
The Hour of the Star: Life and Writing of Clarice Lispector

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Abstract: Clarice Lispector is one of the most important Brazilian writers of the 20th century. In her writings, she explores the limits of the Portuguese language and creates her own literary style. The article will map some of her aesthetic searches that are, at the same time, vital. The article is organized through two moments: a biographical one, in which relevant aspects of her life that will have an echo in her work are indicated; and another focused on her fiction writing, in which the aesthetic commitment of her books is highlighted. *The Hour of the Star* is the title of her latest novel, a title read by Hélène Cixous as an anticipatory metaphor for her own death. We return to it as a trope, no longer to refer to its finiteness but to celebrate its opportune rereading outside Latin America.

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Many times writing is remembering what never existed.

—*Not to Forget*

Belonging to Brazil (by Option)

“May I also come on the trip?”—it is said that a taxi driver asked Clarice Lispector on November 1, 1977, as he was driving her and she was planning an imaginary trip to Paris with her friend Olga Borelli. Overwhelmed with sad enthusiasm, Lispector replied: “Of course, and your girlfriend may come too” (Battella Gotlib, *Una vida que se cuenta* 528). However, the trip did

not end up being to Paris but to the hospital, as Nádia Battella Gotlib recounted in her biography: *Clarice: Uma vida que se conta (Clarice: A Life that Narrates Itself)*. Lispector was urgently admitted to São Sebastião Hospital that same day. Shortly after, on December 9, 1977, she died at the Hospital of Lagoa in Rio de Janeiro due to uterine cancer. She was just a few hours from turning 57. In the following pages, we embark on another journey, a more personal one into her life and work. As with any journey, we will look at some vital fragments and we will also take some pictures of her books. Consider this as an invitation to be travelers of her writing; that is, without considering the return date as a tourist would.

Lispector was born on December 10, 1920. It could also have been October 10 or November 14 of the same year. However, the first date was the one that her early biographers ended up assuming, as it is the one repeated in childhood documents found in archives. That is then the official date. Lispector was not born in Brazil but in Tchetelnik, Ukraine, when her family was undertaking exile. They spent only a few months in Tchetelnik before continuing on the journey that would lead them to Bucharest and then to somewhere in the Americas. The youngest daughter of the Lispectors was born during this transit. In a way, the circumstances of her birth, as well as the permanent changes of residence that the family was subjected to before settling in Rio de Janeiro, will be some aspects that will mark her life, but will also allow for aesthetic explorations by the future writer, as we will see in the second part of this article.

To explore the biographical aspects of Lispector, we relied on three widely consulted biographies. In order of appearance: *Clarice: Uma vida que se conta*, by Battella Gotlib, published in 1995;¹ *Eu sou uma pergunta: Uma biografia de Clarice Lispector (I Am a Question: A Biography of Clarice Lispector)*, by Teresa Montero Ferreira, published in 1999;² and *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector*, by Benjamin Moser, published in 2009, both in English and Portuguese. Lispector's own letters, chronicles, and interviews also provide relevant autobiographical aspects. The next lines benefit from all these materials.³

While Battella Gotlib's biography mainly focuses on the relationship between Lispector's life and work, Ferreira's biography sets out to gather important documents and testimonies to establish a biographical narrative. It was by searching through consular archives and digging into maritime records that Ferreira found the date of the Lispector family's passport issuance. That is how we know that the Russian Consulate in Bucharest issued the exit permit to Brazil on February 9, 1922, and without further delay, the family embarked on the Cuyabá steamship at the port of Hamburg that same month. A month later, they arrived in Maceió, where they were welcomed by their maternal family who had settled in the Brazilian northeast a few years earlier, after a brief stint in Argentina, seeking better luck. When they set foot on northeastern soil, Pedro, the father, was 38 years old (born 1884); Marieta, the mother, was 33 (born 1889); Elisa, the oldest sister, was 10 (born 1911); Tania was 6 (born 1915); and Clarice was just over a year old (born December 10, 1920), to be precise, 15 months old.⁴ However, Lispector will insist until the end of her life that she arrived when she was only two months old.

