

Dealing with Don Juan's Legacy: Rebellion and Inheritance in Lídia Jorge's *O vale da paixão*

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O vale da paixão, by the Portuguese author Lídia Jorge, is first and foremost a story of resistance in an authoritarian society. *O vale da paixão* reconstructs the social and political atmosphere of twentieth-century Portugal to expose, through the troubled relationship between a daughter and her donjuanesque father, the contradictions that riddle the creation of a legacy of rebellion against patriarchal authority. Using a backward and provincial town in Algarve as its setting, the narrative brings to the fore the ambivalent relationship that develops between daughter and father as the former tries to bring together the scattered memories and objects that compose her inheritance. In order to highlight the complexity and the evolution of their relationship, this article is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on how her father's blanket – an unique object among all the other elements left behind by her father – functions as a screen that prompts both the narrator and the other members of her family to revisit the past, and assess the contradictory desires to which her father gives rise. The second part draws on Jacques Lacan's definition of drives to show how the narrator's careful reconstruction of the past exposes the dangers of bestowing a revolutionary inheritance without first revising the hierarchical principles underpinning such patriarchal logic. To think about the past in new productive ways it is not enough to revise the facts that compose history. As Lídia Jorge's novel suggests, such revision should start with a challenge to the representations we use to talk about time and to organise in a linear sequence the series of events that compose our lives.

1. Building an Inheritance

Set in the small provincial town of São Sebastião de Valmares in the Algarve, southern Portugal, *O vale da paixão* tells the story of the Dias family. Through the lens of its nameless female narrator's memory, its narrative reconstructs the lives of a family of landowner peasants during most of the New State's

dictatorship, the Carnation Revolution, and the subsequent integration of Portugal into the European Community and capitalist world economy. The narrator (the illegitimate daughter of Walter Dias – the youngest of the Dias siblings – and Maria Ema), painstakingly unfolds the story of her father as she tries to deal with his contradictory legacy after his death. The arrival by mail of her father's inheritance, an old soldier's blanket on which his father supposedly performed both the artistic and sexual exploits that made him famous, triggers the desire to revise in a new light her vilified paternal figure and her own history. In this sense, *O vale da paixão* emerges as a narrative effort to rescue from the patriarchal and conservative context in which her legacy is enmeshed, the scattered elements she can claim her own. Her narrative task involves an active revision of the past as well as an awareness of the pitfalls of memory.

O vale da paixão revisits the decadent and miserly project that the great rural patriarch Francisco Dias imposed on the land and his family. Described by the narrator as an 'empire of stones' in which Francisco figures pitifully as 'o rei das carrasqueiras' – the king of heather-bells – the Dias estate in São Sebastião de Valmares offers a bleak portrayal of Portugal's backwardness throughout most of the twentieth century (Jorge 177–8). From a fairly productive farm in the thirties, the narrative records the gradual decay of the Dias' property, as well as the underdevelopment of a province where horse-drawn coaches remained the main form of transport in the early sixties. Indeed, as Paulo de Medeiros suggests, the Dias' estate functions as an allegory of both the nation and the declining Portuguese empire during the New State Dictatorship (1933–1974) ('Casas' 144). In the context of the New State, then, the Dias' farm in Valmares functions as a small replica of the Dictatorship's failed social ideal. Francisco Dias runs his property with the authoritarian codes, rigorous discipline and stinginess that characterise the New State (Jorge 27). Like Salazar's walled garden, this is a kingdom where life is organised according to the repetitive year-round cycle of sowing time and harvest, and where, despite its obvious signs of decadence, any deviation from this plan is considered an overt act of defiance against authority.

