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TRUTH, AMBIGUITY, HISTORY: RECONSIDERING LÍDIA JORGE'S THE MURMURING
COAST

The meaning behind the title of Lídia Jorge's fourth novel, *The Murmuring Coast*, only becomes fully apparent in its final lines. Never revealing the specific dates of the events it represents, the experimental text begins with "The Locusts," a thirty-page fictionalized account of a Portuguese bride's experience in Mozambique during the colonial wars in what appears to be the late 1960s, based on a few contextual clues. This is in turn followed by an extended monologue that locates itself twenty years later, in other words, during the 1980s, wherein Eva, the "real" participant on which the historical account is based, provides a rebuttal to the short story's author through her own autobiographical description. Referring to the representation of her husband's death in the short work of historical fiction, Eva hands the text back with her final words of advice regarding the story's plotted end: "Leave it there, suspended, without any useful meaning; don't prolong it, don't listen to the words. Little by little the words detach themselves from the objects they designate, the sounds separate from the words, and of the sounds only murmurs remain, the final stage before erasure" (274). With this seeming endorsement of relativism, Jorge's narrator is stated to have annulled the "The Locusts," and while the above commentary is undoubtedly ironic, such a conclusion has frequently led to slippage in which this critique of the fictional representation of a historical event is equated with the deconstruction of historiography itself, obscuring the important affective dimensions of the novel.

Nonetheless, even as the text has been closely associated with poststructural and postmodern tendencies, it is neither about linguistic erasure nor an endless cycle of relativistic ambiguity. Invested in uncovering personal truths, the novel instead questions the limits of fictional representation by privileging visual and verbal communications in the construction of private archives of historical knowledge. In this sense, far from subvert traditional historiography, Jorge reflects a growing concern across disciplines regarding new means of identifying sources of material forms of historical production. Historian Peter Burke, defining the methods of “new history” in a work contemporaneous to Jorge’s publication, notes how important photography, for example, has become as a means of rethinking written history. Disciplinary self-awareness regarding images and film, just as it has long questioned historical objectivity, has recently also “unmasked the assumption that the camera is an objective record of reality, emphasizing not only the selection made by photographers according to their interests, beliefs, values, prejudices, and son on, but also their debt, conscious or otherwise, to pictorial conventions” (13). In *The Murmuring Coast*, the most effective representations of the colonial war in Mozambique are discovered through these unwritten forms, whether hidden photographs or unsanctioned private conversations, and ultimately, this comes at the expense of narrative—and particularly, fiction writing—rather than professional or narrative history.

The dual structure of Lídia Jorge’s novel complicates its categorization within any single genre. However lauded, this resistance to labels has not prevented attempts to claim the narrative in the name of liberal agendas predicated on recuperating voices from the margins, whether as a form of postcolonial war novel (Medeiros 2009; Moutinho 2008) or a manifesto of gender and sexual difference (Ferreira 1992; Sousa 2002). Yet, as Paulo de Medeiro points out in an exploration of the role of memory in the novel, the most consistent critical approach has

consisted of highlighting the novel's relation to—and, importantly, its subversion of—historical discourse (“Memória Infinita” 63). Indeed, a short review of the novel's scholarly corpus reveals a great number of articles enthusiastically exploring this critique of history (Santos 1989; Ferreira 1992; Kaufman 1992; Kaufman and Ornelas 1997; Sousa 1997; Tosta 2003). This has created one important critical narrative about the novel, yet if we, much like Eva does with regard to “The Locusts,” reconsider this reaction two decades late—in relation to the contextual implications of two important contemporary shifts in cultural and literary attitudes that changed how fiction was accorded political value—it may in fact be far more accurate to conclude that Jorge's intertwined narratives reflect a new attitudes towards historical fiction. This less antagonistic position facilitates scholarship training the same critical gaze upon the novel that Jorge directs upon the narration of the past.