The decision of the Lispector family to migrate was made when the persecution against Jews

become more intense in Russia. This persecution began around 1881, when the first pogroms occurred, which, in less than two decades, had already driven more than one million Russian Jews into exile. Those who stayed were increasingly surrounded by segregated territories, so their possibilities for action dwindled from year to year. After World War I, violence continued to reduce them even further and work became scarce. The Rabin family, Marieta's maternal family, had begun the departure a little earlier, around 1909, so by 1920 it was her turn. Her older siblings had embarked on the journey to the United States and Argentina. It was the latter who settled in Brazil. While they waited to finalize the trip, these were the options available to the Lispector family. The resolution came in the form of an invitation letter from one of the relatives living in either of the two Americas. Like in many stories of exile, the decision was actually not made by the family because misfortune led the way. The path was indicated by Jose Rabin, a relative who lived in Maceió. This is how the Lispector family arrived in Brazil.

In Maceió, they lived for three years, during which the family's livelihood depended on the father's handmade soap production. The difficulties of small towns led Pedro to seek other places that would provide him with a better life, the one that had been taken away from him in Ukraine and was still elusive in Brazil. They moved to the neighboring city of Recife, where the father continued with door-to-door sales, now of furniture and fabrics. Like many immigrants forced to start over again and again, the income was meager. However, the father made an effort to educate his three daughters not only formally, but also spiritually. Theater, music, cinema, and literature were the arts he instilled in them from childhood, creating the conditions to cultivate his daughters.

But the tribulations experienced by the family were not just economic in nature. Their mother had been suffering from an illness for years. In fact, it was following an old Ukrainian superstition that, despite the adversity that was blowing from all fronts, the couple, towards the end of 1919 and the beginning of 1920, decided to have one last child. This child would have the task of saving the mother from her painful illness. The name was chosen accordingly: Haia. Lispector's birth name, according to the legend, means life. Against all odds, the new birth did not cure the mother of her ailment. On the contrary, her health only got worse, to the point of being confined to a wheelchair and losing her speech. Young Lispector only knew a sick mother who had to be cared for, even entertained, and with whom she communicated with gestures and looks. Marieta's illness and her family's suffering were, thus, Lispector's first language. Nobody could attend to her childhood desires; she could not even interfere in what was happening around her, not even during the famous Carnival festivities; at best, they let her stay "until 11 at night at the bottom of the staircase of the house, eagerly watching how others enjoyed themselves," or settling the next day for the "remnants of streamers and confetti." "They didn't dress me up: in the midst of concerns about my sick mother, no one in the house had the head for a little girl's Carnival" (*Todos os contos* 397), she recorded years later in "Remnants of Carnival," a chronicle published in her Saturday column in the *Jornal do Brasil* and later collected as a story in *Felicidade clandestina* (*Covert Joy*) and republished in *The Complete Stories*. And when she was finally going to be

able to participate in the much-anticipated popular festival for the first time—thanks to the pious gesture of the mother of one of her friends, who literally used the leftovers from her daughter’s pink figurine dress to make one for little Lispector—and thus attain the state of childhood grace, the unexpected happened. As the chronicle by Clarice states:

Quando eu estava vestida de papel crepom todo armado, ainda com os cabelos enrolados e ainda sem batom e ruge—minha mãe de súbito piorou muito de saúde, um alvoroço repentino se criou em casa e mandaram-me comprar depressa um remédio na farmácia. Fui correndo vestida de *rosa*—mas o rosto ainda nu não tinha a máscara de moça que cobriria minha tão exposta vida infantil—, fui correndo, correndo, perplexa, atônita, entre serpentinas, confetes e gritos de carnaval. A alegria dos outros me espantava.

When I was dressed in all-crepe paper outfit, still with hair in rollers and no rouge or blush—my mother suddenly got very sick, a sudden commotion erupted in the house and I was sent in a hurry to buy a remedy at the pharmacy. I ran there dressed in *pink*, but my face still bare, without the mask of a girl to cover up my so exposed childhood life, I ran, ran, perplexed, stunned, amidst streamers, confetti and Carnival screams. The joy of others scared me. (*A descoberta do mundo* 45; emphasis on the original)

That terrifying joy, that painful happiness, will be a constant in her writings and will manifest itself in the recurrent form of the oxymoron. Marieta passed away at the age of 41. The youngest daughter was 9 years old. On her shoulders, she carried the weight of an unsuccessful salvation. “I do not forgive myself” (*Todas as crônicas* 115) for having failed in that mission, an adult Lispector will assert, because her birth did not cure her mother’s illness as the family had hoped.

