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“Há um Mundo que Se Quebra Quando Eu (Não) Falo”:

Women’s Speech and the Power of Silence

in Teolinda Gersão’s *O silêncio*

Robert M. Jeffery

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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June 2013

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ABSTRACT

“Há um Mundo que Se Quebra Quando Eu (Não) Falo”:
Women’s Speech and the Power of Silence
in Teolinda Gersão’s *O silêncio*

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Teolinda Gersão’s debut novel, *O silêncio*, addresses two issues which several prominent feminist writers and critics have discussed: women’s search for identity, and the difficulty women encounter when expressing themselves in a man’s world. To this second point, this discussion has been varied but comes to a consensus around the need for women to vocalize as a means of asserting themselves. However, the approach that *O silêncio* brings to this matter is completely the opposite, revealing instead how silence—a form of controlled non-speech—can be more empowering than words.

The novel comes to this conclusion as the protagonist Lídia—a headstrong young woman—attempts to discover and express her own identity. Her search leads her into a relationship with Afonso, a middle-aged man in a stale marriage, and also causes her to recall and reinvent images from her past in order to envision her future.

Although the novel has received some harsh criticism due to its labyrinthine narrative structure, the complexity of the narrative causes the novel’s relationship with its readers to closely mimic Lídia’s relationship with Afonso. The novel seems to resist our efforts to understand it, just as she earnestly seeks to thwart his efforts to control and silence her.

Keywords: feminist theory, women’s speech, silence, Teolinda Gersão, Portugal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a very special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Christopher Lund, for his tutelage not only throughout this project (in all its iterations) but also for his guidance, instruction, and advice during my entire time at BYU. I especially appreciate his patience, which has probably been stretched nigh unto breaking. I also am grateful to James and Rex for their invaluable feedback.

I also wish to thank Dr. Vanessa Fitzgibbon for introducing me to this novel and for challenging me to think about it in ways I might not have.

Most of all, I need to thank my wife Mary Lou for her support from the very beginning. With all the time and effort I have dedicated toward this project, she has sacrificed even more in order to make my efforts possible.

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INTRODUCTION

O silêncio (*Silence*) by Teolinda Gersão was initially published in 1981, with a second edition following that same year. Subsequent editions were released, with the most recent fifth edition published in 2010. Despite being occasionally republished, and being the recipient of the Fiction Prize from the Pen Club in Portugal (1982), there have been few critical studies done of Gersão's debut novel that have focused on it alone. Some critics have looked at *O silêncio* while examining Gersão's writings as a whole (Bozkurt, Duarte, Santos), while others have compared it to the works of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (Leal and Mendes, for example). Only in the past few years has the novel begun to garner critical attention as a separate work, much of which has been through Master's theses similar to this one.

Perhaps this is because the book has often been misrepresented. For example, we need only to look at the synopsis of the book available from its publisher:

O silêncio é uma história de amor. Um diálogo entre Afonso, um cirurgião famoso de meia-idade, e a jovem Lídia, que se torna sua amante e o liberta de um casamento convencional e frustrado.

Lídia fala de si, de sua mãe, Lavínia, do seu modo inquieto de olhar o mundo.

Mas o que Lídia conta é exactamente o que Afonso não quer ouvir.

[*Silence* is a love story. A dialogue between Afonso, a famous middle-aged surgeon and a young woman, Lídia, who becomes his lover and frees him from a conventional and frustrated marriage.

Lídia talks about herself, her mother, Lavínia, about her turbulent way of seeing the world.

But what Lídia has to say is exactly what Afonso does not want to hear.]

(Bertrand)¹

In all fairness, most books are difficult to explain in few words; inescapably, some important details are omitted and some ideas are sacrificially simplified in deference to brevity. No encapsulation of a novel into a sound bite can accurately convey what it is about, and this is particularly true of *O silêncio*. Using the summary above as a starting point, we can recognize some of the ways in which the novel has been misrepresented, which will enable us to establish a clear outline of its plot and structure. Although much of what we mention of here will be laid out in greater detail in later chapters, specifically Chapter 1, laying out a brief overview of the novel will help us to begin to understand the novel on its own terms.

The above synopsis' first misstep is in its initial declaration that *O silêncio* is a love story. There is a romantic relationship in the affair between Lídia and Afonso, but from early on we learn that there is no love in the relationship, only a struggle for dominance. This conflict becomes a central theme to the novel, allowing the relationship to function as a venue through which the novel explores its greater themes of women's speech, and silence. These themes are explored not only in a scope limited to the novel, but are applied more universally to conflict between the sexes. These themes become apparent only as we move away from the specious interpretation that the publisher suggests, which is that *O silêncio* is about a romance, first and foremost.

In addition to exploring conflict in male/female relationships, the novel also concerns itself with a more individual theme, as the following passage from its beginning pages illustrates:

Eram um homem e uma mulher e falavam. E o que diziam, ou o que a mulher dizia, era a tentativa de um diálogo fundo, mais fundo do que o diálogo de amor

que se trava, ao nível do corpo, entre uma mulher e um homem. Ela procurava uma forma de encontro, através das palavras, um encontro que era, antes de mais, consigo própria, e só depois com o homem que escutava.

[There was a man and a woman and they were speaking. And what they were saying, or what the woman was saying, was an attempt at a profound dialogue, deeper than the dialogue of love which opens, at a physical level, between a woman and a man. She was seeking a means of connection, through words, a connection that was, more than anything else, with herself, and only afterwards with the man who was listening.] (11)²

Although connection and communication between man and woman is an important part of the novel—and the source of nearly all conflict within it—*O silêncio* is much more about self-discovery and expression. The woman in this passage (who many have assumed to be Lídia; this assumption will be tested in Chapter 1) is more concerned with understanding herself, with finding herself. The woman, as specifically stated in the narrative, tries to find this understanding through words—more than just knowing herself, she desires the ability to use language to express herself. The man in this case enters into the equation only as an afterthought. The question of female self-expression becomes the focal point of the novel.

We might be surprised by this perspective given that in the summary above Afonso is portrayed as the main character and Lídia is not much more than an accessory to his freedom from a “conventional and frustrated marriage.” From this viewpoint, the man is the subject and the woman the object. However, in *O silêncio* the emphasis is exactly the reverse: Lídia is in fact the main character, and Afonso is the accessory in her self-discovery: “a connection that was, more than anything else, with herself, and only afterwards with the man who was listening.”

The woman is then both subject and object, and the man is another object. Indeed, most of the narrative focuses on women, whether Lídia or Lavínia. Their actions, words, monologues, and what they dream and imagine comprise most of the text; considerably less of the novel is dedicated to the same elements from the viewpoint of Afonso and Alfredo, the two most important male characters.

The summary's assertion that a dialogue exists between Lídia and Afonso is particularly ironic, as Darlene Sadlier points out: "while the speakers address their remarks to one another, the overall effect seems less like a conversation and more like two monologues, one overlapping the other" (100). While they do speak to each other in what might be called a "dialogue," the novel focuses on how unlike a dialogue their discourse is. In summary, their relationship within the text itself is completely different than what we might be led to believe.

While the most important relationship of the novel is that between Lídia and Afonso, the mother-daughter relationship between Lídia and Lavínia is also important, although the synopsis above treats it like an afterthought. Many critics have confirmed the importance of this relationship, yet it is not as simple as it has been made out to be. As we will see in Chapter 1, there is a second interpretation of the nature of this relationship which holds even greater implications for Lídia, especially as it pertains to her search for identity.

Despite the distortions the summary makes in regards to the plot of the novel, it is correct in the final line where it alludes to the communication between Lídia and Afonso and the conflict this exchange creates. Through an examination of this conflict and its results, we can see how *O silêncio* fits into feminist literature, both in Portuguese tradition and in contemporary feminist theory. In Chapter 2, we will observe the way that *O silêncio* strives for the same objective that contemporary feminist theory aims for: to affirm both women's presence and power within (or

over, or despite) a predominantly patriarchal society. However, at the same time that the novel promotes this objective, it directly criticizes and contradicts the means typically advocated by prominent feminists for achieving it.

Although we have here dissected the publisher's plot summary in order to expose the misrepresentations it contains, we should, in all fairness, explain the assertion from earlier that *O silêncio* presents a difficult challenge to be accurately condensed in a simple synopsis. From a reader's perspective, *O silêncio* requires a concerted effort to arrive at an understanding of the novel. As Gerald Moser remarks in his review of the book,

The narrative...would be perfect, but for the literary mania, apparently rife in Portugal, of compacting the different characters' speeches and thoughts into a tangle which the patient reader is supposed to unravel. (264)

Moser praises the novel as nearly perfect while attributing its only flaw to the style and structure of the narrative in the novel, which is so complex and labyrinthine that we as readers can easily get lost. Before we can begin to put forth any deeper analysis of the novel and the misrepresentations outlined above, we first need to, as Sadlier suggests, "analyze its perplexing surface" (97)—that is, to unravel the narrative structure of the novel before moving on to analyze the story and events that comprise it.

Defining much of the text as "fragmented," Sadlier discusses the trouble in distinguishing among dialogue, narration, and characters' thoughts:

Many of the fragments are narrated from a first-person perspective, but it is not clear if what is being said is spoken aloud by the character as a kind of soliloquy, or is only...the character's interior monologue. This ambiguity extends to what

seems like dialogue. Sometimes “conversations” suddenly appear in the middle of a sentence. (98-99)

The conversations that Sadlier describes are just one example where the narrative seems to interrupt itself. Often one character will interrupt another in speaking, and occasionally they may interrupt each other in thought only, weaving together soliloquy and dialogue. At times characters may be speaking to each other, but at other times these conversations occur entirely within the thoughts of a single character, who imagines what the other is saying and replies to it as if it were an actual conversation. This final characteristic alone impedes an easy understanding of the different characters’ speeches, as it is often hard to tell if a character actually said a particular thing or was merely imagined to have said it. As Moser states, this jumbling of different characters’ viewpoints, uttered or unexpressed, demands some deciphering on the part of the reader.

As an added complication, there are the elements of the Portuguese language itself, which is a null-subject language, meaning that an independent clause does not need to specify the subject. Thus whereas in English we would say “he said” [ele falou], or “she said” [ela falou], in Portuguese we would likely find the expression “said” [falou], without the text ever identifying who is doing the speaking. This kind of grammatical construction is used extensively and deliberately throughout *O silêncio*, and some passages may extend for a page or more before identifying the subject or speaker. The relationship between the subject and object of a given phrase or passage is often unstable and fluid. As Sadlier remarks:

A character can function as both the object and subject of his or her own narration, so that in any given passage the “he” or “she” and the “I” of a particular discourse might refer to the same individual. There are seldom any clues alerting

the reader to these shifts in perspective and voice—they might happen anywhere.
(98)

Not only is it often difficult to determine who is speaking or acting in many instances of the novel, but the ambiguous narrative also fluctuates and interrupts itself, “forcing a reader to reorient himself or herself several times within a single fragment [of text]” (Sadlier 98). This reorientation also becomes necessary due to the anachronic nature of the narrative, in which events do not follow any specific timeline. No dates are given, nor historical events on which to anchor the narrative, which shifts back and forth between the past and present. “Words such as *dia*, *tempo*, *momento*, and *agora* abound, but they appear...in such a plotless fashion that they almost lose their meanings” (Sadlier 97). In a short essay, Manuella Pereira Carvalho summarizes that this composition of the novel causes “um rompimento da estruturação tradicional da narrativa, onde já não existe uma lógica estrutural em que se pode definir claramente um início, meio e fim” [a disruption of traditional narrative structure, where there no longer exists a structural logic in which the beginning, middle, or end can be clearly defined] (3). Part of this disruption also stems from the fact that some events are revisited throughout the novel, yet they are described differently and thus the non-linear narrative of the text makes it seem as though they were separate occurrences.

Aside from all of these verbal or content-related elements—the use or absence of subject pronouns; the compounding of thoughts, dreams, dialogue and viewpoints into a continuous, shifting narrative; a chronology that reels from past to present—there is yet another aspect of the text that hinders a reader’s comprehension, which is the physical layout of the text on the page. This (and others of the above-mentioned obstacles to understanding) will be discussed further in Chapter 3, but we should note here that the visual configuration of the words, paragraphs, and

punctuation on the page is not designed for easy access. Several paragraphs end on a comma, characters' speech is rarely denoted with verbal cues and only once set off with conventional punctuation (it is common in Portuguese to use a line break that begins with an extended dash rather than quotation marks), and occasionally Gersão abandons all visual organization and streamlines the text into run-on sentences, which in some cases extend beyond a page.

The overarching result is that not only through language and content, but also visually, the text does not yield easily to interpretation or analysis, which might explain why much criticism has failed to focus directly on the novel, preferring to group analyze it beside other works. In any case, even after only this brief overview of the narrative structure of the novel, one thing is easily perceived, as stated by Moser and echoed by Sadlier: as we pursue our analysis of *O silêncio*, we will need to patiently and continually reorient ourselves in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the novel. All of these elements combined create a rather confusing narrative, but as we will see in Chapter 3, there is a purpose behind the novel's "perplexing surface."

Here then, it becomes convenient to replace the publisher's synopsis of the book with a more accurate account:

Lídia is a young woman who has an affair with Afonso, a plastic surgeon married to Alcina. Although we never meet Alcina, we understand that she and Lídia are polar opposites: Alcina accepts her routine existence as Afonso's wife, leading Afonso to view his marriage as dull and lifeless, although ultimately under his complete control. Lídia, on the other hand, is exciting and unruly; her passion, however, threatens Afonso's perfect order of things. She has a very active imagination, but when she tries to communicate her thoughts with Afonso, he continually berates and belittles her.

Their story is interwoven with the story of Lavínia, who is married to Alfredo but has an affair with Herberto. Lavínia and Lídia's experiences in their relationships are nearly parallel; however, their reactions to the same situation are very different, often in direct contrast with each other. In the end, Lavínia's path ends in her death, apparently by suicide, yet Lídia's decisions lead her to freedom. As she discovers her own expression, she resolves to leave Afonso, leaving his life in complete disarray.

This thesis is comprised of an in-depth examination of *O silêncio* in three aspects: the first, an exploration of the content of the novel as Lídia searches for and eventually discovers the "connection...with herself" that she seeks, as well as understanding the means of her discovery; the second, a contextualization of the novel within the contemporary feminist theory as well as Portuguese tradition, particularly in regards to the portrayal and treatment of women; and third, a return to the content of the novel as we explore the male/female relationships through recurring images, and our relationship to the text as its readers through a discussion of the novel's form in light of its content. It is my hope that this analysis can contribute to the nascent body of criticism centered on Teolinda Gersão's debut novel, help make clear some misconceptions about the novel, and bring greater attention to and appreciation of this exceptional work.

CHAPTER 1: “Um diálogo fundo”: Lídia and her search for identity and expression

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
...Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

—Edgar Allan Poe, “A Dream Within A Dream” (1849)

“Ela procurava uma forma de encontro, através das palavras...que era, antes de mais, consigo própria” [She was seeking a means of connection, through words...that was, more than anything else, with herself] (11). This passage from the first page of *O silêncio* captures, as stated in the introduction, the most prominent theme from the novel: Lídia’s desire to understand herself—to not only discover her own identity, but to then be able to express herself, specifically “through words.” Central to the novel is Lídia’s search for this connection, which represents both her identity and her unique expression.

The specific means through which Lídia seeks for this self-connection—words—comes with its own perils and problems, of which Lídia is aware. The above passage continues:

Ou era apenas um jogo de palavras? Hesitou de repente, sem ver claro. Em algum lugar, é verdade, a falsidade começava. Talvez pressentia que o homem estava parcialmente fora do diálogo e lhe resistia, como se ele representasse, de certo modo, um perigo...

[Or was it all just a word game? She suddenly hesitated, unable to see clearly.

Somewhere, it was certain, the falsehood began. Perhaps [she] could sense that

the man was partially tuned out of the conversation, resisting it as if it represented a certain danger...] (11)

The text continues to describe the way that the man attempts to subtly curtail the conversation (so as to reduce its potential as a threat) and the way the woman, with equal subtlety, chooses her words in a way that allows her to remain in control of the discussion. This concerted determination on the part of both man and woman to control the conversation, all the while pretending to let the other remain in control, is the pitfall that Lídia perceives in regards to finding her expression through words. Because of the mutual inability of the man and woman to make the conversation more than a diplomatic exercise in control, Lídia knows that she cannot find a true form of self-expression; rather, she senses falsehood creeping in.

The conversation itself then emerges upon this framework of Lídia's perception that the narrative has provided for us—the statement of her objective to find her own expression, while at the same time she realizes how impossible this expression is. The best she can manage is a form that, once expressed, is compromised by the man. As the man and woman discuss the woman's story, the conversation is a form of tug-of-war between the two. The man continually interrupts, often trying to anticipate what the woman will say, and she similarly rebuffs and corrects his interjections. Later, after he feels like the conversation has escaped his control, he asks questions in an attempt to regain it, although he admits to himself that “a pergunta era inútil porque em qualquer dos casos, agora, a mulher continuaria a contar” [the question was useless because in any case, now, the woman would keep on talking] (16).

The outcome of this conversation is surprising, as the man has clearly lost control. The limits which he had tried to establish at the outset to keep the woman in an enclosed space have proven ineffective, and it seems as though the woman has “won” the word game. However,

another interruption suddenly breaks off her speech, and she reflects how “agora a imagem estava partida...e não havia outra coisa para fazer com ela senão deixá-la resvalar para nada” [now the image was broken...and there was nothing that could be done now except to let it slide into nothingness] (20).

This interruption does not come from the man with whom she had been conversing earlier, who had felt his grasp on the situation slipping. Concluding the first block of text, this interruption comes from Afonso. Although we might expect that it is Afonso who is debating with the woman, who we presume to be Lídia, if we examine the passage as a whole, we realize that the conversation between the man and woman is not what it initially seems, but that what it reveals much about Lídia’s goal to find a “means of connection...with herself.” As she seeks for this connection, she conducts a series of mental exercises or experiments. In these experiments she attempts to find through her imagination a path that will guide her through reality. These experiments allow her to try out various approaches to her situations, that she may clearly see the course to pursue in her future. At one point, these experiments come to involve her mother Lavínia in surprising and innovative ways.

1.1 Thought experiments: Imagination vs. reality

Let us go back to the first sentence, the first subject/predicate pair of *O silêncio*, where we will see the nature of this conversation: “Lídia *imaginou*” [Lídia *imagined*] (11, emphasis added). Cited more completely:

Lídia imaginou um corpo deitado na praia, ao lado de outro corpo. Eram um homem e uma mulher e falavam. E o que diziam, ou o que a mulher dizia, era a tentativa de um diálogo fundo, mais fundo do que o diálogo de amor que se trava,

ao nível do corpo, entre uma mulher e um homem. Ela procurava uma forma de encontro...

[Lídia imagined a body lying on a beach, beside another body. They were a man and a woman and they were talking. And what they said, or what the woman was saying, was an attempt at a profound dialogue, more profound than the language of love which exists on a bodily level, between a man and woman. She was seeking a means of connection...] (11)

As the narrative instantly dives into a description of the couple lying on the beach debating, it is easy to skip over this important detail that the entire scene exists only in Lídia's imagination. Complicating this, Lídia and Afonso are also stretched out on the beach at the same moment, something they do often (as we learn later on in the novel). However, we should be careful not to confuse the coincidence of these two scenes—the real and the imagined—as evidence that they are the same.

The distinctness of the narration with regards to Lídia's imagination and the “reality” that she experiences and shares with Afonso is described in a thesis by Olga Duarte, who states,

Dentro da narrativa principal do romance *O Silêncio* (história de Lídia e Afonso), encaixam-se narrativas secundárias – a narrativa imaginativa e rememorativa de Lídia.

O romance inicia-se com a narração da imagem que Lídia criou em torno de um homem e de uma mulher... Trata-se, pois, de uma narrativa heterodiegética, dado que o narrador não participa na acção narrada, mas com amplo domínio da focalização interna, porque a personagem parece ter conhecimento total da história que imagina.

[There are secondary narratives within the principal narrative of the novel *O silêncio* (the story of Lídia and Afonso)—the imaginative and reminiscent narrative of Lídia.

The novel begins with the narration of the image Lídia has created of a man and a woman...It involves, then, a heterodiegetic narrative, since the narrator does not participate in the narrated action, but has ample control of the internal focus, because the character seems to have total knowledge of the story that she imagines.] (52)

Although the conversation Lídia imagines exists only for her, she personally does not enter into it. It is as though the man and woman are pieces on a chess board, to be moved and manipulated at will. Like a chess player, Lídia is in control of the pieces, but that does not transform her into a chess piece herself.

O silêncio has the added complication that the imagined scene closely mimics the real scene in appearance, as if the chess player were dressed as a knight and the carpet were checkered; notwithstanding, player and pawn exist on separate spheres, just as Lídia and the figures she imagines do not inhabit the same plane. As Lídia and Afonso lie together, her imagination conjures a situation that mirrors her own, until she is interrupted by Afonso who tells her it is late and accuses her of hiding his watch.

That the two situations are so similar is no coincidence; on the contrary, it is entirely on purpose that Lídia's imagination so closely parallels her reality. She is in absolute control of her thoughts, until Afonso's interruption. Her imagination is a key part of her search for self-expression as evidenced by the fact that in the phrase "ela procurava uma forma de encontro," the antecedent of the subject pronoun "ela" is both the imagined woman and Lídia herself.

Admittedly, this grammatical ambiguity blurs the line between imagination and reality even further, to the point that later passages of speech in the novel cannot be clearly assigned to Lída or the imagined woman. However, in the last two “chapters” (or numbered fragments) of the novel, this distinction is not as crucial as it is in the first chapter, where the concept of thought experiments is introduced.

Thus, Lída’s imagination is a tool that she actively and consciously uses in order to help find her own expression, as we can see in the above episode of the imagined couple on the beach. She is able to project her own situations into her imagination as a simulated environment as if moving the pieces around the board, which bears the familiarity of her own surroundings. In this way, she conducts experiments and weighs the outcomes, and then, based on the results she discovers through her experiments, decides how to act accordingly in reality.

Let us consider as an example the episode above: Afonso’s interruption at the very end of the block of text is the first example of spoken text in the novel (and so technically it is not an interruption at all). Although there has been plenty of dialogue up to this point, it has all been contained in Lída’s imagination; it is a thought experiment of what she and Afonso might be saying were they to actually converse.

Immediately noticeable is the way the two imagined figures discourse, parrying back and forth, playing their word game. As they both struggle to control the dialogue, the woman fills her descriptions with blatantly ridiculous and impossibly fantastic details, of which the man tires quickly—a parallel attitude to that between Lída and Afonso. On later occasions in the novel when Lída and Afonso do speak, their attitude is much the same; Lída often speculates what wild things the future portends, and Afonso has very little patience for her wild notions.

We see the way in which Lídia attempts to manage and control her surroundings by having already played the scenes out in her mind. Along with the similarities between Lídia's imagination and her reality, there are also many differences, which help to more clearly define Lídia and Afonso's actual relationship and, in a more general sense, the interaction between a man and woman. These comparisons between imagination and reality further reveal Lídia's search for her elusive self-expression, and how she finds it despite having to struggle against the presence and expression of the man.

The most obvious difference between Lídia's thought experiment and her reality is the role of the man. In her imagination, even though he may be interrupting or merely playing along, the man responds to what the woman is saying. In reality, however, when Lídia and Afonso do speak together (as we see throughout the course of the novel), it is as Darlene Sadlier states: the two characters "address their remarks to one another, [but] the overall effect seems less like a conversation and more like two monologues, one overlapping the other" (100). In Lídia's mind, even if there is an admitted sense of falsehood or lack of true expression, there is some actual communication between the two. While there may be a lack of mutual respect (the man's continual interruptions, the woman's merciless censorship of the man), the two are at least able to talk about the same thing. This mutual exchange is absent outside of Lídia's imagination; when Lídia and Afonso do converse, the only manner in which they directly address the same topic or each other is in criticism.

In considering this (and other differences), we must remember that the man's reactions are not necessarily the same as Afonso's; they are what Lídia anticipates his reactions would be if she were to engage him in an actual conversation. Take for example this passage, taken from the same imagined conversation: "Acabou por...começar a fazer riscos na areia. Suponhamos

que aqui está a casa, disse ele (e sentiu que esse gesto era já, de certo modo, um compromisso)” [In the end he...began to scratch lines in the sand. Let’s suppose that here is the house, he said (and he felt like this gesture was, in a way, compromising)] (12). The text betrays a certain ambiguity, as well as what Lídia anticipates the man’s reaction to be: the word “compromisso” can be used to mean a “concession” or “yielding”—the man’s scratching in the sand is him agreeing to see things on her terms. Thus, he finds himself in a “compromising” situation as he must give up some ground to meet the woman halfway—or at least, that is the way that Lídia perceives things, through this thought experiment of the imagined couple.

