CLARICE LISPECTOR

From Brazil to the World

Earl E. Fitz

CLARICE LISPECTOR

Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures

PSRL volume 90

CLARICE LISPECTOR

From Brazil to the World

Earl E. Fitz

Purdue University Press
West Lafayette, Indiana

The paper used in this book meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Cataloging-in-Publication Data on file at the Library of Congress
978-1-61249-941-3 (hardcover)
978-1-61249-942-0 (paperback)
978-1-61249-943-7 (epub)
978-1-61249-944-4 (epdf)

Cover image credits: Abstract South America: Art-Digital-Illustration/iStock via Getty Images Plus; Coping with stress and anxiety using mindfulness, meditation and yoga: ma_rish/iStock via Getty Images Plus

To Julita, always, and to our wonderful offspring,
their spouses, significant others, and children.

Contents

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank, first and foremost, Doña Julita, for keeping the whole show going. Thanks also to our wonderful offspring, Ezra, Caitlin, Dylan, and Duncan, their also wonderful spouses and partners, and their lovely families. Special thanks go to the Purdue University Press for its interest in this book, to Vanderbilt University for its unwavering support, and to Lilliana Rodríguez and Sam Brawand, without whose patient, professional assistance this project would have never come to fruition.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you goes to Greg Rabassa, peerless translator, discerning scholar, and dear friend, who first introduced me to the work of Clarice Lispector so many years ago.

Introduction

Long revered in Brazil, Clarice Lispector (1920–77) is today a writer who appeals to people around the world. Although her international fame has, thanks largely to translation, been growing steadily since the 1980s, by 2020 she has become a global celebrity, one who is read and idolized, by both men and women, in cultures that are vastly different. She is the subject of an ever-growing list of scholarly studies, symposia, and professional meetings. On November 13, 2020, to cite one recent and notable case, writer Jhumpa Lahiri gave the keynote address at an international conference devoted to Clarice and her work and hosted by Princeton University.

At the time of her death, only three of Clarice's books had been translated. Today, she lives in at least sixteen languages and is read in all parts of the world. A major portion of this newly spawned acclaim owes to our new communication technologies, many of which have been developed since her untimely death. Benjamin Moser, one of Clarice's most recent, if controversial, advocates, is undoubtedly correct in noting that the internet provided her global reception with "a powerful boost" ("Glamour and Grammar" x). Websites and social media of all sorts have indeed played decisive roles in bringing Clarice to the attention of new audiences everywhere. "Circulating unstoppably online," Moser points out, "is an entire shadow *oeuvre*, generally 'deep' and breathing with passion. Online, ... Clarice has acquired a posthumous shadow body," one that millions of readers today follow avidly and identify with (x). Global communication today is virtually instantaneous, and long-standing literary hierarchies are being dissolved. Cultures long ignored are now making their presence known. This is certainly the case for Brazil, a nation with an exceptional national literature and one that deserves more respect.

Clarice, as I will refer to her in this study, is easily distinguished from other women writers who also enjoy large global followings; she is very far from Anna Todd and Han Kang, for example, but she also stands apart from such other stars as Elena Ferrante, Christa Wolf, and Valeria Luiselli. At the same time, Clarice, for all her singularity, does have some things in common, technically, and thematically, with the latter three. Like them, Clarice deals with questions of female authorship, agency, and an often-frustrated quest for identity, both public and private. And, like Luiselli, Clarice's texts regularly involve children and young people as well as adults and even the elderly. But always she does so in her own, unique fashion. And so, to paraphrase something that has long been said in Brazil of her, the fact remains: no one writes as Clarice does. Even in translation, her voice is unmistakable, and her readers respond to it, in Brazil and around the world.

Working in the tradition of Brazilian critic, Benedito Nunes, one of Clarice's original champions, Giovanni Pontiero (among the earliest of Clarice's English translators) hears in her work "echoes of Kierkegaard and Heidegger" as well as Camus and Sartre (Pontiero, Introduction 15; see also Nunes, *Leitura de Clarice Lispector*, and *O Mundo de Clarice Lispector*). Writer Colm Tóibín speaks of her reverentially as "one of the hidden geniuses of 20th century literature" (see Toíbín website, n.p.), while Kevin Gildea finds parallels with Clarice in Beckett and Spinoza, the latter a thinker often related to her (see Gildea; also Moser, *Why This World* 109–12, 161, 227). The same commentator describes Clarice's writing as "strangely humanistic and heartfelt" yet always capable of harnessing its "obliqueness" "to produce an exploration of the nature of writing" and "a contemplation of class inequality" typically leads to an intense "existential/spiritual denouement" (Gildea, "If You Were to Read"). Ronald Sousa notes that in France, Clarice is regarded as "an important contemporary philosopher dealing with the relationships between language and human (especially female) subjecthood" ("Once Within a Room" vii). For Laura I. Miller, it is Clarice's "nakedness of feeling that causes readers to fall in love with not only her writing," which, we should remind ourselves, comes to most readers via translation, "but with the person who dared to expose so much of herself in the process of creation" ("10 Reasons" n.p.). And David Shook, in an interview with Magdalena Edwards, one of Clarice's most

recent translators, speaks of her "ever-growing cult status here in the United States" while Edwards herself refers to her "as a world literature phenomenon" (Edwards, "Real Clarice" n.p.). Clarice has long been read in the same vein as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Jean Rhys, and Moser has dubbed her "a female Chekhov" ("Glamour and Grammar" xxiii). And while many have compared Clarice to Kafka, it was Hélène Cixous, who first envisioned Clarice as a female Kafka (*Coming to Writing* 133). Similarly awe-struck comments turn up daily from admirers in a host of nations and cultures.

The goal of my new book is to understand why this is so; to wit: How is it that Clarice Lispector, a Brazilian writer long considered to be hermetic and esoteric (indeed, as Cixous has suggested, a writer squarely in the tradition of Kafka, Rilke, Rimbaud, and Heidegger [*Coming to Writing* 133]), has, by 2020, achieved almost mythical status to an amazingly diverse global audience? How has this happened?

The answer, I will argue, has to do with the many different but always interconnecting sides of Clarice Lispector: there is the philosophical writer, the national writer vs. the international writer (Cixous; Varin, *Langues de feu* 27), the mystic (Armbruster; also Kaminsky 23), the existentialist, the eroticist, the feminist, the autobiographical, the poet, and the weekly columnist. Of this latter point, as Lorna Sage has written in the *London Times Literary Supplement*, it is a bit of a shock for readers who know Lispector from her novels and stories to find that, in her newspaper columns, or *crônicas*, "so stern a 'new novelist' ... would" develop "her own extraordinary idiom—intimate, revelatory, mystificatory," one that was "a triumphant metamorphosis for the avant-garde author" (the back flap of *Clarice Lispector: Selected Crônicas*). Clarice has not a single voice but many; her *personae* are multiple, but, as in real life, they always intertwine, sometimes harmoniously but, just as often, discordantly. When people read Clarice, they feel they are reading about themselves and their own lives. Her texts feel intimate and personal to them. And they respond to this.

The current study seeks to address those readers who do not already know Clarice as a pillar of modern Brazilian literature and who are new to her work, her worldview, and her culture. I have not written this book for specialists, though I hope there will be

something of interest in it even for them. Clarice's fame in Brazil is well known and well documented. Her critical bibliography is extensive and growing. What we need now, as she becomes a global literary phenomenon, is a guide to her work, one that will allow non-specialists to appreciate the full range of what she writes about.

In an age marked by anger, recrimination, mendacity, division, and deceit, the voice of Clarice Lispector stands out like a beacon in the night. In language that is sometimes hypnotically poetic and unnervingly self-aware and sometimes sharply political and disturbingly funny, she speaks to us about what it is to be human, and she does so with all the fear, confusion, and desire this entails. Clarice and her characters seek to understand—to understand who and what they are. This struggle, this desire to comprehend, appeals to all of us, even when, or perhaps especially when, we fail. Clarice takes us through that experience, and she does not abandon us. As human beings, we are many different people. We live out different realities, and often, these clash. But as we struggle to deal with them, we never cease trying to figure things out, to understand the meaning of all that is happening to us and around us. This desire to understand is a deeply human trait, and we're drawn to Clarice's writing because we see this very struggle playing out on the page. In reading her, we identify with it and with her. The tangled, multiform lives we all lead come to life in her work, as do the complexities and frustrations these entail. Today, people around the globe today yearn for precisely those qualities that, from beginning to end, mark Clarice's texts: honesty, vulnerability, and empathy. Even in her various translations, Clarice's texts appeal to all of us, and we, in turn, recognize ourselves in the characters and voices that speak in them. This is the fount of her global appeal.