Tired of working without much success, Pedro decided to make one last bet. In 1935, he and his daughters headed towards the federal capital, the majestic Rio de Janeiro. With so many moves behind them, this was just one more, but it promised to be the definitive one. And despite everything, it was. Elisa, the eldest, got a job in the Public Ministry and with this, she could help alleviate the family’s expenses. Tania and Clarice obtained good grades and each found a way to help support the household. Tania also joined a public service while Clarice enrolled in Law School, a choice made early on. Since she was a child, she had been identified as a “defender of the underprivileged.” She recalls this in another chronicle titled “What I Wanted to Be.”

Em pequena, minha família por brincadeira chamava-me de “a protetora dos animais.” Porque bastava acusarem uma pessoa para eu imediatamente defendê-la. E eu sentia o drama social com tanta intensidade que vivia de coração perplexo diante das grandes injustiças a que são submetidas as chamadas classes menos privilegiadas. Em Recife eu ia aos domingos visitar a casa de nossa empregada nos mocambos. E o que eu via me fazia como que me prometer que não deixaria aquilo continuar. Eu queria agir. Em Recife, onde morei até doze anos de idade, havia muitas vezes nas ruas um aglomerado de pessoas diante das quais

alguém discursava ardorosamente sobre a tragédia social. E lembro-me de como eu vibrava e de como eu me prometia que um dia esta seria a minha tarefa: a de defender os direitos dos outros.

When I was a child, my family jokingly called me “the animal protector.” Just the accusation of mistreatment towards an animal was enough for me to immediately jump to its defense. I felt social issues so intensely that I lived with a perplexed heart in the face of the great injustices suffered by the so called less privileged classes. In Recife, I used to visit the house of our housemaid in the *mocambos* on Sundays. What I saw made me promise myself that I would not allow it to continue. I wanted to take action. In Recife, where I lived until I was twelve years old, there were often crowds on the streets listening ardently to someone speak about social tragedies. I remember how I vibrated and promised myself that one day that would be my task: to defend the rights of others. (*Todas as crônicas* 163-164)

Lispector claims to have lived in Recife until the age of 12. Her biographies state that it was until the age of 14, and one of them even claims it was until the age of 15. But assuming one or the other age depends on the adopted date of birth. In the author’s autobiographical account, we will notice several variations; she will even deliberately play with this material: “Many times writing is remembering what never existed” (*Para não esquecer* 32), as the epigraph with which I have started this text says. What matters in this passage is how the author tells the story of a professional decision. As a natural defender, the natural path to follow seemed to be that of law school. Once admitted to the university, she leaned towards criminal law, with no less ambition than to reform the Brazilian prison system. Despite her initial enthusiasm and feeling destined for the courts, she quickly realized she would not practice law. This was not only due to the poor prospects that that moment offered to a professional woman. By the late 1930s, women in Brazil were entering universities, but few were studying traditional careers. Law was one of them, and those who did graduate rarely practiced. Lispector noticed this with her classmates, who numbered only six, and for whom their time in Law School was more about finding a good husband than a professional occupation. But it was not what intimidated her. It was realizing that her purpose of reforming the prisons was gigantic, if not impossible. Alongside her law classes and various jobs she took to support herself, she began to enter the world of literature laterally, that is, through journalism. She initially got a job as a translator, but as the workload was full, she was entrusted with the job of a reporter. This is how she made her first writings for newspapers and her first interviews with writers, material that can be found today in *Outros escritos* (*Other Writings*). The team she worked with was made up of renowned narrators and poets, and she found in them an entrance to the intellectual milieu of Rio de Janeiro.

When she finally found peace, Clarice’s father had to undergo a routine surgery to resolve a gallbladder problem, but he did not return from that surgery. He died suddenly in 1940 at the age of 56, speculated to be due to medical negligence. Pedro would not live to see his youngest daughter’s first novel published.