However, while Lídia’s thought experiments may be completely accurate—Afonso’s reactions to her speech at later points of the novel are further iterations of the man’s tentative, compromising agreement—she is not always able to completely foresee what will happen when she moves beyond mental experimentation to actually entering into those previously imagined scenarios.

For example, the dynamics of power and control between the man and the woman are markedly different between the real and the imagined environments. In Lídia’s imagination, when the imagined man does interrupt, the woman is able to immediately take charge of the discussion once again, correct whatever errors the man may have uttered, and continue with her narration. The man is unable to wrest control from the woman in any case. On the other hand, Afonso is able—without even trying, or even being aware of the effect—to completely shut down Lídia’s internal conversation, and bring her thought experiments and search for expression to a sudden halt. She is completely unable to even pick up the pieces of what she had been thinking about, but is forced to “let it slide into nothingness” (20). Having not found her own

“means of connection,” she is at this point simply incapable of remaining in control of the conversation or her own expression, even when kept privately to herself.

Afonso is aware of his triumph over Lídia, as the narrative relates his thoughts:

...de qualquer modo, agora, havia um tempo vivo, intenso, que o fazia esquecer do tempo antigo, Lídia surgira, de repente, em sua vida, apanhada também ela de surpresa, lutando no começo, obscuramente lutando, mas ele vencera, finalmente, e havia agora uma jovem mulher nos seus braços—uma vitória, talvez...

[...at any rate, now, there was a moment of life, intense, which made him forget the old times, Lídia had appeared, suddenly, in his life, with she just as surprised as he, struggling at first, confused, but he had conquered, finally, and now there was a young woman in his arms—a victory, perhaps...] (34)

Lídia imagines herself unbeaten, or at least, she allows herself to imagine a situation in which she (or, the imagined woman) would be able to be in control. Yet as she carries out this thought experiment, she comes to grips with the impossibility of being able to speak for herself under Afonso’s authority. Her present line of mental experimentation—a discussion with Afonso, in which she is able not only to speak but be listened to, and ultimately be in control—can never lead her to find the self-expression she seeks, because the reality of their relationship is different.

The following passage relates not only her recognition of the facts, but her reaction to them:

Soube que se falasse, assim como pensando em voz alta, Afonso não responderia coisa alguma, apenas sorriria, com uma espécie de indulgência distante que ela conhecia e que era o seu modo de dizer que não acreditava, como se tudo fosse falso, uma vez dito...Ela cedeu..., entrou no seu silêncio, e deixou, dentro de si, o vento levar todas as palavras.

[She knew if she spoke, or were to think out loud, Afonso would not reply at all, only smile, with a distant kind of indulgence that she knew and that was his way of saying that he didn't believe her, as if everything became false once spoken...She gave in..., slipped into the silence, and inside herself, let the wind blow all her words away.] (32)

She realizes that she is beaten and that the pretended victory she achieved in her mind is easily swept away by the cruel reality of Afonso's effortless dominance, all because she has yet to find her own expression.

The Portuguese here is ambiguous in a few respects, most notably in the final reference to silence, which the possessive pronoun : "seu" could render in English as "his", implying her submission of her yet-undiscovered expression to his control; or as "hers", in which case she would be forging her own means of expression—even a silent expression—separate from his, and out of his reach. At any rate, she realizes that she cannot and will not find her own expression by trying to beat Afonso at his own "game of words," as a woman in a man's world. Defeated and silent (and silenced), Lídia changes the way she behaves in reality, and the way she projects that reality onto her imagination, as an image on a screen.

For example, although Lídia's thought experiments continue, there is a shift of focus: rather than the manner in which the man and woman communicate, the content of that communication becomes more important. The narrative style which presents the conversation between the imagined figures, which to this point has given us an impression of both the man's and woman's attitude and gestures, completely disappears. When the novel returns to these characters, we only read the words they speak; no other kind of narrative framework is given to identify the speaker. Also, the imagined woman often appears to be in soliloquy, not talking to

the man at all; while we assume that he is present (in a continuation of their imagined conversation), there is rarely any explicit indication that he is still involved.

As Lídia's approach to imagination changes, so does the way she behaves in reality. She brings the imagined conversations out of her private thoughts into reality, speaking to Afonso in the flesh. As mentioned earlier and stated by Sadlier, the conversation between the two seems like two independent but overlapping monologues, except at the point where Afonso addresses her directly to criticize her. Her own contribution to the dialogue is simply her wild imaginings, made vocal. Her words follow the same stream-of-consciousness form of expression as had the imagined woman's words, with the same inclusion of fantastic and absurd elements which Afonso refuses to tolerate with any seriousness—a confirmation of her thought experiments in which the imagined man became similarly frustrated.

Afonso had been in control before we ever see Lídia attempt to speak to him, and he remains in control now. He initially berates her—“é você que ironiza...e depois acusa-me de não falar a sério” [it's you who is sarcastic...and afterward you accuse me of talking nonsense], (41)—then turns to ignore her completely. While she speaks at length, he deliberately puts on a record to play, pausing only to talk over her to point out a mandolin solo, then again at the end of the “conversation” to laugh out loud at her:

está a ver como está a mentir, desde o início, avançou ele rindo, e o riso soou como um canto de alívio e de vitória por sobre todas as palavras ditas. Reclinou-se para trás, de olhos fechados, estendeu um dos braços e fez girar ao de leve o botão, aumentando o som no solo de mandolinas.

[do you see how you are lying, from the beginning, he cried laughing, and his laughter echoed like a song of relief and of victory over all of the words spoken.

He leaned back, eyes closed, reached out his arm and lightly spun the knob, turning up the volume on the mandolin solo.] (42)

Afonso is ultimately cognizant of the power he has over Lídia, and prides himself on his ability to control her, much in the same way that the imagined man would like to have controlled the imagined woman. His expression neither tolerates nor admits hers, and on the other occasions that Lídia tries to speak to him early on in the novel, each conversation ends the same, with him silencing her.

All the while that Lídia has been attempting to make contact with Afonso in search of her own expression, she has been aware of how difficult or impossible it might be. At the onset of the novel, we read the imagined woman's recognition that falsehood was inherent in her conversation with the man, but later we read (through Lídia's perspective) that there has always been a sort of tension particular to Lídia and Afonso,

...desde o início. Porque eles eram dois mundos sem pontos de contacto. A constância disso, desde o primeiro instante. As tardes em que ela vagueava ao longo do rio, solta, dispersa, confundida com as coisas...uma figura indefinida caminhando através da luz baça. E do outro lado da ponte a janela iluminada, a pequena casa para onde ele se mudara, dissera-lhe, e esperava por ela, detrás das janelas altas. Entrar na casa e tomar a forma da casa...

[...since the beginning. Because they were two worlds without any connection. The persistence of that, from the very first instant. The afternoons when she would wander freely along the river, scattered, jumbled together with everything else...a formless figure walking through the dim light. And on the other side of the bridge the lights on in the window, the little house where he had moved, he

told her, and was waiting for her, just beyond the high windows. To enter into that house and take on its shape...] (34)

That she sees herself as shapeless, formless, and undefined reminds us again of the need she feels to find herself, her own form of expression “through words” (11). She views herself entering Afonso’s home, his space, and adopting that form as her own—her own identity then, is ultimately dependent upon his.

This description aligns itself with another later on, shortly after Lídia’s failed attempts to communicate with Afonso. The two are seated near the water, looking at fish as they pass, when Afonso runs his hand through Lídia’s hair and slides his fingers along her face. In a moment, the image eerily changes and Lídia sees herself as a patient of Afonso’s, stretched out on a surgical table:

um novo rosto surgindo, moldado, esculpido com a ponta do bisturi sobre a carne de argila, uma mulher acordando diferente, olhando no espelho a sua imagem, uma mulher...que não sabia da sua própria forma e a procurava através do homem

[a new face emerging, modeled, sculpted with the point of a scalpel upon flesh of clay, a woman waking up different, looking in the mirror at her own image, a woman...who did not know her own form and so sought it through a man] (49)

Lídia’s acceptance of Afonso’s form (his house) as her own suddenly takes on a more menacingly intimate and invasive image. She is not only adapting her lifestyle to his, but is becoming putty in his hands, shaped however he wants. It is at this point that her attitude toward Afonso changes, and she recognizes and rejects his reconstructive influence. The passage immediately continues:

— não quero entrar no teu mundo nem mudar o meu rosto, quero ficar como saí do mar agora, os meus cabelos verdes, os meus olhos conchas, o meu corpo alga, as minhas mãos gaivotas, e se não me amares assim vai-te embora e deixa-me ficar, absurda e doida e contente de mim...

[— I don't want to come into your world or change my face, I want to stay the way I came out of the sea, my green hair, my eyes as shells, my seaweed body, my seagull hands, and if you don't love me this way then go away and let me be, absurd and crazy and content with myself...] (49)

Perceptive to what is happening around her, Lídia changes course and refuses to allow herself to be molded by Afonso any further. The imagery of the sea that she uses resurfaces time and again throughout the rest of the novel, as a metaphor of her inability to be tamed, and also of the destructive force of nature (for further examination, see chapter 3 of this analysis). From this point on, she refuses to be subject to Afonso's whims, his logic, and his need to impose an order on things.

The description of the scene that the imagined surgery interrupts is a simple example of Lídia's change of course. She and Afonso are looking down at the fish and they both comment on them: "mil peixes, disse ela seguindo-os com os olhos, cem peixes, disse ele, cem peixes apenas" [a thousand fish, she said following them with her eyes, a hundred fish, he said, only a hundred fish] (48). Verbally checked by Afonso, Lídia imagines the scene of surgery, which gives her the resolve to no longer be bullied by Afonso. Returning to observe the the fish, "sentou-se ao lado e levantou a cabeça para o sol: Eram mil peixes, disse. Contei-os um por um e eram mil" [she sat off to the side and raised her head to the sun: There were a thousand fish, she

said. I counted them one by one and there were a thousand] (48). She refuses to let her imagination be hampered, contained, or reordered by Afonso's logic.

We might regard her response to him as stubborn and childish, or a humorous exaggeration, but it betrays her calculated attitude towards his control: she takes Afonso's weapon of logic and turns it back on him. As a result, he has nothing to say in response (or at least, nothing is repeated in the text). She beats him at his own game and is suddenly in control, having had the final word.

After this singular victory, Lídia delves back into her imagination once again to make sense of her reality. She imagines herself through a series of images, first as a stray cat that wanders through the streets and in and out of houses but ultimately returns to its master, and second as sitting at the piano and suddenly finding herself combining notes and keys in endless improvised cadences. The two images, which slightly overlap in the text, relate the transformation she has just undergone: from wandering aimlessly with her inevitable return to her master, Afonso, as her only destination, to feeling the power and freedom of being able to create and express herself. The text relates:

Agora ela tinha uma forma e um lugar, dentro do tempo. Jamais atravessaria como antes as ruas, sem nenhuma direção de norte ou sul. Jamais retornaria a passar, indiferente, pelas casas, sem relação com nenhuma. Agora o mundo estava ao alcance da mão, e era-lhe possível determinar a sua forma, pelo puro poder do seu desejo. E ela era tão forte que podia ser lenta e passiva, não precisava sequer de correr ao encontro do mundo, porque era ele que vinha de repente em direção a ela, como uma bola de vidro deslizando.

Ou, pelo contrário, ela era tão fraca que se perdera, puramente, quando julgara ganhar-se, numa forma mais funda de existência? Equivocava-se talvez em tudo o que dizia a si mesma, e só conseguia traduzir o que pensava através de semelhanças longínquas, como se o verdadeiro sentido lhe escapasse

[Now she had a form and a place, in time. Never again would she cross the streets as she had before, without any notion of north or south. Never again would she go back to ranging indifferently from house to house, with no connection to any of them. Now the world was within her grasp, and it was possible for her to determine its form, by the pure power of her desire. And she was strong enough that she could be deliberate and passive, she no longer needed to run out and find the world, because it was the world which was suddenly coming towards her, rolling like a ball of glass.

Or, on the contrary, was it that she was so weak that she had become utterly lost, when she thought she had found herself, in the most profound state of existence? She wavered, perhaps in everything she was saying to herself, and only managed to translate what she was thinking through distant similarities, as if the real meaning had escaped her] (52-53)

For a moment, she feels the world in the palm of her hand, and believes that she has at last found her own form of expression. The world takes on a completely different look for her, and she herself is strong, powerful, and dominant. However, she immediately begins to question her new-found power, second-guessing herself to the point that she begins to feel just as lost as she had felt found a moment before.

Although her victory over Afonso is only momentary, from this point on in the novel Lúcia approaches him differently. As already stated, her thought experiments no longer focus on the success of a conversation with an imagined man, and she personally no longer shares with Afonso her wild fantasies, although we as readers still experience them through her own monologues. She still occasionally tells him what she is thinking; however, these exchanges become shorter both in length and in temper. Rather than trying to conquer Afonso's space, Lúcia is more determined to protect her own—particularly, her thoughts and her imagination.

Afonso was hitherto able to easily dominate Lúcia's speech, but as she speaks less to him, he senses his grasp on her slipping. Feeling the tables turned on him and desperate to return to control, Afonso asks Lúcia more than once what she is thinking, as if to draw something out of her so that he can quash it. Lúcia, however, remains on her guard and gives him nothing: "Em que está a pensar? perguntou-lhe. Em nada, disse" [What are you thinking about? he asked. Nothing, she said] (99). At times, his need to be in control of the conversation turns violent, as the text relates his desperation to regain in power, and Lúcia's conscious effort to remain silent in order to avoid granting him space:

Por vezes ele surpreendia-a distraída, pensando em coisas, e atirava bruscamente a pergunta, como se lhe pegasse pelos ombros, de repente: em que está a pensar? Em nada, dizia sempre. Porque era preciso defender-se contra ele, soube, sentindo que estava presa.

[He would sometimes catch her by surprise, distracted, thinking about things, and then suddenly bombard her with questions, as if he were grabbing her by the shoulders: what are you thinking about? Nothing, she would always say. Because

it was necessary to defend herself against him, she could tell, sensing that she was trapped.] (61)

Having read what the text relates of Lída's thoughts, we as readers know that her terse answers ("em nada") to Afonso are lies, which she tells to protect herself, and also to remind him (and herself) that he is not in total control. Unsure of her own ability to express herself, she once again returns to her mental exercises, projecting her own reality onto her imagination. However, after her sudden insecurity, she is only able to "traduzir o que pensava através de semelhanças longínquas" [translate what she was thinking through distant similarities] (53). These similarities emerge in the form of Lavínia.

1.2 Lavínia as a thought experiment: A dream within a dream?

The relationship between Lída and Lavínia is an important one that has not seen much critical analysis. The book summary from the introduction reveals Lavínia to be Lída's mother, and most critics have affirmed this to be the case (Duarte 9; Leal 5; Rocha 101; Sadlier 104, 107; Santos 2). Few critics probe the relationship in depth, simply relying on the assumption of a maternal relationship. As a result, the interaction between the two main characters of the novel (Lavínia comes to assume an even more important role than Afonso) is generally accepted to be that of a mother and daughter and no further consideration is given to the matter.

However, there is another interpretation of their relationship that is suggested by Gerald Moser; he describes Lavínia as fiction, a figure dreamt up by Lída in her wild imaginings (264). This interpretation completely alters the relationship between the two women, erasing the maternal bond between them. Yet despite its uniqueness of his affirmation, Moser, like the others, does not explain himself any further.

Not surprisingly, given the complex nature and complicated narrative structure of the novel, this relationship does not lend itself completely to either explanation. Given that none of the analyses cited above offer any evidence for their assumptions, we must return to the text itself in order to determine which interpretation is more accurate, examining first the evidence for the predominant view that Lavínia is Lídia's mother to then look at how the text might lead us to accept Moser's view. Before we can begin to weigh these two viewpoints against each other, we should remember the way Lavínia emerges as a presence in the novel.

The conversation between the imagined couple from the first lines of *O silêncio* concerns the imagined woman's memories of her childhood. She tells of the house she lived in, the physical arrangement of things as she recalls them, and of the people who live in her memory. Strictly speaking, these memories would belong to the imagined woman, but since we regard her as an imaginary, mental projection of Lídia, it is safe to assume that these are Lídia's memories being filtered through the imagined character.

The way she tells about her childhood betrays a familiarity on a personal level that leads us to further believe that these are Lídia's actual memories. She describes details with the same foggy acuteness with which we often recall childhood memories, in which visual details often survive but without context, or where facts are irrefutable but ultimately without meaning. For example, the location of flowers in relation to the garden wall, the appearance and position of a cat, and the precise kinds of flowers Lavínia would or would not have placed on the table are described vividly across pages. Interspersed with these precise descriptions are the woman's (or Lídia's) confessions that she cannot remember what happened or simply does not know how to describe the scene. For example, when the woman is prompted by the imagined man to describe Herberto (who we learn later is Lavínia's lover), we read:

Bem, disse a mulher depois de pensar um pouco. Não consigo ver a cara dele. Sei apenas que traz sempre no bolso um pacote de doces e quando me pega ao colo para beijar-me tem um perfume discreto a tabaco de cachimbo.

[Well, said the woman after thinking for a bit. I can't see his face. I only know that he always carries a package of candies in his pocket, and that when he sits me on his lap to kiss me there is a slight odor of pipe tobacco.] (16)

Although we can see the narrative framework of the imagined couple built around this story, we have no reason to believe that the story itself is not drawn directly from Lídia's memory, even though the imagined woman never refers to Lavínia as her mother. Towards the end of the novel, the mother-daughter relationship is cemented into place as the narrative once again turns to the imagined couple in their discussion. The man comments that the story the woman has been telling about her mother was nothing more than an isolated experience (107). The woman rebuts his obvious criticism of the act, yet does not argue his statement that Lavínia was her mother. Assuming these memories to be Lídia's, we accept that Lavínia is, in fact, her mother.

However, this does not allow us to dismiss so easily the notion that Lavínia is a character merely imagined by Lídia. The added element of the imagined woman between the two women separates them into real and imagined spheres of existence. Lídia, by the sea, imagines the woman, also by the sea, who tells Lavínia's story to the imagined man. But if the woman is imaginary, does that mean that the story of Lavínia is also mere imagination? There are clues within the text that seem to indicate so, or that at least part of Lavínia's story is a fiction, an invention.

As the woman tells the story, she is very overt in the poetic liberties she takes throughout the telling—it truly is a story she is weaving, and not just the description of things as she

remembers them. For example, she personifies the house, saying that it “*movia-se mansamente, era uma casa mansa, que parecia perfeitamente domesticada, apenas com uma leve frustração quando sorria, abrindo devagar a porta da entrada*” [moved about gently, it was a very gentle house, that appeared perfectly domesticated, with only a mild frustration whenever it smiled, the front door opening slowly] (15), and that as a child, she and others would call out to it to turn more slowly, that summer might linger a little longer, while the house purred like an enormous cat. While we can assume that the story being told concerns actual memories, we must also understand the whole account in consideration of these fantastic elements.

This is particularly true towards the end of her story (that is, before Afonso interrupts Lídia’s thoughts, cutting the story short), as the explicit fiction and fantasy begin to center on Lavínia herself. The story continues realistically: unable to leave Alfredo and Lavínia’s house because of a storm, Herberto is forced to spend the night. When Lavínia quietly tiptoes toward his room, the credibility of the account is suddenly swept away: Lavínia passes through the closed door without opening it, and the passage ends with the two mounting brooms and flying out into the night through the open window (19).

Hence the problem regarding Lavínia’s existence and her relationship to Lídia: it may well be that Lídia’s mother was Lavínia, but due to the blatant fiction we as readers have to deduce that the Lavínia the imagined woman and man are speaking about is an adaptation, a fictionalization of the real Lavínia. It may be that the Lavínia described resembles or approximates Lídia’s actual mother, but are unable to know, as we only learn of her through the lens of Lídia’s imagination and monologues. In any case, the Lavínia described here and later in the novel is a fictional character, perhaps based on reality, but ultimately an invention of Lídia’s capable imagination.

For further proof of the fictional nature of Lavínia, we can look at the nature of her character before and after Afonso's interruption. We recall that after the intrusion, Lídia realizes to herself that "agora a imagem estava partida...e não havia outra coisa para fazer com ela senão deixá-la resvalar para nada" [now the image was broken...and there was nothing that could be done now except to let it slide into nothingness] (20). The image spoken of is the story of Lavínia, or rather, Lavínia herself. Interestingly, as Lídia allows the image to slide away, Lavínia disappears from the narrative as well, not to reemerge until several pages later.

The context for her reappearance provides additional evidence that she exists only as an object in Lídia's imagination. After Lídia gains self-assurance through her momentary victory over Afonso, only to falter and doubt herself, the text relates her feeling "como se o verdadeiro sentido lhe escapasse" [as if the real meaning had escaped her] (52-53). She is then only able to "traduzir o que pensava através de semelhanças longínquas" [translate what she was thinking through distant similarities] (53). The first iteration of Lavínia in Lídia's imagination was as another person, a different person in different circumstances, merely the object of a conversation. The reappeared version of Lavínia, on the other hand, resembles very closely Lídia herself—in many cases, the text describes both them and their situations with identical language, creating in Lavínia a resemblance to Lídia "through distant similarities."

Having once discarded the image of Lavínia after Afonso's interruption shattered it, Lídia now readopts Lavínia as the focus of her thought experiments, this time forming her after her own image. The mother, reimagined, becomes the mirror of the daughter, through which Lídia again—as she had done before with the imagined conversation—weighs her own situation and choices, and acts according to what she discovers.

In this way, both of the above-cited interpretations about Lavínia are true; she is both Lída's mother and invention, recreated first as a memory of the past and then as a projection of the present and future. The dual nature of her role is a testament to the skillful complexity of the novel, meaning that we cannot—and should not—rely on one of these interpretations over the other. To classify the relationship between the two women as merely that between mother and daughter would deny the deftness with which Lída is able to manipulate the image of Lavínia in her imagination. Conversely, to treat the relationship as solely imaginary would undermine the real emotion that Lída has with regards to Lavínia, and how deep an influence Lavínia has on her; if she were purely imaginary, Lavínia might be too easily swept away. Yet because she is real (or at least based on someone real, regardless of any imagined details), her effect on Lída is indelible and intimate. Maintaining a vision of both of these co-existing relationships helps us to see the course that Lída ultimately takes on her quest of self-discovery.

First, let us examine the way in which Lída relates to Lavínia as her mother. From the onset of the novel the two are tied together by the obvious parallel between their names. However obvious it may be, this similarity is more than simply superficial. As the imagined woman describes Lavínia to the imagined man, she relates a bit of a dialogue that she recalls between Herberto, Lavínia's lover, and Alfredo, her oblivious husband.

The two are discussing how Lavínia came to Portugal as an emigrant from Russia, and how she adopted the name "Lavínia" because it was easier to pronounce, and was similar to her real name: "Lavínia fica-lhe bem, confirma Herberto, movendo a mão que segura o cachimbo. Parece um nome de flor. E depois é uma palavra esdrúxula, sobe até um ponto alto e parte-se de repente" [Lavínia fits her well, confirms Herberto, waving with the hand that held his cigar. Seems like the name of a flower. And after all, it is a strange word that comes up to a high point

then suddenly takes off] (18). Later on in the novel, Afonso recalls a conversation with Jorge, a minor character and Lúdia's only relative after Alfredo's death, in which Jorge describes Lúdia (Afonso is the only one present, but Jorge's words seem directed to no one in particular): "Lúdia, íris, ígnia, um nome esdrúxulo, que sobe até a um ponto fino e alto e se parte de repente, o i quebrado, violado, como uma palavra dita" [Lúdia, iris, igneous, a strange name, which comes up to a fine, high point and suddenly takes off, the i broken, violated, like a word when spoken] (48).

These parallel descriptions of the two women bind the women together, as Sadlier affirms, "These nearly identical comments suggest the way in which the women's names are irrevocably linked to the idea of a "sudden taking off," as if there were something unpredictable, indomitable, or unretrievable about both of them" (107). There is also some foreshadowing, as at later stages in the novel both Lavínia and Lúdia "take off" suddenly, leaving their companions. Additionally the word "esdrúxula", while translated here as "strange," also includes a host of other meanings, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

Jane Rodrigues dos Santos points to another similarity between the women's names, in that they both begin with the letter "L", while surrounded by characters whose names all begin with "A"—Alfredo, Afonso, Alcina (Afonso's wife) and Ana (Alcina's maid) (2). Interestingly enough, the characterizations of Lúdia and Lavínia quoted above both come from the only two characters whose names do not fall into this pattern: Herberto and Jorge.