The clashes between Francisco Dias and his sons and daughters punctuate *O vale da paixão*'s narrative. From the diegetic present, Walter's daughter summons her memories to describe the fractures that Francisco Dias' authoritarian rule produced within the Dias family. The submissive attitude of compliance with authority of the majority of the Dias siblings veiled their innate slyness that finally emerged when they decided to migrate in the fifties (Jorge 87). With the exception of Custódio – Francisco Dias' crippled eldest son – all of the Dias siblings left their barren home in Valmares and crossed the Atlantic to try their fortune in the Americas. In Canada, The United States

and Caracas, spanning a period of nearly thirty years, these migrants make their way from menial workers to fairly affluent and respected businessmen in their countries of destination. As Kimberly Holton affirms, from their secret exit to their economic objectives, these modern migrants exemplify the experience of Portuguese immigration in the twentieth century (183). Overwhelmed by the poverty of the parental household and defined as traitors in the heart of the patriarchal family, the Dias siblings will not renounce their current privileged status in their new countries of residence to participate in their father's miserly project of rural expansion. In fact, once gone and fully established, they refuse to come back and assume an active role in the development of their decadent country.

Unlike most of the Dias siblings' surreptitious resistance to Francisco Dias, Walter Dias poses an overt challenge to the old patriarch's authority. From his early unwillingness to participate in the farm work, to his adolescent escapades in the dray that belonged to his mother, Walter Dias always lived in defiance of his father. As such, he remained a disruptive presence for Valmares' traditional life style (Jorge 58). By refusing to assume a fixed role in his father's rural estate, Walter Dias becomes an element of instability within the carefully orchestrated Dias economy. Moreover, even Walter's hobbies seem at odds with his surroundings in the strict traditional peasant atmosphere where he grew up. From his early childhood, Walter Dias devotes endless hours to painting birds. An unproductive and sensually charged activity – Walter's drawings usually are likened to acts of pure perversion – his drawings are a threat to the prudish morals of Valmares' rural society (Jorge 64). Branded as the Dias family's pustule and depraved son, Walter Dias' free roaming lifestyle is at odds with the severe patriarchal regime Francisco Dias' household embodies. A symbol of defiance to authority, the figure of Walter slowly emerges from the narrator's memory, furnishing her with an image on which to lean in her own personal struggle.

The narrator's memory of her father is all the more precious to her thanks to the ambiguous position she has in the family. Divided by her dual filiation, the narrator of *O vale da paixão* occupies a position that Cláudia Pazos Alonso has defined as ex-centric in relation to the family's structure (245). Despite being brought up as the daughter of Custódio Dias and Maria Ema, the narrator is fully aware of her illegitimate origin and hence, of her dual legacy. The narrator is the product of a chance encounter and the daughter of a youthful romance and sexual passion that never should have happened. In this respect, there is more to her inheritance than the obedient subjection to authority that Custódio represents (Jorge 136). Both the daughter and niece of Walter Dias and Custódio Dias, the narrator has a legitimate claim to the heritage of her rebel and always-absent father. In fact, Walter's daughter

affirms her rights to that legacy even if this was never offered to her. The absence of a testament does not enfeeble the relevance of the inheritance Walter's daughter creates out of his remains. Although meager, these are the only objects out of which she can start building her rebellious legacy.

Rather than receiving her inheritance directly from her father, the narrator invents it out of the stories of Walter's past and the few objects Walter left behind after a short visit in 1951. Apart from the constant bird drawings he sends from all over the world – drawings that speak of unknown horizons beyond Valmares' barren landscape – Walter leaves behind his military equipment and a picture of himself alongside his daughter. His daughter gathers the drawings he sends from abroad and builds an album for her personal use only. She hangs his military uniform inside her closet to keep her company, and maintains Walter's old revolver under her bed for protection. As Mónica Figueiredo points out, the revolver works as a phallic symbol that represents the body of the father, an item capable of guarding her from the impending darkness and filthiness of the asphyxiating provincial environment (25). Likewise, the revolver also works as an outlet for her pent up frustration. The gun becomes the focus of several aggressive fantasies where the daughter of Walter imagines herself killing her mother, Maria Ema, and her putative father, Custódio. A means of protection and aggression at the same time, the revolver becomes, like the rest of her father's inheritance, paramount to her survival during her childhood. It is through these objects and scattered memories that she finds an outlet to escape briefly Valmares' authoritarian traditions.