Reconsidering Critical Definitions of History and New Historical Fiction

The first of the two critical events may be linked to a general reconsideration of Portuguese national identity within cultural production after the fall of António de Oliveira Salazar's *Estado Novo* (1933-1974) and the attendant end of its strict censorship. To diagnose then-current social and political conditions, writers looked to the past in search of sources of great historical change. As Helena Kaufman and Jose Ornelas have argued, this was partially a consequence of the manner in which Salazar had himself manipulated national historical and mythological symbols in order to justify the regime's continued occupation of African colonies. Thus the literary goal was not merely to recuperate events and individuals from the past for contemporary audiences, but also to “focus on the historical process as such and render it problematic” (146). This, I

would suggest, is one of the reasons that the expectations of what constituted historicity shifted. Traditional historical fiction was understood as first occurring in a time period preceding the author's own, and, second, adhering to the recognized historical record, yet many authors across Europe and the Americas, like Jorge, began instead to focus on characters in the present reflecting upon past experiences. And in the case of *The Murmuring Coast*, given that the control of information about the colonial wars under Salazar had been so tight, a majority of the information about the operations occurs via secondhand sources.

Demonstrating the expansive and heterogeneous nature of the historical turn in Portuguese letters through a broad survey of authors (including Jose Saramago, Lúcia Jorge, António Lobo Antunes, Carlos Pires, and Augusto Abelaira), Kaufman and Ornelas propose three distinct models for new literary historical engagement:

1. The juxtaposition of official and marginal discourses within history in an attempt to reclaim the margins
2. The metatextual juxtaposition of historical facts, interpretations, fictions, and parodic parables
3. The interrogation of historical narrative and representation that blurs the line between history and fiction (147)

It should be pointed out that these categories are not exclusive. *The Murmuring Coast*, for example, demonstrates overlap between the different groupings, as documented in the variety of scholarly articles to champion the novel. With regard to the first characteristic, as Helena Kaufman has discussed, the novel reclaims marginal history in a paradoxical fashion ("Reclaiming the Margins" 45). A female viewpoint in the midst of the doubly patriarchal social conditions extant in the male-centered military and media certainly represents one form of marginalized perspective. In addition to noting Eva's privileged position in terms of social class, though, postcolonial scholars might well question labels of marginality by pointing to the notable

absence of agency in representation by any African social or racial groups. This may alternatively be a strategy on the part of Jorge to draw attention to that silence as a “deliberately constructed *appearance* of complicity, of speaking from within the discourse it aims to subvert” (Moutinho 95, emphasis in original), but this gap also highlights the fact that Eva’s monologue is a form of personal historical remembrance not designed to represent official correspondence. Margins are revealed to be a subjective concept, as Eva’s husband in “The Locusts” sarcastically reveals through his evaluation of Mozambique’s geopolitical importance in relation to the surrounding region: “What about Southern Africa? Mozambique is to Southern Africa what the Iberian Peninsula is to Europe—they are both as the hem is to the pants” (22).

In this sense, the book does reflect the second category of new historical fiction via its juxtapositions of interpretations and historical facts. After petty bureaucracy over a small deposit leads to a soldier’s pregnant wife not being admitted to a hospital as she goes into labor, resulting not only in the loss of her child in the waiting room but also the tearing of her sphincter muscle, Jorge vulgarizes the concept of history through a grotesque metaphor to account for how such a personal issue ended up having far greater consequences than could have been imagined, wedging a social divide between military families and the city inhabitants who being to publicly demonstrate. She clarifies that “in my concept of History there is room for the influence of invisible muscles that lower and raise the anus. Because if it hadn’t been for that accident with Zurique’s wife, the Stella [Hotel] would not have become separated from the pianist’s death, the demonstration would not have been unexpected, and the doors would not have been bashed in” (203). Clearly Jorge is interested in reflecting upon how historical events are narrated, but this is not the same as subverting history. With this in mind, I would argue that the novel does not correspond to Kaufman and Ornelas’s third category in which new historical literature blurs fact

and fiction. Eva emphasizes the story's Fictionality through her narrative critique of its limitations, though she also recognizes the way fiction is able to communicate emotional responses and provide the closure that her own experience, which is neither tightly plotted nor poetic, lacks.