While these patterns may seem coincidental, or superficial at best, they subtly group the characters into categories (although the letters themselves have no intrinsic meaning). The characters whose names begin with "A" are all strictly governed by order, organization, and routine. In direct contrast with these are Lavínia and Lúdia, who find themselves forced to live

under this imposed order. The final two characters do not fit into either group, because they are characters who figure into the text so minimally—Herberto is not much more than Lavínia’s means of escape from Alfredo, and Jorge’s only purpose seems to be to echo Herberto’s thoughts about Lavínia, refocusing them on Lídia—that to categorize is both impossible and pointless. They do not fit any pattern because they do not need to. Ultimately, grouping characters by their names pits Lavínia and Lídia against all other characters; it is them against the world.

This does not mean that Lídia and Lavínia are on even terms with each other. Both characters struggle against the order and structure imposed by the “A” characters, but Lídia struggles against Lavínia as well. While bound together by their “whimsical” names (Sadlier, 107), the nature of their relationship does more to alienate Lídia from her mother than endear her to her.

To begin with, Lavínia’s running away with Herberto is an experience “that would severely impact her daughter” (Duarte 59) during Lídia’s childhood. We learn from the imagined conversation that after Lavínia returns home to Alfredo after her encounter with Herberto, she and Lídia would sit together in the study listening to the rain as the seasons pass, with Lavínia smoking through her long black cigarette holder (20). While we might not infer from this passage that they are specifically happy, we can at least consider the time they share to be untroubled. We learn differently later on after Lídia has conducted her thought experiments through the “distant similarity” she sees in Lavínia. Through monologue, Lídia criticizes the memory of her mother:

Lembro-me de te ver fumar, pela casa, com a tua boquilha negra e longa, o ar distraído, ausente, o cigarro-apoio, a cortina de fumo isolando-te, os dias em que as coisas ficavam longe...

Vejo-te daqui, encostada à janela, a cabeça apoiada aos vidros, chamo-te baixo e sei que não irás ouvir, jamais ouvias quando chamavam por ti...

[I remember seeing you smoking, around the house, with your long black cigarette holder, a distracted air, absent, the cigarette holder, the curtain of smoke isolating you, the days in which everything seemed distant...]

I see you from here, leaned against the window, your head pressed against the glass, I call you quietly and I know that you will not hear, you never heard it when they came calling for you...] (63)

The hours passed together through the rain were not moments of familial joy, but of estrangement, detachment. The curtain of smoke around Lavínia was a barrier against her daughter through which she could not be seen, through which she was unreachable, absent, distant. The rain was not the backdrop for a happy memory, but the only sound to fill the void of silence between the two.

The silence from her mother is the most aggravating part of her childhood, as the monologue continues, and we see that she regards her mother as a changed woman who may have once been beautiful (physically as well as in her gestures and personality), but is now disfigured: “disseram: Impossível acreditar que ela alguma vez tivesse sido assim bonita. Porque com o tempo te tinhas tornado outra mulher, perfeitamente silenciosa e alheada” [they said: It’s impossible to believe that once upon a time she was beautiful. Because with time you turned yourself into another woman, perfectly silent and oblivious] (64). Denise Rocha, a university professor in Brazil, points out another specific way in which Lavínia’s silence further alienated her:

Para sua enteada Lída, Alfredo explicava algumas fotos de Lavínia...As diferentes representações imagéticas de Lavínia, em diversas poses, mostram a ausência de Lída. A foto da maternidade não existia.

Muitos dos conflitos e inseguranças de Lída refletem um trauma do passado: de um lado, o estranho comportamento de sua mãe Lavínia...seu egoísmo ao desprezar Alfredo e a filha, e ao fugir para viver com o amante; e a opção pessoal em acabar com a própria existência.

[For his stepdaughter Lída, Alfredo would explain some of the photos of Lavínia...The many different portraits of Lavínia, in diverse poses, reveal Lída to be absent. The portrait of her as a mother did not exist.

Many of Lída's conflicts and insecurities reflect a trauma from the past: on the one hand, the strange behavior of her mother Lavínia...her selfishness in neglecting Alfredo and her daughter, and running away to live with her lover; and her personal decision to end her own existence.] (117-118)

Rocha demonstrates how Lída's traumatic childhood with an absent and uncommunicative mother leads her to action: she resolves to take a different course of action in her own life, and to someday repay her mother for her neglect, vowing

Um dia voltarei...e tu estarás morta...e para castigar-te de sempre teres sido ausente pegarei nas agulhas que seguras ainda, como sempre absorta e fatigada, e espetá-las-ei ternamente nos teus olhos.

[Someday I shall return...and you will be dead...and to punish you for always having been absent I will take the knitting needles that you still clutch, absorbed and worn-out like always, and I shall tenderly stab them into your eyes.] (65)

Lídia's declaration against her mother is particularly interesting, as Rocha has already alluded to Lavínia's eventual suicide: Lídia asserts that her mother would be dead, while betraying an inclination to kill her again if she weren't. This brings up an important issue, which we will revisit in Chapter 2.

From this passage we also see the way Lídia struggles violently against the empty family ties that bind her to her mother, yet in her struggle there is a sense of irony, as the similarities between her and Lavínia run deep, much deeper than the analogy of their names. For example, the passage cited just now is an echo of a previous one in which Lídia, lying on the beach, remarks to herself how the sunlight pierces through the holes in her straw hat, like needles in her eyes (24). The passage in which Lídia imagines Lavínia as aged and transformed by her obliviousness, she describes her as "a woman lying down, eyes closed"—an identical description of herself from earlier, when she imagined herself as Afonso's patient (48-49).

Perhaps it is her inherited tendencies, or perhaps it is the deliberate product of her imagination: what she projects onto Lavínia from her reality is the incarnation of everything she hates about herself. As Lídia's thought experiments continue, Lavínia comes to represent the part of Lídia that most resembles her mother, the part of herself that is still dominated by Afonso, that stray cat part of her always returns to his master, admitting to herself that,

Ele talvez não precisava dela, pensou, mas ela só junto dele encontrava paz...
...e o homem que está inclinado sobre a mesa sente a sua presença [a do gato]
ainda antes de levantar a cabeça e alegra-se porque ele [o gato] volta sempre,
apesar de a porta estar aberta, e de ser livre de não voltar.

[He perhaps had no need of her, she thought, but it was only by his side that she could find peace...]

...and the man crouched over the desk feels [the cat's] presence even before looking up and is pleased because [the cat] always returns, despite the door being open, and [the cat] being free to not come back.] (51)

This internal monologue concerning the cat returning to its master parallels Lavínia's relationship to Alfredo: dominated, made to bend to his rules, she ultimately comes home at the end of every day. As she sees Lavínia's tendencies in herself, Lídia projects those into her imagination, focusing on the hypothetical question of "what would Lavínia do?" so that she can make her own independent decisions. At times, her path follows her mother's perfectly, and at others, she avoids mimicking her imaginary doppelganger. There are other instances in which the two women's experiences seem to be narrated simultaneously, so that an ambiguous passage might be about either one or both of them, without us as readers being able to tell for certain. On a few of these occasions, Lídia comes to appreciate her mother, despite the grudges she harbors against her.

We should remember that throughout all of her thought experiments, Lídia is still after the one thing she was searching for in the beginning: to find "a means of connection, through words...that was, more than anything else, with herself" (11). Everything she conceives as she positions and observes Lavínia in her imagination is designed to move her towards this goal.

Although there are many situations in which the two women find themselves in similar situations (which, as stated, is a deliberate part of Lídia's imagination), one particular similarity stands out in the text. When Lavínia is boarding the train to meet Herberto, the text follows her from the station into the train, describes the way she sits, arranges her things, and her anxiety in knowing that there is only a short time until the train stops and she can get out. She disembarks, climbs into a taxi and arrives at the hotel where she finds Herberto's reservation. "Sobe no

elevador...bate na porta logo aberta, Herberto abraça-a, beija-a longamente na boca, despe-a devagar. Deitar-se contra o seu corpo” [She takes the elevator up, knocks on the door which soon opens, Herberto embraces her, kisses her lips for a long time, slowly undresses her. To lie down against her body] (75).

These lines are directly followed by two lines of empty space, after which we read these words, describing Lídia: “Subir no elevador, abrir a porta, abraçar Afonso. Ele beija-a longamente na boca, despe-a devagar. Deitar-se contra o seu corpo” [To take the elevator up, open the door, to embrace Afonso. He kisses her lips for a long time, slowly undresses her. To lie down against her body] (75).

The parallel language of these passages, and their immediate relative proximity on the page connect them with a sense of continuity, as if it were actually one episode with a mere change of cast in the middle. The scene builds Lavínia up to meet Herberto, but once she does the passage suddenly whisks us away to an identical encounter between Lídia and Afonso, after which Lídia contemplates waking up the next morning with Afonso already gone. Whereas Lavínia anticipates the encounter, Lídia reflects on what happens afterward.

Through this identical circumstance, a subtle difference between the two women is observed. Anxious to meet Herberto, Lavínia finds herself delighted with herself that she has taken the courage to make her own decision and arrange her own life. This recognition comes on the heels of her taking in the arrangement of the things around her:

ela recosta-se melhor no estofado da cadeira, reclinando a cabeça para trás, vê o casaco bem dobrado, acomodado no espaço livre que ficava ainda na rede, ao lado da mala, e tudo isso a impressiona agradavelmente, a existência de um lugar para cada coisa...as formas geométricas

[she adjusts herself to lie back more easily on her padded chair, leans her head back, sees her coat neatly folded, arranged in the remaining space in the compartment, next to her suitcase, and all this impressed her pleasantly, that there was a place for everything...the geometric forms] (73)

The order she recognizes, and in which she later arranges the things in her purse as her journey nears its end, is an echo of both Alfredo and Afonso and their meticulously organized spaces, and their need to impose an order on chaos. Ironically, while Lavínia prides herself on her decision to take her life in her own hands by leaving Alfredo, she is in fact mimicking his patterns and habits.

On the other hand, Lídia, who is aware of this irony (it is, after all, in her imagination that this has taken place), approaches the scene differently. She recognizes that Lavínia has again become the woman lying down, eyes closed, about to undergo surgery to find “a new face emerging...a woman, who did not know her own form and so sought it through a man” (49). Although she has left Alfredo, Lavínia is still seeking for herself through Herberto, and still betrays the habits of order and structure that Alfredo thrust upon her—“é preciso aprender a língua do país em que se vive, Lavínia” [it is necessary to learn the language of the country in which you live, Lavínia] (67). Lídia sees Lavínia as deluding herself, seeing only falsehood in her apparent transgression of male dominance.

In response to this realization, Lídia wonders to herself if it is Afonso’s presence that immobilizes her and keeps her his, and if when he is far, she is able to rediscover herself, to find her own form—the very thing she has been searching for. Acting differently from her mirror-image-Lavínia, Lídia begins to set the house in disorder, to disrupt Afonso’s great, organized world (75).

From this point, Lídia begins to purposefully put things out of place, at one point dumping a handful of rice on the floor and watching the grains scatter, at another time by hiding one of his cuff-links (82-83). As he searches for the missing ornament, he mocks her wild fantasies, apparently suffering a nervous breakdown, ranting and raving as he continues to mock and look. She breaks into his rant, replying briefly (and likely only to herself) and revealing the game behind her actions: “você não entende que atrás do botão que falta toda a casa se desmorona” [you don’t understand that behind the missing cuff-link, your entire house crumbles] (83).

Recognizing the ability she has to bring Afonso’s entire world crashing down, simply through a misplaced item, for example, Lídia accepts this power as a part of the means of expression she has been looking for. Rather than subject herself to Afonso’s order, as Lavínia had done under Alfredo, Lídia consciously acts differently than Lavínia (although Lavínia did in small ways disrupt the order of Alfredo’s house—such as turning the blades of the knives to the outside when setting the table). “What would Lavínia do?” becomes a guiding force for Lídia, as she plays out her experiments in her mind. However, although she rejects Lavínia, she also comes to recognize what it was that she was attempting to do.

This is particularly noticeable in a very long and ambiguous passage in the middle of the novel. Its ambiguity comes from never identifying the characters involved—it could be a description of Lavínia and her struggle against Alfredo, or it could portray Lídia’s similar conflict with Afonso. We are forced to rely on other details within the passage to determine which woman it pertains to. However, these details themselves are vague—there seems to be equal support for either woman. For example, the woman described is painting a canvas (a reference to Lídia) and imagines records spinning in silence (an allusion to Afonso). On the other

hand, there is mention of a class (referring to Alfredo's position as a professor of Portuguese) and of burning tobacco (clearly attributed to Lavínia). Equally present are other duplicitous details which could apply equally to both—the strongest of which is the image of a cat who, refusing to be tamed, lies coiled up, ready to pounce ferociously—a symbol of the repression felt by both women. Another image is that of an “immoveable house” [uma casa imóvel] (59), in contrast to the fantastically personified house from Lídia's childhood (which was Lavínia's house as well), which could turn itself about. (15)

This ambiguity is resolved, or rather, validated by two sections within the passage, which imply that it is purposely applicable to both women. The first describes the repression under which the two women (applied universally, all women) have to live:

A força dele sobre ela era assim uma força de identificação que a levava a perder os seus próprios contornos, somando-a, apenas, à vida que era a dele, e por isso ela vagueava, diluída, na casa que era a dele, e não a dela?

[His strength over her was really a force of identification that caused her to lose her own contour, making her just another part of the life that was his, and was it because of this that she wavered, watered down, in the house that was his, and not her own?] (59)

We cannot tell which of the women is thinking these lines, because the description of the house fits them both perfectly. Lídia finds herself in Afonso's home after he is gone, but Lavínia similarly was brought to Alfredo's home in Portugal, an emigrant from Russia. Gaston Bachelard comments that the home space is a “virtuous” one of “shelter;” “the house, quite obviously, is a privileged entity” (12). Yet for both of these women (and women at large), trapped within a male-imposed domesticity, the home holds nothing that is privileged or virtuous but rather,

empty, oppressive, and silent. Again personifying the home space, Lídia assigns to it haunting, prison-like qualities, imagining that Alfredo's house had swallowed Lavínia up, and that Alfredo himself had thrown away the key (82).

In this way, Lídia identifies and sympathizes with Lavínia. She perceives Afonso's attempts to domesticate her, as a cat, and to place her under the same domestic paralysis as his wife Alcina, the same which Alfredo had inflicted upon Lavínia: "se não te deres conta e não lutares depressa, esta casa será, de repente, a outra, de onde procurastes, através de mim, uma saída" [if you do not realize this and fight against it quickly, this house will suddenly become the other, from which you sought, through me, an escape] (84).

Because she is able to identify with Lavínia's situation, she comes to defend Lavínia's desperate actions—including her suicide—in a continuation of the imagined conversation. The man speaks first, trying to minimize Lavínia's death by saying it was not a suicide, but an accidental overdose of sedatives, to which the woman responds,

mas não vê que a experiência individual e isolada de uma mãe, que por acaso foi a sua, não tem qualquer significado exemplar, moral ou social,
mas não vê que você não aceita o suicídio porque persiste em afirmar que nenhum gesto de revolta se admite,
[but you don't see that the individual and isolated experience of a mother, who happened to be yours, has no exemplary moral or social meaning,
but you don't see that you cannot accept suicide because you persist in claiming that no gesture of revolt is admissible,] (107)

Although Lídia herself does not opt for suicide as a means of escape (choosing not to follow Lavínia's path), she defends her mother's actions, since she is able to see clearly her

motives for doing so: “porque não pudeste levar-te a ti mesma voltaste para trás e procuraste na morte uma saída” [because you couldn’t get yourself out, you turned back and looked to death for an exit] (83). Lavínia’s actions echo the words of Michel Foucault, who suggests that suicide is the most “private” form of escape from tyranny, that “death was the manner in which a terrestrial sovereignty was relieved by another, singularly more powerful sovereignty...death is power’s limit” (138).

There is, from the openly ambiguous passage cited above, another section which helps us to see that the passage is meant to apply equally to both Lavínia and Lídia. It does not do so by establishing a means of identification for them both, but rather through the creation of a vicious cycle in which both women (and again, all women) are trapped: “De repente passaram mil anos, e tudo o que acontecer será igual ao já acontecido” [Suddenly a thousand years passed, and everything that happens will be the same as what has already happened] (59). By projecting Lavínia into her imagination and perceiving her as a “distant similarity,” Lídia recognizes that she, like Afonso, must “realize and fight against this quickly, or else this house [her life] will suddenly become the other [Lavínia’s].” She does not want to repeat Lavínia’s mistakes, as seen the in the next passage.

1.3 “Há um mundo que se quebra quando eu (não) falo”: Power through silence

Towards the end of the novel there are two separate blocks of text that begin with similar language. Unlike the encounter between Lavínia/Lídia and Herberto/Afonso, these two passages’ equal beginnings signal not a continuity between them, but a shared starting point from which Lavínia’s and Lídia’s paths diverge. Regarding Lavínia, the text relates:

Acorda cedo, fecha sem ruído a porta atrás de si e atravessa o jardim segurando uma pequena mala branca...levanta a mão para uma luz verde que certamente é um táxi, mas a luz não pára, desliza muito e dilui-se na noite...

Uma nova luz verde se aproxima e de novo ela levanta a mão, passa tão perto que ela quase lhe toca com a ponta dos dedos, mas também desta vez continua correndo e se desmancha...o seu corpo é leve mas informe

[She awakes early, closes the door noiselessly behind her and crosses the garden carrying a small white suitcase...she raises her hand toward a green light that is certainly a taxi, but the light does not stop, it slips away and fades into the night...

A new green light approaches and she again hails it with her hand, it passes so close she almost touches it with her fingertips, but this time it too races away and breaks up...her body is light, but formless] (114-115)

Lavínia had previously used a taxi to take her from the station to the hotel where Herberto was waiting for her, but now she finds that it fails her—try as she might, she is unable to flag one down. The result is that she ends up disoriented, lost, and in the end everything in this puzzling nightmare is dead—the passengers on the bus, the driver, and in the end she ingests a fiery liquid which runs down her throat, and her blood begins to flow, “sangue como uma aguda lâmina de faca” [blood like the sharp blade of a knife] (118) as she commits suicide by overdose.

The taxi in Lavínia’s case might seem circumstantial, or as a small part of the confusion depicted (which carries on for nearly three pages), until we compare its role in the parallel passage with Lídia:

Acorda cedo, fecha sem ruído a porta atrás de si, entra num táxi, desliza depressa pelas ruas, pára diante do edifício claro, sobe as escadas...

Uma luz verde pára perto e leva-a consigo, sem peso

[She awakes early, closes the door noiselessly behind her, climbs into a taxi
[which] glides off quickly down the streets, stops in front of the white building,
climbs the stairs...

A green light stops close by and takes her with it, weightlessly] (118-119)

Lídia effortlessly catches a cab, and similarly, it takes her very purposefully where she wants to go. We learn that the white building is the hospital where Afonso works, but that her reason for going there is not what Afonso thinks: “Afonso...atravessa rapidamente o átrio, sorri ao vê-la, vinha procurar-me, dizes, não, não vinha procurar-te, digo, e saio a porta, tomo o primeiro taxi” [Afonso...quickly crosses the atrium, smiles upon seeing her, you came here to see me, you say, no, I did not come to see you, I say, and I exit, I take the first taxi] (121). Lídia is able to get where she needs to go quickly because of the decision she made before, to no longer roam the night as the stray cat, eventually to return to her master. She has purpose, and it takes her to her destination. On the other hand, Lavínia, who still represents the wandering stray, is unable to find her way, because she doesn’t have one. The taxi represents to Lídia her having finally found her way, her self-expression, her long-sought after “means of connection...with herself;” she is able to affect her transgression without dying, although death is still involved.

This death is that of her unborn child with Afonso; the reason for her visit to the hospital was to have the child aborted. The process of the abortion, the death of Lídia’s unborn child, is detailed in language identical to that which describes Lavínia’s suicide: “um fio de sangue escorrendo, como uma aguda lâmina de faca” [a line of streaming blood, like the sharp blade of a knife] (120). The parallel language establishes another connection between the two, as characterized by Susan Bozkurt in her 2011 thesis:

In the explicit images of suicide and abortion characters like...Lavínia and Lídia affirm their freedom over their existence...Death, in this context, becomes a point of departure, where a new identity can be formed. Teolinda Gersão's female protagonists struggle to break free from old societal structures and fight for freedom. (9)

Along with their struggle to transgress imposed societal norms and order, there is the search for personal expression which Lídia has been trying to achieve since the first lines of *O silêncio*. The abortion of her child is in fact the culmination of this expression, her first action of asserting her newly discovered self-connection, on multiple levels.

On a physical level, Lídia's abortion represents her avoiding her mother's mistake; this act does not claim her life in the way Lavínia's suicide claimed hers. In a book review shortly after *O silêncio*'s publication, Cristina Cordeiro Oliveira claims that Lavínia's suicide actually helped Lídia to find her own expression: "ao destruir a imagem da mãe, Lídia abandonará a espiral que era a forma da sua hesitação...para olhar o presente e caminhar face ao futuro" [upon destroying the image of her mother, Lídia will abandon the spiral that was her form of hesitation...to look at the present and move forward facing the future] (82). Additionally, with Lídia's resolve not to follow in her mother's footsteps, she avoids the problem of becoming an absent, oppressive mother by eliminating motherhood altogether.

There is an interesting passage at the hospital in which the nurses talk with a woman who has many children about sterilization procedures. The woman refuses, because her husband receives a check for each child, with which he buys alcohol (95). Lídia's decision to abort Afonso's child is a conscious decision to not be exploited by him, and to avert having his order imposed upon her child, as seen again toward the end of the novel.

Part of Lídia's imagined, horrific future dominated by silence is that parents will drug their children to keep them quiet (112, Moser 264). When Afonso buys a playpen for their future child and sets it up at home, Lídia sees the playpen as another sort of infant tranquilizer, which fits both into her visions of a future devoid of freedom and into Afonso's dominant order of things. Leaving the hospital after the abortion and her brief exchange with Afonso in the lobby, she returns to the house, folds up the playpen and puts it away, (admittedly, because there is no longer a child to put in it) as a lasting protest against him. At the very end of the novel she declares, "estou livre e solta, meu filho livre e solto que ninguém irá prender nunca...o parque [está] fechado no armário" [I am loosed and free, my child is loosed and free and no one will ever contain him...the playpen [is] folded up in the closet] (122). She determines that her child is free from Afonso's influence not only from the abortion, but also by removing any trace of that influence—in an ironic way, by "rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's:" as the playpen would have designated an orderly space for her child, so she disposes of it in an orderly way, packing it neatly away.

The abortion also carries meaning on a metaphysical level, related to Lídia's own awareness of her self-expression. Before her momentary victory over Afonso, as described earlier in this chapter, a victory which she soon lost hold of because of her own self-doubts, Lídia had described her nascent expression as though she were "transportando a sua própria forma, soube, como uma mulher grávida transporta um filho" [transporting her own form...as a pregnant woman carries a child] (50). However, it is only a few pages later that she begins to question her triumph, "equivoca[ndo]-se...e só consegui[ndo] traduzir o que pensava através de semelhanças longínquas, como se o verdadeiro sentido lhe escapasse" [waver[ing]...and only

manag[ing] to translate what she was thinking through distant similarities, as if the real meaning had escaped her] (52-3).

As a woman trying to find her own expression through the man (through beating him at his own game of words), she won; however, this victory ultimately spells defeat, as she loses her expression almost as quickly as she had found it. This loss, though, enabled her to find herself again through a different path, through her thought experiments involving Lavínia (in a way, a “connection with herself”) and not with the man. What she gained from the man was easily lost, but this loss empowered her. By aborting the child she had conceived with Afonso, Lídia is able to find her own expression, her own way of transgressing the domesticating, suffocating norms that he tries to impose upon her. To repeat Bozkurt, “Death...becomes a point of departure, where a new identity can be formed” (9).

An identity, an expression, “a means of connection, through words...that was, more than anything else, with herself:” this is what Lídia has been searching for throughout the novel. By using her imagination, by attempting to open a dialogue with Afonso directly, by reflecting on her own thoughts in her monologues and by replaying and rewriting her memories of Lavínia, Lídia has searched to find this expression of identity specifically “through words.” In the final episode of the novel, as Lídia reveals how she has become the master of words:

não podes atingir-me...virá de novo o silêncio...porquê, perguntas, louca, e também agora tentarás calar-me, mas não podes, não poderás nunca mais, você não podia, dizes, não podia, mas todas as palavras são minhas, de repente, e há um mundo que se quebra quando eu falo...