2. The Screen

The elements comprising the narrator's inheritance have different functions. Indeed, while the picture book, her father's uniform and gun play a crucial role during her childhood in Valmares, her father's blanket carries out a very important narrative function that still needs to be thoroughly analysed in *O vale da paixão*. Sent in a last effort to make amends with his daughter, the arrival of Walter's blanket triggers the narrator's careful reconstruction of her past and the assessment of her father's heritage. On this blanket, as on a screen, the narrator will project the film of Walter's life and construct her own identity. It is no coincidence that this old soldier's blanket is the only object Walter Dias gives willingly to his daughter since on it, like on a blank sheet of paper, everything remains to be written. With little more than the sentimental value that is attached to it, Walter's blanket becomes the perfect gift for someone who needs to revisit the past. If it only concerns the sender

and addressee, as Walter writes on the package, it is only because it is up to the latter to imbue it with meaning.

A fundamental part of Walter Dias' legend in São Sebastião de Valmares, the blanket is also the most divisive object of Walter inheritance. Known by his neighbours and by his siblings as a consummate womaniser, Walter's dissolute life style becomes a matter of scorn and public shame for his well-to-do and respected family. The blanket on which, as rumor has it, he lay down alongside women while he painted birds is the point on which his family's spite concentrates. Defamed as a bad patriot for soiling a national symbol, and as a disgrace to the hardworking Portuguese due to his dissipated lifestyle, Walter's image is meticulously redrawn to match that of a prodigal son. In fact, considered as a depraved, irresponsible rebel, Walter's life acquires different meanings depending on who writes his story. His blanket may have no meaning in and of itself, but this does not make it immune to all kinds of narrative inscriptions. In this respect, Walter's gift works as a double-edged sword. It grants his daughter the possibility of writing her own story, but such a gift is not an exclusive right of the addressee.

Walter's blanket functions as an empty background on which at least two parallel narratives are written. The contradictory rebellious figure that his daughter remembers exists in an unstable equilibrium alongside the poisonous narrative of her father that the Dias siblings elaborated in their letters from abroad. Unlike the poised narrative the narrator displays the night she receives the blanket, such cold and analytical writing reduces Walter to a series of easily graspable facts (Jorge 213). As the narrator realises the night of her final reckoning with her father's legacy, such a highly contagious narrative seeks to rewrite the life of the self-same character it tries to portray (Jorge 216). Pulsating with anger, the Dias' poisonous letters make no allowance to chance or to different subjective motivations. Closed to other readings and blind to alternatives, this narrative annuls the distance that separates it from reality as it blissfully celebrates its mastery over its object.

The poisonous effect of this narrative on the narrator's writing becomes explicit as she remembers the events surrounding her last encounter with her father in Argentina in 1983. Intoxicated by the poison distilled by the Dias' letters, the narrator creates three narratives to enact her revenge upon Walter Dias. Taking the symbols of Walter's rebellion – the same elements she latter claims as part of her inheritance: his drawings, blanket and horse-cart – the narrator elaborates a narrative where Walter can read his life through his daughter's eyes. *The Fornicating Soldier*, *The Painter of Birds* and *The Devil's Wagon* are narratives that pretend to have absolute mastery over their referent and, as such, they seek to offer to their reader a mirror in which he can see his life completely reflected. Affirming a totality that she later recog-

nises as biased, her writing at that time tried to close the very story her father wished to leave open (Jorge 238).

Walter's blanket acts as a screen on which the members of the Dias family stage their fantasies. Rather than staging Walter's desires, his blanket offers a surface on which different films are, literally, projected. Thus, like the different pictures of birds Walter paints, their meaning lies in the gaze, not in the specificity of their design. In this respect, Walter's old blanket functions as the 'other scene' or empty space on which, according to Slavoj Žižek, subjects screen 'nostalgic desires' and 'distorted memories' (8).¹ On the surface of this blanket different spectators and literary critics interpret the events the narrator recounts of Walter's life from opposing perspectives. However, in addition to standing apart from the other elements of Walter's inheritance due to its direct relationship with writing, as Ana Paula Ferreira affirms, the arrival of the blanket is more than a last effort on the part of Walter to make amends for his past mistakes ('Precisa-se' 31). Indeed, this blank piece of cloth bespeaks of Walter's final appeal to his daughter to uncover the past and highlight, despite past misunderstandings, the hidden points in common between them in their struggle against authority.