What led to the popularity of this particularly political paradigm then? The answer emerges through the second important event shaping the scholarly milieu of Jorge's book. The shift in definitions of historicity was not only a question of Portugal's specific sociocultural context, but also one occasioned by critical shifts, particularly in the role accorded postmodern fiction. Kaufman and Ornelas' model, from its emphasis upon blurring fact and fiction to its championing of parody as a means of subverting history, is indicative of the influence of Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon. In the same year that Jorge published *The Murmuring Coast*, Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) would completely revise the field of literary studies through her claim that "historiographic metafiction," or "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically lay claim to historical events and personages" (5), was not only an openly political gesture, but that it was also the primary manifestation of postmodernism. Embracing the notion of paradox and arguing that in decentering conventions such self-aware fictions provided voice to the margins, Hutcheon refers to a doubleness in this contemporary historical fiction that utilizes the primary strategies of parody and intertextuality to unseat assumptions about how traditional history is constructed. By parody, Hutcheon does not signal "the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions," but rather its redefinition as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (26). In the face of charges of political relativism, Hutcheon claims no less than the revolutionary power of postmodern literature to call

into question the authority of other disciplines that make truth-claims, including the category of “official history.”

Although Hutcheon never defines what she means by “official history,” the novelty and the urgency of her claims made the concept of historiographic metafiction particularly attractive for scholars seeking to find a positive meaning in recent artistic and social shifts, and this impetus is particularly visible in the first decade of criticism following the publication of *The Murmuring Coast*. Under the cited influence of Hutcheon’s historiographic form of postmodernism, Jorge’s attack on history’s authority has revolved around proclamations of parody (Moutinho 79) and of relativism (Kaufman 46), following the argument that “there is no reason for the privileging of certain events—those deemed ‘public’—as historical, and the neglect of others—those deemed ‘private’—as non-historical. As Eva Lopo goes on to demonstrate, a concept of history based upon this false dichotomy suppresses both the diffuse plurality of the historical and its inscription on the physical body” (Ferreira 273). And yet, for the narrator Eva, certain events are privileged, especially those of a private nature, as a means of her coming to terms with a representation. Eva never argues that her own memories should be considered official representations, but there is little ambiguity in what her discoveries have meant for her personal experience. Hers is a narrative of loss, but not of erasure.

Confusing History and the Limits of Fiction

This aggressive approach towards subverting official or traditional history was important in the early 1990s, as scholars attempted to distance artistic and critical attitudes from the conservative politics of preceding decades. Nonetheless, revisiting the same responses twenty

years on, we may draw attention to certain counter-readings to this narrative without “annulling” the important interventions that were performed during the rise of new Portuguese historical fiction. First of all, “traditional history” is an elusive term, and it is important to define what precisely is being referenced. Is it the political history of the nineteenth century or the social history that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century precisely to account for previously marginalized groups? Is it the further branching fields of cultural history and feminist history, both of which had been consecrated by the late 1980s? One of the dangers of Hutcheon’s use of “traditional history” as a synonym for the representation of dominant ideology is its presumption of historiography as a static discipline such that it becomes a caricature.

Nonetheless, even sidestepping the definitions of traditional and contemporary historiographic practices, it is problematic to suggest that *The Murmuring Coast* subverts the discourse of history for two literary reasons. The first is revealed by a slippage in terms. When Eva hands back “The Locusts” in the final lines of the novel, she is not annulling a piece of professional historiography, for the story is not a critical biography or scholarly intervention, but rather a work of historical fiction. Helena Kaufman has provided a very insightful breakdown of the story’s literariness and Eva’s subsequent monologue’s “deliterarization” (42), although my reading would understand deliterarization more in the sense of a negation of literary practice. This is not to say that Jorge ignores the role of history, but rather that her critique has much more to do with types of representation—in this case, fictional narrative. Eva says as much when she explains her reaction to the author of “The Locusts”: “I’m not neglecting History. I even find History’s pretentiousness interesting; it is a much more useful and complex game than cards. But in this case, why do you insist on History, and on memory, and on ideas like that that are so disturbing? If you’re telling a story, tell it for its own sake, and that’s all there is and all that