[you cannot reach me...once again the silence will enter in...why, you ask, you crazy woman, and you will also try to shut me up, but you can't, you never can,

you couldn't have, you say, you couldn't have, but all the words are suddenly mine, now, and there is a world which shatters when I speak...] (122-123)

The compacting of Afonso's words within Lúcia's words makes it difficult at first to follow their conversation (which carries on in a single sentence for nearly two pages), but upon rereading, we realize that Lúcia has turned the tables on Afonso: he is the one interjecting wildly, screaming at her, while she calmly points out the irony of "the chaos with [his] yelling and wild gestures" when she has left his house clean and organized, down to the neatly pressed clothes in the drawers (122). Through her deliberate motions to introduce chaos into his life, she has caused him to lose his grasp on his precisely organized physical space, which in turn leads him to lose control over his own speech, of which he had previously been master. He turns on her, trying to cage her like an animal, slapping her twice, but she calmly responds, "o dia é claro e não podes atingir-me...vou-me embora" [the day is bright and you cannot reach me...I am leaving] (123). As she had previously felt a sense of self-confidence and power earlier in the novel (then subsequently lost through her own self-doubt), the same feeling comes again, now that she has found a lasting form of expression.

However, she did not discover this expression during the moment in which she declared Afonso's defeat to him; that was merely the pronouncement of her triumph. The realization of her expression came several pages earlier, in the section of the text that follows the missing cuff-link. Rather than trying to comply with Afonso's order and speak according to his rules, Lúcia discovers the already mentioned power of disruption in place of order—"behind the missing cuff-link, your entire house crumbles" (83)—and in place of speech, silence:

Agora ele parou de procurar, entra na cozinha e diz uma frase qualquer, uma frase que não quebra o silêncio, este silêncio que cresce, enche de súbito a casa, invade

todas as coisas, rapidamente ele começa a dizer mais frases, não importa quais, desde que nos distraiam do essencial, mas o que quer que digas eu acabarei sempre por quebrar o silêncio, porque jamais, jamais aceitarei a tua regra de jogo...

[Now he stopped looking [for the cuff-link], he goes into the kitchen and says something random, a phrase which does not break the silence, this silence which grows, fills the house unnoticed, invades everything, he quickly begins to say more, it doesn't matter what, as long as it distracts us from what is important, but no matter what you say I will always be the one to break the silence, because I will never, ever accept your rules to the game...] (83-84)

Lídia senses the silence and also that she is in control of it—Afonso, who had before censured her and reduced her to silence, both in verbal speech and in her thoughts to herself, now finds himself trapped by this suffocating force. As Lídia declares, “I will always be the one to break the silence”, indeed it is she who refuses to answer his questions, “Em que está a pensar? perguntou-lhe. Em nada, disse” [What are you thinking about? he asked. Nothing, she said] (99). She refuses to break the silence until her victory is completely assured. Thus, when she says “there is a world which shatters when I speak,” she might as well be saying, “there is a world which shatters when I choose not to speak.” Her deliberate silence is a form of expression—which she has sought for throughout the novel—but also of control, of dominating Afonso’s world. Although “the male imagination constructs a mute ideal...in woman” (Brooke-Rose 14), it is precisely this silence which leads to Afonso’s defeat.

After Lídia leaves, Afonso tries to regain control, but even in her absence, is unable to say anything meaningful. From the window he calls down to her, but the silence remains

unbroken and his words change nothing: “ela estava de repente fora do seu alcance, caminhando, abrindo passagem com o corpo...” [she was suddenly beyond his grasp, walking, opening the way before her with her body...] (124).

1.4 Conclusion: “A means of expression...” through words?

The novel’s concluding description of Lídia as she opens the way with her body reveals how her search for expression has changed from a search “through words” to other means: on a verbal level, she has abandoned words in favor of silence, adding to it a physical, bodily element of disorder. These two forces undo Afonso and he is unable to stand against them. Lídia’s triumph—both over Afonso, and over herself—echoes the statement by philosopher Jean Paul Sartre: “Silence itself is defined in relationship to words... This silence is a moment of language; being silent is not being dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep speaking” (38).

In this light, her silence in no way precludes the fulfillment of her quest. On the contrary, the silence that she learns to control enables her to ultimately say what she needs, whether or not she is speaking at the time. The difference from the beginning of the novel to the end is the nature of the words. For example, in her first and failed thought experiment (the imagined conversation), the woman’s approach toward the man was verbal:

A mulher imaginada escolhera assim primeiro grandes palavras abertas, como céu, mar, ponte, barco, estrada, rio, palavras que ofereciam espaços livres... Mas pouco a pouco, insidiosamente, fora-se aproximando de um espaço limitado, concentrado em torna dela mesma...”

[The imagined woman chose first great open words, like sky, sea, bridge, boat, road, river, words which offered open spaces...But gradually, insidiously, it became a delimited space, concentrated around the woman herself...] (12)

However, the results of this experiment did not hold true as she tried to engage in direct dialog with Afonso. So, instead, she turned to a managed silence, a silence of which she was in control. Faced with this new menace, Afonso finds himself compromised:

ele colocara atrás de si uma barricada de objectos...no seu pequeno espaço de segurança provisória, mas ela acabava sempre de invadir mesmo esse espaço diminuto...devagar ia-o empurrando para um espaço cada vez mais exíguo, até que finalmente não haveria mais lugar onde refugiar-se...

[he placed behind himself a barricade of objects...in his small space that provided some temporary safety, but she always seemed to invade even this tiny space...slowly she would push him along toward an even narrower space, until finally there was nowhere left for him to find refuge...] (87)

This successful new approach came about through Lídia's imaginative deliberations regarding her mother, Lavínia, who becomes a rough mirror for Lídia—a sort of puppet for herself. Able to appreciate her mother's failed attempts to break free from the oppressive state to which she was subjected by her husband Alfredo, Lídia sees herself falling into a similar state, and is similarly motivated to escape the stranglehold that Afonso has upon her. However, she resents her mother's negligence, and so she resolves to make her decisions, acting differently than Lavínia. Thus learning from her mother's example, she is finally able to disrupt Afonso's machine-like oppressive order, and in so doing, discover her identity and express herself against his former dominance. Consequently, she ultimately uncovers what she had been looking for the

whole time, “a means of connection, through words...that was, more than anything else, with herself.”

CHAPTER 2: “A woman’s glory”: Silence in (and in opposition to) feminist theory

You will do well to teach your daughter
to hold her tongue in a man's presence.

—Chi-fu, *Mulan* (1998)

All classes must be deemed to have
their special attributes... ‘Silence is a woman’s glory’
but this is not equally the glory of man

—Aristotle, *Politics*

As mentioned in the introduction, and repeated in the first chapter of this analysis, the central theme in Teolinda Gersão’s *O silêncio* is Lídia’s search for herself: “Ela procurava uma forma de encontro, através das palavras...que era, antes de mais, consigo própria” [She was seeking a means of connection, through words...that was, more than anything else, with herself] (11). Her search for self is a search for her own identity, a way of “connecting with” or understanding herself, and who she truly is. Luce Irigaray emphasizes how women, in realizing this identity, have to struggle within the foreign, masculine form of expression imposed upon them (85).

In *O silêncio*, the concepts of identity and expression are bound together as complementary parts of Lídia’s goal, as she seeks not only to understand herself, but to do so specifically “through words.” She then falls prey to the problematic question of identity, accompanied by the compromise of expression:

Women's social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to "masculine" systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women. (Irigaray, *This Sex* 85)

The purpose of this chapter then is to present and summarize the historical and cultural context onto which *O silêncio* emerged, as well as some predominant feminist theory and how critics have viewed the problem of feminine expression and transgression in a world operated by the masculine. Both the historical and theoretical aspects of this analysis will be brief, as discussions can be had more extensively in other sources; their purpose here is to provide a basis for understanding *O silêncio*. Consequently, analysis of the novel itself in terms of these contexts will comprise most of this chapter: specifically, how Lídia's realization of her identity and expression differs from the methods of transgression advocated or prescribed by prominent feminists.

2.1 A brief history of women: Marriage, maternity = silence, submission

To properly contextualize the cultural climate in Portugal in which *O silêncio* was published, we must first return to the turn of the twentieth century. Until this time, women's affairs in Portugal had not progressed as much as in other European nations, as Portuguese scholar Cláudia Pazos Alonso admits, "Portugal did not have any 'great' woman writer in the nineteenth century," while other parts of the continent had already seen an increase in women's writing (23).

The prevailing view in Portugal at the time is captured in the words of Oliveira Martins, a prominent politician and widely published sociologist in the late nineteenth century. Martins

claimed that “pelo casamento...a mulher é consagrada como fonte de geração” [through marriage...woman is consecrated as a fountain of generations] (qtd. in Ponte 13). Martins’ comment is explained in the words of Michelle Boulous Walker who, in describing the way the maternal body is treated in philosophy, sees a correlative relationship between motherhood and silence, stating, “we can discern a masculine imaginary that works to silence women in quite specific ways...women are silenced most effectively by their association with maternity” (1).

Martins’ appears to approach marriage and motherhood as ennobling qualities of women, when in truth motherhood was a means to reduce them to the only decent purpose he sees fit for them: to become subservient to a man and bear his children. He further “dismissione[s] women as ‘doentes’ [infirm], forever incapacitated and in need of the moral guidance of successive male figures” (Alonso 31). This ideology resounded throughout Portugal in much of the popular literature of the time (Rector 15), as well as being echoed in the Catholic inheritance of Paul’s words, in which he urges his disciple to “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection...suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence...Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing” (King James Bible, 2 Tim. 2:11-12, 15). Turn-of-the-century Portugal therefore inherited and perpetuated a legacy in which marriage and motherhood were a kind of oubliette, a place to put a woman where she would be silent, forgotten. Women’s only hope for redemption was that she would “be saved in childbearing.”

Despite the paternalistic attitude toward women exemplified by Martins, the twentieth century brought several advances, particularly with regards to education, as related by Glória Fernandes in her sociological study of twentieth century Portugal (40). However, such successes were short-lived; in 1926, Portugal came under the dictatorial rule of António Salazar, who

maintained his regime until 1968. Salazar's attitude toward women in society was similar to that of Martins', as historian Marion Kaplan remarks:

Salazar did not dislike women, only independent women. "The great nations of the world should set an example by confining women to their homes," he once wrote to his French friend Christine Garnier. "Convinced as I am that a wife who has in mind the care of her home cannot do good work outside, I shall always fight against the independence of married women." (251)

Kaplan's claim that Salazar only disliked "independent women" is revealing: Salazar wished, like Martins, to maintain women in perpetual submission. A married woman posed no problems, because she had already been put into her place, subordinate to her husband. Marriage served the purpose of confining women to a prescribed duty, precluding their independence. As Fernandes explains, Salazar's civil codes legally allowed for severe treatment of women: "[a husband] could even beat his wife...As regards family and marriage...women only had duties and men had rights" (42).

In 1976, Portugal adopted a new constitution which pledged absolute legal equality to men and women. Fernandes notes that despite the strides women had made in all spheres of society toward an equal footing with men, in most families traditional gender roles continued to hold: "Mentalities take time to change and if there is apparent equality in the workplace, at home it is different. Literature written by men for centuries has passed on patriarchal ideology to whoever read it" (45-6). While legally women's status had elevated, in real life—the day-to-day living in home and family circles of the typical Portuguese woman—much remained unchanged.

Fernandes' specific mention of literature as a driving force behind the propagation of the patriarchal system is no coincidence, as literature relates back to the other tactic employed by

men to dominate women: silence. Man's control over woman's ability to speak and express herself is paramount to his sustained dominance, as Jean-Paul Debax states, "to reduce woman to silence is to reduce her to powerlessness" (qtd. in Brooke-Rose 14).

Silence was a means of control also extolled by both Martins and Salazar. Concerning sexual equality, Martins declared: "As que pregam a igualdade dos sexos, os direitos da mulher, o outras pateticas crónicas nas sociedades caducas: para esses íamos pedir dois açoites..." [The women who preach equality of the sexes, the rights of women, and other foolish stories in these crumbling societies: we would recommend these be whipped twice over] (qtd. in Ponte 18). This incendiary statement from Martins is likely not to be taken literally, but the ease with which he speaks so jovially about torturing women who suggest equal treatment is a testament to how securely masculine dominance was couched in Portuguese society, and how little power women's expression had against it.

Salazar, on the other hand, did not joke about torturing women who spoke for themselves; torture for such women became policy. During Salazar's rule, many women who had written in protest of his oppressive policies were censored, and imprisonment and torture were not uncommon (Fernandes 41). One of the more notable cases was that of the three Marys (Maria Velho da Costa, Maria Isabel Barreno, and Maria Teresa Horta), over their controversial 1972 book *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* [*New Portuguese Letters*]. The three women were eventually acquitted due to some fortunate timing in the courts, as their case was concluded within weeks after the Carnation Revolution of late April 1974 (Ascherson).

However official women's triumph may seem over these two obstacles of forced domesticity and imposed silence, Fernandes' statement that "mentalities take time to change" still rings true; family traditions still demand women's acquiescence to maternal duties, and the

dominant discourse is still that of the man, and not of woman. Monica Rector, a Brazilian professor specializing in women writers, describes with some irony how powerless women had been to express themselves, or even to define what it meant to be a woman:

A condição da mulher, através dos séculos, tem sido a de ser calada ou apresentada sob uma ótica masculina...Na representação há um constante dualismo, cuja base se encontra na oposição masculino/feminino...

À mulher restou, pois, o lugar do silêncio, porque a voz era a do homem. Os homens falavam pelas mulheres e em nome das mulheres, numa espécie de ventriloquia...

[Woman's condition, through the centuries, has been one of being silenced or filtered through man's vision ...In this representation there is a constant dualism, based on the opposition of masculine/feminine...

All that was left for woman, then, was the place of silence, because the voice belonged to the man. Men spoke for women and in the name of women, in a kind of ventriloquism...] (21-22)

Citing Hélène Cixous and Rachel Gutiérrez, Rector defines in further detail some of these dualisms, concluding that defining women through such oppositions always grants women a negative connotation, whereas men are viewed (they view themselves, as it was man who constructed the definition in the first place) in a positive light. Debax summarizes the situation concisely, saying, "if man is strong woman is weak; if man speaks woman must be silent. So was created an image of woman in negativity to that which man was forging of himself" (Brooke-Rose 14).

Man is the one who defines woman, and in his own language. Woman is then defined according to the man's dictates, often in opposition to his self-assigned positive qualities. As Rector stated, "the voice belonged to the man," leaving woman with no voice of her own with which to define herself. Thus, the only thing left to her is "...a lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the [masculine] subject"... "the 'feminine' is never to be identified except by and for the masculine" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 78, 85).

There is a brief passage in *O silêncio* which plays out the question of how women are defined. Lavínia, an emigrant from Russia, relates her thoughts as Alfredo is teaching Portuguese to her. She pictures herself in a classroom with a blackboard at the front, on which is written a word. As she describes the oppressive atmosphere of the room, Lavínia suspects that the word written on the board is her own name, although she cannot remember for certain. Alfredo erases the word, and all that is written on the board is silence. Lavínia laments: "E então sei que o veredicto sobre mim será sempre negativo" [And that is when I know that my verdict will always be negative] (67).

Alfredo on the other hand, is resolute: "ele nega, ele nega, Lavínia começa e acaba nesta casa, decide, e não ficou mais nada para trás" [he denies it, he denies it, Lavínia starts and ends in this house, he decides, and there is nothing else she has left behind] (70). Whatever she might have been before when she knew her own language is erased by Alfredo, who decides that she is nothing more than a part of his house. Her identity is solely dependent upon what Alfredo decides it will be, and she lacks the language with which to assert herself any differently.

2.2 Contemporary feminist theory: Contrasts with *O silêncio*

Faced with a lack of native language, a lack of natural identity, and a lack of place other than domestic banishment, several feminist critics have proposed solutions to these problems. They suggest methods whereby women can escape from the suppression of masculine dialogue, whereby they can discover that they do, in fact, have a voice, and a place where they need not remain silent. Although these solutions are often varied, they generally follow a trend, as we will see shortly through examining a few examples from some notable feminists. These solutions are not new, and, like the historical aspects examined earlier, are given here only in brief detail, as more complete analyses of the theories themselves can be had elsewhere (Eagleton, *Theory*; Salvaggio; Todd). Their purpose here, as mentioned, is to flesh out enough of a background that we may contextualize and examine the implications made by *O silêncio*, which are often surprising and run contrary to contemporary feminist theory, as will be seen below.

2.2.1 Hélène Cixous: “Women should break out of the snare of silence”

Among the most vocal of feminists is Hélène Cixous, who states in “The Laugh of the Medusa” that “women will confirm [themselves] in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place *other than silence*. Women should break out of the snare of silence” (881, emphasis added). Cixous chooses to characterize the “symbolic” place reserved for women—which she describes as a marginal or objectified sexual role—by emphasizing the silence imposed upon women. She then describes the way that women may avoid this silence through words, particularly, through the written word: “Women must write through their bodies...they must submerge, cut through...the very idea of pronouncing the word ‘silence’” (886).

She declares that the act of a woman expressing herself will not only empower her to discover her own identity, her own life, but that it will become “an act that will also be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression” (880). Cixous is not content to merely explain women’s conditions or method of escape, but demands that women act. With a tone that is ironically patronizing, Cixous urges women to "write themselves:”

And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written. (And why I didn't write before the age of twenty-seven.) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great—that is, for “great men;” and it's “silly.” Besides, you've written a little, but in secret. And it wasn't good, because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn't go all the way...
(876-877)

Cixous’ suggestion to write finds its mirror image in *O silêncio*; however, rather than being a positive urging to Lídia to express herself, the statement comes from a mocking Afonso: “você devia escrever um romance, disse ele...já viu que desperdício, toda essa imaginação gastando-se, nesta conversa, certamente interessante, em pura perda?” [you should write a novel, he said...have you ever seen such waste, all this imagination being thrown away, in this conversation, which is certainly interesting, in a complete loss?] (114). Books to Afonso are important—in more than one scene he is described as sitting at his desk, reading—but the books which neatly line his shelves are science textbooks; a novel would hold nothing interesting for him, hence the sarcasm of their “interesting” conversation.

Throughout this and previous conversations, Afonso shows himself doing his best to avoid listening, turning up the volume on the music to drown Lúdia out, trying to change the subject, or by consciously choosing not to listen to her at all. Sensing this effect in male/female discourse in general, Cixous urges writing instead of speaking, claiming that when a woman speaks, “her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine” (881). Walker concludes the same, remarking that “the question of silencing might be less a prohibition against speech than a refusal to listen...women may well speak, may be able to speak, but may never be heard...[an example of] the masculine gesture of turning a deaf ear toward the ever-nagging woman” (10-11).

In the case of *O silêncio*, however, the game is reversed. In the above passage, Afonso’s suggestion that Lúdia write a novel comes because he wants her to stop talking, but there is more than that; it is a way of writing her off. While her spoken words persist in his ear, he could close the cover on a book it if offended him, he could throw it away; if her words were written, he could ignore them much more easily, thereby subjecting her again to silence. In direct contrast with Cixous’ recommendation to write rather than speak, Lúdia prefers the spoken word:

a literatura também se converteu em silêncio, se tornou apenas imanente, as palavras ficam cercadas, bloqueadas, e encontra-se sempre um meio de demonstrar às pessoas que elas significam tudo, e que portanto, não significam nada, a palavra escrita é uma palavra morta e por isso eu quero a palavra dita, rente ao corpo, inseparada do corpo, língua, boca, braço, mão, gesto...

[literature was also converted into silence, it became merely immanent, words become encircled, blocked, and someone always finds a way to show to people how those words mean everything, and therefore, they mean nothing, the written

word is a dead word and that's why I want the spoken word, close to the body, undivided from the body, tongue, mouth, arm, hand, gesture...] (118)

For Cixous, writing is the pathway to power, but for Lúdia, written words can be twisted, manipulated, and ignored, and are ultimately part of the systematic order that Afonso imposes on everything; they represent death. There may be some reconciliation between Lúdia and Cixous' viewpoints, as Rector points out: "Justamente por isso, nos tempos atuais, é pela palavra que a mulher deseja se impor...[Um] processo de conscientização é pleiteado pelos movimentos feministas: primeiro, a voz falada; depois, a escrita" [It is precisely because of this that women nowadays seek to position themselves through words...[A] process of awakening is begged for by the feminist movements: first, the spoken voice; afterwards, written] (22). Rector values both written and spoken words as instruments of transgressing the masculine order, as they are both tools to spark women's awareness.

In another contrast with Cixous, where awareness is an obvious concern, Lúdia seems concerned only with her own self-expression, not with any other women in the novel or even women generally. When she confronts Afonso (only in her mind, and not in person), warning him not to try and oppress her as he has done with Alcina in her domestic paralysis, her concerns for self are clear. She does at one point feel pity for Alcina and her maid Ana, but this pity is momentary compared with concern for self: Lúdia is repulsed by these lost women, which compels her to seek an escape from the same fate. She does the same with her mother, Lavínia, whose image becomes filtered through Lúdia's imagination to the point that she becomes a puppet for Lúdia to manipulate, a tool to help find her own expression. Apart from this, where it concerns her own self-discovery, Lúdia has no use for her mother, and ultimately discards her, as we will see later in this chapter.

We should make a distinction here between what Lúcia does in *O silêncio* and what Teolinda Gersão does in writing *O silêncio*, in which she is fulfilling Cixous' recommendations to the fullest. "Laugh of the Medusa" first appeared in 1975, and as if in response, Gersão released her debut novel a mere six years later. When Cixous urges women to "write your self. Your body must be heard" (880), Gersão undeniably answers the call with *O silêncio*.

While the existence of Gersão's novel confirms Cixous' words, the story she tells within its pages seem to go contrary to this philosophy. For example, Lúcia discovers her strength and expression through silence, part of which is comprised of an internal, unspoken dialogue, and part of which only exists in words through the narrative of the novel, which translates her thoughts into words through the third person. Lúcia's method of refusing to speak seems to break rank with both Cixous and Rector in terms of verbal expression, whether written or spoken. Cixous advocates writing; Rector, both writing and speaking, but giving deference to the latter; on the other hand, although she voices a desire for spoken words, neither speaking nor writing offers Lúcia what she is seeking for.

As explored in Chapter 1, Lúcia sets out to find her expression "through words," but in the end words fail her; she realizes that speaking allows Afonso to dominate her. In response, she opts to say nothing to defend herself against him, even when he tries to trick and trap her through words (61). She thus finds that through remaining silent, she prevents Afonso from gaining control over her, and that by keeping her power of speech to herself, she becomes even more powerful and able to resist Afonso: "este é o plano que eu sonho em segredo, sorriu, em segredo, porque se tu soubesses a força que há nos sonhos, de noite levantar-me-ias as pálpebras para ver o que estou sonhando e controlar o sonho" [this is the plan which I dream of in secret, she

smiled, in secret, because if you only knew the power that there is in dreams, at night you would pry open my eyelids to see what I am dreaming and to control my dream] (62).

This silent solution may seem contrary to what Lídia herself had stated earlier in a private monologue: “eu quero a palavra dita, rente ao corpo...” [I want the spoken word, close to the body...] (118). As we have already established, to speak is something she wants, and as we read further into her monologue we discover the reason: “a palavra está no princípio do eu e do mundo e que é talvez, talvez, o amor...” [the word is in the beginning of me and of the world and that it is perhaps, perhaps, love...] (118). Along with her search for expression, Lídia loves (or wants to love) Afonso. However, she must deny herself what she wants in order to do and find what she needs.

For example, Lídia states in the final passage of the novel her desire to bear children, a mere four hours after aborting her child (123). Her love for Afonso follows the same path; she realizes that despite her initial desire to love him (22), they would never love each other (111) because “eles eram dois mundos sem pontos de contacto...desde o primeiro instante” [they were two worlds without any connection...from the very first instant] (34). Although she would prefer to be able to speak, as she does throughout much of the novel, she realizes that he will never understand, but will twist her words against her until they are no longer hers, denying again the power of her dreams:

se eu dissesse que ela olhava para mim, sentada na margem, e que tinha descido pelos verdes degraus do sonho, tu dirias que não existem sonhos, nem verdes degraus do sonho, nem crianças sonhadas, sentadas
e se eu dissesse que o mar vinha pelo crepúsculo adiante, até bater na orla do jardim, a espuma da onda mais alta saltando até às janelas, tu dirias que havia

uma enorme distância...entre a casa e a praia, e então, (porque me obrigavas), eu corrigiria: havia uma enorme distância entre a casa e a praia...

[if I said that she looked at me, sitting on the bank, and that she had come down the green stairs of a dream, you would say that dreams do not exist, neither do green stairs of dreams, nor dreamed-up, sitting children

and if I said that the sea came with the approaching dusk, until it crashed down at the edge of the garden, the foam from the highest waves reaching even to the windows, you would say that there was an enormous distance...between the house and the beach, and so, (because you would make me), I would correct myself: there was an enormous distance between the house and the beach...]