3. Dealing with Don Juan's Legacy

Lacanian psychoanalysis is a useful tool to build on this final gesture of understanding between father and daughter as demonstrated by Ana Paula Ferreira's seminal reading of *O vale da paixão*. Ferreira's article offers many insights into the narrator's search for a new language grounded in the wound of the Real – that is, a fully desiring language that bypasses the limitations imposed by the set of social, cultural and historical coordinates symbolic representations impose on reality ('Precisa-se' 32). Unlike Ferreira, however, I contend that the disruption that the introduction of this rip in the symbolic matrix produces is not enough to circumvent the pitfalls of representation. The search for a new language emanating from the Real – that elusive kernel that constantly resists symbolisation and points to possibility – entails not so much a dismantling of the symbolic, but the introduction of a new syntax that is particular to drives. According to Jacques Lacan, the repetitive

1 Slavoj Žižek draws on the enigmatic role played by the house on top of the hill in Patricia Highsmith's story 'Black House' to explain how, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, fantasies structure reality. Like the house Highsmith describes in her story – a house to which are associated most of the myths of the small town where the story takes place – Walter's blanket becomes a point of contention between all the members of the Dias Family – that is, space on which their hidden desires and fears are staged.

motion and non-specific character of drives in their approach to their object offer the subject the only possibility of bypassing the chain of signifiers and obtaining satisfaction (*The Four* 179). The new desiring position associated to the drive provides the narrator both with a way of breaking the restraints of the symbolic order and, furthermore, with an alternative manner of relating to her father and reclaiming her legacy. In fact, the drive is what unites, despite all their contradictions and outward differences, Walter Dias – the rebellious womaniser – Doctor Dalila – the drunken and emasculated doctor who becomes the narrator's first lover – and the narrator herself. By dwelling on the drive's structure and the form in which it sidesteps the cause-effect logic governing symbolic representations, I will now illustrate how this new syntax impacts the narrator's desiring life, her disruption of the patriarchal concept of legacy and, finally, the structure of her own writing.

The arrival of the blanket triggers the narrator's mourning and a careful revision of her relationship with her father from her childhood to the present. According to Mónica Figueiredo, this assessment is based on the recognition of her father as a desiring being (23). Figueiredo argues that the narrator acknowledges that desire is the only thing her father taught her as she summons the scattered memories of him onto his blanket (24). However, recognising the debt she owes to her father and questioning the legitimacy of his legacy are part of the same narrative effort. To come to terms with her memories of her father, first she needs to challenge the image of her father as a simple Portuguese-wanderer-of-the-seven-seas, and reclaim for herself his resistance and his desire.

Unlike most of the wanderers that have informed this image in the Portuguese context, Walter's wanderlust is linked to his desire and to his overt defiance to authority. In stark contrast to the causes propelling the mythical Portuguese sailors, the image of Walter Dias is inextricable from his dogged resistance to Francisco Dias and the traditional and authoritarian society he embodied. In this sense, the narratives that erase his nonconformity from his character end up by disfiguring him. By erasing this trait from his personality, Walter can easily drift along the lines of a nationalistic narrative, or follow his siblings in their search for respectability and wealth. Furthermore, in Walter, rebelliousness is linked to his position as a desiring subject. Like an iteration of earlier versions of Don Juan – a myth revised in the Portuguese postcolonial context by Helder Macedo in *Partes de África* (1991) – his desire plays a fundamental part in his rebellion against the established order. Indeed, contrary to the contemporary version that portrays Don Juan as a consummate and vacuous womaniser, more classical renderings of his story put Don Juan's many amorous endeavours in the context of his rebelliousness against the dominating social and moral orders. The tale of Don Juan, Sganarelle – his

loyal servant and moral conscious – and the betrayed Dona Elvira is a story of impenitence. In Molière’s take on the myth of this unrepentant womaniser, Don Juan’s most striking feature is his unwillingness to let go of his desire despite the social and religious admonitions to do otherwise. Portrayed as an inveterate rebel, as Alenka Zupančič highlights in her reading of Molière’s *Dom Juan*, Don Juan is not willing to accept any limits on his desire (127–8).² Nor will he compromise with society, marrying at least one of the women he has supposedly defiled. So stern is his reluctance to conform to traditional social rules that he becomes a threat to society – not only to women, but also to the men that, through a tightly regulated system of exchange, endeavour to control them.