If it is true, as Harvard literature professor, Louis Menand, contends, that a style of writing that, even in translation, comes across as "more authentic," can help a book "gain status in the literary marketplace," then we can more readily understand why Clarice Lispector has won such a passionate global following (68). As Marta Peixoto, one of Clarice's most discerning critics, puts it, many readers "have recognized a distinctive contribution" in her

> original, often strange language, dense with paradoxes, unusual phrases, and abstract formulations that tease and elude the rational intelligence ... Lispector's linguistic inventiveness cen-

> ters not so much on the lexical level, but on the use of unusual words or neologisms ... but rather on syntactical contortions and strange juxtapositions, creating semantic pressures that unsettle the meaning of words and concepts. (Peixoto xii)

Alexis Levitin, one of Clarice's most acute translators, comes to a similar conclusion, adding that "Beyond the notorious difficulty of her style lies the problem of voice or tone, and finally the question of her artistic-spiritual voice" (Afterword, *Soulstorm* 171). And according to Pontiero,

> At her most introspective, Clarice is willfully capable of tying herself and her reader into metaphysical knots. Syntax and punctuation, for example, are often treated in arbitrary fashion in an attempt to capture fragmented patterns of inspiration. The conceptual intricacies, however, are offset by dazzling powers of insight and recognition. Her transcendental meditations unfailingly exude their own poetic lyricism." (Afterword, *Foreign Legion* 219)

Dealing with these stylistic and thematic issues drive translators to distraction and challenge their skills as readers and as writers. As I shall show at the end of my study, this core question about the nature of Clarice's complex, elusive style makes her afterlife in translation a crucial but complicated aspect of her growing global acceptance.

Often not literary in a conventional sense, Clarice's texts tend to reflect the thought processes, the ebb and flow, of a real human mind trying to process the welter of thoughts and sensations flashing through it. Her work, from beginning to end, exemplifies this—and more, as I will try to show. Certain motifs, moreover, are omnipresent in Clarice's world, and link her early work to her later efforts: water/moisture; darkness; silence; paradox; words/language/meaning; birth; the female body (breasts, chiefly, but also hips, wombs, placentas, and ovaries); transformation (physical, as with puberty, but also psychological in nature); desire/sexual expression/identity; freedom/power; love (not that of sappy romances but as a life-affirming force); possession vs. freedom; the moment; violence/hatred; humor; understanding (a desire to gain it); being (what does it mean, "to be?" Or "to exist?"); knowing (what does it mean when we say we "know" something?); sex/sexuality; and God. Language, Clarice shows us, is inherently epis-

temological and ontological; it determines who and what we are, even as we evolve moment to moment, and it is the mechanism by which we try to understand and know. But Clarice's texts also make it clear that we live in a world of words, one in which words give birth to other words, *ad infinitum*. We use words to talk about other words and what they may mean, and the process never ends. The taproot, the common denominator of Clarice's work, then, is this constant and abiding preoccupation with language, but language understood not as a stylistic issue but as a life-giving force.

Though far from the contrived artifice of what used to be termed "automatic writing," and going far beyond what typically thought of as "autobiographical" writing, Clarice's poetic and philosophic *textes*, open, semantically productive, and endlessly seductive, engage the reader on a variety of issues, from concerns with freedom, personal identity, and pleasure to those of justice, gender, age, and sexuality. Indeed, it is not difficult to argue that reading the stories, novels, and chronicles of Clarice Lispector represents the new kind of education, of self and of self-in-the-world, that scholar Cathy N. Davidson believes our students need while at the same time providing non-student readers around the world an honest and unflinching exploration of how the world actually works and of their deepest desires, fears, and uncertainties in relation to it (see Davidson; see also Jarrett 673–77; and Jabr). Reading Clarice Lispector in World Literature classes will give our young people insights into a culture they may know nothing about, but it will connect them with a writer who speaks to all people everywhere. In the main, Clarice themes and concerns are timeless, the human ones.

The question is: How well will she be taught? If students and instructors are not familiar with her, her work, or her culture, how accurately, how properly, will she be understood? This is, of course, a nagging question for those who argue in favor of World Literature, many of whom have their homes and vantage points here in the insular and market-centric United States. And, as Emily Apter notes, this perspective can itself be problematic. "Though many partisans of 'World Lit' endorse it for sound political reasons—as a way of militating against the latest harmful forms of exclusionary cultural nationalism," for example, "they remain vulnerable to the charge of complacency toward market-driven models of literary culture and education" ("Untranslatability" 197). In a great many

ways, the case of Clarice Lispector epitomizes not only the justifications of World Literature but the complications that make its study challenging.

The desire to regard World Literature as the analogue of market globalization is misleading. Though often described as a commodity, literature is not a commodity like an automobile, a computer part, or a bushel of corn, and it cannot be traded as easily as these things can be. There are too many differences, between individual texts, between national literary traditions, and between readers. The consumption of literary texts in the global exchange is never equivalent to that of material things; a function of different languages, cultures, and ways of seeing, being, and understanding, the circulation of literature between nations, almost always through the prism of translation, is never as smooth as that of refrigerators, medical instruments, and foodstuffs. The reading of a *haiku* poem reconstructed in a language other than Japanese produces on its consumer an effect different from the driving of a Japanese car. If both are judged to be acts of global consumption, then we must understand that they are very different, in nature but also in effect. Economic globalism is one thing; literary globalism is quite another.

Clarice Lispector challenges people who hold that the reception of writers from one culture by readers in another culture is going to be more or less the same. Or that said writers could be evaluated appropriately. Clarice is a deeply Brazilian writer, a point not lost on her legions of still passionate enthusiasts in Brazil. Yet she is far from being a narrowly nationalistic writer. Although infused with global culture, Clarice's work makes no effort to offer grand explanations, to countenance hypocrisy, or to see comfort-giving patterns where there are none. These latter two points are especially evident in her thoughts about God and about the tortured relationship that exists, in Brazil and globally, between the privileged and the non-privileged.

At the same time, there are certain aspects of Clarice's writing that do make her accessible to readers from cultures beyond her native Brazil. Her lifelong concern with issues of gender, sexuality, and equality come to mind in this context. Reading Clarice, it might be said, is itself a life experience, one replete with the entire tangle of thoughts and emotions, and of pain and pleasure, and of the relationships between self and Other, that define human exis-

tence itself. As the title of Clarice's first novel suggests, her work does take us to the wild heart of life. And it is more disturbing than we like to think it is; indeed, the wild heart of life can be both deeply disjunctive and, for women in particular but also for certain kinds of men, profoundly subversive.

Given its intent, my book is speculative. And, for some, this will be perceived as a weakness. On the other hand, my speculations about why Clarice has gained such ardent followers around the world are based on a lifetime of studying and teaching her texts and on a judicious consideration of some of the key qualities of her work that could be expected to appeal to a diverse global audience. So while I readily admit to guessing about how one might explain Clarice's newfound popularity beyond Brazil, I also contend that some guesses are better than others. I further believe that the ones I offer here both underscore some of her work's most defining characteristics and manifest her sharply etched humanity, how she addresses the hopes, the fears, and the concerns not merely of Brazilians but those of people everywhere. A major part of Clarice's power as a writer stems from her fearless plumbing of the complexities and vicissitudes of the larger human experience, the one of which, for all our differences, we are all a part. If her primary subject is language, understood as a semantically fluid and self-referential semiotic system, her focus is the human condition. And on trying to understand it, which we do through language. Readers respond to Clarice's texts because they see themselves in them; they see Clarice struggling to deal with what they themselves are dealing with. Clarice Lispector is, I submit, the world author *par excellence*.

The conceptual basis of my study rests on three recent and influential studies, Apter's *Against World Literature* (2013), David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (first published in 2003), and Héctor Hoyos's *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (2015). Also useful were Alexander Beecroft's *An Ecology of World Literature* (2015), Gisèle Sapiro's work, *Les écrivains et la politique en France* (2018), on what she contends is the feminization of World Literature, and Eduardo F. Coutinho's *Brazilian Literature as World Literature* (2018). While Damrosch concerns himself with defining World Literature, which he sees not as a static list of "great works" but as a matter of how and why certain texts "circulate" internationally between cultures, Hoyos argues that Latin

American literature tends, for a number of historical, artistic, and intellectual reasons, to exemplify it (Damrosch 5; Hoyos 8–10). On this point, I concur with Hoyos. Apter, concentrating on the role translation must play in World Literature studies, wonders how many crucial differences between authors, texts, and cultures get ironed out, lost, or simply ignored. It is for this reason that I include in my study here a lengthy consideration of how Clarice has fared in translation. Though not a scholar of Luso-Brazilian literature, Damrosch, for his part, is impressed by how profoundly Brazilian history and culture exemplify what World Literature sees itself as doing. In Brazil, he writes, the concept of world literature "has long been shaped by a very" unique "set of forces: by complex relations between people of indigenous, European," African, "or mixed descent; by inter-American relations within Latin America and *vis-à-vis* North America; and by lasting cultural ties to Portugal, to Spain, and to France" (27). Building on the work of Beatriz Resende, and on theoretical basis of Brazil's anthropophagous modernist movement, Damrosch notes that "contemporary Brazilian scholars are moving beyond the paradigm of 'Paris, cultural capital of Latin America' to emphasize" something radically new, a cultural exchange that recognizes "Brazil's dynamic heterogeneity" to the extent that its significance is now seen as being at least equal that of France, if not, as I would suggest, actually superior to it (27).