(110)

Faced with the irreconcilable and inevitable defeat that she suffers whenever she speaks (and recognizing that the same would happen to a greater extent through written, “dead” words), Lídia opts for silence, despite her preference for words. Silence is necessary to Lídia as a form of protection against Afonso’s dominance, and ultimately works in her favor, as a means of subverting his order to favor her own triumph. “Being silent is not being dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep speaking” (Sartre 38).

While O silêncio is an example of Gersão writing herself, following Cixous’ exhortations to “confirm [herself]...in a place other than silence...break[ing] out of the snare of silence” (881). Lídia does precisely the opposite, protecting, discovering, and confirming herself in a place that is precisely silent, breaking out of the snare of speech

2.2.2 Luce Irigaray: “One must assume the feminine role deliberately”

Contrary to Cixous’ methods, in “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” Luce Irigaray does not speak out in favor of open rebellion, of direct transgression of the patriarchal order. She recognizes the futility of this kind of tactic, because the feminine discourse must, by necessity, bend to the masculine in order to be understood. She states that “the danger of every statement... of every discussion about the question of woman [is this:]...to speak of or about woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition” (*This Sex* 78).

Instead of trying to open a space within the masculine dialogue, Irigaray advocates another method: “*What remains to be done, then, is to work at “destroying” the discursive mechanism.* Which is not a simple undertaking...For how can we introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity?” (*This Sex* 76, emphasis in the original). Faced with the impossibility of transgression through a language structure that is by definition a compromise for a woman, Irigaray suggests another course, which is completely contrary to Cixous’: mimicry.

There is...perhaps only one path...One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it...To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try and recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. (*This Sex* 76)

This solution is present in *O silêncio* from the first pages, in the imagined conversation between the imagined man and woman. We will cite this passage at length, to understand both the man’s and the woman’s attitudes towards this conversation:

Em algum lugar, é verdade, a falsidade começava. Talvez porque a mulher imaginada pressentia que o homem estava parcialmente fora do diálogo e lhe resistia...Ele estabelecera, portanto, limites tácitos a todas as palavras...e, se a mulher que falava tentasse ultrapassá-los, ele obrigá-la-ia a retroceder e a alegar que estava mentindo.

A mulher imaginada escolhera assim primeiro grandes palavras abertas, como céu, mar, ponte, barco, estrada, rio, palavras que ofereciam espaços livres, onde a forma dela própria podia sempre perder-se de vista facilmente, no meio de uma infinidade de outras coisas. Mas a pouco a pouco, insidiosamente, fora-se aproximando de um espaço limitado, concentrado em torno dela mesma, e era aí que o diálogo começava a adquirir a tensão que ela secretamente procurava [Somewhere, it was certain, the falsehood began. Perhaps [she] could sense that the man was partially tuned out of the conversation, resisting it...He had established, therefore, tacit limits to the words...and, if the woman who was speaking tried to cross them, he would force her to go back and admit she was lying.

So the imagined woman chose first great open words, first great open words, like sky, sea, bridge, boat, road, river, words which offered open spaces, where her own shape could always be easily lost to sight, in the middle of an infinity of other things. But gradually, insidiously, it became a delimited space, concentrated around the woman herself, and that was when the dialogue began to acquire the tension that she was secretly looking for] (11-12)

The first paragraph of this passage relates exactly the situation that Irigaray has described—a “tightly-woven systematicity” wherein the man has already laid down the rules of the game, how the conversation is going to take place. The woman senses the man’s detachment from her own expression, and knows now that the conversation is not on equal terms, but the man’s, and thus “the falsehood began”. This falsehood, we assumed in Chapter 1, was the compromised nature of the discussion, which would not lead Lídia to her own discovery of expression. However, here we begin to see it as the woman’s own falsehood as she deliberately assumes the feminine role, to paraphrase Irigaray; the falsehood creeps in because she is being false, deceptive.

And thus she begins to turn “her subordination into an affirmation,” by playing along with the man’s rules, choosing words that will not give away her intentions. Slowly and subtly, she begins to bring the conversation back to herself, “the question of woman” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 78) until the dialogue has taken on the tension she requires, tension that will allow her to thwart the man’s rules.

Although this sort of tactic is, in a way, another fulfillment of Cixous’ theory, it is dramatically different in its nature. Irigaray assumes a sort of covertness to cause a rift in the masculine discourse, and trap the man before he is even aware, whereas Cixous relies on shock value to try and jolt the order apart.

For Lídia, however, neither a subtle subversion through the imagined conversation, nor open dialogue with Afonso leads to her being able to cast aside the shackles of his imposed will upon her. There is a scene in which Afonso envisions his space around him dwindling as Lídia slowly invades—a parallel scene to the description of the woman’s subtle manipulation of the conversation above—but Lídia’s power in this episode does not come from her having assumed

any stereotypical feminine role imposed upon her. Rather, as concluded in Chapter 1 from this same passage, it comes from physical disruption, from Lídia deliberately upsetting Afonso's meticulously delineated order of things.

There are scenes where Lídia imagines herself assuming the shape Afonso has reserved for her—for example, “Entrar na casa [de Afonso] e tomar a forma da casa...” [To enter into [Afonso's] house and take on its shape...] (34)—but each time she sees this submission as the gateway to her losing herself and her quality as a woman entirely: “Uma casa masculina, o apartamento de um homem. Sensato, organizado, prático, sem a profusão de objectos que as mulheres espalham em volta. Talvez sem tapetes, apenas com uma alcatifa lisa e neutra, para se poder esquecer mais facilmente” [A masculine house, the apartment of a man. Sensible, organized, practical, without the profusion of objects that women scatter around. Maybe without a rug, just a flat neutral carpet, so that she might forget herself more easily] (42).

This concern of Lídia's is confirmed when she visits Alcina, Afonso's wife. While she never actually meets Alcina, she pictures her in her imagination (her assumptions are proven correct by Afonso in the end of the novel). The rigorous order of her domestic role practically brainwashes her, and we read two parallel phrases that describe how her fate is sealed: “jamais uma coisa aconteceria fora de ordem” [nothing would ever happen out of order] (26) and “ela jamais encontraria uma saída” [she would never find an exit] (26). Her permanence in the home has been irrevocably pronounced. Alcina at one point had thought of leaving Afonso's repressive order, his suffocating house, but in the end became less and less restless to the point that she stayed, “quase se orgulhava como se tivesse escolhido...perdia-se de tal modo que quase se sentia livre” [almost proud of herself as if she had chosen,...having lost herself in such a way that she almost felt free] (26). Lídia's exit from the house reveals the repulsion she feels: she

waits for Ana to inform Alcina of her visitor, but as soon as Ana is out of the room, Lídia “desceu as escadas e não voltou nunca mais” [went down the stairs and never went back] (28). Sensing the impossibility of breaking out of the domestic role once assumed, she refuses to even begin to conform to that prescribed role.

For Lídia, Irigaray’s theory of “assum[ing] the feminine role deliberately” holds no promise of success with regards to the domestic role, instead introducing us to failure on two accounts—for both Alcina and Lavínia. While the text affirms that Alcina had once contemplated escape, there are never any details given of her attempts—we get the impression that Alcina’s thoughts of leaving and upsetting order were weak and poorly conceived. Lavínia, on the other hand, is shown guilefully filling the role which Alfredo had given her, consciously trying to thwart Alfredo’s system of order. The text describes how she would set the table for dinner for Alfredo’s guests, recognizing all the while that her submission was only superficial as she secretly sought a means of revolt:

“à hora exacta chegavam as visitas, as tias, os parentes, as pessoas gordas que vinham abraçá-la com a sua conversa inútil e já sabida que ela fingia aceitar, mas na verdade não aceitara nunca, e era aí que ela punha as facas sobre a mesa com as lâminas afiadas voltadas contra nós.

E tudo isso se repetiu durante anos, durante anos ela imitou os gestos aprendidos, as palavras aprendidas, fingi[ndo] que falava a mesma língua...

[at the precise time the visitors, the aunts, the relatives, the fat people who would come and hug her with their same old useless conversation that she would pretend to accept, but in reality she never ever accepted them, and that was when she would put the knives on the table with the sharpened edge turned out against us.

And all this repeated itself through the years, through the years she mimicked the learned gestures, the learned words, pretend[ing] that she spoke the same language...] (70)

Despite her efforts to subvert Alfredo's oppression, Lavínia ultimately falls victim to her mimicry and she is led to a state from which she cannot escape. What started out as mimesis eventually crowded out whatever identity she had as Alfredo rewrote her: she becomes a prisoner and commits suicide, ironically transforming into the "mute ideal" female (Brooke-Rose 14), similar to Alcina. Lídia, having learned from her observations of both unhappy women, refuses to be bent to fit Afonso's will, opting instead to fight actively against it through a physical rupture of his neat organization.

This is a force which Irigaray almost describes, but which she ultimately fails to pronounce with any precision. She asserts that her stealthy means of subversion will eventually lead to the creation of a parallel language, in which "the masculine would no longer be "everything." That it could no longer, all by itself, define, circumvene, circumscribe, the properties of anything and everything" (*This Sex* 80). She goes on to claim that this must do more than "aim simply for a change in the distribution power, leaving intact the power structure itself," or else women are "resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallographic order" (*This Sex* 81). In other words, she describes how being subtle can thwart the masculine discourse, leaving it powerless, and that women should be careful that this doesn't just rearrange the order of things. What she fails to specify is that they should deliberately break the order of things, the power structure itself. Earlier, she had discussed destroying the discursive mechanism, but that would already be accomplished when the masculine ceased to be everything.

Thus, *O silêncio* again breaks from mainstream feminist theory, as Irigaray's solution to assume and subtly thwart the traditional domestic feminine role imprisons Alcina in her ignorance, and eventually leads Lavínia to suicide. Additionally, the process that finally brings Lídia the same result promised by Irigaray's solution was something else entirely, that Irigaray had not fully mentioned: not a linguistic disruption or upheaval, but a deliberate physical disruption of order. If we understand Irigaray to be speaking only about assuming a domestic role, then we must conclude that her theory is an utter failure in every case presented in *O silêncio*. However, if we remove the quality of domesticity from the "traditional feminine role" and instead engage in applying her claims to a different aspect of the "feminine" role, the results are immensely revealing. We must change our focus from the home to another realm to which women are resigned—that of silence—where we can see how Lídia's actions follow Irigaray's counsel exactly.

In the beginning, Lídia speaks to Afonso freely and frequently. While he gives different excuses at different times, his reactions are always the same, and he finds some way of telling her to be quiet or simply ignoring her. However, as we have already stated, when she deliberately silences herself and refuses to give Afonso a single thought when he asks what she is thinking, it enables her to assume control of the silence that before had been his tactic for ignoring her: "this is the plan which I dream of in secret, she smiled, in secret" (62). By subtly assuming the role of silence thrust upon women, Lídia is able to usurp power over it and use it, along with physical disruption, to break Afonso's control over her and over his world.

2.2.3 Maternal images: “Mother, I shall never become your likeness”

A third realm of feminist theory is with regards to the mother-daughter relationship. Walker relates that while the maternal relationships with regards to the son have been analyzed extensively, particularly by Freud’s exploration of Oedipal dynamics, the relations between mother and daughter have been ignored. She cites Julia Kristeva, stating that she “brings the mother [and daughter] back into theoretical focus...” (147). Arguments from Kristeva as well as Irigaray form part of the basis of the discussion of motherhood, with other critics such as Walker also contributing significantly to blend these two views together. These women’s affirmations of the role of the mother-daughter relationship in feminist theory will serve as a context for the relationship between Lídia and Lavínia in *O silêncio*.

The image of the mother is not a separate part of feminist theory; it relies heavily on the arguments made above concerning the woman’s historical relegation to the domestic sphere, as well as those selections of theory that have already been discussed. Putting these concepts into perspective with motherhood, Walker relates,

[Mother] is a transgression of the patriarchal sense of self and law, marginal to its truth and rationality. The mother encoded as the feminine, exists in opposition to the stability of the father’s universe. She is movement, flux and undecidability...
...the maternal acts as a metaphor for tension, ambivalence and ambiguity. More specifically the maternal body, the mother’s body, comes to occupy the site of this tension. We can see this in the writing of many women who adopt the mother, or the mother’s body, as an emblem of defiance. They use the maternal to express emblematically the tensions women experience in their lives. (Walker 135)

While affirming that motherhood has led women to be marginalized, Walker also exalts the role, stating that motherhood, while it represented a woman's acceptance of the role assigned to her, was also a way of transgressing the patriarchal order, of introducing tension into it. "The mother's body...reproduces the fathers symbolic order while simultaneously destroying it..." (Walker 145)

This argument is closely aligned with Irigaray's earlier solution to women to "assume the feminine role deliberately...and thus to begin to thwart it" (76). As concluded earlier, we cannot consider this suggestion only in relation to the domestic role of women or we must dismiss it as failed policy, as in that aspect it only led to tragedy; in regards to silence, however, Lídia's success comes through this suggestion precisely. Moreover, the nature of the role Walker is describing in this instance is very different; rather than a merely "feminine" role, characterized by domesticity, or being resigned to silence, Walker emphasizes the role of mother in a strictly reproductive capacity.

Alcina does not fit this characterization, as she never bore Afonso any children (although this certainly would be cause for him to view her as a failure). Lavínia also falls outside this description, but for a different reason. As described in Chapter 1, her relationship to Lídia was fairly absent; furthermore, the reason it is difficult to apply Walker's statement to her is because Lídia was already a little girl by the time Alfredo took them both to Portugal. Whatever tension might have been created by her motherhood was already present. The novel directs the focus of Lavínia's tension as mother away from her own motherhood, refocusing it instead on her struggles against the patriarchal order.

We may, however, fit Lídia into the context of Walker's statement, as both of her maternally linked relationships—the first with her own child, and the second as daughter to

Lavínia—are sources of tension. In the case of the first, *O silêncio* contrasts yet again with contemporary theory, as tension is not created through Lídia performing her role as mother, but by her sudden interruption of it, as expressed by Afonso: “quatro horas de morto, meu filho morto e ela falando, e então ele esbofetou-a” [dead for four hours, my son dead and she [keeps] talking, and so he slapped her] (123). It is by abandoning the maternal body that Lídia creates tension and commits transgression.

The second of these relationships can be loosely fit to Walker’s description, since Lídia in a way rewrites her mother as an emblem of defiance. However, Lavínia is not set in defiance against the patriarchal order (Lídia recognizes her mother’s failed attempts to transgress Alfredo’s oppression), but rather is emblematic of Lídia’s defiance of her mother. Thus when Walker describes how “Like the maternal body itself, the mother-daughter relation is an experience of contradiction: of love and hate, of mutuality and estrangement, of anger and desire, of unity and separation” (162), we may see that this contradiction holds true in *O silêncio* only with regards to the mother-daughter relationship, and not “the maternal body,” the simple reality of motherhood itself.

This description of the contradiction within mother-daughter relationships is also perceived by Kristeva, who claims that “for more than a century now, our culture has faced the urgent need to reformulate its representations of love and hate...in order to deal with the relationship of one woman to another” (“Mater” 150). She continues to describe the source of this dichotomous nature, saying,

Here again, maternity points the way to a possible solution: a woman rarely, I do not say never, experiences passion—love or hate—for another woman, without at some point taking the place of her own mother—without becoming a mother

herself and, even more importantly, without undergoing the lengthy process of learning to differentiate herself from her own daughter, her simulacrum, whose presence she is forced to confront. (“Mater” 150)

Kristeva’s depiction of a woman’s position—caught between generations, with a need to somehow reconcile both as daughter and mother—is helpful to understand Lavínia and Lídia’s relationship; however, we must invert the process from what Kristeva suggests.

Lídia takes the place of her mother, but not by becoming a mother, as Kristeva suggests; she finds herself in similar situations, under a similar oppression as her mother, but this discovery is more deliberate, more calculated than that. It is as if, rather than drawing closer to her mother, Lídia rewrites her mother, drawing her closer to herself. In this way, we must switch the roles that Kristeva describes: Lídia must undergo the lengthy process of learning to differentiate herself from her mother—who she casts as her simulacrum—whose presence she is forced to confront. It is the daughter who must navigate around the specter of her mother, and not the other way around.

Having rearranged the scenario in this way, we can draw immediate similarities between this appropriated version of Kristeva and further statements from Irigaray in “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other,” where Walker claims

Irigaray indirectly poses the question of whether daughters repeat their mothers...she warns that patriarchal culture places the two within a deadly immediacy where the daughter becomes the image of her lifeless mother...The confusion of identities in the mother-daughter bond is a recurring theme of Irigaray’s work. The daughter experiences the mother as both oppressive and

liberating. The mother is at once the space of her confinement and of her release.
(170)

We have found another aspect in which theory lines up almost perfectly with what we discover in *O silêncio*; Lídia literally wakes up to find herself living a fulfillment of Lavínia's experience (75) and, desperate to not repeat the mistakes of her mother (Lavínia's oppressive influence), comes to realize the struggle her mother had against Alfredo (this appreciation is liberating). While she defies her mother, seeking her own path, it is through Lavínia, or her altered mental image of her, that Lídia finds an escape from Afonso.

The parallels between *O silêncio* and Irigaray's essay become even more pronounced when we look at Irigaray's own words. She poses the question, which we could imagine being asked of Lídia: "You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, what are you? What space is yours alone?" ("Doesn't Stir" 63) Caught between her mother, whose absence inflicted a great deal of anguish on Lídia as a child (Rocha 122), and her own child, Lídia is also drawn apart by meanings related to these two figures—the imperious limitations of the patriarchal order, imposed on both women, and what this order will mean for Lídia's future child.

Lídia's "answer" to Irigaray's question is found in a passage toward the very end of the novel, as this answer is also an essential part of her identity that she has been seeking throughout the course of the novel. In this passage, Lídia enters into a dream in which she is wandering through a silent, snowy scene, when she suddenly stumbles:

tropeça num corpo caído de bruços...uma pequena mala entreaberta ao lado de onde caíram objectos soltos, meio soterrados, um sapato, um farrapo de renda, folhas de um livro, um pedaço de uma saia com flores, volta-lhe o rosto...Lavínia,

diz, debruçando-se mais, mas quando lhe toca com as mãos o rosto diluiu-se e é já só água, e então ela levanta-se e começa a caminhar, com esforço, em direcção ao momento em que irá despertar de novo...ela recusa parar, caminha para a frente, lutando, apesar do cansaço,...Lídia, dizem, e quando a levantam um pouco na almofada há uma dor mais funda que a desperta e todo o seu corpo está vivo. [she stumbles on a body lying face down...a small suitcase half-open nearby where have fallen loose objects, half-buried, a shoe, a scrap of lace, pages from a book, a piece of a flowered dress, she turns her face towards her...Lavínia, she says, bending over even more, but when she touches her with her hands her face melts away and now it is just water, so she gets up and begins to walk, with great effort, toward the moment when she will wake up again...she refuses to stop, keeps walking ahead, fighting, despite her weariness,...Lídia, they say, and when they prop her up a little on the pillow there is an even greater pain which awakens her and her whole body is awake] (120-121)

The description of Lavínia's death (suicide, from an intentional overdose of sedatives) in this scene is different than we have read it before. On more than one occasion, Lavínia is said to have committed suicide during the bus ride back home to Alfredo, after having left him for Herberto. The details of her suicide are inconsistent from each retelling to the next—on one occasion, it is Alfredo who finds her; another, Lídia; and yet another, Alfredo is merely described as weeping upon Lavínia's return home—but this final dream scene is completely different from the others. The fact that it is specifically a dream—the ambiguity of the prose in *O silêncio* rarely identifies the nature of the text so clearly—draws attention to its existence not in

Lídia's real world, but in her mind. Her mother, already dead by suicide, dies again in Lídia's imagination.

This dream provides an even deeper context, as it is brought on by the anesthetic used during Lídia's abortion—by rewriting her mother's suicide, Lídia in effect kills her mother anew at the same moment she causes another death by aborting the child inside her. As she struggles to regain consciousness from both the dream and the anesthetic, we perceive her awakening not only to the realization of these two deaths—of her mother, and herself as mother—but also from her own death. Kristeva describes the concept of surmounting death by postulating maternal love instead (“Mater” 145), but Lídia escapes her own demise by putting maternity itself to death. “Death, in this context, becomes a point of departure, where a new identity can be formed” (Bozkurt 9)—it is precisely after this moment that Lídia declares herself the victor and leaves Afonso to himself, speechless.

Whereas Kristeva unites mother and child with positive connotations, this characterization does not hold true in *O silêncio*; on the contrary, the tension within the maternal figure does not defy the patriarchal structure (as proposed by Walker), but rather is only a source of conflict between the mother and daughter pair of Lavínia and Lídia. This conflict is finally alleviated, allowing Lídia release from the confinement her mother represented to her, as Lídia destroys the maternal image, both in Lavínia and in herself. It is in Irigaray that this kind of mother-daughter relationship is reflected. “And I grow angry, I struggle, I scream—I want out of this prison...Farewell, Mother, I shall never become your likeness” (“Doesn't Stir” 60, 62).

2.3 A notable silence: The sex that is lacking

Throughout this discussion of feminist theory, of which we have only mentioned a few critics and writers among many, we have seen that in nearly every case, *O silêncio* has stood counter to many of the major concepts and movements in contemporary feminism. Of particular note is the novel's apparent affirmation of silence as Lídia's ultimate means of expression, whereas critics have railed against it as a form and sign of oppression. We should make brief mention here of yet another way in which *O silêncio* stands out as different from other feminist works, by being notably silent in one characteristic: an absence of sexually explicit language, which is practically non-existent in *O silêncio*.

This distinction is not made here in an attempt to censure any work; rather, we should point this out because the absence of such language from the novel is so marked—especially in comparison to contemporary works such as *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, by the three Marys. *Novas Cartas*, although perhaps singular in its audacity in terms of content, includes several “open [explorations of] physical and erotic love, male and female anatomies, masturbation, orgasm, erection...” (Sadlier 10). These same themes can be easily found in much of feminist literature and theory, as well as psychology—for example, the writings of Cixous and Irigaray, to name a few, and notably Freud—where sexual terms, body parts, and descriptions of sex acts are described casually and frequently.

O silêncio, on the other hand, contains few sexually charged passages, and most of these only contain a single word that might be considered titillating, such as “orgasm”. There is in the rest of the novel one mention of a body part, when describing Lídia's abortion; the word used is “sexo,” a euphemistic description for genitalia which is ambiguous because it can have a male or female referent. Whereas other texts seem to supercharge the sexual language, *O silêncio* opts for

the most conservative description possible. The most sexually explicit passage in the entire novel is where Lavínia lies down with Herberto, and the text continues into Lídia's awakening after a night with Afonso (75), as cited in Chapter 1. The scene is so brief that its simple description here is almost more graphic than the passage itself.

Also missing from *O silêncio* are any references to the state of affairs in Portugal at the time. Portugal was still recovering from failed wars in Africa and India and the dissolution of a dictatorial regime—events which emerge in much of the literature contemporary to *O silêncio* (and are still recurring themes today). However important these issues may have been at the time of publication, the novel makes no nods to any of this political historical context.

Although to say so creates a circular argument, the truth is that these sexual or political themes are missing from *O silêncio* precisely because it is a book about neither sex nor politics; it is a book about identity and expression. These objectives are not met through repressed sexual channels or political protests, but through woman's (Lídia's) connection with self "through words," and the dynamic of the male/female relationship on a level "mais fundo do que o diálogo de amor que se trava, ao nível do corpo, entre uma mulher e um homem" [more profound than the language of love which exists on a bodily level, between a man and woman] (11). The lack of political imagery means that the novel is not tied down to any place or time, but lends it a sort of universal, timeless interpretation. Furthermore, sexual themes have no place in the novel because the novel looks beyond the physical nature of human relationships. Therefore, these themes are simply incongruent with the more introspective part of the work, which "revel[a] o mundo interior, subjetivo, o não-dito" [reveals the interior world, subjective, the un-spoken] (Rector 24).

2.4 Conclusion: *O silêncio* speaks louder than words

Seemingly unaware of the historical context onto which it emerged, the content of *O silêncio* offers a new perspective on feminist literature and theory. While revisiting themes that have become a staple for women writers—themes such as repression under the dominance of the masculine, inherited by women throughout history; the struggle against an imposed domesticity and within a system of language in which woman is always defined as negative, as the inferior opposite of man; the need a woman has to find her own identity and expression, apart from man—*O silêncio* does not conform to the prescribed methods of contemporary feminism.

O silêncio goes against Hélène Cixous' recommendation to women everywhere to write, going even further to deny its protagonist Lídia her desire for the spoken word. Instead, its conclusion is that writing and speaking are methods of expression that are doomed to fail as a means of self-discovery; silence is the way whereby women can protect themselves from the ravages of masculine discourse. Once women have gained control over silence, then they will find that “todas as palavras são [delas], de repente, e há um mundo que se quebra quando [elas] fal[am]...” [but all the words are suddenly [theirs], now, and there is a world which shatters when [they] speak] (123), and they can pronounce their triumph over man, who is rendered speechless.