The narrator’s careful assessment of Walter’s legacy is all the more necessary due to the fact that, like Don Juan’s, Walter’s rebelliousness rests on the same privileges patriarchy upholds. Indeed, Walter’s freedom is far from being an inclusive universal model. Walter’s main threat to the order of São Sebastião de Valmares comes from the danger he represents for the young women of the surrounding area, and not from his reluctance to participate in his father’s rural enterprise. His dray – the symbol of his free love life – becomes the object of multiple fantasies in the community only because it embodies the greatest fears of its male members. An irresponsible lover unwilling to abide by the traditional rules of exchange between men, Walter uses the privilege that being a male grants him to deal patriarchy an unexpected blow: he uses women as objects yet he is unwilling to play by the established rules. He is a scam artist, but a scam artist that deals in the same currency patriarchy uses. This is the fundamental paradox that lies hidden beneath Walter’s inheritance to his daughter. Like the radical defiance Molière attributes to Don Juan, Walter’s challenge to patriarchal authority is complicit with the same system he wishes to overthrow.

The marked gender bias of Walter’s freedom shows itself during the description of the relationship between Walter and Maria Ema. In choosing to leave for India with the Portuguese Army instead of marrying the pregnant Maria Ema, Walter affirms his independence from society regardless of Maria Ema’s predicament. Having lost her virginity and soiled her family’s honour, Maria Ema becomes an outcast after Walter’s departure. Despised by her family and society, she is condemned to live in shame until Francisco Dias arranges the wedding between her and Custódio. This reflects the radical difference between Walter and Maria Ema’s positions within patriarchal society. While Walter willingly chooses to leave, Maria Ema is forcefully

2 According to Zupančič Don Juan’s desiring position hinges on his avowed right to share his agalma – that is, the petit object a, the ‘mysterious treasure, the mysterious object that the subject has within him which provokes the love and desire for the other’ (128).

expelled until another man decides to make room for her within the system. Despite his overt nonconformity, Walter never stops being a subject. Maria Ema, on the other hand, must assume the role of an object to restore the equilibrium Walter disturbed. This is a role, however, that she is not willing to play passively.

Maria Ema's reluctance to renounce her subjectivity and comply with her new role as Custódio's wife emerges as a new menace to the patriarchal order after Walter's departure. Maria Ema's refusal to sleep in the same room with Custódio Dias in the first years of their marriage, as well as her nervous excitation during Walter's last visit to Valmares in 1963, risk breaking asunder the frail equilibrium Francisco Dias tried to restore with her marriage. Although subtle at first, the signs of Maria Ema's desire for Walter Dias erode São Sebastião de Valmares' provincial routine in 1963. The uncontained bustle and excitement Maria Ema makes in the house prior to Walter's arrival, the careful way she combs her hair and puts lipstick on, render her feelings visible to everyone inside the house. Tellingly, during this cold winter, Maria Ema becomes a wanderer, just like Walter Dias, as her desire transforms the old provincial house into a forest of doors – 'floresta de portas' (Jorge 101) – and, the simple sound of a steaming kettle, into a boiling waterfall – 'cascata fervente' (Jorge 116). Mobile and expectant, Maria Ema's inner and outer turmoil is the reflection of the storm that hovers over Valmares during the winter of 1963 and, like the storm, it suddenly breaks out. The pent up desire caused by Walter and Maria Ema's contained proximity inside the house and in the car, explodes in minute gestures of violence. Much in the same way as an apparently harmless evening dance inside the living room ends with an abrupt act of violence against the restless children, their family journey to Sagres exposes the abyss that Maria Ema's desire has opened beneath their feet (Jorge 149). Unable to satisfy itself, Maria Ema's uncontrollable desire threatens to suck them all in into its vortex. The chasm opened within the symbolic structure by the Real of their desire is too dangerous to allow it to stay unquenched. After Maria Ema's aborted suicide attempt in Sagres, Walter's banishment from Valmares becomes inevitable to restore Valmares back to its old provincial stillness.