Damrosch's work is important for the argument I am making here because World Literature forms the artistic and intellectual framework in which Clarice Lispector is being examined. Today, in 2020, Clarice is both a Brazilian writer and a world writer, and she exemplifies Damrosch's argument about what this means. Coutinho does much the same (Introduction, *Brazilian Literature* 1, 2). At the same time, I will argue that Clarice's work epitomizes what Apter describes as the problem of "untranslatability," and the politics, including cultural biases and flat out ignorance, that go into this condition (*Against World Literature* 3–4, also, and with particular reference to Portuguese, 138–45). And although he does not focus on her work, Hoyos's study helps contextualize Clarice as a Latin American writer from Brazil and all that means, pro and con, for her reception on the global stage (1–32, 189–221; see also Varin 26–29; also Brushwood 14–15, 20, 30). A powerful example of the "foreign" writer who defies the expectations of the

Anglo-US intellectual world, Clarice's work challenges the "flaccid globalisms" that pay "lip service to alterity while doing little more than" buttressing "neoliberal 'big tent' syllabi taught in English" (Apter, *Against World Literature* 7–8). Politically aware, Clarice was also, as Marília Librandi points out, "a writer deeply attuned to forms of listening and verbal/aesthetic practice in Brazil and in the world at large" (6). While the desire for "trans-national" readings animates many US English and American literature departments these days, what is not so clear is how seriously they will treat, *or be able to treat*, hitherto unknown authors like Clarice Lispector. At the same time, for US academics, the people who design World Literature courses and pick the books that will be read and discussed in them, this recognition of Brazil's importance to the World Literature agenda by Damrosch, one of its primary advocates, could militate in favor of Clarice Lispector and her new status as a celebrated global author.

But which are the Clarice Lispector works that are most widely read by her global audience? Knowing this, we could more accurately gage Clarice's reception abroad. As my friend and colleague here at Vanderbilt, the peerless Research Librarian, Paula Covington, has discovered, several of Clarice's texts stand out as being particularly popular with her global audience (E-mail to author, 7 December 2018). These include, in no particular order, the novels, *Near to the Wild Heart*, *The Passion According to G. H.*, *The Stream of Life*, and *The Hour of the Star*, a spate of her stories, and, increasingly, her quite fascinating newspaper columns. *Family Ties*, published in Portuguese in 1960 (when the author was forty years old), was the first of Clarice's texts to be translated into English, and its stories are still widely read, taught, and written about. Today, however, it is possible that her final novel, *The Hour of the Star*, with its searing admixture of outrage at global exploitation and technical brilliance, ranks as her most popular work in the World Literature circuit. The Susanna Amaral film version of the novel only helps intensify this text's global impact.

The one constant feature of Clarice's work is the centrality to it of language, which, for her, lives as a vital ontological and epistemological force and one that affects all aspects of human existence, whether private or public. In Clarice's world, language, in all its semantic fluidity and creativity, is how we define ourselves, in all of our multiple and evolving identities. It is how we seek to know

and understand ourselves and the world about us. For Clarice, language is never a mere adornment to a larger theme or argument; it is the main subject of her work, its warp and woof, and she is ever conscious of this in her writing, just as she is aware that we use language to think about language. In coming at this theme, the centrality of language to human existence, from multiple perspectives, from the philosophical to the poetic and from the sexual to the political, Clarice touches something very fundamental to the universal human experience.

While in working this ground, Clarice shows herself to be part of a grand Brazilian tradition that includes such other figures as Machado de Assis, Guimarães Rosa, Cecília Meireles, and Nélida Piñon, among many others, who also pursue this theme, her approach to this issue is both more systematic and multifaceted. This is why, although she is an utterly Brazilian writer, she stands out as strikingly as she does. For those who would teach and study Clarice Lispector in World Literature classrooms, it is imperative that this aspect of her work, and its relation to Brazilian literature in general, is duly noted and taken into account. For all her brilliance and originality, Clarice was not *sui generis*; she came out of a powerful and innovative national literature. And her work echoes those who came before her. One hears in her poetic introspectiveness the tones of Lúcio Cardoso and the social consciousness of Graciliano Ramos, and she is a worthy successor to such female writers and intellectuals as Lúcia Miguel Pereira, Rachel de Queiroz, Eugênia Celso, and Helena Morley. In the *Soulstorm* story, "For the Time Being," Clarice invokes Machado de Assis and makes note of her affinity with him (40–42), while in *The Hour of the Star* she composes a line, "The man from the backwoods is, above all, patient" (65), that, in its message and syntax, mimics a line from Euclides da Cunha's *Rebellion in the Backlands*, "the sertanejo, or man of the backlands, is above all else a strong individual" (trans. Putnam, 89). The reader who comes to Clarice Lispector, then, is not engaging with an anomaly but with a writer deeply rooted in a very specific literary tradition, one aware of itself, its formation, and its place in the world.

Commenting on the salient characteristics of modern Brazilian literature, translator and scholar, Gregory Rabassa, highlights this concern with the nature of language. Focusing on Rosa, Piñon, and Lispector, he writes that

> It is precisely in their styles of presentation that the three writers diverge: Guimarães Rosa using the primitive resources of the language for the creation of new words in which to encase his vast and until then amorphous sensations; Piñon extracting every bit of richness from the lexicon of a very rich language, ... and Lispector marshaling the syntax in a new way that is closer perhaps to original thought patterns than the language had ever managed to approach before. (Rabassa, Introduction, *Apple* xii)

To understand the work of Clarice Lispector properly, then, we must understand that she is the product of a powerful national literary tradition, one that has long cultivated linguistic self-consciousness and the semantic fluidity of language for their ontological and epistemological functions. This keen awareness of language, and its relevance to who and what we are, and to how we understand the world around us, identifies Clarice as a Brazilian writer, even as it enhances her newfound status as an international writer.

A theorist "of language and literature authored by a woman," Clarice and her novels, stories, and newspaper columns exude a powerful "feminist appeal," yet one that transcends orthodox notions of gender (Librandi 8; also Kaminsky 120–21). They also go beyond many other conventional norms, borders, limits, and expectations. Her work resists categorization, and this very quality, I submit, is part of her global appeal; she is everyone's and no one's.

> That Lispector is a writer working within the between-space of twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro and incorporates within herself a host of subjects—she is a Judeo-Brazilian woman born in the Ukraine, and from her position of unquestionable whiteness, she chooses to incorporate a Brazil that is at once black, Indigenous, Catholic, animist, *umbandista*, and formed through *candomblé* while also taking in the accents acquired during her long sojourns outside of Brazil—is what makes her writing so amply pluralist and multiversal. (Librandi 8)

A white, basically heterosexual, and middle-class woman, Clarice is also able to imagine and write sympathetically about same-sex love (mostly female but also male) and life circumscribed by injustice, poverty, and oppression, in all its many forms. But there are other factors as well that help people around the world

to relate to her. As her avid fans in Brazil know full well, Clarice was a product of the immigrant experience, she was divorced (never to remarry), and she was the mother of two boys, one of whom had to be institutionalized early on with incurable mental illness. This was agony for her. In spite of being a celebrity in her own country, she suffered from loneliness and, perhaps, from an intractable sense of isolation. Clarice knew first-hand the pain of life as well as its pleasures, and in everything she wrote she bade the reader to accompany her as she sought to make sense of it all. Her readers around the world, I suspect, love her for doing what they themselves want to do and try to do. And, from her earliest published work, Clarice tended to create female characters seeking to make their way in a man's world. This alone could explain her global audience in 2020. It also leads to the conclusion that, overall, Clarice's social awareness, her outrage at injustice, emanates from what we understand today as "feminism," a term utilized in its broadest, most inclusive, and most politically acute context.

It is important for readers not familiar with Clarice's significance in Brazil to know that feminism there has had a long and effective tradition. Brazilian women, for example, won the right to vote before women in France did. Already in the second half of the nineteenth-century, Brazil could boast of a "viable women's movement," one replete with several of its own publications, one that featured many women writers, and that dealt openly with the question of "women's emancipation" (Callahan 159; see also Sadlier 9). A prominent feminist leader of the time, Francisca Senhorinha da Motta Diniz, argued persuasively in favor of better education for both men and women, better access to the professions, increased social, political, and economic emancipation, expanded legal rights, and equal rights with men (Hahner 45–46). And, writing at the turn of the century, the Brazilian author, Carmen Dolores (the pen name of Emilia Moncorvo Bandeira de Melo), argued in favor of "equal rights, ... educational reform, ... the institution of fair wage legislation," and changes to the legal code that would "allow divorce in Brazil" (Sadlier 13; see also Barbosa, "Women Novelists"). By Clarice's time, the "Brazilian women's movement" had become "the largest, most radical, most diverse, and most effective of women's movements in Latin America" (Skidmore 207). In addition, there is the question of Positivism, so essential to the formation of modern Brazil. The

Brazilian Positivists "regarded women as superior to men," and so could easily support legislation demanding equal rights for women, but they were similarly progressive on a host of other concerns, nearly all of which dovetailed nicely with the feminist agenda (Burns 255, see also 254–55). To appreciate the feminism of Clarice Lispector, it is imperative that she be read as the heir to a Brazilian feminist tradition that is powerful, organized, and of long standing.

And yet, to read her multiform and polyvalent texts from that perspective, and most pointedly from that perspective as defined by Anglo-American criticism, risks confusion and faulty interpretations (see Kaminsky xiv, 120–21). Indeed, Clarice's vision may well be, as Mara Galvez-Breton contends, an early expression of post-feminism (70). The problem, for enthusiasts of World Literature in general and for non-Portuguese-speaking enthusiasts of Clarice Lispector in particular, is that there is a tendency "to foreclose the possibility of discordant textual encounters" and to minimize or disregard altogether "the estranging action of literarity" in favor of "transcendent" readings that gull us into feeling that all literary texts are understandable, or translatable (to reference the crucial role translation must play in the development of World Literature), in the same ways (Apter, "Untranslatability" 197). We know this is not what happens in such an exchange, and we should not allow ourselves to be led into thinking that it is. In Clarice's world, moreover, "discordant textual encounters" are not the exception but the norm. No one knows this better than her translators.