remains of so tiresome a task!” (36) It is both the narration and the purpose of the narrative that capture her attention, and she notes the different strategies that written story employs to communicate meaning, a closed system of relations that is absent from her own messy experience. Thus virtually the first response she provides the author is to aim for truth about the past as a form of correspondence rather than the truth found in verisimilitude, as the latter is an “illusion” (36). On one level she does point to issues that the story writer does not represent in terms of verisimilitude, but on a second level she admits that the text is able to create meaning despite, or perhaps precisely because of, its inaccuracies and compressions.

Second, much like Eva’s longwinded discussion of the differences between her “true” memories and the poetic representation of historical fiction, the short story is not representative of official discourse. To the contrary, both narratives provide ironic and critical portrayals of the effects of war, ones that belong firmly to the realm of literary discourse. A brief overview of the short story will help illustrate this claim, though while it appears that the two texts are separate axes of the novel, they are not in fact independent entities and must be analyzed together to be fully comprehended. For example, “The Locust” features an epigraph attributed to Alvaro Sabino, yet it only becomes clear in Eva’s own testimony that Sabino is in fact a journalist, one with whom she had an affair during the prolonged absence of her husband during his final deployment of the war. Working for the suggestively named newspaper *The Hinterland*, the journalist in “The Locusts” is identified only by his role in the text. Even more telling, the short story’s epigraph is a fragment of one of Sabino’s editorial columns that appears near the end of the Eva’s monologue (261-3), a description of the descent of a plague of locusts upon the city, which covers everything below the hotel rooftop in a coat of green. While Eva challenges the privileged position from above that the military families housed in the Hotel Stella Maris maintain with

relation to the infestation of the city below, in the historical fiction the locusts take on a poetic significance because of the compressed nature of events, in essence serving as a metaphor for the Portuguese military's invasive presence in Africa.

The story opens with Evita's wedding ceremony in the city of Beira to Lieutenant Luís Alex on the rooftop of the hotel overlooking the Indian Ocean, and during which Evita is introduced to her husband's captain, Jaime Forza Leal, both his name as well as the way he proudly wears his scars marking him as an exaggeration of war machismo. Interestingly, photographic images take central stage in the story, as the text opens with the narration of images (the bride and groom kissing, posing against the horizon, etc.) that are staged by the photographer. Nonetheless, this seemingly romanticized setting is quickly problematized, for as the narrator notes, "Things were just beginning, like the early warning signs of a storm" (7). As night falls and the newlyweds retreat to their room, a series of screams wakes hotel residents and they congregate on the rooftop, where they are able to see dead bodies of black Africans in the ocean waves. As trucks begin loading up the bodies and driving off, it appears that the dead individuals have intercepted a shipment of methyl alcohol, and mistakenly drunk it. What is hinted at, yet only made explicit in Eva's narration later on, is that the military is in fact poisoning local supplies of drinking alcohol in order to "control" the population in a clandestine fashion. A soldier does not realize the irony of his assessment when he states, "Of course, if no one took pictures or wrote about it, whatever happened last night would end at dawn—never even having existed" (14). This comment, and its emphasis upon both the written word and visual images, becomes a key to understanding the novel as a whole, as we shall shortly see. *The Murmuring Coast* becomes a means for Jorge to make sure that a view of the toll war takes on private relations does "exist" through its creation of informal images and text.