Walter's abrupt departure from Valmares marks a turning point for both Maria Ema and his daughter. This point of inflexion, however, takes mother and daughter along two different paths. Walter's exit sinks Maria Ema into a profound state of depression. Her feelings completely exposed to the members of the house, Maria Ema lies in bed covered in sheets in an effort to conceal her radical nakedness – a nakedness that extends to the core of her being (Jorge 146). Her nakedness goes beyond her sex and her womb, and touches her innermost fibers, that is, her desire for Walter Dias. Unable

to hide it from those with whom she lives, she becomes an object nobody knows how to deal with or look at; she transforms into an obscene body. Having lost the object of her desire, Maria Ema is left to consume herself in melancholic dejection until her own daughter grants her a passage back into the patriarchal order she nearly escaped at the cost of her own life.³ From being a desiring subject capable of upturning the structures of power that hold her in a subaltern position, Maria Ema becomes complicit with these structures as soon as she assumes the role of the custodian of her daughter's honour. After being a desperate lover, Maria Ema transforms into a protective mother of a disobedient adolescent.

Contrary to Maria Ema, Walter's farewell opens new possibilities to his young daughter. Indeed, from his secret visit to her room protected by a heavy rain during the night, to his tempestuous departure the night of their trip to Sagres, Walter's visit in 1963 is part of the narrator's most complex aspect of her inheritance. Walter's secret visit to the narrator's room is the only moment where father and daughter are able to shed the veil of silent respectfulness imposed on them. During the few hours they spend together Walter no longer has to pretend he is his daughter's uncle, nor does his daughter need feign she is his niece. For once, he could avow their resemblance in front of the mirror and promise to compensate her for all the things he, until then, had failed to provide. Although she does not manage to say anything to her father about the relevance of his legacy – the legacy that he, unaware, left behind for her to transform into her own – this brief exchange becomes the dearest part of her inheritance. Out of it the narrator creates the main scene of the film of Walter's life she plays while in Valmares and, from that precise instance, she decides to contravene her parents' authority.

4. Escaping the Symbolic: Introducing a New Logic

Despite their positive value, the status of the objects that comprise Walter's inheritance as symbols of resistance is subtly questioned in *O vale da paixão*. In this respect, *O vale da paixão* shows its greatest difference from *A Instrumentalina*, the short story that served as *O vale da paixão*'s precursor. Although both stories gravitate around the memories of the female narrator's uncle's resistance to the asphyxiating patriarchal order in which he grew up, the relationships both the narrator and the uncle hold in relation to the objects that symbolise such a struggle in each story are diametrically opposed. As the

3 According to Sigmund Freud, melancholy ensues when an object imbued with considerable amount of libidinal energy disappears, and the ambivalent feelings he or she experienced for this object are redirected to his/her own ego (208).

predecessors of both Walter's paintings and dray, *A instrumentalina's* bicycle, camera and typewriter also serve a double function. These objects, as Ana Paula Ferreira affirms, point to a space that lies outside the symbolic representations that organise reality into fixed categories such as 'history, community, identity and otherness' ('Donning' 99). Indeed, while present inside the current symbolic domain, these objects work simultaneously as mobile signifiers that signal the existence of a marginal space beyond the symbolic coordinates we use to represent reality. However, like Walter's donjuan-esque behaviour, the objects that comprise his daughter's inheritance bear the burden of the same contradiction. Insofar as they remain trapped in the symbolic network of signifiers, these objects remain complicit with the order they endeavour to subvert.