O silêncio initially offers a strong counterpoint to Luce Irigaray's assertion that women should deliberately assume the domestic role assigned to them. When applied only to the domestic role of women, we see this theory's failure in the case of Alcina, the brainwashed housewife, and Lavínia, the tortured soul whose efforts to thwart the system of language and domesticity ultimately fail and lead her to suicide. As we reconsider Irigaray's claims in terms of silence as the “role” of women, it is this behavior that allows Lídia to begin to protect herself

from Afonso's intrusions onto her self-expression, enabling her to inject chaos and disorder into his life. Thus the novel reveals the lesson that Lídia has learned, that the only escape from the "masculine house," the oubliette where she could be "easily forgotten" was to never enter in the first place. Rather than fill the role Afonso delineates for her—even in mimicry—she discovers that disrupting the perfectly aligned order of his world and defying him with silence are the methods that cause his order to disintegrate into chaos.

The images of mother in *O silêncio* are also remarkably different from most of those depicted in feminist theory, although they find a kindred spirit in some of Irigaray's words, where the relationship between mother and daughter is not seen as one of love, as Kristeva seems to indicate, but rather one of struggle. As it concerns maternity, death is a very strong motif (and will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3); rather than an oppressive force, it is empowering. Through death Lavínia finds the ultimate form of revolt against Alfredo, and through it Lídia releases her child from Afonso's grasp. More than that, however, death is also the means by which Lídia is able to break the tension between her own mother Lavínia and herself as mother: by killing Lavínia again in her mind and by aborting her own child.

In each of these, the theme of silence reemerges: as Lídia's form of expression "through words," ironically relying on the void left by unspoken words; as a form of disruption of Afonso's order; and as a liberating characteristic of death. The novel's own silence in regards to political themes or sexually charged language reverts our attention as readers back on the novel's tendency towards the unspoken introversion of Lídia, bringing into focus yet again the silence that permeates the language of the novel. The constant insistence on disagreement is not only typical of the characters and their relationships within the novel, but adequately describes the novel itself, in relation to its contemporaries, in historical, theoretical, and literary spheres.

Throughout these disagreements, *O silêncio* eponymously promotes silence as the key to women's power. By dissenting from the many and most ardent voices of feminism, *O silêncio* confirms feminism's call-to-arms to make women's voices heard, while quietly drawing the attention of its readers to make its unique message of silence heard through the story of its protagonist.

CHAPTER 3: Male-female relationships and reader relationships

One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things,
but for having chosen to say them in a certain way.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, “What is Literature?” (1947)

Pensar em Deus é desobedecer a Deus,
Porque Deus quis que o não conhecêssemos,
Por isso se nos não mostrou...

—Alberto Caeiro, “O Guardador de Rebanhos” (1914)

In the previous two chapters we have examined *O silêncio* in terms of Lídia and her search for her own identity and expression, and what her discovery has to contribute to feminist discussions on this very subject. In both chapters, we have made mention of the incompatibility of man with woman, particularly as it relates to man’s exalting of self and disdain for the feminine other. Inasmuch as it leads Lídia to seek for a means of empowerment and expression, this disconnect between the sexes becomes an important theme of the novel—Gersão herself even characterized the work as being “efectivamente a história de um desencontro” [essentially the story of a failure to connect] (“Temos” 9).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, citing Rector and Debax, “na representação há um constante dualismo, cuja base se encontra na oposição masculino/feminino” [there is a constant dualism, based on the opposition of masculine/feminine] (Rector 21). As we focus on this “failure to connect,” this dualism becomes even more pronounced, particularly in the way the novel

presents men and women in this binary opposition. Relying heavily on metaphor and imagery, the text attempts to illustrate the contrasts between the sexes.

In the first part of this chapter, we will examine the male/female relationships between Lídia and Afonso, and Lavínia and Alfredo, in terms of the opposing images associated with each character. While our analysis will center on these images, we will also consider other elements of the text, particularly language. We will also return briefly to an examination of the role of death in the novel, as it pertains to the conflict between characters.

The final part of this chapter will move beyond male/female relationships and imagery to other extra-textual elements of the novel, particularly its form and complex narrative structure, and how these affect the novel's relationship to us, its readers. We have already noted the novel's "perplexing surface" (Sadlier 97), so this analysis will be concerned with uncovering the effect that the way things are spoken has on what is spoken, like the way tone of voice can denote sarcasm in an otherwise innocuous phrase. Although the novel's form can confound us and conceal its meaning, we will see that these confusing elements of form actually work in tandem with the content of the novel itself.

3.1 "Contrastes de luz e sombra": Men and women represented through images

Not far into the second section of *O silêncio*, we are presented with the colorful image of a landscape, in which the leaves flutter as the wind blows through the trees. By the end of the page, however, we see that this is not a description of an actual landscape, but of a painting that Lídia is working on in her home (58). Despite its composition as paint on a canvas, the image depicted is vivid, alive.

To Lídia, painting is another form of defiance against Afonso's order:

a tela branca, as mãos procurando, hesitando entre uma forma e outra, uma cor e outra, combinar sempre tudo de outro modo... porque tu não estarás aqui para dizer que minto, e nada do que eu disser poderás rectificar—colocar em linha recta—agora as coisas podem girar livremente em círculo, em espiral, em leque, desprendem-se das mãos e transformam-se e ninguém irá prendê-las nunca [the blank canvas, the hands searching, hesitating between one form and another, one color and another, combining everything always in a different way... because you will not be here to tell me I am lying, and you cannot correct—set in a straight course—anything that I might say, now things can spin freely in a circle, a spiral, a fan, they are freed from my hands and transform themselves and no one will ever catch them] (74-75)

Afonso is only unable to correct Lídia's words because, as she states, he is not there. There is no such limitation set upon the things she creates with images—they spin wildly out of control as chaotic elements set in motion that cannot be stopped, cannot be forced.

Chaos and order, as seen here, are two opposing forces which represent Lídia and Afonso. The conflict between these forces is captured through images of nature confronted with images of civilization. These two sets of images are put into focus by Val Plumwood, who, in her hybrid philosophy of ecofeminism, draws “links between women's oppression and the domination of nature” (*Mastery*, 1). To her, the historical dominance of men over women is no different than the historical conquest by Western European powers over the rest of the world, in terms of subjugating and ruling over indigenous peoples and exploiting the natural resources available. She sees parallel characteristics in both arenas, and so describes a set of binary descriptions that ties the causes of women and nature together:

the sphere of “nature” has, in the past, been taken to include what are thought of as less ideal or more primitive forms of the human. This included women...”Nature” then encompasses the underside of rationalist dualisms that oppose reason to nature, mind to body, emotional female to rational male, human to animal, and so on. Progress is progressive overcoming, or control of, this “barbarian” non-human or semi-human sphere by the rational sphere or European culture and “modernity.” (*Decolonizing*, 52-3)

This characterization of the contrary forces on display in *O silêncio* holds no surprises for us, because these same qualities are exactly those explored by the novel itself through the imagery and metaphor of nature and civilization.

We have opted for the terms “order” and “chaos” to describe what Plumwood has designated “rational” and “emotional.” While her terms appear close in meaning to our own, we need to clarify that “emotional” is not a word we can apply to Lídia: While her determination is powerful, she is never described in a way that appears emotional, volatile, or hysterical. On the contrary, she appears very calm and rational, as she meticulously calculates her next steps through the thought experiments discussed in Chapter 1. Afonso, on the other hand, gets flustered and frustrated, even to the point of committing violent acts, as he is exposed to Lídia’s musings; to him, because he cannot control and categorize them, these musings appear “irrational.” Despite this divergence in terminology, Plumwood’s association of women and nature in the face of colonizing, conquering forces is exactly the situation we encounter in the text of *O silêncio*, where Lavínia and Lídia are illustrated through nature-related images.

3.1.1 *Lídia and Lavínia: Images of nature*

Throughout *O silêncio*, some of the most frequently recurring images are those connected to nature. Flora, fauna, and natural forces such as wind and waves appear often in metaphor. In every instance, however, these natural elements are used to represent the qualities and situations of the female characters. This usually means a direct symbolism with Lídia or Lavínia, but occasionally a space or object closely associated (perhaps stereotypically) with femininity, such as the house, is also involved. The first example of these metaphoric images we will discuss is the cat.

3.1.1.1 The cat

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Lídia on numerous occasions likens herself to a cat. She draws parallels between the cat's ability to wander on her own—although her wanderings seem to be more cerebral than physical. In the end, however, she always comes back to Afonso, like the cat returns to its master, despite her repeated affirmations—both spoken and in thought—that she will leave him. Also like the cat and its master, the master can sense even before seeing that she has returned, “apesar de a porta estar aberta, e de ser livre de não voltar” [despite the door being open, and being free to not come back] (51), and he takes pleasure in that fact.

The cat for Lídia represents a kind of frustrated freedom—although she is not bound to him, she keeps crawling back to Afonso. For Lavínia, the image of cat has a similar effect, only stronger. Whereas Lídia still has some freedom—the cat image seems to remind her of that—for Lavínia the cat is a reminder of her imprisonment within Alfredo's domestic sphere.

In the description of Lavínia's house at the beginning of the novel, an important element is the cat that sits on the garden wall, turned away from the house. From inside the house, Lavínia sees the cat:

Então o gato está no jardim, sentado no muro, pensa Lavínia sentada à mesa, distraíndo-se de repente diante das fileiras de copos e talheres brilhantes. Está parado em cima do muro, olhando para o outro lado. Os seus olhos são frios, com uma pequena púpila escura...Os olhos de um gato.

[So the cat is in the garden, sitting on the wall, Lavínia thinks, suddenly distracted while sitting at the table in front of the rows of shiny goblets and utensils. It's just sitting there on the wall, looking at the other side. Her eyes are cold, with a small dark pupil...the eyes of a cat.] (18-19)

The cat on the wall does not remain there—the imagined woman who describes the scene reports that occasionally it would stalk into other yards or unknown places. Lavínia does not identify herself with the cat like Lídia does, because she cannot wander; she is practically as permanent a fixture in the house as are the goblets. Even the assertion that her eyes were like cats' is uncertain, for the ambiguous possessive pronoun “seus” could mean that Lavínia's eyes were like cats', but it could just as easily be describing the eyes of the cat itself. The yearning Lavínia feels to be able to roam and leave her homebound exile is made clear, not only by how easily she becomes fixated on the cat, but also by the imagined woman's insistence that the cat on the wall was always facing outward; the cat does not look back at the trapped Lavínia, but outward to the world.

There is a feline image with which Lavínia is associated, one that “parecia perfeitamente domesticada” [appeared perfectly domesticated] (15). Interestingly, this cat is not actually a cat,

but is the house she lives in, her very prison. The imagined woman describes the house as though it were content, “ronronando como uma gata gigante” [purring like an enormous cat] (15). This apparent contentment is revealed to be just a façade, as when the house smiles, it betrays an inner frustration, “como se quisesse partir” [as if it wanted to get away] (16).

Once again, an ambiguity in the Portuguese leads us to two different interpretations: the feminine subject pronoun “ela” bestows these descriptions upon both the house and Lavínia, whose outer contentment in her domestic captivity is merely a cover for her personal disquiet. Thus, when the text states that “notava-se que tinha sido inútil todo o trabalho de domesticá-la” [it was noticed that all the work to domesticate it had been fruitless] (16), we may also understand that it is referring to Alfredo’s efforts to domesticate Lavínia. Anxious and oppressed, both house and Lavínia keep their eyes focused on the path out (16).

The cat on Lavínia’s wall outside serves as a conspicuous reminder to her of the freedom she does not have. Her momentary independence from Alfredo does involve a cat image, although this instance is decidedly more verbal than visual. Alfredo informs Herberto that Lavínia has completely forgotten Russian, her mother tongue, being able to recall only two words: cat and goodbye. Smiling to himself, Herberto reflects how he also knows the Russian word for cat, and says it out loud with a laugh: “koschka” (18).

While we never learn how they began their romantic involvement, or why they ended it, this secret, shared word between Lavínia and Herberto provides us a subtle clue. The word “koschka” (кошка) in Russian means “cat,” or more specifically, “female cat.” The feminine case ending ties the word directly to Lavínia, it symbolizes herself: a Russian cat. To Herberto, the fact that he knows only the feminine form of the word might mean that he is a man who can truly understand her, but more likely it signifies his ability to seduce and subsequently

domesticate her. However, his role as her master cannot endure, because he does not know Lavínia's word for "goodbye": he is merely a distraction for a short while, an "Herberto X"—a space into which any man's name might have been written, but with the same result, that Lavínia cannot find through him or any other man the way to bid a lasting adieu to Alfredo. Thus, Lavínia's freedom is only imaginary, or at best temporary: not being truly free, she simply strays from one man/master to another, eventually returning, like Lídia, to her original master.

The image of cat, established as a metaphor for both Lídia and Lavínia—albeit with slightly different implications for each—is used again in the middle of the narrative as a dividing point between the two women. As discussed in the first two chapters of this analysis, Lídia is completely aware of the extent to which her mother suffered herself to Alfredo, able only to escape through suicide. Resolving not to follow the same path, Lídia paces inside Afonso's house, thinking:

era preciso não aceitar... não se resignar, não se deixar domesticar nunca, gato que arma lentamente o salto e se transforma em lince, sobe as escadas e atravessa a casa em todos os sentidos, entre jarras de cristal que se estilhaçam
[it was necessary to not accept it, to not resign herself to it, to not ever let herself be domesticated, a cat that slowly prepares to pounce and transforms itself into a lynx, goes up the stairs and crosses the house in every sense, among crystal jars that shatter] (61-62)

Given this realization, Lídia begins to recognize and find her power, her escape from Afonso's dominance—subsequently, the cat image never resurfaces. As a metaphor of restrained, almost-freedom, it no longer applies to Lídia; she no longer surrenders its freedom by returning like a cat to its master in mournful domestication. Lavínia on the other hand, who only escapes through

death, is until her suicide represented by the cat, trapped by Alfredo, looking continually out over the wall at the liberty that is beyond her reach.

Other animal forms are mentioned throughout the novel, but like the cat they always represent repression and foregone freedom. Birds live in cages, anemones in aquariums, and several diverse animals are described as being imprisoned between one and another wall in a zoo. In a wild scene in which Lavínia imagines several of these animals escaping, they are all consequently run down and massacred (71-72). A notable exception to this trend is a bird which Lídia sees outside her window, and she immediately takes pleasure in it, noting its freedom in flight (57). Overwhelmingly, the image of an animal—even if no more specific than the word “animal”—is associated with being caged and repressed, a symbol of the oppressed women in the novel. The next image to be considered also represents women in an oppressed state, although it centers more directly on Lavínia.

3.1.1.2 Flowers

Another powerful image of nature throughout the novel is that of flowers. Like the animals who are confined in cages, flowers are presented as trapped in an artificial constraint, such as a pot or a greenhouse. The only exception is the gardens at Lavínia’s house, which “fundem-se uns nos outros e não se sabe bem onde começam e acabam” [grow in on each other not knowing where they begin or end] (14). Although these flowers appear to grow freely, even they are part of a structured hierarchy, “um conjunto de pequenos jardins girando no espaço, uma espécie de sistema solar...separados por muros” [a series of tiny gardens spinning in space, a kind of solar system...separated by walls] (13).

More than a mere repetition of the image of the domesticated animal, flowers are used to make particular mention of Lavínia: on numerous occasions, flowers are transplanted—uprooted and forced into a foreign environment. This parallel with Lavínia is most apparent: as a Russian émigré, she is brought home to Portugal by Alfredo. Concerning Lavínia, Alfredo comments to Herberto that “[ela] praticamente começa nesta casa. Este é verdadeiramente o seu ambiente. É assim como ir por um caminho e encontrar uma flor e transplantá-la para o seu jardim. Uma flor chamada Lavínia” [she practically begins in this house. This is truly her environment. It’s like going along a path and finding a flower and transplanting it to your own garden. A flower called Lavínia] (18).

Aside from revealing Alfredo’s objectifying attitude toward his wife, Jane Rodrigues dos Santos characterizes the way he regards Lavínia as a flower as a demonstration of his quick dismissal of Lavínia’s origin, particularly in light of his occupation as a professor of Portuguese:

Situação semelhante ocorre no ambiente familiar, visto que Alfredo, do mesmo modo que negava a subjetividade dos alunos, tentando-lhes impor uma uniformidade de pensamento, nega a condição de estrangeira e o passado da mulher, compreendendo Lavínia, como uma flor que encontrada em um caminho pode ser facilmente transplantada para o seu jardim.

[A similar situation occurs in the home, as Alfredo, in the same way that he denied his students any subjectivity, trying to impose upon them a uniform way of thought, denies his wife’s past and condition as a foreigner, regarding Lavínia as a flower found along the way that is easily transplanted to his own garden.] (3)

Santos’ reference to Alfredo’s classroom manner is an allusion to the way he would make his students learn the rules of Latin, “running through the declensions of the word ‘rose’”

(Sadlier 107). He repeats this same task at home with Lavínia, while patronizingly trying to teach her Portuguese: “repare o latim, rosa, rosae, sempre no início os jovens se rebelam mas acabam por aprender a declinar” [notice in Latin, rosa, rosae, always in the beginning the kids rebel but end up learning the declensions] (68). The verb “decliner” carries more meanings than a simple linguistic exercise—it also can mean to decay, to degenerate, or to bow down (before something). Alfredo’s assertion is not only that his students always end up learning the grammar, but also that he breaks them—they give up, ceasing their rebellion, and submit to him. It is no coincidence that the word he repeats in this exercise is the name of a flower.

Like his students, Lavínia is unable to sustain her struggle against Alfredo’s dominant will and order—she relents, and her own identity becomes lost. Alfredo assumes, as stated earlier, that she cannot even remember any words in Russian, but the imagined woman (in this case, a clear channel for Lídia’s childhood memory) recalls a time when Lavínia cried out suddenly:

algo como inas—inastranka, não sei, nao me recordo ao certo, uma palavra absurda e louca e perigosa, porque não significava para nós coisa alguma mas tinha certamente sentido noutro código de que não possuíamos a chave, uma palavra inimiga, que estava para além do nosso alcance e nos agredia, nos insultava talvez sem nós sabermos

[something like inas—inastranka, I don’t know, I don’t remember exactly, an absurd, wild and dangerous word, because it didn’t mean anything to us but it certainly had meaning in some other code that we didn’t have the key to, a hostile word, which was out of our grasp and which attacked us, insulted us without us knowing] (70)

The word which she unleashes—“inostranka” (иностранка)—means “foreigner” in Russian, once again in the feminine case. Sensing herself dying in her own identity, she tries to express her feelings, as a flower transplanted against her will. Although her outcry is menacing, it ultimately has no effect, but “soava apenas como uma palavra resignada e morta, que não atingia ninguém e não significava coisa alguma, vibrava apenas no silêncio sem mudar nada, sem tocar em nada” [sounded out weakly like a word resigned and dead, that affected no one and meant nothing, merely vibrated in the silence without changing anything, without touching anything] (70-71). Lavínia is too far down the path of submission to reclaim herself.

Recapturing this image late in the novel, Lídia imagines Lavínia, restless with her domestic chores, entering into her greenhouse and watering the variety of plants that are there. In a moment, she sums up Lavínia’s trapped state, saying to the imagined image of her mother that, like the plants,

sei que não irás nunca...porque estas plantas são plantas domésticas,
domesticadas, que não sabem mais viver ao ar livre e suportam pouco sol...medes
de repente a quantidade de obstáculos, das coisas em que foste ficando
soterrada... e porque não pudeste levar-te a ti mesma, voltaste para trás e
procuraste na morte uma saída,

[I know you will never leave...because these are domestic, domesticated plants,
that no longer know how to live in the open air and that can only take very little
sun...you measure suddenly the number of obstacles, the things by which you
became overwhelmed...and because you could not get yourself to go, you went
back and sought an escape through death] (81-82)

Again the Portuguese betrays a double meaning, here in the word “soterrada”; while its usage reflects the English word “overwhelmed”, it might also be translated as “buried.” The second meaning is stronger in Portuguese than in English, as its metaphoric use is overshadowed by the fact that the word “terra”—“earth,” or “dirt”—appears within it. While Lavínia has become “buried” by her domestic environs, the earthy aspect of the word hearkens back to the image of transplanting.

As plants are used to illustrate these two major characteristics of Lavínia—her identity as a stranger, unable to express herself, and her predicament as Alfredo’s captive—the same motif is used to introduce Lavínia’s suicide. The passage cited above alludes to her suicide in the context of plants—while Lavínia is in the greenhouse, the two themes are tied together in a later passage much more strongly—albeit delicately (M. Oliveira 6).

A tiny plant is described as having been purposely stunted, to keep it smaller than was natural. Lavínia keeps this plant as a constant companion, carrying it with her from place to place in the house; she knows the plant intimately and preserves it delicately: “ela sabe exactamente como a planta precisa de ser tocada, as palavras que quer ouvir, assim em voz baixa, apenas ciciada, conhece o seu crescimento” [she knows exactly how the plant needs to be touched, the words it wants to hear, in a quiet voice, merely whispered, the way it has grown] (100). One day without warning, she takes it to the window, opens the pane, and pushes the plant off the ledge, hearing the pot shatter on the ground below. The allegory in this scene is easy to see, as Maria de Almeida Tavares explains in her dissertation, “Lavínia...concentra a sua atenção numa planta anã, que bem pode simbolizar a sua própria existência” [Lavínia...concentrates her attention on a dwarf plant, which may well symbolize her own existence] (131)—an existence which she ends

abruptly and seemingly without purpose. There is also another interpretation for this scene, which we will return to toward the end of this chapter.

A final reflection on the representation of Lavínia through flower metaphors comes through Herberto, and his opinion of Lavínia's name: "Lavínia fica-lhe bem...Parece um nome de flor. E depois é uma palavra esdrúxula, sobe até um ponto alto e parte-se de repente" [Lavínia fits her well...it seems like the name of a flower. And after all, it is a strange word, that comes up to a high point then suddenly takes off] (18). Alfredo agrees, and explains that Lavínia is not her original Russian name, but was a name she adopted when she arrived in Portugal because everyone found her real name so hard to pronounce. The name she accepts is a name that appears like that of a flower, which fits her for the reasons already explained above.

Like in other instances, the Portuguese here conveys more than one meaning—one is that "esdrúxula" (in English, "proparoxytone") is a linguistic term which is used to describe a word in which the third-to-last syllable is stressed: literally, Lavínia's name rises to a certain point (the stressed syllable), then drops off from there. While Sadlier translates this word as "whimsical" (107), it could also be understood as "odd," "strange," or "out of place"—all meanings which again can be attributed to Lavínia on multiple levels. Physically, she is out of place both as a foreigner in a strange land and as a woman under Alfredo's control; linguistically, she is out of place as a non-speaker of Portuguese, and as a woman, she is marginalized from the dominant male discourse. This struggle is expressed as Alfredo teases her during a Portuguese lesson: "oh, essa sua comovente procura das palavras certas, que nunca encontra no momenta preciso" [oh, the touching way you search for the right words, and never find [them] at the moment you need them] (68).

As stated in Chapter 1, a similar description of Lídia is given at a later point in the novel, seeming to serve only to draw the two women together, given the implication that they might “suddenly take off.” The reference to “iris” in relation to Lídia’s name is merely superficial, because while flowers represented Lavínia, whenever a flower image is mentioned in conjunction with Lídia, she manages to distance herself from it.

For example, in the beginning of the novel, when Lídia still imagines that her relationship with Afonso might have a happy future, flowers are associated with her almost as foreshadowing, suggesting that she is following the same path as Lavínia: she is carrying a basket of flowers that have been gathered, heading back to Afonso’s house. The parallel between this and Alfredo’s “transplanting” of Lavínia is obvious; however, the scene changes as she enters the house, signifying her parting of ways with her mother. Seeing Afonso hunched over his desk, poring meticulously over his books as he writes—both consuming and contributing dead, written words—she allows the flowers to tumble to the ground, introducing disorder into his house:

ela poisa ao acaso o cesto que acabará sempre por tombar e aproxima-se descalça, pisando a areia que se solta do seu corpo e as flores que se espalharam pelo chão. E a desordem é subitamente uma forma de amor, a sua forma de amor.

Interromper Afonso como o mar entrando.