It is at this point that the story author's ironic tone becomes increasingly salient when he characterizes the military families' responses to the tragedy, which reveal deep-seated prejudices. In response to how the Africans could have drunk the methyl, the narrator sarcastically reproduces colonial logic, noting, "This was a bunch of savages that needed to be protected from themselves... They [the military families] could all return to the terrace and ask the manager to serve lunch there and, if possible, dinner as well, so that they wouldn't miss out on the display of barbarity that was, after all, going on between the Chiveve [River] and the sea" (17-18). The following evening, as the locusts descend upon the spectators out on the roof, the author turns his attention to the Captain Forza Leal, utilizing the repetition of the word "naturally" to suggest precisely the opposite, namely how inappropriate his violent reaction is when men admire his wife's beauty: "Naturally, the Captain noticed the looks that rained down like darts. Naturally, the Captain slapped his wife. More naturally still—because it had to do with dynamics and kinetics—the woman ended up leaning against the railing of the balcony that separated the Stella from the Indian Ocean. Having been slapped, her face was naturally even prettier" (23-24). Juxtaposed against a description of the Captain's own war scars along with the information that the millions of locusts hide the fingerprints that still mark the faces of multiple wives who have been beaten (27), such descriptions suggest a much deeper, systemic level of domestic violence that becomes normalized within the sphere of official war. Indeed, when the journalist arrives to ask questions about the methyl alcohol, he is roughly forced off the premises. Evita's husband chases him at gunpoint into the ocean, and after the sound of shots, the reader is led to believe that the journalist has been murdered. What seems at first to be an act of military intimidation against discovering the "truth," however, ends up being suicide, for the narrative suggests that groom turns the gun on himself. Constructing a symmetrical structure within the text, the

groom's body is found floating in the very water where the military families dispassionately witnessed the massacred victims of poisoning the night before. Contrasting the poetic descriptions that have flourished throughout the text, the fiction's final lines are dry and succinct, stating simply that Evita flew back to Portugal the following day, her husband's body following soon after on a military ship.

"The Locusts," then, is not history, per se, but rather a highly stylized representation of a particular community that does not necessarily attempt to speak for the greater trajectory of war. Yet it is particularly curious that Jorge, despite utilizing the character of Eva to provide the context that fills the gaps of the story, never provides any context about the writer or the story itself. Was the fiction written shortly after the events or shortly before the interview with Eva? In other words, what were the motivations for this literary project, and what is the writer's relation to these events? Was the work written within Portugal or in a postcolonial sense from within Africa? What is the identity of the writer? Where, for that matter, does the interview between the two individuals occur? The effect of this ahistorical encounter is ironically to dislocate "The Locusts" from the historical context it pretends to address, despite the fact that the author seems to share similar concerns about exposing a particularly problematic chapter of national history. It is clear that the writer has interviewed various individuals such as the journalist (264), yet given Eva's later descriptions in which she mentions how the writer would have (mis)imagined what the hotel terrace looked like, it stands to reason that the individual did not witness the events directly. Furthermore, Eva's monologue, while delivered in the first person, features verbal cues that suggest the author has specifically asked for her feedback to the story. Thus the word "annul" may not be the correct description of Eva's engagement. She revises through the process of remembering.

It is possible that Eva's narration is the writer's attempt to represent her additions, given the appearance of an occasional third-person narrator who reminds readers that it is Eva who is speaking, yet this does not answer all the questions raised by her choice to preserve ambiguity. Thus, far from present a monolithic account of the past, the author seeks feedback and revision. And it is no accident that her monologue is designed to reproduce the conventions of verbal speech. Orality plays an important role in the revision of Eva's preconceived notions about the war, and thus it is appropriate that her revisions would themselves be communicated orally within the text rather than through written form. Therefore, as we shall see below, at several moments what Jorge questions is the capacity of the written word—not bureaucratic descriptions of official history—to transmit the experience of individual loss.