The death of the father took young Lispector by surprise, and this new sadness would engulf her life from then on. Soon after, in 1942, she would meet Maury Gurgel Valente, a fellow student who would become her husband in 1943. Against her wishes, Lispector would end up fulfilling the mandate of the times. She would study but not practice law. She would marry and become Clarice Gurgel Valente. Her husband was pursuing a diplomatic career, so once married, travel would once again become her way of life. She would follow an itinerary that would take away from Brazil for 16 years, with short trips back and forth, but which would trace a new map that would mainly unite Naples-Berne-Washington, a map to which a reminiscent Lispector—divorced, and having regained her maiden name, and now settled in Rio de Janeiro—would return time and time again. She would so, however, to re-narrate the life in which she acted as the “wife of” a diplomat. Behind the demands of altruism and social decorum imposed by her role, there was a writer struggling with words and with silence. This would be the emphasis she would give to her reminiscences, which can be found scattered throughout her chronicles, which, as we have already indicated, are collected in *Todas as crônicas* (*Too Much of Life: The Complete Crônicas* in English).

The wandering, persecution, drift, and anti-Semitism that intensified with each war, the supposed failure that her birth brought to her mother, and the difficulties her father went through, all led her to nurture an insistent desire to belong. In a 1968 chronicle titled precisely “Belonging,” Lispector wrote, “I’m sure that in the cradle my first desire was to belong” (*Todas as crônicas* 115). There are many ways to belong. Nationality is one of those fictions, although it is not always comfortable or feasible to assume one. At that time, it could not have been easy or desirable to acknowledge oneself as Russian. It meant carrying the condition of a foreigner who cannot return to her own land and somehow harboring the idea of returning someday. Contrary to that, the idea of returning does not appear in any of the stories related to Lispector or her sisters.

As a teenager, Lispector began to recognize herself as a native of Pernambuco, and in her naturalization request made in 1942, she affirms above all her condition as a Brazilian. She said she knew nothing about Russia except its name, while she had everything from Brazil, her language, her customs, and mainly her will to belong. In the statement “I am more Brazilian than Russian” (*Todas as crônicas* 341; a statement she used to repeat to those who insisted on asking about her nationality), it is this desire for belonging that manifests itself and seems to ask, “Are you from a place because you create emotional ties to it?” We also do not know how much this insistence was influenced by being descended from a Jewish family. Recognizing oneself as such during the interwar period was a very delicate issue. Before 1948, no one knew what could happen. It was something Clarice did not talk about, at least not publicly.

The bond was more of a familial type. The closeness that Lispector had with her father, who died waiting for the creation of the State of Israel, is well-known. This does not mean that all of his daughters believed in the same project. Once her father died, Lispector never returned to the synagogue. She married a Catholic, thus going against the endogamous life that was expected of her and the will of her older sister. But this does not mean that the traces of Judaism disappeared

in her writing. What is not desirable is to explain her writing through this fragile bond, as Moser attempts to do in his biography, considerably reducing the possibilities of reading her work to a matter that was more circumstantial than experiential. This, of course, does not mean that it is an irrelevant issue, but rather that it must be taken into account in its proper measure.⁵

She only talked about that connection with her friend and colleague Alberto Dines. The first time was in a conversation in which Lispector wanted to know if it was something evident, to which her friend responded, reassuring her: “Kafka was also very Jewish, although he did not make an obviously Jewish literature” (Ferreira 263). Dines concluded that Clarice preferred the shadows. The second time was in adverse circumstances when, in late 1973, Dines, the editor-in-chief of the *Jornal do Brasil*, was dismissed from his position by the military dictatorship. The reason: he was accused of “fostering indiscipline in the newsroom” (263), as Ferreira recounted. But, as the biographer recorded, Dines knew he was being fired for being Jewish, as it bothered the negotiations the government wanted to enter into with the Arabs on oil matters. Since Lispector was one of the writers invited by Dines to work at the newspaper, what could be expected was the resignation of the team that shared the same Jewish condition. Her dismissal was confirmed in early 1974. In the face of misfortune, she affirmed being proud of that “new belonging” (263).

Lispector naturalized as a Brazilian in late 1943, but she had to repeatedly address the issue of her pronunciation of the letter “r.” On one occasion, a specialist, who was her friend, helped her with a treatment to correct her diction and found that it was not a physical problem, such as a frenulum issue, but rather a childhood habit that was easily fixable. Some exercises with a speech therapist would do the trick.

After having been “cured” of her pronunciation issue, the specialist ran into her on the street and noticed that the problem persisted. When he asked her about it, she reportedly replied: “It doesn’t bother me, it makes me unique. It affirms my personality” (150). In that specific way of speaking, there is an affective memory of her childhood. It is not difficult to imagine that growing up in the previously described family environment and attending a Jewish school, young Lispector would have been familiar with her parent’s language, even though she did not speak it. This anchored language, now taken metaphorically, is a trace of the Jewish diaspora of which she was an heir.