Clarice's feminism is a case in point. While Clarice's always sharp though never explicit feminism is clearly evident in much of what she writes, it may not be what a reader steeped in the literary traditions of Europe and North America would expect. Indeed, the question of Clarice's feminism is far from a settled point. All manner of complications are in play. It is always problematic to move a term long and deeply associated with one culture (that of England and English-speaking North America, for example) and apply its long-established meaning to a very different culture. The chances for misunderstanding abound. Our commonly held assumptions about a term like feminism may not apply all that well to a Brazilian writer like Clarice Lispector and may, in fact, lead us to misconstrue her work. Words not only mean different things to

different people but to different cultures as well. A prime example of this problem, feminism has very different connotations in Spanish America (which itself subdivides into very different cultures) and Brazil than it has had in Europe and North America. This is an issue of critical interpretation and evaluation the advocates of World Literature are learning they have to deal with very carefully. And that demand a great deal more knowledge than initially (and perhaps arrogantly) assumed. As Kaminsky contends, "the intersection of politics, gender, and sexuality ... must be" regarded as "the crux of a Latin American feminist criticism" (115, see also xi-xvi).

Clarice is an important writer for students, scholars, and teachers here in the United States to know. She is an innovative stylist and brilliant thinker who challenges the too often uncritical ways we envision and consider things, but, as a Brazilian, she is also an American writer. There's more. To a great extent, the resurgence of World Literature is being driven by US departments of English anxious to break out of the parochialism that has long afflicted them. In the case of Clarice Lispector, it is essential that English students know more about their huge, complex neighbor to the south. They need to know, for example, that some of her most creative work came during the brutal Brazilian dictatorship, which began in 1964 and which end until 1985, twenty-one long and bloody years later. Readers here in the United States need to know how deeply their own country was complicit in both the establishment and the maintenance of this dictatorship. As historian E. Bradford Burns puts it, "Clearly involved in the military overthrow of the constitutional and democratic government of Brazil, the U.S. government became intimately associated with the military dictatorship which followed" (504). The social, political, and economic context in which Clarice was living and working, and that she depicts in *Soulstorm*, to cite one conspicuous case, should be understood by readers here in the States not as something foreign or bizarre but as our own, as something we helped create and sustain. This is the kind of in-depth understanding about the literature they are consuming that enthusiasts of World Literature must have.

Even as a young woman, Clarice was quite aware of how much the female body was merchandized and how extensively it had become a staple of the global market, in Brazil and elsewhere.

Her early work as a health, beauty, and fashion writer for a major women's publication had taught her this. And yet, as is clear even at the beginning of her career as a creative writer, Clarice also understood the body as one's ultimate site of being, the physical reality that allows us to be, to exist. And for women, she also knew, this very human problem was uniquely complex. So while we can easily interpret the constant references to the female body that permeate her work, her fiction as well as her non-fiction, as motif-like indicators of why she appeals so viscerally to Cixous and her concept of *l'écriture féminine*, we can also conclude that Clarice engages us all in a frank discussion of the politicization, ownership, and commodification of the female body.

In Brazil, a culture long understood as patriarchal society based on a variety of master/slave relationships, this attitude about women, their roles in society, and their bodies has juridical and repressive roots in the Estado Novo (1930–45) of Getúlio Vargas. But this oppressiveness became greatly exacerbated during the years of the Brazilian dictatorship (1964–85), which obliged women to conform to their traditional roles as subservient wives, mothers, and homemakers. For the generals, these were to be the areas in which women would be permitted to make contributions to the newly autocratic and androcentric Brazil. Ironically, however, the more repressive the generals became, the more organized and radicalized Brazilian women became (Skidmore 204–08). Middle and lower-class women especially came together to demand better wages and working conditions and to insist on better health care, better schools, improved government services. And, perhaps most importantly of all, Brazilian women began to be elected to public office and to assume leadership roles in Brazilian life and government. It is useful to read the stories in *Soulstorm* in this context.

As Clarice is from Brazil, itself a part of Latin America (albeit a distinctive one), her sense of "feminism" is much more complicated, for both political and personal reasons, than it might at first appear to someone from the United States, England, or even Europe. And to avoid misunderstanding it needs to be understood in all its complexity. As Amy Kaminsky writes,

> A blindly middle-class, Europeanized feminism will not do for Latin America, especially when the very models of such a feminism are well into the process of scrutinizing their own class

> and racial biases. A feminist cultural criticism, of which literary criticism is a part, must take into account not only gender relations but stereotypes but other unequal power relations as well. (Kaminsky 23)

For a writer who died in 1977, Clarice's ideas about gender and gender fluidity are remarkably prescient. In reading her work, we can see that for her same-sex relationships exist, that they defy the old dyadic division of heterosexual/homosexual, that they change and evolve as do other human relationships, and that they are entirely normal, part of being human. In short, while today's thinking about sexual identity is more sophisticated and complex than it perhaps was in Clarice's time, gender remains a productive perspective from which to read her work, even today. As her texts make abundantly clear, "feminist concerns," about gender and a host of related issues, "bring a new energy and vitality to literary studies, for men as well as for women" (Showalter 4).

Many of Clarice's most striking and memorable passages derive from precisely this unifying sense of feminism, where the liberation of both men and women depends on their ability to regard themselves and each other differently. And upon their ability to work together to offset the rigidly gendered and warping identities authoritarian society seeks to impose on them. In the process of growing up, Clarice's texts often show us, the loss of the sense of solidarity and comradeship that boys and girls can have as youthful playmates becomes a tragic flaw in adult society. "The Message," a longish story from *The Foreign Legion*, zeros in on this theme with a poignancy that is unusual even by Lispectorian standards.

"Because of its Anglocentrism, North American feminist literary theory and criticism, which in its pragmatism, practicality, and commitment to social change has much to offer Latin American criticism, stops at its own borders and only with difficulty sees itself not as normative but as only one mode of being out of many" (Kaminsky 23). At the same time, it is all but certain that the highly educated and intellectually curious Clarice would have been attuned to the new trends in Anglo-American thinking about the new opportunities that were opening up for women across the Western world. And, as the wife of a Brazilian diplomat who, between 1945 and 1959, had postings in Europe and in the United States (where she lived for many years, in the Washington, DC area), Clarice would certainly been exposed to a full slate of

hitherto unknown possibilities. This experience could only have whetted her appetite for more, and she would surely have seen that the times were right for precisely the kind of writing she'd been doing and that she wanted to explore even more. "Whereas Anglo-American feminist criticism ... tries to recover women's historical experiences as readers and writers," the kind of *escritura*, or writing-centered work, that Clarice offers us, already in the early 1940s, explodes "the ways that 'the feminine' has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic systems of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, and art" (Showalter 9; also Sá). But for all that Clarice's work is concerned with how languages makes us what we are and how we seek to know things, to understand ourselves and the manifold realities about us, her work is never without social, political, and economic value. There is here abundant material to attract the attention of both the American and the French school of feminist thought. Clarice's is a world in which both men and women exist, and in which they must re-unify as allies in a common cause against oppression and in support of mutual empowerment. This spirit of comradeship is particularly evident in the stories of *Soulstorm*, which, as we will see, can be productively read in the context of Brazilian life under the dictatorship.

It was a dangerous time, and, in order to understand the context in which these stories appeared, and the risks Clarice took in writing them, it is essential that the reader not familiar with Brazil understand this. Beyond the issue of state imposed censorship, which was designed to curtail the work of writers and intellectuals and to quell public dissent, Brazilian citizens were being subjected to arrest, detainment, and torture. Many were simply "disappeared," murdered by the authorities and their bodies disposed of. Under a series of Institutional Acts, abuse of power was pervasive. Basic freedoms were ignored, civil rights were suspended, and dictatorial powers were assumed by the generals. The AI–5, enacted on 31 December 1968, was especially heinous. It "disbanded Congress, closed down the state legislatures, suspended the constitution, imposed censorship, cancelled the political rights of many, waived writs of habeas corpus" and permitted the persecution of journalists, writers, artists, and dissidents (Burns 519). This was the political environment in which Clarice would have been envisioning the narratives of *Soulstorm*. And in which she would have written them.

As we seek to better understand Clarice's reception abroad, it is useful to bear in mind the admonitions of Kaminsky and Showalter, especially as we consider Clarice's reputation in the United States and France and her celebration by Cixous, the latter an event that, for better and worse, has greatly expanded Clarice's global audience.

Aside from the question of feminism, other issues complicate global consumption of Clarice Lispector and her work. Although originally only known and admired in her native Brazil, Clarice's popularity today has expanded (by means of translation mostly) to Spanish America, the United States, and Canada (where she is celebrated by Nicole Brossard, among others). More recently, as noted above, Clarice's appeal has gone global. One complicating feature of her foreign reception is that she is from a culture long judged, by the reigning cultural elites, to be "marginal" or insignificant. Brazilian literature, one of the richest and most diverse literatures of the Americas, is simply not much studied or respected in the United States. Or even known. I dare say that most of Clarice's readers in the United States are not aware, as Roberto González Echevarría showed as recently as 1990, in *Myth and Archive*, that she comes from a culture with a high regard for science and scientific analysis (see 93–141, esp. 126–41). Even among those who prize creative writing, Brazil has long been ignored, rendered all but invisible. An old split, dating back to 1492 and 1500 and the arrivals of Spain and Portugal in the New World, has worked to separate Spanish America and Brazil even among Latin Americanists. More recently, the same split has emerged among Americanists, in the larger, hemispheric sense.