Contrary to *A instrumentalina*, as Ferreira highlights, *O vale da paixão's* narrative attempts a radical break with the symbolic matrix of signifiers ('Precisa-se' 28). Rather than becoming permanent keepsakes to which the narrator clings in the diegetic present, the narrative describes carefully how each of them disappears or loses its importance for her and, what is equally important, for her father. It is no coincidence that both father and daughter participate actively in the destruction of their common inheritance. When Walter tells his daughter that he did not paint birds anymore during their last encounter in Argentina in 1983, he confirms the message he unwittingly gave his daughter when he burnt down his wagon the last day of his final visit to Valmares in 1963. By affirming that he does not need to draw birds any longer because birds are already in his head, Walter draws our attention to the dangers lying hidden behind these signifiers and the fantasies they support (Jorge 219). It matters little whether they speak of unheard of possibilities or if they signal a completely different beyond, as long as we deal with signifiers, as Jacques Lacan highlights, we will always remain bound to the domains of the Law ('Subversion' 694). Hence the threat that springs from keeping Walter's blanket, his wagon or any of his simple paintings of birds. The fantasy for freedom that emerges from them, like Maria Ema's desire, only leads to an abyss. If a true alternative to patriarchal oppression is to emerge, other means of resistance must be explored, that is, forms of resistance that do not imply the annihilation of the subjects in a direct confrontation with the Real of their desire. Such is the paradox Walter's daughter tries to solve when she explores her father's donjuanism; these are the perils they must confront if they wish to reclaim a legacy that does not belong to any of them.

O vale da paixão explores the possibilities and contradictions of establishing a legacy of rebelliousness – that is, of conciliating two conflicting terms. The narrator carefully reconstructs the life of Walter Dias, trying not

to transform her own life into a mere shadow of her father's. By selecting the objects and memories that compose her inheritance, Walter's daughter affirms her own independent identity both from her absent father and her conservative family. The narrator creates her own tradition and gives birth to her own legacy, and through this final gesture she also acknowledges her father's independence from her. The subversion of the constraints of the past the narrator enacts is far from being a simple reversal of the relationship of power between her and her father. Burying the blanket in the last scene of her narrative does not turn the tables; it does away with the game altogether. The narrator questions Walter's rights as her father and affirms, instead, her rights as mother. Who is our father or our mother? She asks as she buries Walter's blanket and imagines Walter as her own son (Jorge 240). She imagines him ridding innumerable cars and sailing countless ships, and although she is filled with fear at this sight she keeps her distance from him. 'Please, wait', she murmurs as she realises that despite the fact that the distance that separates them cannot be bridged, such distance must be acknowledged (Jorge 241). Only from the recognition of their independence as desiring subjects can a true connection emerge between them and, furthermore, a new legacy of rebellion be unveiled – that is, a legacy that, despite these connections, recognises the other as independent.

A very specific desiring structure foregrounds the defiance of authority that unites father and daughter. Like in Don Juan's myth, in their story rebelliousness and sexual drives are entwined. The same approach to pleasure lies behind the external appearances, from Walter's wagon to the daughter's Dyane car, and from the father's paintings, as Walter confesses to his daughter in Argentina, to Doctor Dalila's alcoholism. The relationship between Walter's daughter and the androgynous and eccentric Doctor Dalila – a relationship that lasted ten years – marks a turning point in the narrator's life. Indeed, built within Valmares by two marginal beings, this relationship will trace the line along which the narrator's later relationships will develop. However, rather than being based on another instance of the patriarchal order she wishes to escape, as Paulo de Medeiros affirms, the logic guiding this relationship lays the ground for her conscious emancipation ('Consenting' 100).

Referred to as the logic of the penultimate, Doctor Dalila's alcoholism is based on a very particular concept of the final element of a series. According to this logic, every glass he poured was boisterously hailed as the last one only to be subsequently replaced by another glass that will immediately be hailed as the last one in turn. Thus, every drink he had drunk became the last before the last, composing a series that never seemed to reach its final goal – that is, a series that is kept on going indefinitely because the will to stop is exerted

before, and not after, the last element of the series (Jorge 157). Like the ocean waves that endlessly splash on the shore, every element of the series in this way created becomes the last one of an infinite series of last ones (Jorge 157). There is no end in such a series, just as there is no beginning. In it, every element is equal to the others and, as such, capable of delivering the same amount of satisfaction. In fact, there is no difference between the waves that splash on the shore or the glasses of alcohol Doctor Dalila endlessly drinks, since what is really important is the drive that propels them. In between each wave as in between each glass emerges the subject, an inexplicable anomaly in an infinite series of endless ancestors. This is doubtless a malfunctioning series or 'série avariada', as the narrator highlights when she exposes the logic governing Dalila's drives, but it is a series in which the subject can circumvent the limits of the series he or she comprises (Jorge 157).