In “Ver a no saber” (“Seeing without Knowing”), Hélène Cixous attributes a double birth to Lispector: “once on one continent, birth withheld and then reborn two months later on another continent, born twice from a slow, difficult, and rushed journey, to finally arrive in the Brazilian language with that slight lag” (151). So the matter of the *erre* is her way of approaching Portuguese as a foreigner who discovers it in every new sentence. Double birth: one that takes place on foreign lands, and one that takes place in her writing. There lies her ultimate belonging. Helplessness and orphanhood were embraced by a transcribed language, because as she herself affirmed: “Writing is also blessing a life that was not blessed” (*Todas as crônicas* 143). This power of life that her writing carries was very well perceived by another contemporary of hers; João Guimarães Rosa,⁶ who on some good occasions when they coincided in the same instance confessed to Lispector that

he read her not for literary reasons but for reasons of life. Let us clarify: it does not mean that her writing was not literary, but that her literature addressed nothing less than (her own) life.

Clarice Lispector the Writer (by Vocation)

Between 1943 and 1977 Lispector published *Near to the Wildheart*, *The Chandelier*, *The Besieged City*, *Family Ties*, *The Apple in the Dark*, *The Passion According to G. H.*, *The Foreign Legion*, *Covert Joy*, *An Apprenticeship or The Book of Pleasures*, *The Stream of Life*, *The Via Crucis of the Body*, *Where Were You at Night*, and *The Hour of the Star*.⁷ Lispector wrote a total of thirteen books: eight novels and five short story collections. She often referred to all of them as “books,” because she was not interested in literary genres. However, she did differentiate between writing books and writing for newspapers, expressing a preference for the former over the latter. Additionally, two posthumous books were published: *A Breath of Life* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Taken together, these fifteen books represent the construction of a poetics that was very concerned with the Portuguese language and aesthetic form.

Lispector’s concern for punctuation is well known, as evidenced by a chronicle published on February 4, 1968, in *Jornal do Brasil*,⁸ titled “Ao linotipista” (“To the Linotypist”), in which the writer makes the following request: “não me corrija. A pontuação é a respiração da frase, e minha frase respira assim. E se você me achar esquisita, respeite também. Até eu fui obrigada a me respeitar” (“Don’t correct me. Punctuation is the breath of the sentence, and my sentence breathes like this. And if I seem strange to you, please respect me. I myself have been forced to respect myself”; *Todas as crônicas* 74). Her concern for punctuation allows for a double reading: on the one hand, it explicitly reveals the body of the writer and creator, and on the other hand, it created a cadence that is distinct from Portuguese. In other words, if punctuation is the breath of the sentence, this implies a relationship between body and writing. There is a clear alteration in the breath that creates a unique form of writing, whose index is punctuation. To respect punctuation is therefore to reveal and feel the body in (her) writing.

The Portuguese language was one of her great concerns, to the point of confessing her love for it as follows:

[...] amo a língua portuguesa. Ela não é fácil. Não é maleável. E, como não foi profundamente trabalhada pelo pensamento, a sua tendência é a de não ter sutilezas e de reagir às vezes com um verdadeiro pontapé contra os que temerariamente ousam transformá-la numa linguagem de sentimento e de alerteza. E de amor. A língua portuguesa é um verdadeiro desafio para quem escreve. Sobretudo para quem escreve tirando das coisas e das pessoas a primeira capa de superficialismo.

[...] I love Portuguese language. It is not easy. It is not malleable. And, since it was not deeply worked by thought, its tendency is not to have subtleties and to sometimes react

with a real kick against those who daringly try to transform it into a language of feeling and surveillance. And of love. The Portuguese language is a true challenge for the writer. Especially for the writer who removes the first layer of superficiality from things and people. (Lispector, *Todas as crônicas* 103)

In this declaration of love for Portuguese, Lispector also reveals what writing means to her. Writing is about removing the first layer of superficiality from people and things. Thus, her relationship with language is also her relationship with writing. In each book, Lispector seeks to approach words as if it were always the first time. This “slight displacement” that Cixous attributes to the second birth, and which translates into a close relationship with the Portuguese language, becomes a creative power in her books. There is no invention of words in Lispector as there is in Guimarães Rosa, one of her contemporaries. However, what Lispector does create is her own grammar. For example, the use of parentheses often interrupts the writing in *The Hour of the Star*. *An Apprenticeship of the Book of Pleasures* begins with a comma. At other times, she may end a story with ellipses.