Informal Oral and Visual Archives

It has been suggested that while the short story relies on narrative linearity, Eva's account favors the image because of her frequent reference to the act of seeing as she recounts her traumatic experiences (Kaufman 45). We might take this one step further to suggest the privileging of image occurs at the expense of written narrative, as the only times in the novel in which Eva is able to glean meaningful information is through unwritten modes, particularly through the discovery of photographs and conversations held off the record. One of the reasons for this informal archive has to do with the way that the published written word is controlled. Eva refers to the military archives as the "caretakers of History" (225), reminding the author of "The Locusts" (and ostensibly also the reader) about the disconnect between having public records and disseminating knowledge when she suggests, "Run your hands through the chaff of history, see how it fades implacably in the boxes, how it dies and wilts away, and its interpreters

pass on. Yes, they pass on, on the way to the end of their time, ever faster, ever darker, nothing else mattering—not the great deeds, not the crimes. Many crimes full of duty—which is what makes up great history” (226). This description is much closer to the notion of “erasure” Eva mentions in the book’s final lines. Great history here takes on an ironic overtone, for there is nothing great about the deeds she uncovers through her own investigation. Because she has firsthand experience of the inability of written accounts to communicate the “truth,” she chooses to reveal what has not been passed down in order for it not to be erased or simply neglected. In other words, she believes there is such thing as truth, and she does not subscribe to a relativist position that considers as equally viable multiple versions of the past as competing truths.

The fulcrum of the text rests upon her discovery that war has completely transformed her husband from a mild-mannered mathematician into a sadistic murderer. In one visit to the abusive captain’s wife while both women’s husbands are away on an extended mission, Eva is presented with a box of photographs that were supposed to have been destroyed. Unlike the romanticized wedding photos that initiate the short story, here the images destroy any humane identification with the army’s soldiers or their convictions. The envelopes are labelled “Spoiled,” and both women are aware there will be drastic consequences should they be caught accessing this unarchived documents. “Once white independence came to pass, those documents would testify as to who had gone to war and who had not” (133), Eva explains, though the photographs have a profoundly different function for her future. She discovers that a hired photographer has carefully documented her husband’s unit’s missions. Gruesome images of torture and execution of locals are mixed with series of photos that reveal old women, mothers, children, and groups of prisoners have been executed, considered as military threats. And most shocking of all for Eva is

what the images reveal of her husband's descent into depravity after the death of one of his soldier mates.

To confirm her suspicions, Eva turns to another informal means of personal archival, visiting in the hospital a sick soldier whose wife is brainwashed by the narrative of bravery and laments that he is not taking part in the company's final mission, if only because he is so "photogenic." Because there are no other soldiers present, the patient is willing to talk about the story behind the photographs that Eva has seen when she prods him. The conversation, however, demonstrates the military's awareness of the power of images. As the soldier puts it, "Thank God those media guys are in cahoots with people who have a lot more hands to wash than the average recruit. Otherwise that little episode could be dangerous. But, no problem. Except that, if they were to know about everything, with pictures ... There could be a lot to chew on" (155-156). The soldier reveals the image Eva saw of him placing enemies' decapitated heads on hut roofs was not a task he enjoyed. Instead, Luís Alex's passion had become maiming chickens for sport by shooting them in the anus. This particular detail, of course, circles back to the military's neglect of a soldier's wife, resulting in her torn sphincter, a symbol of a broken nation. Yet Eva's husband's transformation is not the only difference from the story to materialize through her monologue.

Eva is obligated to keep this new knowledge to herself because both her status and her means are limited. She could never confront the military captain, and she realizes she no longer knows the man that she has married. Feeling an increasing sense of moral obligation, she instead turns to the investigative journalist in an attempt to seek justice for the methyl alcohol plot against the local population while her husband's company is on a month-long mission. Eva at times admits the unreliability of memory, but in this case, "I have no doubt whatsoever; it is that