The logic of the penultimate exposed in *O vale da paixão* echoes the Lacanian description of the drive. Like the infinite and repetitive series composed exclusively from last elements the narrator describes, the drive is capable of bypassing the endless flow of signifiers that composes the symbolic order – that is, the order in which all our representations of reality are coherently mapped into a closed totality. Instead of focusing its efforts in a search for a jouissance that never fails to fail, as is the case with the object of desire, the drive swaps specificity for satisfaction. Drives can attain their goal – satisfaction – without attaining their original aim (*The Four* 179). Any object would do to satisfy a drive so long as it stands in the way of its circuit. Indeed, for the drive, as Alenka Zupančič explains in her reading of Molière's *Dom Juan*, any object in any given series is the right one (136). Every object is as good as the last one for a drive since there is no specific fantasy that needs completion to obtain satisfaction. The drive affirms itself in every act and draws pleasure from any element of the series regardless of its role in the symbolic order. In this light, Doctor Dalila's endless series of glasses and Walter's daughter's series of unnamed lovers after Dalila's death, stand in a radical opposition to the romance Maria Ema and Walter shared. Contrary to the specificity of Maria Ema's desire for Walter, every glass and every man are the right ones without necessarily having to be the last ones in their own series. Insofar as it does not require the existence of a definite hierarchy or order within the symbolic order, each of these acts is an act of affirmation in and for itself. Hence the importance of this specific kind of logic to disrupt the authority imbued with any given legacy. Once the specific series of blood relations has been undone, both father and daughter can affirm themselves as independent desiring individuals within the same malfunctioning genealogy.

The logic governing this malfunctioning series also permeates the narrative structure of *O vale da paixão*. In fact, *O vale da paixão* could only have been

written once its narrator manages to replicate the drive's repetitive motion and disrupt time's unruffled sequence. Rather than a straightforward historical narrative, *O vale da paixão*'s reconstruction of the past revolves persistently around a set of events. Using Walter's clandestine visit to her room in 1963 as an axis, her narrative flows incessantly from the diegetic present to the past as she endeavours to reconstruct their stories. Endowed with a persistent and repetitive movement that is constantly actualised in the present, her narrative unwinds, as Lídia Silvia shows, in the same manner myths unravel (132). With each memory that is unveiled, she brings forth to the night in which she receives Walter's blanket the only night they spent together in 1963.⁴ To make Walter's ghost reappear in her room, she must first collapse the infinite series of instants that form the backbone of time's linear structure to allow the present and the past to touch each other again. As both nights overlap giving way to a mythical re-emergence of the past, she can finally let her father's ghost back into her room to tell him the revised version of their story.

Unlike the three short stories she gave Walter in Argentina, the new story the narrator offers her father in *O vale da paixão* leaves the story of her father open. Neither idealised, nor negative, her narrative drops both the heroic and analytical approaches in favour of a more prudent description of her father's story. Walter's daughter is careful not to claim a false narrative mastery over the character she creates as she retraces their common history in an effort to rethink the nature of the bond that unites them. In this respect, *O vale da paixão* subverts the traditionally hierarchical approaches to legacy at the same time that it builds an alternative form of conceptualising it. Rather than focusing on the authority each of the members of a linear series derives from its temporal and spatial position, *O vale da paixão* introduces a logic that aims at considering each object without reference to any given series. Shifting the order of the elements that compose a series will not disrupt the relations of authority that organise it. On the contrary, such changes only produce minor modifications that can never alter any given system's power structure. As the female narrator of *O vale da paixão* suggests, it takes more than a mere change in the façade to build a revolutionary tradition that doesn't collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. To escape the paradoxes of this oxymoron, just like Walter's daughter does when she buries her father's blanket in a last gesture of affirmation, both our ideas of tradition and revolution must be reconceptualised. Dismantling the symbolic series from which both terms draw their meaning is a necessary step if a different order is to be envisioned.

4 As Jacques Lacan points out, drives share with myths the same cyclical and repetitive movement. Indeed, rather than following the direct metonymic displacement of signifiers that propels desire, drives rely on a circular movement that, like myths, always repeats the same cycle ('On Freud's' 723).

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