And yet, there is today the global thirst for novelty, the danger of being popularized and consumed as an "exotic," or faddish, writer. I worry that this problem may be particularly germane to Brazil, a nation whose culture is so steeped in stereotypes and tantalizing images that, ironically enough, these very qualities make it difficult for readers abroad to understand it and its writers as they need to be understood. Known, globally, as a mysterious but seductive land of fabulous beaches, samba, carnival, and soccer, but also as a place of corruption and violence, "Brazil is," writes Grace Paley, "a huge country. Its population is African black, Indian brown and golden, European white. There are landless peasants" as well as fabulously wealthy individuals and corporations (223).

> There are in Indian people, whole villages and ... tribes driven out of their forest homes by development. There is the vast ancient forest which, breathing, we absolutely require. There is the destruction of that forest continuing at such a rate that a sensible breathing world might be terrified. Imagine living in, being a citizen of a country in which the world's air is made. (Paley 223)

Paley concludes by connecting the global reader with both Brazil and one of its great writers, Clarice Lispector: "Imagine the woman, the urban woman writing not about that world but in it," the woman who shows us that the Brazilian experience is quintessentially the human experience (223).

But the times are changing. The critical voices who endorse World Literature and who militate in favor of a more global, and more democratic, approach to literary study, are presenting Brazilian literature with an opportunity, albeit one charged with both difference and *différance* (see Sellers; also Oliveira Machado). This is happening with Machado de Assis, Oswald de Andrade, Caio Fernando Abreu, João Gilberto Noll, João Paulo Cuenca, Regina Rheda, and Hilda Hilst, among many others, and it is happening with Clarice Lispector, a singular writer whose best work exemplifies what Apter terms "Untranslatability," not just lexically and stylistically but culturally, historically, and psychologically as well (see "Untranslatability"). In arguing for our need to recognize the uniqueness of each author we read, and in warning us against embracing the homogenized and denatured texts that can result from careless translations (and from careless readings!), Apter reminds us that different cultures and writers produce different texts. Cultures relate to each other in ever-changing ways, and readers, dealing with prejudices both pro and con, are on the cutting edge of this always mercurial exchange.

Yet it is a fact that some cultures are more attuned to this process of influence and reception than others. Brazil is one of these nations. As its specialists know, it is not difficult to argue that, from its inception, Brazilian literature has tended, in its historical openness to the global Other, to exemplify what we today salute as the best aspects of World Literature. This enthusiasm for intellectual and artistic engagement with the world remains a benchmark of Brazilian culture today. And the work of Clarice Lispector embodies it as well as anyone ever has.

In what amounts to a defense of the comparative method, which rests on a recognition of what texts have in common plus a detailed discussion of the differences that separate and distinguish them, Apter rightly emphasizes the importance of difference over similarity, which Damrosch, in *What Is World Literature?* relies on perhaps too much in laying out his position. In Apter's view, as we have seen, Damrosch's approach to World Literature "tends to foreclose the possibilities of discordant textual encounters," discordance being precisely what Clarice's texts offer (197). Librandi points to the same quality, noting that Clarice's writing "is at once deeply personal and detached, biographical and cosmogonic, feminist and animal, feminine and mechanical" (124). In considering the nevertheless very convincing argument Damrosch makes for World Literature, one can feel that while he clearly supports translation into English as a way for texts not originally written in English to become staples of the World Literature market (dominated overwhelmingly by English-language readers), he also seems to view the discipline of Comparative Literature as a function of English-language texts, thereby diminishing the importance of extensive foreign language training to it. In order for Comparative Literature to avoid becoming a mere subset of global English Studies, it must continue to insist on in-depth language learning for its students and practitioners. One must be able to speak, read, and write at the level of the graduate seminar in at least two languages other than one's native tongue. This is the *sine qua non* of the discipline and it must be maintained.

Part of Clarice's ardent global reception comes, we can hope, from a deeply rooted desire for commonality, from a newly awakened desire for human solidarity, and for unity through diversity. Clarice's work, exemplary of a "feminine writing" that does not exclude men and that would bind us all together, politically, economically, and culturally, leads us to think so. No where does Clarice show us the importance of this unifying force that so permeates her work more than in the 1974 story, "Where You Were At Night." Oneiric in nature, this singular text deliberately combines, and then recombines, the male/female/female/male life forces of the universe into a single, hybrid existence, one that recalls Plato's androgynous being but one that suggests much more as well. As suggested by the title chosen by Levitin in his very reliable translation, "Where You Were At Night" can be read as

an allegory about the movement from a state of sleep, dream, and uninhibited being to being awake, rational, and constrained by social mores. In short, it can be understood as carrying the reader from a state of unconsciousness to one of consciousness, from darkness and the night to the morning light. From this, it would be easy to interpret the story as Clarice's attempt to chart the interplay of conscious and unconscious being. This would explain the jumble of discordant images that give form to it. It would also explain the powerful, Id-like sexuality that runs through the entire text, from beginning to end, when it is checked by the light of day, by a sense of shame, by invoking God, and by social convention. There is even a moment when Clarice seems to be writing about herself, as a person and as a writer: "The failed writer opened her diary bound in red leather and began to record the following: '7th of July. I, I, I, I, I, I, I! On this beautiful morning with its Sunday sun, after having slept badly, I, in spite of everything, appreciate the marvelous beauties of Mother Nature" ("Where You Were At Night" *Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories* 127). Then, after telling us that she does not go that day to the beach, a place Clarice loved and often wrote about, the narrative ends with this enigmatic declaration: "Your viperous tongue will be sliced through by the scissors of complacency" (127). To whom or to what is being referred to here? The text does not tell us, though we feel the force of the utterance; as in much of life, we simply do not understand.

Other than its nightmarish aspect, and its evocation of unrestrained sexuality, the most distinguishing aspect of "Where You Were At Night" is how it systematically inverts the name, "He/She" to "She/He" and then back again. The result of this continuous syntactical alternation, which occurs from beginning to end of the story, is to eliminate from the name itself any sort of gendered hierarchy or sense of primacy. The effect, unique in Clarice's *oeuvre*, is quite striking, and even the most casual reader does not miss it. In this hallucinatory world, one created by and through language, gender distinctions are erased in favor of a new kind of being, or consciousness, one sexual in nature but one neither male nor female, nor female or male, but the product of both. And, one feels, finally, in more or less equal proportions.

Chapter One

Clarice and Politics

Political concerns are everywhere in Clarice Lispector's writing. Hunger, especially, was a concern of hers, as were the issues of poverty (so evident in *The Hour of the Star*), human rights, civil rights (and most particularly the rights of women), the plight of indigenous people (see *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 137–38), police violence ("Mineirinho," *The Foreign Legion* 212–15), public education (*Discovering* 104–05), and penal reform (*Discovering* 597), among others. As she tells us in a 4 March 1970, column from the *Jornal do Brasil*, where she was a regular contributor, Clarice felt a great sense of responsibility to her fellow citizens, in Brazil and globally (*Discovering* 358–59). There is no reason to doubt her word on this point.

Early in her career, Clarice's political consciousness is more muted and oblique, a matter for the engaged reader to ferret out of her texts. Two examples are the anonymous woman in the 1940 story, "The Flight," and the character, Joana, from Clarice's first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, published late in 1943. The lone exception to this tendency is the remorseless and lacerating 1948–49 morality play, "The Woman Burned at the Stake and the Harmonious Angels," where a woman is immolated alive for being a participant in an adulterous affair but the man involved is not; though guilty of the same offense, he, in fact, gets to pass judgement on her, and then simply walk away, free to do the same thing again. It is difficult to read this text without feeling it amounts to a withering critique of patriarchy, in Brazil and around the world. In "Literature and Justice," a chronicle published in 1964, Clarice speaks candidly about her political consciousness and how it affects her work as a writer. She mentions what she calls her "inability to deal with the 'social problem' in a 'literary' vein (that is to say, by transforming it into the vehemence of art)" (*Foreign*

Legion 124). She then goes on to say that "Ever since I have come to know myself, the social problem has been more important to me than any other issue ... I wanted 'to do' something, as if writing were not doing anything. What I cannot do is to exploit writing to this end" (*Foreign Legion* 124). Then, and rather defensively, she adds, "I am not entirely ashamed of contributing nothing human or social through my writing. It is not a matter of not wanting to, it is a question of not being able to. What I am ashamed of is of 'not doing', of not contributing in an active way ... But, of writing what I write, I am not ashamed" (*Foreign Legion* 124–25).

Later, however, and especially in the final few years of her life, Clarice's texts began to exert a more open and obvious political force. This is most apparent in the parodic, and, in the beginning, critically decried tales, known in their English translation as *Soulstorm*, which, focusing on the empowerment of women, can be taken as a protest against the Brazilian dictatorship then in power. Overall, we can say with confidence that the root of the political Lispector has to do with issues of gender, a term she never fails to relate to issues of race, class, and power. As Marta Peixoto puts it,

> In her passionate fictions, Lispector undermines the authority of reason, which she repeatedly construes as a version of male domination, both in her characters and plots (or their erasure) and in the very texture of her dense, oxymoronic language with its tendency toward self-contradiction and the dissolution of logical sense. Throughout her work, Lispector searches for alternate sources of power and organization. (Peixoto, *Passionate Fictions* xiv, see also xii)

Gender, then, is key to understanding Clarice's political consciousness, from "The Flight"[1] (1940) and *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), through "The Woman Burned at the Stake," to what was, perhaps, her final story, "Beauty and the Beast, or, The Wound Too Great" (1977).