[she puts down at random the basket which will always end up falling and barefoot she comes closer, stepping on the sand which shakes free from her body and the flowers which littered the ground. And disorder is a subtle form of love, her form of love. To interrupt Afonso like the breaking sea.] (22)

Although at this time Lídia wants to love Afonso and believes that their relationship can work, the text reveals her eventual evolution and discovery that this will never happen. This presentiment is made clear through the image of the fallen flowers: Lídia will not be domesticated like a flower. Also characterized through this image are Lavínia's suicide, echoed later in the plant she pushes from the window, and Lídia's subsequent reenactment of her mother's death as discussed in Chapter 2, as she drops the flowers to the floor and tramples them.

In the same way this passage ties the flower image more closely to Lavínia and her fate, it also suggests another image of nature which accurately represents Lídia and her chaotic force: that of wind and waves. This image, different from the flower, is wild and forceful—a clear distinction between the untamed Lídia and the condemned Lavínia.

3.1.1.3 The sea and wind

The sea in the novel is best described as uncontrollable—precisely because as it is used as a metaphor for Lídia, it references her freedom in terms of Afonso's attempts to control her—she is defined by the forces of opposition. For example, while Lídia dreams of “interrupting” Afonso like the tide on the sand, he repeatedly makes attempts to stem that very tide by making Lídia adhere to his world of order, as we see in the following passage toward the end of the novel, in which Lídia becomes aware of the impossibility of their relationship:

e se eu dissesse que o mar vinha pelo crepúsculo adiante, até bater na orla do jardim, a espuma da onda mais alta saltando até as janelas, tu dirias que havia uma enorme distância, desde logo em altura, entre a casa e a praia, e então, porque me obrigavas, eu corrigiria: havia uma enorme distancia entre a casa e a

praia, mas ela imaginava que o mar vinha vindo pelo crepúsculo e que a espuma batia nas janelas—

então o mar vinha vindo pelo crepúsculo adiante, até bater na orla do jardim, a espuma saltando ate as janelas, disse, e ele riu, seguro de si, porque ela dizia sempre coisas impossíveis—

[and if I said that the sea came with the twilight, up to the edge of the garden, the highest wave throwing surf up onto the windows, you would tell me that there was an enormous distance, just so long, between the house and the beach, and so, because you forced me, I would correct myself: there was an enormous distance between the house and the beach, but she imagined the sea coming in with the twilight and the surf thrown up on the windows—

so the sea came in with the twilight, up to the edge of the garden, the surf thrown up against the windows, she said, and he laughed, sure of himself, because she always said impossible things—] (110-111)

This passage then immediately repeats itself: she (again) imagines the waves crashing against the house, and he (again) corrects her, stating such to be impossible because of the distance. The repetition of the same scene, with the same details, in nearly identical language is a textual parallel to the tide against the beach—as the sea, she unceasingly attempts to “interrupt” him, but because of his necessity for order, he puts her and the tide back in their place. In response to Afonso’s persistent reminder of the enormous distance between the house and the sea, Lídia comes to regard the same distance, “reconhece[ndo] que eles eram um homem e uma mulher que não se amavam, porque não conseguiriam falar nunca” [recogniz[ing] that they were

a man and a woman who did not love each other, because they would never be able to speak] (111).

This conclusion comes late in the novel to Lída, but it is here that she determines that if she is to find her own expression, she will have to look somewhere other than Afonso; she has no hope of finding a “connection, through words” as long as she and Afonso cannot speak. While we may be inclined to read this passage to mean that they cannot speak to each other, the ambiguous Portuguese may mean that they cannot speak at all—not only can Lída not speak with Afonso, but being with him makes it so she cannot speak.

While Lída may only discover this a few pages from the novel’s end, we as readers have seen it coming since the beginning—again, the disconnect between her and Afonso has been illustrated all along through images of the sea. There is a passage in which Afonso’s office erupts in chaos from the wind—coming in through the windows that Lída had opened. Afonso, as Lída notes, had: “sempre o gesto de fechar janelas e correr cortinas sobre o mar” [always the gesture of closing windows and sliding curtains against the sea] (31). This shows both her attempts to cause chaos in his life, but also encapsulates his attempts to keep those chaotic forces in check—by closing the windows.

This habit of both characters—Lída’s constant opening of windows, and Afonso’s consequent attempts to close them behind her—plays out with an almost humorous frequency in the novel, as if it were a running gag. However, the frequent repetition of this scene serves to reiterate the conflict between the characters through their continual attempts to undercut each other, also providing a counter-image to the nature motifs which represent Lída and Lavínia throughout the novel: civilization and industry.

3.1.2 Afonso and Alfredo: Images of civilization

The concept of civilization, as defined in the introduction to this section, is characterized by progress: to borrow from Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade, “the determination of progress by catalogues and television sets” (41). Inherent to the concept of civilization and modernity are the notions of efficiency, industrialization, specialization of labor, and machination. It is logical then that Alfredo and Afonso be closely linked to this overarching theme of civilization, often defined by their occupation. Alfredo is characterized through his profession as a strict disciplinarian (Duarte 58); similarly, Afonso is largely defined by his occupation as a cosmetic surgeon (Faria 4). This characterization of the central male characters in the novel depicts them as regulated professionals, in sharp contrast to Lídia and Lavínia, who resist such regulation. Aside from their professions, Afonso and Alfredo are more clearly identified by the images that are associated with them. For Afonso and Alfredo, the most clearly linked image is that of glass, seen above as a synecdoche of windows.

3.1.2.1 Glass

As it relates to the window-image, glass is a perfect metaphor for Afonso’s order against Lídia’s chaos. It enables him to shut Lídia out from invading his physical space, being able to observe her but not interact with her, except on his own terms. While this characteristic of glass is clearly discerned in *O silêncio*, in a later novel Gersão makes it explicit: “vendo tudo, mas sem participar, como se se estivesse atrás de uma parede de vidro” [seeing everything, but without participating, as if behind a wall of glass] (*Cavalo* 239). He is able to both keep her and keep her at bay, like the sea outside his window. Being able to deposit her behind the glass (or to put the glass up between them) is echoed throughout many of the images previously discussed, notably

the flowers in the Alfredo's greenhouse. Thus by closing the window, Afonso is able to reduce Lídia to an object, as in a collection ("havia agora uma jovem mulher nos seus braços—uma vitória" [now there was a young woman in his arms—a victory] (34).

There is another separating, subjugating quality of glass which Lídia recognizes, and that is that it also acts as soundproofing, a means to silence. During one of Lídia's dystopic daydreams about the future, she envisions a society of people where

não é possível falar porque as pessoas do lado as olham com estranheza, a tal ponto se habituaram a viver dentro de caixas bem isoladas que qualquer som espontâneo as incomoda, transportam em volta da cabeça uma caixa de vidro mental que se fecha por si mesma à menor suspeita de desordem...

[speaking isn't possible because the people around them give them awkward looks, to the point that they have become used to living inside their very isolated boxes and any spontaneous noise annoys them, they carry around their heads a mental glass box that closes on its own at the slightest hint of disorder...] (39-40)

In this vision, the role of glass is the same as before—it is a method of separation between chaos and order. However, because in this passage this aspect is seen specifically from Lídia's point of view, it is given a negative connotation—rather than enclosing nature within boundaries, it merely encloses and isolates itself.

Afonso's reaction to Lídia's description of what she has imagined confirms this: "Ele riu, defendendo-se dela, recuando, fechando em volta da cabeça a sua caixa mental—" [He laughed, defending himself from her, recoiling, closing around his head his own mental box—] (40).

Returning to the sort of binary male-female language used in Chapter 2, glass represents the way man keeps woman in his control while simultaneously ignoring her, thus prohibiting her speech.

From this passage, we can see glass as an individual symptom of silence; however, this silence does not limit itself to individuals, but begins to pervade society as a whole. Lídia describes the imaginative scenes that comprise her vision of a terrible future:

‘É um mundo que começou a enlouquecer...e algumas pessoas começam a ficar inquietas, porque de repente perceberam que estão bloqueadas, dentro de caixas de vidro. O universo é um conjunto gigantesco de sucessivas caixas de vidro, e elas apenas transitam, ou são transportadas, de umas para as outras, casas, escritórios, auto-carros, hospitais, aeroportos, aviões, transatlânticos...é o mundo que não tocam mais vem até elas apenas em imagens, dentro da televisão-caixa-de-vidro.

[It is a world that started going crazy...and some people begin to grow restless, because they suddenly perceive that they are blocked, inside boxes of glass. The universe is a gigantic series of successive glass boxes, and they merely transfer, or are transported, from one to another, houses, offices, buses, hospitals, airports, planes, ocean liners...it is a world they no longer touch which comes to them only through images, inside the box-of-glass-television.] (39)

The dystopia she envisions is characterized by glass, which is closely identified with technology and mobility. People are continually trapped within some kind of glass box; glass boxes carry them to and fro, glass boxes in a neat orderly matrix isolate them from each other and the world, and through yet another kind of glass box, they are given access to the outside world without ever leaving their own individual cell. Glass is both their prison and portal.

The overarching feeling from this passage is the creation of a perfect order which is introduced and upon which everyone becomes ultimately and entirely dependent. While this

vision portends the future, Lídia makes it clear to Afonso that the system described is nothing more than a perpetuation of the status quo:

é tudo sempre outra vez aproveitado em favor do silencio vigente [sem interesse] em modificar coisa alguma. Entretanto vai crescendo o silêncio e a sua ordem perfeita, nada mais é directo, não há mais contacto, e tudo regulado.

[everything is again put to use to promote the prevailing silence [with no interest] in changing a single thing. Meanwhile the silence and its perfect order keep growing, nothing is direct anymore, there is no more contact, with everything regulated.] (40)

We find an interesting example of this in the pictures of Lavínia that Alfredo keeps after her death. Since he is unable to understand her suicide as a form of revolt against him, he ignores it, focusing all his attention on vigilantly maintaining the picture frames in their place. These pictures of Lavínia are all still frames that he took himself in which he had Lavínia pose a certain way. By keeping them in their precise positions on the table, he ensures that they will never cast a glare, preserving Lavínia—his version of her—in a perfectly silent stasis. He wiles away the rest of his life maintaining their arrangement in an attempt to reclaim Lavínia, although the Lídia-narrator informs us that he never was able to get them exactly right (104)—a symbol of the lasting rupture and tension that Lavínia’s suicide introduced to Alfredo.

3.1.2.2 Plastic and other industrial allusions

In addition to the multiform presence of glass in the novel, it is not the only industrial material that makes an appearance—plastic and machinery are also found, although to a lesser extent. Besides their comparatively reduced presence in the novel, they also do not fulfill the

same function. Whereas glass is used to trap life and to contain chaos, these other technological elements are used to replace it. As Jorge Vaz de Carvalho affirms,

em *O silêncio*, a representação...de “perfeição fictícia” artificialmente fabricada, [em que] desenvolve-se uma civilização negativamente sempre mais sofisticada, onde o progresso científico e tecnológico cria uma vida artificial...que substitui a natureza para eliminar os aspectos incómodos, circunscribe a população ensimesmada...e promove o abdicar da criatividade e do sonho...para que nada perturbe o silêncio, que “Cresce e é fundo e é total.”

[in *O silêncio*, the representation...of “fictitious perfection” artificially fashioned, [in which] an ever more negatively sophisticated civilization develops, where scientific and technological progress create an artificial life...that substitutes nature to eliminate those cumbersome aspects, circumscribes the self-absorbed population...and promotes the abdication of creativity and dreams...so that nothing may disturb the silence, which “Grows and is deep and is absolute.”] (49)

These aspects of nature which are substituted—a few of which Carvalho makes specific mention—include Lídia’s imagining that all the trees in the cities have been replaced with plastic ones and that instead of real birds, mechanized ones are invented which make no mess, and pets are replaced by mechanical animals. Even the sea has been replaced, transformed into a sea of plastic, calculated so that no one can drown in it. Through these images of nature replaced, we can draw parallels between Alfredo attempting to teach Lavínia Portuguese, replacing her natural culture with unnatural and foreign habits, claiming that she has no past other than what he has created for her. We can also see Alcina as having subsumed her own identity to Afonso’s,

abandoning herself and being defined as merely his wife—a process which Afonso also tries to implement on the stubborn Lídia.

Whether glass or plastic these images together represent, as Carvalho states, “an ever more negatively sophisticated civilization.” They function as a metonymy for modern technological society, pitting the man-made against the natural, the artificial and orderly against the organic and chaotic—as depicted in *O silêncio*, dominant man versus oppressed female. This binary construction is captured in the word “civilization”—the verb “to civilize.” Intrinsic to this concept are themes which we have already examined, here and in other chapters: to instruct, to teach, to enforce behavior—and in a more imperial sense, “to conquer”. In the same way that modern man builds a dam to keep and shape the water, holding back and harnessing the forces of nature, Afonso and Alfredo place barriers around Lídia and Lavínia to mold them according to their wishes—an act illustrated in the novel by the industrial image of glass. Furthermore, they attempt to remove those elements of the women that most threaten them, such as Lavínia’s mother tongue, through substitution.

3.1.3 A matter of life and death: “Die, die, Lavínia, and thy shame with thee”

Along with the dualisms of nature versus civilization which Plumwood describes, and order and chaos, which we have observed in the relationships outlined above, we might add another binary qualification: the opposition of life and death. For example, the images of nature associated with the women in the novel imply a sense of life and vivacity—even if that life is being hampered and restricted. Added to this, we might also consider the vividness of Lídia’s painting. In the case of Alfredo and Afonso, it does not seem accurate to say that they themselves represent death, but it is clear that death seems to abound and accumulate around them. For

example, Afonso's house is described as "cheia de coisas mortas" [full of dead things] (32), including his still life of a wife, Alcina. Similarly, Alfredo's house after Lavínia is stagnant, immovable, and lifeless.

As death surrounds Alfredo and Afonso, it is clear that the primary victims of this death are Lídia and Lavínia. Lídia becomes aware of this early on in her relationship with Afonso, and so manages to escape; Lavínia, on the other hand, suffers not only her own suicide, but is also identified with death through her namesake.

Returning to the scene of Lavínia's suicide, we are reminded of the tiny plant Lavínia kept which was symbolic of herself, and the way she shocks everyone by sending the little plant to its destruction by pushing it out the window. Maria Lúcia de Oliveira relates how this allegory is used to delicately reveal Lavínia's suicide, while at the same time it reminds us of a reflection Lídia makes about one of her imaginary visions of the future (6).

In the vision, Lídia imagines the people of her future realizing how empty their precisely programmed society is, and subsequently leaping to their deaths at the stroke of twelve:

a rua ficaria de repente cheia de pessoas inadvertidamente mortas, mas por outro lado só quando se compreende que a alternativa é mudar a vida ou saltar da janela se adquire a exacta perspectiva das coisas,

[the street would be suddenly full of people inadvertently dead, but on the other hand it is only when you understand that your options are to change your life or leap from the window that you gain the exact perspective of things,] (101)

Given the impossibility of changing her life in the environment of strict silence which was made to govern her—"é tudo sempre outra vez aproveitado em favor do silêncio vigente" [everything is again put to use to promote the prevailing silence] (40)—Lavínia's suicide was the

only available option left. The allegory of the plant being pushed from the window, the people leaping from the window to their deaths, and her head leaning against the window of the bus (in one of the descriptions of her suicide) all tie Lavínia's suicide back to the image of glass, which is again echoed through the portraits Alfredo keeps. Yet, as described in Chapter 2, death is the means whereby she finally escapes from the predetermined role assigned to her by Alfredo; while silence oppresses her, death ultimately redeems her.

These effects of silence and death upon Lavínia are brought into sharp focus again as we recall her namesake—Lavinia from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. *Titus* is often regarded as Shakespeare's most violent play, and the principal victim of that violence is Lavinia. Perceiving that she is about to be raped, she pleads for death instead, but is denied it (2.3.913-920) and the scene ends with her being dragged away by her two captors. When she reappears in the next scene, her tongue has been cut out and her hands cut off (2.4.1061-1062), so that she may not speak of what has happened or reveal her assailants.

Lavínia in *O silêncio* does not suffer from violent sexual assault as does Shakespeare's Lavinia, but the two women's fates are remarkably reflected in each other. Alfredo essentially removes Lavínia's tongue as she forgets her Russian under his tutelage, and while her hands are not cut off, her banishment to and figurative burial within Alfredo's home makes her hands only useful for knitting or other domestic chores. She is rendered just as powerless and silenced as her Shakespearean doppelganger.

In similar fashion, death is something Alfredo is not willing to afford her—even after her suicide. As mentioned before, Alfredo's house became stagnant and lifeless—specifically, Lídia describes Alfredo's mania in maintaining everything in its exact place, even subscribing to all the magazines Lavínia used to receive, doing all this “para que nada perturbe a ilusão de que ela

não está morta” [so that nothing might disturb the illusion that she wasn’t really dead] (106).

Others are also unwilling to grant her death, or at least her particular form of death, as later the imagined woman rebukes the imagined man because he “não aceita o suicídio porque persiste em afirmar que nenhum gesto de revolta se admite” [cannot accept suicide because [he] persists in claiming that no gesture of revolt is admissible] (107), while Afonso claims that her death was the result of an accidental overdose (106).

When death does finally come to Lavinia (both Gersão’s and Shakespeare’s), it is a means of release, of escape, of redemption. In *Titus*, Lavinia receives death at the hands of her father, who kills her as an act of mercy:

Titus Andronicus. My lord the emperor, resolve me this:

Was it well done of rash Virginius

To slay his daughter with his own right hand,

Because she was enforced, stain'd, and deflower'd?

Saturninus. It was, Andronicus.

Titus Andronicus. Your reason, mighty lord?

Saturninus. Because the girl should not survive her shame...

And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

Titus Andronicus. A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;

A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant,

For me, most wretched, to perform the like.

Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee;

[Kills LAVINIA]

And, with thy shame, thy father's sorrow die! (5.3.2567-2580)

In *O silêncio*, Lavínia's death comes at her own hand, as she drinks poison from a (glass) vial. While there is no explicit approval of Lavínia's suicide as in *Titus*, Lídia confirms the trying circumstances which led Lavínia to seek an escape through death (82). Her suicide is also shown to be meaningful, as the imagined woman rebuffs the imagined man's claim that Lavínia's death carried no exemplary social or moral significance (107), affirming that it was her means of revolt, of redemption from her fallen, surrendered state. Further condoning of Lavínia's suicide is the fact that, as related in Chapter 2, Lídia essentially kill Lavínia afresh, by reinventing her death through different circumstances. "Die, die, Lavínia, and thy shame with thee."

Death also holds special qualities for Lídia, not of redemption, but of empowerment. Lídia gains power over death as she determines to assume the space of silence in order to thwart it. It is interesting to note that what she kills in both cases—her reimagined thought-experiment mother, and the fetus growing inside her—are her own creations. Her real mother is dead, but the mother image she retraces is the fruit of her own labors. From our analysis in Chapter 2 we concluded that killing her mother anew allowed her to kill that part of herself which was weak, like Lavínia had been—an interesting tie to Titus' final proclamation: "And, with thy shame, thy [creator's] sorrow die!"

Similarly, the child she aborts gives her another power, that of controlling silence. The child is a symbol of the connection which she had sought since the beginning of the story, as seen in the following passage:

uma forma viva que subia do mais fundo dela mesma...o instante em que se revelava a forma procurada e de repente os seus olhos viam claro—desceu a escada e vagueou pela rua, transportando a sua própria forma, soube, como uma mulher grávida transporta um filho

[a living form that came rising up from the deepest part of herself...the instant in which the sought-after form revealed itself and suddenly her eyes saw clearly— she went down the steps and wandered about the street, carrying her own form, she knew, as a pregnant woman carries a child] (50)

The sought-after form which she seeks is that form through words which she never finds, but eventually abandons to silence like she abandons her aborted child to death. Now capable of controlling both of these forces (death and silence), she exits the scene at the end of the novel, “abrindo passagem com o corpo...” [opening the way before her with her body...] (124). With her body, not words, she is entering a path of freedom and life. Having become master of both silence and death, Lídia now leaves them both behind. She is free in a very physical sense, hearkening back to the nature images which she had embodied—free like the swooping gulls on the beach, like the raging sea, like the restless wind. Unlike the semi-domestic images of cat and flower, she will never again return to Afonso.

Afonso, on the other hand, calls after her but his voice has no effect. He recoils back into the house, shutting the window one last time as he resigns himself to “um ódio leve, que se estendia a todas as coisas do mundo” [a mild hatred, which extended to all the things in the world] (124). He is effectively silenced by the powerlessness of his voice, and left mortal, exposed to death—as dead to Lídia as she was now to him, closed inside his isolated box of glass which he himself had shut around his own head.

So, while the tables have turned in terms of death and silence as they refer to Lídia and Afonso, they stay true to their respective images of nature/chaos and glass/order, with the only change being the semi-domesticated identity of the cat which Lídia has shed. Throughout *O silêncio* these images have remained constant as characterizations of both the men in the novel

(Afonso, Alfredo) in their typically dominant roles over the women (Lídia, Lavínia, Alcina). Understanding the conflict between these two incongruent images allows us to better illustrate these male-female relationships.

3.2 “A palavra escrita é uma palavra morta”: The text’s relationship with its readers

While the first two chapters discussed what the novel *says*, and the first half of this chapter concerns what it *shows*, we have relied on the same means as Lídia in trying to find her connection with herself “através das palavras” [through words] (11); as she sought through language to understand herself, we have similarly sought to understand the novel.

Yet, as we and other critics have pointed out on numerous occasions, the book does not lend itself to an easy read. Comparative literature scholar Flávio Leal describes eleven characteristics of Gersão’s writing, seven of which are deeply linked to the reader-text relationship. One of the more interesting and accurate of these characteristics describes her writing as one which “cri[a] uma forma de escrita nômade” [creates a nomadic written form] (3)—an apt description, considering the way the text shifts between dreamspace to reality, from past to present to future, and from one character to another almost recklessly. All throughout our discussion here, we have followed the same path as Sadlier in her analysis:

I have summarized these events in a much more direct and orderly way than they appear in the text; and I should emphasize that Gersão’s whole purpose is to undermine chronology and make rational distinctions seem ambiguous. (109)

Whether referring to the text or to our relationship to it, both form and content are constructed in a way to mask meanings.

Given these conclusions, it may seem to us as readers that *O silêncio* is a book that does not want to be read. This is an odd reflection, yet it accurately portrays the relationship of the book with us, its readers, consumers of the written word. Take, for example, Lídia's attitude toward writing, that "a palavra escrita é uma palavra morta" [the written word is a dead word] (116); shunning words, Lídia prefers to paint instead (58). Echoing Lídia's attitude, the novel itself betrays a sentiment of disdain toward the written word, such as in Afonso's sarcastic suggestion to Lídia that she write a novel (114). A book that does not want to be read, such as *O silêncio*, is by its own existence a contradiction in terms, a paradox.

3.2.1 *The paradox of existence*

When we read a book, we expect a certain degree of comprehensibility; we want to understand the book, and we expect it to make such an understanding forthcoming. This is strictly true of informative texts, (an encyclopedia or dictionary), and generally true of novels as well: surprises, plot twists, and suspense are things that make for a more enjoyable read, but we still expect the book to guide us somewhat to a conclusion of its meaning. *O silêncio* completely frustrates such an expectation. Present its compacted, tangled narrative, which "the patient reader is supposed to unravel" (Moser 264), "pos[ing] considerable problems for the reader" (Sadler 97), *O silêncio* does not guide us, but sets us adrift in a sea of conflicting narrative. Even if we pay attention and catch some of the narrative's endless comings and goings we may spend the whole time reading the novel searching for some sense of meaning to cling to. After multiple re-readings, both of short passages and of the entire work, the novel still refuses to yield to us easily: it does not want to be read.

However, is this not exactly what the content of the book is about, as a mirror to its form?

Let us cite a description that Sadlier gives of the imaginary conversation that begins the novel:

there is no apparent logic or order in this scene...the man tries to impose a logic on what the woman is saying...prov[ing] to be inaccurate and finally incapable of representing all that the woman has to say. Ultimately, her language seems to have no boundaries and it defies coherence or order. (96-97)

While used to describe a single scene within the novel, this statement accurately applies to the novel in its entirety, especially with regards to our relationship with it as readers. As we try to impose a system of logic onto (or derive one from) what the text is saying, it slips out of our grasp, tauntingly defying us to tame it. Like the imagined man, we find that the conversation has gotten away from us, and that we are no longer in control. Lídia refuses to bend to Afonso's suffocating order, and the text refuses to reveal itself to us. In this way, the form of the novel directly complements its content, recasting the impossibility of mutual understanding between the man and woman onto our relationship as readers with the text itself.

Lídia not only rejects the order which Afonso tries to place her under, but she also willfully flaunts it in order to undermine and overturn it. Afonso becomes aware that Lídia is not under his control, and in the same moment perceives the chaos that Lídia is heaping upon him:

[ele] continuaria a escrever, no seu pequeno espaço de segurança provisória, mas ela acabava sempre por invadir mesmo esse espaço diminuto, como se para ela nunca houvesse fronteiras, e por onde ela passava destruía...onde todos os gestos de defesa são inúteis, até aí ela o empurrava...