As for aesthetic form, Lispector sought to question the idea of totality, temporality, and modern reason. This questioning reaches its peak in *The Passion According to G. H.* and *The Stream of Life*, but we can see it in all her writings in various ways. Hence her preference for fragments, instants, and sensations. This does not mean that we cannot establish a line of continuity between all her books, nor that each book is independent of the others. There are obviously insistences and resonances between her books. For example, there are topics that she revisits and characters that she takes up again from one book to another. In her early work, there is a tension between domestic life—which oscillated between the figure of a housewife, a diplomat’s wife, and a mother—and the profession of a writer. *Near to the Wildheart*, *The Chandelier*, *The Besieged City*, *Family Ties*, and *The Foreign Legion* are filled with love stories, marriages, housewives, mothers, and wives, who, far from affirming those roles, put them in crisis or dislocate them. Likewise, the figure of the domestic employee is recurring throughout her work, including her chronicle writing. In this sense, the series of domestic employees that starred in her chronicles from 1967 and 1968 in *Jornal do Brasil* foreshadow Macabea, the character from *The Hour of the Star*, an insignificant and incompetent typist. The physical features of Macabea, in turn, coincide with the figured body of Janair, the domestic employee who provokes G. H.’s return to the cavern in *The Passion According to G. H.*

Although new forms of narration can be seen in her first fiction, *Near to the Wild Heart*—which some critics have described as psychological writing—and also new ways of conceiving the novel—leaving behind 19th-century models, according to the literary critic and writer Silviano Santiago—it is in *The Passion According to G. H.*, *The Stream of Life*, and *The Hour of the Star* where literary forms become more radical. The first has been most critically successful, as it has often been read in relation to Frans Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. And, indeed, they can be read together, but not in terms of influence as traditional criticism has done, but in terms of resonances

and differences. The operations at play in these two key books of 20th-century literature are turned upside down. As Gregor Samsa turns into an insect, he loses his human form and, with it, communication with others, his peers, is endangered, whereas eating the white matter of the cockroach, seeking to enter into communion with each other, what G. H. realizes that this gesture leaves no place for the other. The path is not identification, but the encounter with what we have in common: life. The former, in the case of Kafka, fears losing the human form and one of its attributes by definition: language. The latter, in the case of Lispector, seeks to overthrow precisely the human form and question the preeminence of articulated language to give away to other models of encounter with others, human and non-human.

Água Viva, for its part, is the “book” that produces the most perplexity in its first reading. Indeed, it is a “strange” book. The author herself claims that it is not a book, despite the fact that it takes on the material form of a book and we thus can visually recognize it as such. The truth is that there is no narration or characters in the traditional sense, although we can recognize a sort of narrator. The Chilean critic Raúl Rodríguez Freire has suggested that there is a link between the artist who narrates in *The Passion According to G. H.* and the one in *The Stream of Life*. In other words, we would be facing the same narrator, but a narrator who is already transformed or, better yet, disarmed, that is, without the human obstacles that modernity imposed on us and that G. H. identifies in the triad of reason, logic, and comprehension. She is simply a narrator willing to love and forgive more, which is one of the final objectives of *The Passion According to G. H.* The form of *The Stream of Life* is fragmentary, sensitive—in the sense that what is written are sensations—and incorporates blank spaces between fragments, substantial spaces for its reading that, unfortunately, only the first edition in Portuguese respects. In other words, the narrator of *The Stream of Life* is the narrator of *The Passion According to G. H.*, but already deprived of her human, anthropocentric figuration. She is a “jellyfish” (“água-viva”) that moves like a feather stirred by the wind, who can now live without that third leg that in *The Passion* gives her human security.