Although his comments relate to Machado de Assis's memorable female character, Sofia (from the 1891 novel, *Quincas Borba*), what K. David Jackson points out applies equally well to my discussion here concerning the political importance of gender to the work of Lispector (see Jackson 139–40). In both Machado de Assis, an earlier Brazilian master, and Clarice Lispector, who

greatly admired Machado (and who was almost certainly influenced by him), the question of women's rights and their place as equals in Brazilian society[2] looms large. In writing about Sofia, but using words that speak to Clarice's dissection of a society (any society!) that sustains itself on the strength of gender-based oppressions, Jackson declares, correctly, that "female repression, wish fulfillment, unconscious states, dreams, libido, guilt, the shame of sexuality, and the death wish" are critical to our ability to understand and appreciate complex female characters (140). Then, as if referring directly to Clarice's characters, he continues: "The open expression of female sexuality involves transgressing or violating some of society's legal or moral codes, while remaining taboo, both in the sense of a sacred and an accursed value of the patriarchal state" (140, see also 219). And, moreover, since a major part of Sofia's problem is that she is the prized possession, mere chattel, really, of a selfish and "masochistic" husband, her displeasure with him (as a boring sexual partner, one supposes, but in myriad other pleasure-squelching ways as well) seems to echo the complaints of a great many modern women stuck in unhappy marriages or relationships (140).

As Kate Julian reports, her 2018 study of sexual satisfaction among young women shows that, increasingly, many are rejecting traditional heterosexual relationships in which pain, violence, or oppression are the norm and, instead, turning to masturbation for relief or to sex with other women (82–83, 92–93). In the opinion of researcher Julian, this statistically verifiable phenomenon, an issue of gender, is changing the nature of human society around the globe (see also Brantley; Diamond 25–26, 61–62; and Bergner 127). From beginning to end, Clarice's texts exemplify precisely this, how and why human society needs to change how it regards not only women but men as well. Focusing on what we might describe as sexual politics, and understood in a broad context, her narratives consistently depict a cultural universe in which men and women exist together and in which they must learn to be in all respects supportive rather than exploitive. For readers around the world, both male and female, this unifying and uplifting approach to human interaction is tremendously appealing.

The early stories, "The Triumph,"[3] "Obsession," and "The Flight," written when Clarice was a law school student, all deal not merely with relationships but with relationships understood

in the context of certain oppressive social, political, and economic systems. Tying all of these together, and adding to it issues of psycho-sexual trauma, the complications and problems associated with gender rank as fundamental to this vision. And while the male character is not neglected, it is the female character whose perspective dominates. In "The Flight," for example, which one could read as a kind of dress rehearsal for the novel that follows it, *Near to the Wild Heart*, Clarice takes the reader into the heart of a disintegrating union between a man and a woman. In both cases, however, it is the woman who is depicted as leaving an unhappy marriage in quest of something better.

The 1940 story, "The Flight," focuses on an unnamed woman who, after twelve years in a conventional but, for her, suffocating middle-class marriage, is presented as being in the process of leaving it, to flee in quest of what she imagines as freedom. For this woman, marriage has been a prison, and, as we meet her in the story, she is in flight, trying to escape it. While at first, it appears that she is going to be successful, in the end she fails, succumbing, finally, to the weight of convention—and to a lack of financial resources; she does not have the money to buy passage on a ship she envisions as carrying her away to a new life. Her realization of just how unhappy she is comes gradually and fitfully, as it does for most people in this predicament. "How did it happen?" she asks herself, thinking back to her existence as an appendage of her husband (56). "In the beginning," it was "just a sense of uneasiness and heat. Then something within her began to grow. Suddenly, in slow, miniscule movements," she strips herself naked and stands in the middle of the room, "panting ... Now she was hungry," for freedom, the reader feels, and for the experience of life (56). As a married woman, "She hadn't felt hungry for twelve years," but now, shorn of her clothing and, for a moment, at least, of her status as chattel, she *was* hungry—for life and all it could bring her, from a satisfying sexual life to economic independence and authenticity of being (56). Once aboard the ship that was to sail later that afternoon, she would be on the verge of executing her flight to freedom (56). She does not make it, and no reader, male or female, is immune to the pain of her failure.

In Clarice's 1943 novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, Joana, the main character, does board her ship and depart. But here, in the 1940 story, this does not happen. Here, with the cruel realization that

she could not even buy her own ticket, our pre-Joana protagonist collapses, along with her dreams of escape and regeneration. She's living out a fantasy, she thinks to herself, crushed, and her plans are nothing more than "a lie" she torments herself with (56). "Twelve years are a heavy weight," the narrative voice tells us, "like kilos of lead, and the days close around one's body, squeezing harder" (56). Defeated, she returns home, lies to her unsuspecting husband about where she had been, receives his passionless and seemingly perfunctory kiss, and goes to bed, "wiping her tears on the sheet," all the while excruciatingly aware that "In the silence of the night, the ship" that is her way out "moves farther and farther away" (57). As painful as this final scene is, it strains credulity to think that the issues at the heart of it—a desire for freedom, for authenticity of being, and to exist as something more than merely the property of someone else—are not valid for women and men around the world. Some relationships, we know, are mutually nurturing and empowering, but many others are not, and this, as Clarice's global readers would certainly recognize, is a basic truth of the human experience.

While the 1940 story broaches this theme, it receives a more thorough plumbing in *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), Clarice's audacious first novel. Here, however, it is not merely the institution of marriage, as an institution, that presents itself, for women, as a prison, but the nature of relationships as well. Now woven together, these issues here come up early in the narrative. "How," muses Joana, the restless young woman at the novel's center, "was she to tie herself to a man without permitting him to imprison her? How was she to prevent him from enclosing her body and soul within his four walls? And was there some means of acquiring things without those things possessing her?" (*Near to the Wild Heart* 29). As Brazilianists know, this question about marriage as a form of imprisonment has a long history in Brazilian literature. Perhaps its most brilliant early expression came in 1875 and the novel, *Senhora*, by José de Alencar. Unique in all the Americas for its advocacy of female agency, *Senhora* focuses on how one woman, forced by penury and circumstance, into an arranged marriage, manages to take control of her situation and become master of her fate, marital and otherwise. Alencar's successors, the brilliantly innovative Machado de Assis, and Aluísio Azevedo, whose gynocentrically revolutionary masterpiece, *The Slum* (1890), openly takes up both

lesbianism and female solidarity, all dealt with the issue of female standing (see Fitz, *Machado de Assis* 60–62). "The radical recovery of women's sexuality that lesbian feminism implies ... is profoundly political" in nature (Kaminsky xiv). As Puerto Rican writer, Rosario Ferré, argues, in fact, "Brazilian women writers have always been at the forefront" of change and justice in Portuguese and Spanish-speaking America "for they were the first to write not solely for the women of Brazil, but for all those Latin American women ... who have suffered a stifling social repression" (40). As a national writer, Clarice's exploration of women's rights does not appear in a vacuum, then; rather, it stems from a longstanding narrative tradition in Brazil, one cultivated by both women and men, that deals with this same subject. But as an exemplar of World Literature, the appearance, in 1943, of *Near to the Wild Heart*, marks a milestone in the global struggle for women's rights.

"The Woman Burned at the Stake and the Harmonious Angels" (1948–49) is unique in Clarice's *oeuvre* in that it utilizes the genre of drama, specifically the medieval morality play, to make its very sharp point (see Fitz, "A Pecadora Queimada e os Anjos Harmoniosos"). It is, for the then twenty-eight-year-old author, an unusually angry text as well, one that may well reflect Clarice's personal vexation as, justifiably frustrated, she exudes a scarcely concealed rage over the second-class status of women in society. The drama, stark in its presentation and relentless in its condemnation of patriarchal social and religious mores, centers on a nameless woman whom a variety of men have condemned to death; she is to be burnt at the stake. While the woman in question never speaks, the male voices, each one representing a different segment of society, relentlessly indict her. The crime in question, however, is adultery, and she is guilty of it. That is not in doubt.

What the reader comes to realize, however, is that one of the men who condemns her is her lover, the very man with whom she entered into an adulterous state. He will suffer no punishment at all, however, save a possible glimmer of guilt for not being charged with any crime while his female accomplice is consigned to death in a most barbaric fashion, one that the (also male) religious leaders present enthusiastically condone.

Interestingly enough, only a few voices of "the people" end up speaking on behalf of the woman who is to be killed because she engaged in marital infidelity. The voice identified as the "people"

does "not understand" why the woman in question is suffering this punishment (*Foreign Legion* 158, also 160). The reader is left to wonder: Do men who commit adultery suffer the same fate? And, of course, the answer is "no." Identifying the woman's plight with their own, the "people" then declare, as the flames engulf the woman who is being sacrificed, that "This fire was already ours, and the entire city," which one is led to think of as their entire social structure, "is ablaze" (158). Led by the silent, but smiling, woman (who is about to be put to an awful death for the "sin" of adultery), the "people" do not understand how the double standard that will execute the woman bound to the stake but not her male partner in crime can be allowed to stand. For the reader, the conclusion is clear: The injustice that destroys the woman ends up destroying the entire city—and, by extension, their entire civilization—as well. Injustice is fatal to a healthy society; it cannot be countenanced.

