relevance that the closure of Neto Jorge's poem attributes to grammatical gender provokes a consciously "incorrect" reading of the title, in which the initial "A" may emerge not as the preposition it is at the "mimetic" level, but as a definite article that transgressively *feminizes* the male gender of the noun "o lume."

Neto Jorge's revolutions of (linguistic) matter may thus, once again, be shown to coexist in a tightly woven alliance with the poet's emphasis on the (gendered) "divisibility of light" ("A divisibilidade da luz aclara os mistérios"). It is, however, a calculated, reticent emphasis, filtered through an ironically slanted viewpoint that, for all its committed intensity of insight, is pro-

foundly mistrustful of encountering easy answers to difficult questions. In Neto Jorge's playful yet exquisitely wrought self-portrait "SO-NETO JORGE, Luiza," the poet's own physical markers of femininity are viewed through such a distancing, questioning lens that in an epigrammatic formulation evokes and takes apart an entire network of symbolic affinities: "Tenho o mênstruo escondido num reduto / onde teoricamente chega o mar" (209). Nevertheless, to acknowledge the oblique and strategically deferred intelligibility and consequent impact of some of Neto Jorge's most powerful articulations is not to say that they are destined to become any less explosive. Such is the message firmly conveyed in the closing distich of the poet's testamentary "Minibiografia," which will thus serve as the final, (in)conclusive *envoi* of these all too cursory comments on her unceasingly inspiring work (254):

Um poema deixo, ao retardador:
Meia palavra a bom entendedor.

Notes

¹ An indispensable recent exception is Manuel Gusmão's article "A invenção do corpo amoroso em Luiza Neto Jorge" (*Inimigo Rumor* 13 [2º semestre 2002], 163-175), which was published after the present study had already been completed. Gusmão's many illuminating insights focus precisely on the textualization of the gendered body as a centrally important aspect of Neto Jorge's poetic work. See also Maria Rosa Martelo, "Corpo, enunciação e identidade na poesia de Luiza Neto Jorge" (*Cadernos de Literatura Comparada 2: Identidades no feminino* [2001], 35-48).

² I am echoing here Horta's complaint in a 1990 interview published in the weekly *O Independente*: "as pessoas esqueceram-se de que eu tenho livros de poesia, esqueceram-se de que eu tenho determinada posição na literatura portuguesa, e passei a ser tratada como feminista, apenas" (III-7).

³ To be sure, those dispersed references to Neto Jorge's feminist relevance that I have been able to register in recent years are for the most part tangential and indirect. Taken jointly, however, they do seem to indicate a more comprehensive change of perspective in Portuguese cultural discourse, from a generalized denial of any meaningful symbiosis between feminist commitment and literary value to an at least partial recognition that a specifically female perspective and identifiably feminist concerns occupy an important place not only in Western literary tradition at large, but also—and particularly—in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Portuguese modernity. It is significant that such remarks have tended to appear in reviews of new collections published by women poets writing in Portugal today, most notably those, such as Ana Luiza Amaral, who openly signal their aesthetic and ideological indebtedness to feminism. On the connection between Neto Jorge and Amaral, see Osvaldo Manuel Silvestre, "Recordações da casa amarela. A poesia de Ana Luiza Amaral" (*Relâmpago* 3 [Outubro 1998], 37-57), where the author also cites earlier remarks on the affinity between the two poets by Maria Rosa Martelo and Américo António Lindeza Diogo.

⁴ Regarding the publication of *Poesia 61* and its afterlife, see, in addition to the 1961 interview with the five poets in *Diário de Lisboa*, Manuel Gusmão and José Bento, “Os poetas de *Poesia 61*: dois depoimentos” (*O Tempo e o Modo* 57-58 (Fevereiro-Março 1968): 265-73; the commemorative tenth anniversary section (“Os dez anos de *Poesia 61*”) in the “Vida Literária” supplement of *Diário de Lisboa*, with statements by Nelson de Matos, Fiamma Hasse Pais Brandão, Eduardo Prado Coelho and Gastão Cruz (4 February 1971, 1-7); Jorge Fernandes da Silveira, *Portugal Maio de Poesia 1961* (Lisboa: IN-CM, 1986); E. M. de Melo e Castro, *As vanguardas na poesia portuguesa do séc. XX* (Lisboa: ICALP, 1980); and Manuel Frias Martins, “*Poesia 61* e Experimentalismo: A vitalidade de uma prática conjuntiva” in his *10 Anos de Poesia em Portugal 1974-1984* (Lisboa: Caminho, 1986).

⁵ Only Fiamma Hasse Pais Brandão’s declaration escapes this general tendency by concentrating exclusively on a theoretical explanation of the method of composition followed by the poet in *Morfismos*, her contribution to *Poesia 61*.