image [of death] that makes me go to the *Hinterland*" (123). The journalist's writing proves to be minimally, if any, more effective, however, for he too is aware of the dangers of information and therefore protects himself, claiming, "In regimes like these, even when they're in the process of falling apart, you don't write, you encode. You don't read, you decode" (150). Eva seems unconvinced by his claim to risk everything for the "truth" (126) by writing his weekly column that seeks to destabilize the Portuguese military through parody that will go undetected by official sources. Ultimately, the journalist becomes more important for Eva in her private life than in public justice. For a variety of reasons, the two begin an affair. Eva is alienated not only in geographical and cultural terms, but also marital, now that she has lost all sentiment for her husband. The journalist is the one man who seems to listen to her, and this intimacy turns physical, even though she seems to have little attraction for him. When the troops return, which coincides with the newspaper's first open engagement with the methyl alcohol scandal, however, the journalist is beaten up and forced to play Russian roulette with Eva's husband as an acceptably patriarchal means to resolve their love conflict. The reader learns that Luís Alex did not in fact commit suicide as the short story surmises, but rather was the unlucky loser of the game. The journalist immediately flees the country without writing out against the military, and Eva follows soon after as she returns to Portugal. As she explains of the journalist, who soils himself in fear during the ordeal, his search for truth was never a genuine one, for as a writer he "never called the dead dead, he never called the methanol poison, he never called the murders crimes; even our coupling he had called 'Europe prone on top of Africa.' Obviously, when the challenge came he called it a plane ticket" (273). All that remains of this event is her own memory in the moment that she shares it with the short story's author.

Eva is ultimately not surprised by her husband's brutal test of fate, as the captain's wife previously had a lover who was not as fortunate as the journalist when interrogated by the military. Thus the repetition of Russian roulette explains the mysterious nature of her husband's death in the short story which is incorrectly attributed to suicide. Unlike her counterpart in the story, though, Eva knows that the military dumped the lieutenant's body in the ocean and concealed the evidence, leading people at the hotel to associate the blame the doubly victimized Eva. If on the one hand Russian roulette fills in the missing information and corrects the "The Locusts," on the other hand the game is symbolic of the issue Eva takes with the literary text. The historical fiction is necessarily plotted, attributing meaning to events of war through a series of causes and effects that for Eva were completely lacking in sense. Russian roulette is not heroic; it is pure chance, which defies the standard narrative of deeds with logical causes and effects. This absence is why she must discover and protect a personal truth, one through which she creates her own agency. Numerous are the times that she mentions how changing details in the story would disrupt the effect a particular passage has upon the reader, and it is this memory of the meaninglessness of existence that provokes her to make the novel's final claim with which I began this article: "Leave it there, suspended, without any useful meaning; don't prolong it, don't listen to the words. Little by little the words detach themselves from the objects they designate, the sounds separate from the words, and of the sounds only murmurs remain, the final stage before erasure."

Understood in the context that I have presented here, her statement has greater bearing for the process of memory and trauma than it does with regard to the story's viability. Both of the narratives are ultimately critical of the role Portugal has played in this chapter of history. Despite the narrator's suggestion that Eva annuls "The Locusts" through her long response to the

author, we may interpret the two texts as constituting a much more constructive dialogic relationship. Her account does not compete with historical fiction so much as demonstrate that multiple forms of representation are necessary to create historical accountability. Jorge's work certainly demonstrates postmodern attributes of self-awareness and multiplicity, but instead of annul history, she provides a context in which different forms of meaning-making—whether written or visual, “traditional” history or new history—can interact to revise one another. If there is a postmodern paradox in her work, it is that the privileging of visual and oral sources is communicated through a written text.

Eva's process of meaning-making ends up paralleling the reader's own attempts to make sense of the fragmented narrative. As both subject and protagonist in two different genres of memory, Eva understands that memory and fiction have the potential to overlap. It is important to note that without the production of the historical story, Eva would not have a platform on which to share her “version of history,” the one that believes the small incidents, the torn sphincters, can have monumental impacts. By the end of her narration, it is clear that for Eva only the murmurs of memory remain, but the two versions of a tragic experience have the effect of cementing her truth in the reader's consciousness, combatting the erasure the narrator fears. Truth in this instance is a consequence of accountability. Like “The Locusts,” *The Murmuring Coast* creates stylized portrayals to provoke emotional responses to a difficult historical moment that had previously been erased from public discussion. If Jorge's model illustrates the need for mutual forms of historical expression and revision rather than an aggressive subversion of historical discourse, this does not make its contributions any less political.

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