At the end of the play, with everything (save the hypocrisy of the male ruling forces, including those of the religious sector) in smoldering ruins, the voice of a "Drowsy child" asks, the key question: "Mother, what has happened?" (160). Another voice, that of the "Newly-born angels," repeats the same question: "Mother, what has happened?" (161). As if to warn the reader of what will happen if society's attitudes about gender inequality and injustice are not changed, an anonymous "Woman of the people" then responds, "My children, it happened like this" (161).

Although Clarice had been writing stories for several years, the collection, *Family Ties* (1960), was the first of her efforts to have a major impact on the Brazilian reading public and critical community. Its appearance, in fact, established her as a writer who had transformed the nature of the short story in Brazil. In particular, Clarice was hailed for interiorizing it and, most of all, for feminizing it. Even today, there are many readers who prefer her stories over her novels. In *Family Ties*, action

> is virtually nonexistent, and the threads of tension are maintained by use of stream-of-consciousness techniques and interior monologues frequently sustained by a single character. This creates an intensely personal note in Clarice's ... writing that can often give the impression of being labored and excessive in some of her novels, yet is unfailingly effective in her stories, where the brilliant flashes of insight are less exposed to repetition. (Pontiero, Introduction, trans. *Family Ties* 14)

It is true that the narrative techniques utilized in her stories and in her novels do make for an interesting comparison, though the demands of genre do come into play as well. The tales of *Family Ties*, however, stand out for a number of reasons. One of these, as we see in such stories as "The Buffalo" and "Preciousness," deal with male infidelity and molestation. Citing the widely read story, "Love," Diane E. Marting observes that here, as elsewhere in these early narratives, the mystery of human relationships "regularly provokes misunderstanding" (*Clarice Lispector: A Bio-Bibliography* 58).

The same critic also notes a particular translation problem about this collection's title, which Pontiero rendered, understandably, as "ties." Some years later, Katrina Dodson makes the same decision. As Marting points out, however, in Brazilian Portuguese "A 'laço' is not quite as neutral as a simple 'tie,' coming from the same Latin root as lasso in English" (58). As the stories of this collection show, their characters are ensnared by a variety of forces, all of which work against their desires "to free themselves" (58). As in the title story, "Family Ties," where a woman finds herself strapped by both her mother's expectations of her and her own desires, and by a husband who is oblivious to her wishes, this drama of existence is what binds the stories of this collection together (see Pontiero, "The Drama of Existence"; also Moisés, "Clarice Lispector"). The point Marting makes here about the semantic complexities of "laço" that are lost in its translation into English as "ties" illustrates the argument Emily Apter makes about "untranslatability" and the danger, as she sees it, of the degree to which World Literature advocates are willing to minimize, smooth out, or even elide, these key differences.

One of Clarice's mid-career stories, "The Message," from *The Foreign Legion: Stories and Chronicles* (1964) stands, arguably, as the single-most powerful treatment of the question of gender that she ever wrote. Exquisitely painful, "The Message" epitomizes how the gendering of both women and men corrupts, imprisons, and finally destroys everyone involved, the men as well as the women. This under-appreciated text begins by depicting a still innocent and uncorrupted boy and girl treating each other as comrades, as if they "were a new sex," "Hybrids—who so far had not," as if they would have any say in the matter, "chosen a personal lifestyle," who had not, in other words, as yet had a rigidly gendered

"life-style" imposed on them ("The Message," *Foreign Legion* 31, also 41). Later (and by the end of the story) they would, and this fact accounts for the sense of tragedy that drives this deeply moving short narrative. Noting that, as equals, as "bodies with blood, like flowers in the sun," "they asked a great deal of each other" even as "they had the same needs," the narrator makes it clear that the girl and the boy were together in quest of some sort of personal happiness, of "salvation" (34). Poetry, understood as a sensual but mysterious force talked about by adults, both attracted and, as they were wary of its potency and its proximity to sex, repelled them (34–35).[4] At this point, language begins to fail them; words are used to create messages which, becoming entangled, lose their meanings. Growing confused as they try to deal with what society demands that they be and think and do, the boy and the girl exchange gender roles, she becoming aggressive and "virile" while he acquires the "almost ignoble sweetness of a young girl" (36). Nothing works for them, however, and they and the reader sense their androgynous innocence and equality slipping away. Slowly but ineluctably, their society demands that she become "a woman" and that he become "a man," with all the consequences that the changes in attitude and conduct that these new states of being would entail (41).

Interestingly, "The Message" ends not on the girl's transformation, which would be the conventional story about the damage done women by gendering, but on that of the boy. Imbued at the end with a newly acquired sense of sexual power and aggressiveness, the boy, still confused, declares "I am a man," although the reader learns that it was "his sex" that "told him" this "in dark victory" (41). He now watches "with pornographic and inquisitive eyes" the girl who had formerly been his friend, companion, and comrade-in-arms (42). Now, sadly, she was nothing more than "a monkey wearing a short skirt" who was boarding a bus (42). At this point, the young man is overcome by a strange sense of unease and "disquiet" (42). He feels that something terrible has happened—to him and to her! "The girl," the narrator tells us, was now, for him, "a nonentity," and

> meanwhile, man as he now was, the boy suddenly needed to turn to that nonentity, to that girl. Not even to turn to her as equal to equal, or to turn to her in order to concede ... *But, imprisoned in his kingdom of man, he needed her*. For what reason?

> ... He hungered after her in order never to forget that they were made of the same flesh ... What is it? What is finally happening to me? He asked himself in fear. ("The Message," *Foreign Legion* 42, 43, emphasis added)

The boy/man tries to sluff this fear off by thinking that his distress was "Only a moment of weakness and uncertainty" and that he would momentarily regain his new-found sense of superiority (43). But, Clarice stresses, this does not work. "Within that system of harsh and final judgement," which the reader immediately recognizes as patriarchy, "which forbids even a moment of disbelief lest the ideal should collapse, he looked at the long road," which we can think of as their common future, and saw that "everything was now in ruins and arid as if his mouth were full of dust" (43). "Now, alone at last," we learn, "he was defenceless and at the mercy of the hasty lie" (patriarchy?) "with which the *others* tried to teach him to be a man. But what about the message? The message reduced to dust which the wind was blowing towards the grating over the sewer. Mummy, he said." (43). Rarely, in modern global literature, has male domination received such a scathing indictment.

A similar indictment of the phallogocentric order occurs in "The Obedient," a story from the same 1964 collection, *The Foreign Legion*. Here, however, the focus is on a middle-aged couple, a man and wife who, trapped in what we now think of as the prison house of language and a confused state of being, are trying to figure out who and what they are, to themselves and each other. A quiet desperation permeates this little read story, and, in fact, the distraught wife will ultimately commit suicide. The narrative carefully develops the two together, with parallel sections of the story focusing (first) on "The wife" and then on "The husband" (*Foreign Legion* 85). The reader can easily see here one of Clarice's main points about living in a patriarchal society, that it warps both women and men, though in different ways. While she found herself "under the continuous spell of fantasy," he was trapped "by the atmosphere of anguished masculinity in which he lived" and "by his own masculinity, which was diffident but real" (85).[5] For both of them, as for the reader, "Each thing appeared to be the sign of something else" (85).[6] With images of wetness (associated with the wife) and dryness (associated with the man) interweaving, the story ends with the woman, fifty-one years old

and "without a ticket" to anything, throwing herself out of their apartment window and the man, "puzzled," walking around with no understanding, no purpose, and no direction (85, 86).

In "The Evolution of Myopia," another story from *The Foreign Legion*, the problem has to do with the nature of intelligence, and, more specifically, the development of female intelligence within the confines of a male dominated system. "She did not know if he was intelligent," the narrative voice tells us about the two people, a man and a woman, involved (*Foreign Legion* 69). "To be or not to be intelligent depended upon the instability of others," a pronouncement that confirms Clarice's brilliant literary and deeply human expression of the too often arcane and abstruse tenets of poststructuralism (69; see also Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist University of Clarice Lispector*). Gendering very quickly establishes itself as the prime mover in this story. While the narrative concerns itself with what the man is thinking and feeling, it is the woman's desire to know and to understand that drives it. In doing so, "The Evolution of Myopia" focuses the reader's attention on how men and women perceive themselves and each other. A variety of issues, all basic building blocks of Clarice Lispector, come into play here: the female body, the complexity and fluidity of being, the problem of knowing, and the mysterious nature of love, freedom, change, and desire. "The whole day long," we read, in prototypically ambiguous Clarice fashion,

> love demanded a past that might redeem the present and the future. The whole day long, without saying a word, his cousin demanded from him that he might have been born from her womb ... On that day, ... he knew one of the rare forms of stability: the stability of an impossible desire. The stability of an unattainable desire ... And it was as if his myopia had vanished and he could see the world clearly ... And for the first time he experienced passion ... It was as if he had removed his spectacles, and myopia itself was helping him to see. (*Foreign Legion* 74)

even though he knows, in the end, that, "overcome by confusion," he "sees" with "the reverberating intensity of a blind man" (*Foreign Legion* 74).

Officially known as a piece of children's literature, Clarice's *The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit* (1967) can certainly be read as such.