[he would continue to write, in his small space that provided some temporary safety, but she always seemed to invade even this tiny space, as if there were no

boundaries to her, and wherever she went she destroyed...where any gestures of defense are useless, that was where she was forcing him...] (87)

Afonso can feel the disorder growing around him, and that Lída is the force behind the incipient chaos. As readers, we sense the same in the novel itself—we know that it is out of our control, that the complex turns the narrative takes are deliberately tracing circles around us, as if to trap us. For Afonso—and for us as well—this danger takes on a menacing form as he envisions Lída as a wild intruder, come into his life intent on destroying it. He imagines her opening all the windows, allowing the wind to rush in and put his office in disarray—his papers, his books, even putting out his light to write by. Reorienting himself in the darkness among the broken objects, he senses Lída in the room, the cause of the chaos:

de repente ele teve a certeza de que invisível, tranquila, ela estava de pé, encostada à ombreira da porta, sentia-a sem a ver, como se a sua presença fosse palpável, bastar-lhe-ia estender a mão para premir o interruptor e acender a luz, mas ele sabia que ela jamais estenderia a mão, ficaria assim quieta, respirando baixo, e deixá-lo-ia mover-se com dificuldade no escuro, sentindo o ridículo de usar óculos no escuro, tropeçando em coisas derrubadas e ferindo as mãos em estilhaços de vidro, e quando finalmente ele alcançasse o interruptor, depois de contornar penosamente todas as mesas e cadeiras, ela já não estaria lá, encostada à ombreira da porta, ter-se-ia ido embora para aparecer pouco depois, com ar interrogador ou mesmo natural, como se tudo tivesse sido um casual acidente, a janela, o candeeiro, a jarra, o escuro, os vidros, a sua mão sangranda. Víbora, pensou com raiva, uma víbora mordida no escuro a sua mão estendida.

[suddenly he was certain that calmly, invisibly, she was standing there, leaning against the doorjamb, he could feel her without seeing her, as if she were a palpable presence, all she had to do was to reach out her hand to flip the switch and turn on the light, but he knew that she would never reach out her hand, she would remain still, breathing quietly, and would let him move with difficulty in the darkness, feeling ridiculous for using glasses in the dark, tripping over fallen things and cutting his hands on shards of glass, and when he finally reached the switch, after fumbling painfully over all the tables and chairs, she wouldn't be there anymore, leaning against the doorjamb, she would have left already only to appear a little while later, with a natural, inquiring air, as if everything had been just a random accident, the window, the light, the vase the darkness, the glass, his bleeding hand. Viper, he thought angrily, a viper had bitten his stretched-out hand in the dark.] (88-89)

O silêncio behaves in the same way; as it withholds its meanings from us, we get the sense that the novel could easily give us more to go on, that it could reach out and turn the light on so we might understand it plainly. However, it does not, but prefers to allow us to bark our shins on the tables and slice our hands on the broken glass. Like Afonso, we recognize that this chaos is not mere happenstance, but is a calculated element of the text, formed not to be confusing, but to confuse. To requote Sadlier, “Gersão’s whole purpose is to...make rational distinctions seem ambiguous” (109).

By leading us through its intricate narrative maze, by upsetting our expectations as readers, by compacting thought and speech from all characters and in all times into one jumbled mess, the novel betrays a certain stubbornness, as if determined to outlast us. By deliberately *not*

giving us anything solid to rely on—by keeping silent—it is as if the novel hopes to keep us as readers on the ropes until we give up and leave the ring, defeated. We realize that we were wrong before: it does want to be read; but only so that it can frustrate and make us realize realize our powerlessness against it.

Moser, however, dismisses this deliberate complication of the reader relationship as a “literary mania (apparently rife in Portugal)” (264): a simple product of its times, employing a trendy approach. Obviously, Moser is alluding to contemporary Portuguese authors, notably José Saramago, who would later receive the Nobel Prize for Literature (1998). Although Gersão’s narrative style in *O silêncio* is similar to Saramago’s in many respects—for example, the use of paragraph length run-on sentences and a general lack of conventional punctuation or dialogue cues—we should not be so presumptuous to think that she is simply going with the flow of Portuguese literature. We have already demonstrated that *O silêncio* cuts across many preconceived notions and ideologies, and to discard its style as merely fashionable is to fail to recognize how profoundly the fluctuating narrative contributes to its content.

The novel’s attitude toward us as readers and disdain for the very act of writing—remember that when Afonso imagines himself confused and lost in the sudden chaos that Lídia has trapped him in, one immediate effect is the interruption and loss of his writings—does, however, create a paradox. After all, if the written word is a dead word, does not the very existence of *O silêncio* as a novel defy its very purpose? Keeping silent is the key to Lídia’s power over Afonso, yet merely by way of its own being, the novel contradicts the very method it proposes. However, it is precisely because of this paradox that the form of the novel is so convoluted and contorted. Unable to stay completely silent (which would require it to not exist), *O silêncio* accepts the fact of existence almost as a necessary evil, that it may flaunt its

nonconformance in the face of what we as readers would expect of it; if it must say something, it will say it in the most obtuse, impenetrable and undecipherable way.

Cristina Cordeiro Oliveira points to this same contradiction in a different way. She admits that in writing the novel, which holds Lídia triumphant by virtue of her empowering defiance of order, Gersão had ironically “aprisiona[do] a sua palavra numa ordem, numa escrita” [imprison[ed] her word within an order, a writing] (83). She affirms that for Lídia, the written, dead word represents a “símbolo de uma ordenação contrária ao seu desejo de caos.” [symbol of an ordination contrary to her desire of chaos] (83). Thus, if her words must fall victim to an order, then from within that order they will resist and strive to spread chaos.

This is similar to one of the conclusions drawn from Chapter 2, where Lídia assumes the role of silence in order to thwart and control it. In this case, the necessity of the written word may be seen as a necessary evil, or it may be a way of penetrating the order to pull it apart from the inside. When Afonso takes a sarcastic swipe at Lídia’s wild fantasies, stating that she should write a novel, the resulting text of *O silêncio* is a direct retort to that sarcasm—it is not an act of following his suggestion, but of defiance. This is not to say that *O silêncio* is meant to be read as if Lídia had written it; it is simply another way in which Lídia and Afonso’s relationship parallels our relationship to the novel as readers.

3.2.2. *Crossed words: “Two monologues, one overlapping the other”*

By assuming the form of a novel, *O silêncio*’s jarring narrative turns the organized form we expect upside down, parodying order by creating chaos. This is true not only on a metanarrative level towards us as readers, but is made clear in a few instances within the text

itself. There is one particular passage in which the form of the text essentially pulls the rug out from under the content, causing us to reevaluate what it is we are actually reading.

This passage appears early on in the novel, in a scene where Afonso is doing a crossword puzzle. While he is preoccupied, Lídia daydreams, looking across the horizon along the beach where the gulls are swooping and diving. The contrast between Lídia and Afonso is apparent, especially in terms of order versus chaos, of artificiality and nature.

Yet while these activities clearly define and contrast the two, the form of the passage presents these contrasts as if each were its own opposite: chaos in the place of order and vice versa. The passage is cited here at length, in order to capture the feel that the form gives to the text. Although they are absent in the original text, I have inserted cues in italics to denote who is speaking in order to facilitate comprehension (in the original, all that separates the thoughts or utterances from each other is a new line):

Lídia:... Talvez porque eu procurava um enquadramento, um limite, uma forma, porque estava perdida na multiplicidade das coisas,

Afonso: o mesmo que hemíptero, sinónimo de helvético, símbolo químico do crómio, caminho mais curto para qualquer lugar, matéria corante azul, planta da família das solanáceas, cauda de galo em inglês,

Lídia: a mancha clara da cidade, do outro lado da ponte, o brilho confuso das janelas,

Afonso: você conhece algum peixe de grandes dimensões dos mares da China e da Sonda?

Lídia: porque eu era vaga e difusa e sem fronteiras, igual a tudo e a nada, e havia uma casa que se abria na noite com a sua luz acesa e o seu pão quotidiano,

procurei-te, talvez, por medo ao infinito, mas agora não quero mais ficar aqui,

Afonso: adeus, montes de Atenas, cantou ela: Mireille Mathieu, ou não foi?

Lídia: quebro outra vez esta forma provisória e parto à procura de outra, beijo-te rapidamente na face, abro a porta e peço desculpa pelo incómodo causado, foi apenas um equívoco, enganei-me de estrela, de constelação, de via láctea, não é nesta noite que eu devia estar, foi um serão magnífico, mas tenho outro compromisso,

Afonso: árvore da Índia de cujo fruto se extrai goma, um dos naipes do baralho, veste talar, casta de uva, quem lá mora está fora do smog londrino, pé de verso latina, que tem a forma de colher,

Lídia: é pouco confortável, penso ainda olhando em redor, antes de abandonar a casa, porque tudo está por definir,

Afonso: crustáceo marinho da família dos calápidas, rico em petrodólares,

Lídia: a forma da mulher, e também a do homem, na infinita possibilidade da forma,

Afonso: traço líquido de união entre Schleswig e Holstein,

Lídia: mais difícil ainda a da mulher,

Afonso: colódio na vertical, certo, sagaz, chispe, alcatraz, arrima, nómada, errata, oco, enzima, antraz, mas como sucedâneo?

[*Lídia:*... Perhaps because I was looking to be put away, to be limited, to have a form, because I was lost in the multiplicity of things,

Afonso: the same as hemiptera, synonym for Helvetic, chemical symbol for chromium, shortest path to anywhere, blue dye, plant of the nightshade family, rooster tail in English,

Lidia: the bright glimmer of the city, from the other side of the bridge, the jumbled glare of the windows,

Afonso: do you know of any large fish from the China seas or Sunda Islands?

Lidia: because I was so hazy, without shape or outlines, the same as everything else and nothing, and there was a house that opened in the night with its light on and its daily bread, I sought you, maybe, because I was afraid of the infinite, but now I don't want to stay here,

Afonso: adieu, hills of Athens, she sang: Mireille Mathieu, wasn't it?

Lidia: I'm breaking this temporary form again and I'm leaving after another, I briefly kiss your face, open the door, and say I'm sorry for any inconvenience, it was just a mistake, I followed the wrong star, constellation, milky way, tonight isn't the night I should be here, it was a magnificent evening, but I have another appointment,

Afonso: tree from India from whose fruit gum is extracted, one of the jacks in a deck, ceremonial robes, a variety of grape, he who lives there is out of the London smog, poetic foot in Latin, spoon-shaped,

Lidia: it's hardly comfortable, I think, looking around, before abandoning this house, because everything has yet to be defined,

Afonso: marine crustacean from the calappidae family, rich in petrodollars,

Lidia: the form of a woman, and also that of man, in the infinite possibility of forms,

Afonso: fluid line joining Schleswig and Holstein,

Lidia: even more difficult is that of the woman,

Afonso: vertical collodium, right, sage, pigs' feet, albatross, prop up, nomadic, typo, hollow, enzyme, anthrax, substitutable how?] (35-36)

Without the inserted dialog markers here, it is easy to see how confusing this passage can be—it appears that the whole thing is nothing more than a disjointed stream of unrelated words and phrases. However, when we separate out the text into what Afonso is saying and what Lídia is saying, the form of the passage emerges. The shape this it takes is not that of a traditional dialogue—speaking of a different passage with the same effect, Sadlier describes the scene, saying, “...while the speakers address their remarks to one another, the overall effect seems less like a conversation and more like two monologues, one overlapping the other” (100). While Afonso clearly directs some of his words to Lídia, the intended audience of her words seems to be herself alone. Even if she is speaking aloud, it is clear that Afonso isn't listening—and it is equally clear that she is not listening to him.

From her words, we can see that she is still trying to find her own way, questioning what it was that brought her into Afonso's life in the first place. Her thoughts, while somewhat meandering, follow a kind of trajectory from where she sees herself to where she wants to end up, in which she eventually considers what her own form is like. Although there is still some sense of Lídia's internal tumult, there is an order which we as readers can follow as we separate her words from Afonso's.

Afonso's speech, on the other hand, appears to be pure chaos even when Lídia's words are filtered out. Here we have stated openly that he is filling in crossword puzzles, which immediately explains the random nature of what he is saying—he is reading the clues aloud. However, in the text, this explanation is not as forthcoming, as nothing is made explicit. Embedded in his words is a brief command to Lídia, “vá buscar o de sábado, para ver as soluções do outro” [go and get the Saturday one, to see the answers to the other] (34). When read with the rest of the text, this command appears to be just more random words. Only upon rereading (perhaps multiple times) do we understand what he is talking about, and can correctly put the rest of his chaotic speech into context.

Once we have assigned the words from this passage to their respective speakers, and found a proper context for each, then we can make sense of what this scene portrays: Afonso imposing an order on an assortment of words and letters, and Lídia allowing her mind to wander more or less freely: order versus chaos. Yet the form of this passage casts each as its precise opposite; Afonso is presented in a chaotic, freeform way, while Lídia by comparison is very orderly and direct. Thus, what the content of this passage dictates—Afonso as placid and orderly, versus Lídia as wild and fanciful—is turned upside down by the form: Afonso appears lunatic and chaotic, whereas Lídia appears thoughtful and resolved.

Afonso's crossword is the ultimate illustration of the way he thrives off of measured and meticulous order, “busca[ndo] preencher significados pré-orientados e enquadrados em margens definidas e precisas” [seek[ing] to fill in pre-determined meanings, which fit into precise, defined margins] (Faria 5). It is precisely between the juxtaposition of this scene and the form of its presentation on the page that the two become inverted. The form of Lídia's thoughts and speech is not that different from what the content suggests—that is, the words on the page seem to

wander similar to her thoughts: not in violent movements, but through a slow path of motion.

The difference between the form and content of Afonso's words, however, is violent; his careful, intellectual activity contrasts sharply with its wild, tumultuous characterization on the page.

While Lídia shifts from chaos to order only by comparison, for Afonso, the form of the text clearly contradicts his order, transforming it into an unstable ruin.

The role-reversal is reminiscent of what literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the carnivalesque (Rabelais 4-5), referring to festivals during medieval times where rituals and social classes would be turned upside down. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin ties this notion of an inverted binary construction, wherein rich becomes poor and poor becomes rich, etc., to literature and language:

...cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels [occurred through poetry], on the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all "languages" and dialects...Heteroglossia, as organized in these low genres, was not merely heteroglossia vis-a-vis the accepted literary language...but was...consciously opposed to this literary language. It was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. (Imagination 273)

Heteroglossia is a term coined by Bakhtin to describe the unique polyphony of the novel (as opposed to poetry, which represented a single poetic or authorial voice). He describes its role within the novel as "several heterogeneous stylistic unities [which]...combine to form a structured artistic system" (Imagination 261-2). These many voices may conflict or cooperate, but all are key ingredients to the whole of the work. In terms of the carnivalesque, heteroglossia

(exemplified by the novel) is more closely aligned with the marginalized social classes, whereas poetry identifies with the upper class, the “unifying, centralizing, centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life” (Bakhtin, *Imagination* 272-3). The multitude of voices (and the voices of the multitude) resounded together—not necessarily in harmony—to mock and ridicule the dominant authority discourse, thereby both displacing and parodying it. Bakhtin’s concepts help contextualize and make sense of the multiplicity of voices in *O silêncio*, especially when these two voices occupy the same space on the page as they do in the passage above, where the mechanisms Bakhtin describes are at work.

For example, in the first place Lídia’s inner discourse displaces Afonso’s speech through the reversal of order and chaos. Furthermore, the form of the text itself intensifies this parody by relating his linear, order-oriented speech in such a haphazard, disorganized way. Afonso’s preoccupied attempts to force meanings into tight little boxes appear nonsensical, and the act itself becomes meaningless and hollow, especially in light of Lídia’s earnest soul searching.

The effect of this crossword passage—in which Lídia’s and Afonso’s words criss-cross along on the page, imitating dialogue despite the total disparity between the two—is a sort of foreshadowing for the end of the novel, when Afonso’s world gives way to maddening chaos as Lídia leaves, following a clear path as she “abr[e] passagem com o corpo...” [open[s] the way before her with her body...] (124). The form of the novel, by forcing their words to occupy the same physical space on the page, makes us painfully aware of Lídia and Afonso’s inability to interact on anything other than “o diálogo de amor que se trava, ao nível do corpo, entre uma mulher e um homem” [the language of love which exists on a bodily level, between a man and woman] (11).

Returning again to consider our role as readers, this same crossed-words effect exists between us and the novel, or rather, between us and Lídia, as the heterogloss plurality of voices in the novel is filtered almost entirely through her. In her dissertation, Lucilea Chagas da Silva contends that Lídia is a partaker and participant in each section of the novel, even when she appears to be heterodiegetically distanced from certain sequences (for example, the imagined couple): “a narradora é autodiegética, pois Lídia é protagonista e narradora, falando na primeira, segunda e terceira pessoas” [the narrator is autodiegetic, since Lídia is protagonist and narrator, speaking in the first, second, and third person] (16).

In this way, reading the novel is like entering into a silent dialog with Lídia; as a marginalized voice, the novel identifies with her à la Bakhtin’s heteroglossia. She—the novel—“speaks” to us, and as we try to understand what we are given, we “speak” back. Her thoughts and ours collide, and through it all a sort of mental dialogue plays out across our minds. These constitute an echo of Lídia’s thought experiments as discussed in Chapter 1, a criss-crossing of our thoughts and hers, which often result in a “failure to connect.” This dialogue then appears much like the pseudo-dialogue between Afonso and Lídia that we read on the page; rarely do Lídia’s thoughts and ours cooperate—like Afonso, we find ourselves struggling to make sense of things, until our expectations come crashing down around us, in the same way that his world was turned to chaos.

“It is [im]possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, [without first] having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language,” declares Bakhtin about the importance of considering heteroglossia while analyzing a text (272). This is true not only of the disparate voices within the novel, those of Afonso and Lídia, but also between the reader and the novel. Quite separate from (although

parallel to) the heteroglossia in *O silêncio*, another heteroglossia emerges from us as we engage the novel. While it is impossible to come to terms with the novel without first an understanding of Lídia and Afonso's relationship on a content level, it is equally impossible to appreciate the novel without an understanding of the way it affects us through its form, and of the heteroglossia we produce with it through the act of reading, in which our reaction to the novel is just as an important ingredient as the novel itself.

3.3 Conclusion: Are all readers male?

In this way, we might consider our relationship with the novel to be another male/female relationship, like those on exhibit within the text itself. The text ebbs and flows, like the nature images of the sea, and like Lídia's thoughts, and as we read it we cannot help but attempt to button down meanings here and there, pigeonholing the text like Afonso filling in his puzzles. The novel clearly takes the female role that its relationships portray, and we find ourselves necessarily caught in the role of male, seeking to establish order and put the text into a glass box where we may observe it to see what makes it tick.

This brings us to an interesting question, which has been answered many times with varied responses: "do women write differently?" In summarizing a body of answers to this question, feminist critic Mary Eagleton reflects specifically on the responses of Mary Ellmann, another feminist, stating that differences may not rely on

"male" and "female" but of "masculine" and "feminine" modes of writing, characterizing the "masculine" in terms of an authority apparently absent in the so-called "feminine"...this masculine voice [is] not necessarily the prerogative of the male writer, nor is the feminine voice only for women...It is in the writing

which expresses the “disruption of authority” or the “disruption of the rational” that Ellmann finds the characteristics of...”feminine habits” (285)

O silêncio presents us with an odd case in terms of a gender-specific narrative. The prose certainly could be characterized as “feminine” on the grounds that it “expresses the ‘disruption of authority...[and] the rational,’” yet it also does this in a way that not only ruptures the authority but usurps it—in the reader-text relationship, it is the one in charge. We identify the novel with its protagonist Lídia, because their forms of expression are the same: by disrupting authority—either Afonso’s order, or our attempts at understanding and explaining the text—we must by definition conclude that the text is “feminine.”

The prospect of a definitively feminine writing begs the follow-up question: do men read differently? Or, in other words, is there a “male” reader? In the case of *O silêncio*, the answer must be “yes,” as definitively as the text is feminine. While this does not mean that only men may read it (similar to Ellmann’s claims about writing), any reader of the novel is automatically and irrevocably assigned a “masculine” stance in regards to the novel.

Thus the form of the novel once again supports the content—as the male/female relationships on display within the text are characterized by a “failure to connect,” so must we be in regards to the novel, precisely because of the artfully crafted, purposeful narrative style, whose whole purpose is to confuse us, to withhold its meanings until we concede to try and understand it on its own terms—a feat which we become aware we will probably never accomplish.

CONCLUSION

If we have discovered nothing else through this analysis of *O silêncio*, we should realize that it is an unconventional novel that deftly defies and frustrates all expectations, from those which were originally held by its protagonist, Lídia, to those basic assumptions we have when we first pick up any given text.

For example, in Chapter 1 we discussed how the novel begins by setting Lídia on her search for her “self-connection,” which she seeks to find through words. Her words, however, give Afonso a way to control and corral her, so she discovers that silence is the way to protect herself and eventually disrupt his order. Although Lídia does find what she is looking for, it does not come in the way she had expected.

Chapter 2 described how after a perpetuity of women’s oppression at the hands of patriarchal societies, contemporary feminism has advocated women’s speech as women’s empowerment. Yet, as stated, this method has precisely the opposite effect for Lídia, who cannot assume any sort of domestic “feminine” role with any hope of thwarting the system from the inside; after all, the most resistance Lavínia was able to put up was to point the blades of the knives outward at place settings—hardly revolutionary or redemptive. All she can do is assume a silent approach, eventually taking control of that silence which, we will remember from the words of Sartre, is “to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep speaking” (38). When Lídia affirms “há um mundo que se quebra quando eu falo” [there is a world which shatters when I speak] (123), the speech act that truly breaks apart the dominant order is a closely guarded non-speech. While we would expect an overtly feminist novel such as *O silêncio* to promote vocalizing as vehicle to expression, that is exactly what the novel reveals as betraying weakness.

In Chapter 3, we saw how the power struggle between men and women can be characterized through image association, with natural images being subjected to the overpowering images of civilization and “progress.” Furthermore, these images are characterized as either “feminine” or “masculine,” with the former often portrayed as lacking an inherent authority which the latter possesses. When we analyze our own relationship with the novel from our role as readers, we realize that these frustrated expectations are merely subjacent to the narrative structure of the novel, which is carefully calculated to confuse us—the novel not only withholds any interpretation of its text, but practically flaunts that fact by making us work intensely to glean even some meaning from its pages.

We compared this reader-relationship to the male/female relationship which eventually concludes the novel—where Lídia has succeeded in thwarting Afonso’s order and exits his world triumphant. Indeed, even after multiple readings, the novel may still succeed in keeping secrets from us, triumphantly having thwarted our scrutinizing study. Returning to images of nature, we may well describe our relationship with the book as that of cat and mouse—the novel merely plays with us while we, trapped, know it is only a matter of time until we are completely lost.

In this way, a thesis such as this takes on a particularly ironic role, since our entire purpose here has been to take the novel apart, to analyze its parts and see what makes it work—to subdue and submit it to an order and understanding, which, as stated in Chapter 3, is exactly what the novel tries to prevent. However, through careful study and analysis of the book, both through critics’ eyes as well as the content and form of the work itself, we can see how artfully Teolinda Gersão has crafted her debut novel; rather than just another feminist work, *O silêncio* has its own message to share, its own conclusions to be drawn, and its own unique way of expression. While the form of the novel is successful in supporting the claims the content makes,

it is necessarily unfortunate, as the complicated nature of reading the novel likely inhibits readers' ability to appreciate Gersão's skill as a writer, while probably intimidating other readers from even making the attempt. Hopefully, through the conclusions we have drawn here, greater audience and appreciation can be found for this remarkable book.

As for our discussion here, if we have succeeded in gaining a greater comprehension of the novel, we may think that we have beaten the book at its own game, a game which was actually ours to begin with. However, lest we get too sure of ourselves, we must remember that throughout all of our analysis and discussion and conclusions, it is the book that has been toying with us, and we would do well to ask ourselves what it is we have actually won, remembering the rhetorical question that the imagined woman asks in the very beginning: "was it all just a word game?"

NOTES

1. At the time of writing, *O silêncio* and many of the secondary sources used throughout this thesis have not been translated in to English. Unless otherwise stated, any translations included are my own. In cases of secondary sources where an authorized English translation is available, these translations have been used exclusively, without the original, and it is these translations that are referenced in the bibliography.
2. I have only included page numbers when citing from *O silêncio*, both for direct citations as well as general indications of passages in the text.. As referenced in the bibliography, these page numbers are from the 1984 edition.

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