⁶ See, in particular, Joaquim Manuel Magalhães’s commentary in *Os Dois Crepúsculos*, where the author diagnoses Neto Jorge’s poetic trajectory as “uma das mais conseguidas tentativas de avançar a partir e para fora do surrealismo” (208). Manuel Gusmão takes this insight as the point of departure for his own, somewhat more extensive, investigation of the poet’s “apropriação do surrealismo e a deslocação para além dele” (50). In her *O Surrealismo em Portugal*, published in 1987, Maria de Fátima Marinho pointed to Neto Jorge as “talvez um dos autores da nova geração que mais características surrealistas possui” (294). It is important to note in this context that in her ongoing activity as a professional translator, Neto Jorge rendered into Portuguese several key texts of French surrealism, including André Breton’s *Lamour fou*. She is one of the two Portuguese poets featured in Penelope Rosemont’s voluminous *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (the other is Isabel Meyrelles).

⁷ All quotations from Neto Jorge’s writings follow the collected *Poesia* volume, organized by Fernando Cabral Martins and published by Assírio & Alvim in 1993, four years after the poet’s death.

⁸ It is in this context that Magalhães draws a parallel between Neto Jorge and Dylan Thomas, two poets in whose work surrealist designs are “ultrapassados por um fingimento sabotador: é pela racionalidade da escrita, pela perseguição consciente, revelada pelo jogo sintático, de determinados efeitos que atingem a densidade do imaginário e da irracionalidade surreal. É o surrealismo ultrapassado pela aparência, pelo fingimento, pela outra via inesperada de iluminação: a gramática” (208).

⁹ Perhaps the most interesting example of Neto Jorge’s subtly gendered perspective on sublimity may be found in the complex, metapoetic “A magnólia” (originally published in *O Seu a Seu Tempo*), which culminates in a quasi-androgynous fusion between two initially distinct phenomena, “a exaltação do mínimo” and “o magnífico relâmpago / do acontecimento mestre”: in the final stanza, the beautiful and sublime magnolia is celebrated as “um mínimo ente magnífico / desfolhando relâmpagos / sobre mim” (137).

¹⁰ Irigaray’s notion of “mimétisme” [“mimicry, play with mimesis”] as a feminist discursive strategy is explained in the following way:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the “perceptible,” of “matter”—to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. (76)

While I do not necessarily agree with Moi’s diagnosis of Irigaray’s failure in realizing this strategy in “La ‘mécanique’ des fluides,” I share the critic’s caution with regard to the vulnerability of mimetic discourse to misreading and misrepresentation (vindicated, it could be argued,

by her own adversarial interpretation of Irigaray); such a caution also appears to affect Neto Jorge's poetic trajectory in "As revoluções da matéria."

¹¹ I am alluding here to Irigaray's polemic with Lacan's *Séminaire XX* and with the latter text's insistence "that woman will be taken only *quoad matrem*. Woman comes into play in the sexual relation only as mother" (qtd. in Irigaray 102). As Irigaray comments: "That woman is 'taken only *quoad matrem*' is inscribed in the entire philosophic tradition. It is even one of the conditions of its possibility" (102).

¹² As they wrote, "for Bachelard the protective asylum of the house is clearly associated with its maternal features. [...] Yet for many a woman writer these ancient associations of house and self seem mainly to have strengthened the anxiety about enclosure which she projected into her art. [...] To become literally a house, after all, is to be denied the hope of that spiritual transcendence of the body which, as Simone de Beauvoir has argued, is what makes humanity distinctively human" (87-88). Gilbert and Gubar's implicit endorsement of de Beauvoir's advocacy of the "spiritual transcendence of the body" raises of course at least as many problems as it proposes to solve; for a concise summary and critique of de Beauvoir's position on this and related issues, see Gatens 51-59.

¹³ It is worth noting here that Cabral Martins expresses an intense puzzlement over the poem's conclusion in his own brief analysis of "A lume": according to the critic, the last stanza emerges as an incomprehensible obstacle to interpretation, "um bloco opaco, deceptivo, solto" ("Recordação pessoal intransmissível...? *Private joke?* Recurso ao símbolo?") ("O filtro" 29). Some of the bafflement may perhaps be explained by the fact that the last line of the poem, "a luz da Mestra" in the earlier published version, appears in the collected *Poesia* volume (edited by Cabral Martins himself), through an apparent misprint, as "a lua da Mestra." I retain the former reading, not only because "light" supplies a more logical counterpart to "flame" than "moon" would, but also because, prior to its inclusion in the posthumous *A Lume*, the poem had been published while the poet was still alive in the supplement "Das Artes e das Letras" of the newspaper *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (20 de Julho 1988, 4). The only difference between the two versions of the last line in *O Primeiro de Janeiro* and *A Lume* is that Neto Jorge chose to capitalize the word "Mestra" in the revised manuscript that served as the basis for Manuel João Gomes's edition of the volume (Jorge *Lume* 78).

¹⁴ "The ungrammaticalities spotted at the mimetic level are eventually integrated into another system. As the reader perceives what they have in common, as he becomes aware that this common trait forms them into a paradigm, and that this paradigm alters the meaning of the poem, the new function of ungrammaticalities changes their nature, and now they signify as components of a different network of relationships" (4).

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