By contrast, *The Hour of the Star* presents an explicit reflection on literary technique. The procedures and artifices of fiction, namely author, narrator, and character are exhibited here. In the opening pages, we encounter a dedication from the author followed by a parenthesis with the following statement: “(Na verdade Clarice Lispector)” (“[Actually Clarice Lispector]”; 9). Lispector thus questions the fiction of the author as an abstract and universal entity. She alternates this reflection with that of the relationship between the narrator Rodrigo S. M. and the protagonist of the story: “Pareço conhecer nos menores detalhes essa nordestina, pois se vivo com ela. E com muito adivinhei a seu respeito, ela se me grudou na pele qual melado pegajoso ou lama negra” (“I seem to know the tiniest details about this northeastern girl, after all I live with her. And because I guessed so much about her, she’s stuck to my skin like some sticky treacle or black mud”; 30). Thus, the creation of the character is revealed as the writing progresses, and the narrator will make us, the readers, participants in the decisions he will make. In the end, Rodrigo S. M. reminds us that we are dealing with fiction: “E agora—agora só me resta um cigarro e ir para casa” (“And

now—now all I can do is light the cigarette and go home”; 87).

If we could speak of an aesthetic “program” in Lispector’s work, we could say with Rodrigo S. M. that it consists of not “enfeitar a palavra” (“adorn the word”; 24). A “program” that João Camillo Penna already detected in her first novel, where in his words, “a specifically artistic program of erasing the specific work of literature and art is inaugurated, in a writing that weaves itself, hiding as such, constructing a naked, de-fictionalized experience that not only does not name itself as art but explicitly denies this name” (74-75). Her anti-artistic and at times anti-intellectual stance is also a critique of the established forms of art and the aristocratic pretensions of intellectuals of the time.

Despite the importance of aesthetic aspects, *The Hour of the Star* has often been read in a social context, as it is the only one of Lispector’s novels that explicitly deals with issues that afflicted Brazilian society at the time, such as poverty and social injustice, the migration of people from the Northeast to the big cities, urban segregation, and others. However, this reading is very limited, as it assumes a mimetic idea of representation in which social or political literature is seen as committed or socially realistic. On the contrary, Lispector’s writing touches on social issues from her earliest writing as a law student. “Observações sobre o direito de punir” and “Deve a mulher trabalhar?” are two texts published in August 1941 in the magazine *A Época*, a publication for law students, in which she makes preliminary reflections that will later reappear in her writing, although not explicitly. The first will have echoes in chronicles like “Mineirinho,” collected in *Not to Forget*, in which she questions the “right” to punish that societies have or are believed to have. The concern, which is manifested in the second, “Deve a mulher trabalhar?” about the possibility (or not) of women as workers will resonate in the construction of her female characters, from which different dimensions of “the feminine condition” of the time are explored, not just in terms of work. In “La hora de Clarice Lispector” (“The Hour of Clarice Lispector”), an essay by Cixous, collected later in *La risa de la medusa (The Laugh of the Medusa)*, the French writer also affirms that *The Hour of the Star* is “the book of correct distance” (178), insofar as it is a text that fights against the “appropriation” of the other.

The Apple in the Dark, Lispector’s fourth novel, deserves a separate mention. Published in 1961, it was the book that gave her the most work and took the longest to publish. Completed in 1956, it was published five years later. Lispector used to say that she did not rewrite her books, but in an interview (conducted by Affonso Romano de Sant’Ana for the Museum of Image and Sound given in 1976, transcribed and published in *Outros escritos*), she confessed that she rewrote this novel 11 times and that it was finally the most structured of all. By “structured,” she means that it adopts the traditional form of the genre, making *Água Viva* its antithesis. It is also the only novel that has a male character as its protagonist: Martim. He is a character who, as Battella Gotlib warns in her literary biography, is developed throughout the novel, much like a work of art. Martim is thus one of the author’s literary alter egos, an idea reinforced by Lispector when she says in the interview cited, “I am Martim” (*Outros escritos* 173).

More important than referring to each book is to know that her work “is an immense book of

respect” as Cixous asserts in the essay above mentioned (“La hora” 178). Respect for the other and otherness. Furthermore, in all of them we witness a “thinking literature” (*literature pensante*) as the Brazilian critic and writer Evando Nascimento calls it in his book titled precisely *Clarice Lispector: Uma literatura pensante*. This is a literature “that makes it possible to think the unthinkable.” “Thinking, absolutely thinking, where thought detains the immateriality of the jellyfish, etymologically the pulsating, eruptive sources.” “Thinking” (*pensante*) here is a kind of neologism taken from the author herself, who uses it in one of her children’s stories titled *O mistério do coelho pensante* (*The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit*). It is a writing that gives to think. It is also thought unfolding and embodying in writing. It is an exploration of areas that are difficult to access through language alone. Therein lies the experimentation with the naked word, without artifice. “Thinking literature” is not a synonym for philosophical literature in the conventional sense. In it, writing and thought are intertwined, as Nascimento argues, seeking to account for the radicality of Lispector’s writing: “There can only be thought where the advent of alterity as such occurs, the other as Another or Otherness, in its radical difference” (56).

To conclude, it is worth making a brief mention of the author’s relationship with the reception of her work. Although Lispector received significant attention from the outset, her relationship with literary criticism became increasingly tense over the years, to the point of renouncing and wanting to distance herself from it. What this tension shows is that few critics were able to recognize the invention of her own poetics. Her first novel *Near to the Wildheart* did not go unnoticed. The most generous critics recognized something of originality in it. Others recognized in the young writer’s work the capacity for communication and the use of an artistic language. The critics that are more skeptical said that she resorted to the technique of the English modernist novel, in a clear allusion to James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, and that it was a novel that was modern in every aspect. The reluctant critics advised her to work harder on her literary technique until she could better transfigure her individuality. Whether the appreciation was in favor or against, the critical success of her first book augured well for her future in literature. However, neither *The Chandelier* nor *The Besieged City* had such good luck. Some critics attributed this fact to the author not living in Brazil at the time of their publication. Indeed, it will be *The Passion According to G. H.* that will give her the recognition not only on the national but also on a Latin American level; an acknowledgment that the author hoped for. Lispector was aware of the good critical reception the novel received in countries such as Argentina. Undoubtedly, criticism can open or close readings. The truth is that it is a fundamental part of the study of Lispector’s work. However, I recommend taking all labels with care, which in her case abound: from “psychological,” “intimate,” “hermetic,” “existentialist,” and “feminine” writing, to “feminist.” Not all of them do justice to the richness and complexity of her vital and aesthetic quests. It is my wish that this star of Brazilian literature finds her own light and new developments beyond the American continent.

Notes

1. In 2008 Battela Gotlib published *Clarice Fotobiografia, Which Is, Strictly Speaking, a Visual Biography of the Writer, with Highly Relevant Archival Material*.
2. In 2021 Ferreira published *A procura da própria coisa: Uma biografia de Clarice Lispector*, a kind of revised and expanded version of the first biography.
3. The titles will be indicated in English once, but the quotes are taken from the Portuguese texts, so references refer to the original. Also as we are going to quote several works by the same author, we will put the title of the book in parentheses next to the page number. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
4. Each member of the family adopted a new name upon arrival in Brazil.
5. In fact, she never mentioned that as a child she also studied in a Hebrew school. Cf. Batella Gotlib, *Clarice: uma vida que se conta*.
6. João Guimarães Rosa was a Brazilian novelist, short story writer, and diplomat. His masterpiece, *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, is known in English as *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*, a *sui generis* novel for its blend of archaic and colloquial prose and frequent use of neologisms created between many languages: Portuguese, English, German, and Tupi. Its rhythm is inspired by the spoken language of the Brazilian backlands, also called *sertão*. Its form is an extensive monologue.
7. She also published 4 children's books, but we are referring here to writings that she considered strictly literary: *O Mistério do Coelho Pensante (The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit)*, *A mulher que matou os peixes (The Woman Who Killed the Fish)*, *A Vida Íntima de Laura (Laura's Intimate Life)*, and *Quase de verdade (Almost True)*.
8. Between August 1967 and December 1973, Lispector worked at *Jornal do Brasil*, a daily newspaper where she wrote a weekly column that appeared on Saturdays under the name "chronicle," although they were very heterogeneous texts: letters, quotes, notes, versions of stories, interviews, among others. In 1984, some of them were published in a volume titled *The Discovery of the World (A descoberta do mundo)*. In 2018, the Rocco publishing house decided to republish all of Lispector's works to commemorate the centenary of her birth. That same year, the volume *Todas as crônicas* was published in other newspapers and magazines and those published in *Para não esquecer (Not to Forget)*. In English, they were published as *Too Much of a Life: The Complete Crônicas*. The texts that appeared in *Todos os contos*, published in English as *The Complete Stories*, were also removed.

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