One of Clarice's offspring, Paulo Gurgel Valente, remembers that, as a boy, in Washington, DC, where, largely at his behest, the story was written,[7] the family had some rabbits in a cage in the backyard and that one day they had mysteriously escaped from it (Gotlib 371). Very short, as is appropriate for a children's book, the story deals with the travails of a pet rabbit, named Joãozinho, who lives in a hutch and who is given food and water by his keepers. Although Joãozinho is a basically happy little bunny, he does entertain thoughts of getting out and cavorting about freely. And one day he does just that—he gets out. Not surprisingly, he is captured and returned to his box.

But things have now changed; Joãozinho has tasted freedom, and he does not want to be caged up any longer. And so he spends his time getting out and thinking about his situation, how living in a cage is different from living in freedom. It is at this point in the story that he becomes not merely a pet rabbit but a thinking, or pensive, rabbit.

At the same time, however, one can easily take *The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit* as a subtle statement about the Brazilian political scene in the late 1960s. Published in 1967, three years into what was rapidly becoming a brutal and oppressive dictatorship, it does not strain credulity to think of Joãozinho as the Brazilian people, of his captors as the generals in charge, and of his box as Brazil under their rule. If read from this angle, it is not difficult to envision Clarice asking her readers to think hard about what was happening to their nation and what they needed to do about it. Clarice, we know, did participate in protest marches, a fact that further legitimizes this more political reading of this prize-winning story. Approached from this perspective, *The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit* would make four important points: One, that rabbits, (like middle-class citizens) tend to remain indifferent to how things in their society are going until they really get bad and they lose what is most valuable to them; two, that as long as the rabbits/citizens have enough to eat, they would not seek to "escape" (that is, change their social order and political system); three, that the more Joãozinho (each individual citizen) escaped from her or his "cage" (life under the dictatorship), the more he or she "wanted to do it" (the more each citizen yearned to return to democratic self-government); and, four, when Joãozinho began escaping more and more (that is, to rebel and protest more

vociferously) and to realize the nature of the situation he was in (to understand how unjust the dictatorship was and the damage it was doing to Brazilian democracy), he ceased to be a passive rabbit and transformed himself into a "thinking rabbit," that is, a politically aware citizen (Fitz, *Clarice Lispector* 117, see also 116–18).

Clarice herself gives credence to this specific political reading when, in a *crônica* dated 15 August 1970, during some of the dictatorship's worst years, she seems to hint at the political importance of her earlier "children's story." She writes, toward the end of her piece, where she has been commenting on her visit with some boys and girls, ages five through twelve, about what she and they thought about *The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit*, "that we were united in our love for the pensive rabbit, by our natural warmth *and by a sense of fearless freedom* ... This was no less true of the other adults who were present" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 399, emphasis added, see also 107).

Both interpretive strategies are bolstered by a short and notably enigmatic introductory statement in which Clarice takes pains to tell her audience, children, of course, but presumably adults as well, that she had intentionally made the text "open" so that each reader could fill in "between the lines,"[8] this being a kind of engaged reading that she had discussed in "Writing Between the Lines," a newspaper column she had written about a year later, on 6 November 1971. It is as if Clarice the writer is telling Brazilian citizens not merely how they should read her literary works but how they should regard the right-wing political rhetoric that was then engulfing them. In both cases, Clarice intimates, they needed to "read between the lines," to carefully consider what they are reading and being told.

It is worth noting that this was a shockingly bad time in Brazil. People were being arrested for simply voicing their displeasure with their government and its policies and, in many cases, being tortured and even murdered for doing so. A democratically elected government, that of the progressive João Goulart (the Joãozinho of the story?), had been overturned by a military coup, one supported by a powerful, conservative, and very wealthy oligarchy. And it was dangerous for a writer, like Clarice Lispector, to speak out. Yet she did.

The parallels between 1967 Brazil and today's authoritarian political climate (globally, yes, but also in the United States) are sobering and not to be ignored. Those of us fortunate to still have

the right to vote must do so. We must all be "thinking rabbits," Clarice reminds us, but we must also be "thinking rabbits" who vote, and we must do so each and every time there is an election and at every level of government, from the local and the state to the national! Her readers around the world recognize the urgency of this civic duty and respond to it. In an age when literature is being challenged to make itself relevant to the urgent issues of our time, Clarice answers the call.

Also from the late 1960s, when Brazil was convulsed in a political turmoil that had begun earlier, in 1964, we have what is Clarice's most unusual novel, *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights* (1969). Written in nine days and during a time when Clarice was struggling with personal problems, *An Apprenticeship* does not rank among her best efforts (see Gotlib 381). Coming across as much as an act of self-psychoanalysis as the poignant tale of a young woman's search for a sense of personal identity and worth in a male dominated world (one replete with references to the male dominated military dictatorship that had, only five years earlier, been installed in Brazil), the text does link the protagonist's quest for authenticity of being with Brazil's repressive political situation. Benjamin Moser, referencing the fight for democracy that was going on all around her, in Brazil and globally, as well as Lori's own quest for self, believes that "Clarice explicitly links Lori's struggle to the political struggles of 1968" (*Why This World* 300). If one accepts this point of view, it would reinforce the argument I will eventually make here that a later work, the collection of stories known, in English, as *Soulstorm*, stands as an even more acute form of political protest, one that challenged, in 1974, the repressive politics of Brazil's military dictatorship, which lasted from 1964 to 1985. Although it ranks as one of the very few Clarice texts to have a demonstrably "happy ending," *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights* (1969) comes across as problematic, I suspect, for today's global audience. And particularly for young women, though (one hopes!) for a not small cadre of young men, too. It is difficult not to be put off by this novel. The problem lies with what I regard as the basic master/slave relationship that exists between the female protagonist, a school teacher named Lori, and her mentor, Ulysses, a university philosophy professor. It is far too one-sided, with the man dominating the young woman, who unquestionably wants both freedom and equality.

This is true even in the novel's conclusion, where Lori seems, finally, with her sense of self-worth reestablished and her apprenticeship into life, love, and a re-connection to the world now at an end, to think and act for herself. But does she? Does she really attain agency? The question is moot, even in a novel that seems to want it not to be.[9] The final line of the book is not hers, as one might expect, but his. Zen-like, Ulysses (who, tellingly, has just interrupted Lori as she was beginning to say what she thought) then declares, rather sententiously, "What I think is this:" (*An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights* 116). Should the reader take these words as an expression of sincerity or pedantry, a desire to remain in control? At this point in the narrative, do we take Lori, who is well aware of her "tendency to become some man's slave," to be finally free from fear, uncertainty, and subservience, or even more under the thumb of Ulysses, the man she has hoped would, indeed, set her free (and who, in theory, at least, may well have done so) (113)? And since Lori and Ulysses are now lovers, what will their relationship be like? Will they really "be one," as Ulysses predicts, or will one of them, Ulysses, continue to rule the other, as he has done up to this point? The novel's final section, in the original Portuguese and in translation, does appear to want us to believe that, yes, they will now become a single, fused being; this goal has been driving the narrative from the beginning. But the final concluding line, where Ulysses cuts Lori off and once again asserts his own authority, undermines this belief.

Just a page earlier, Lori, who is now thinking of herself as a newly born woman, one free and equal to men, tells Ulysses, "I've always admired men compared with women. In men I sense the courage to be alive. While I, as a woman, am slightly more delicate and therefore weaker, you are primitive and basic" (115). Then she asks her mentor a question, one that similarly does not inspire the reader's confidence in either Lori's emancipation or liberation: "What's my social value, Ulysses? I mean right now?" (115). Ulysses, never lacking for answers, declares, "That of a woman, a marginal member of Brazilian society's middle class today" (115; see also Schmidt). To this, Lori then replies, once again in what can be taken both as a sign of a questionable ability to perceive reality as it is and as a troubling mode of self-valuation, "As I see it you don't belong to any class, Ulysses. If you knew how exciting it is to imitate you. I'm learning along with you, although you

think that I've learned from your instruction" (115). This position is then undercut by Lori herself, when she says, "But that's not true," a point that surprises the reader at this point in the narrative (115). "I've learned," Lori continues, "what you didn't dream of teaching me. Do you think that all my freedom goes against the structure of my social class?" (115). "Of course it does," Ulysses responds, before continuing: "The fact is that you've just come out of prison as a free agent and no one can forgive you for that. Sex and love aren't forbidden to you anymore. You've finally learned how to exist. And this causes the release of many other liberties, which is a threat of your social class" (115). Other than declaring that now, perhaps under changed circumstances, she would "like to get pregnant," that she has "come to the edge of a new beginning," and that she is now Ulysses's "woman," Lori does not elaborate further (115, 116); the reader is left in the dark as to what Lori thinks about the new life she may well have and the "many other liberties" that give it meaning.

While the legitimacy of gender inequality is most certainly being questioned here, and while *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights* was written at a difficult and painful time in Clarice's life, the overall thrust of this late 1960s novel makes one dubious about its global appeal (see Moser, *Why This World* 300–04). Beyond the problem of now being reduced to the level of chattel property, perhaps most troubling of all for today's reader is that while Lori clearly says to Ulysses that she is his woman, he does not reciprocate; he does not declare to her that he is, in similar fashion, her man. His failure to say this leaves the reader worried that an unequal relationship is going to result, one to which the woman commits but the man does not. Although an obviously pleased Lori now feels miraculously reborn and all but divine, the reader of 2020 cannot be so sure.

At the same time, however, it could be argued that millions of women around the globe do, in fact, find themselves in precisely Lori's predicament; she desires strength, self-confidence, and assertiveness but she also desires a relationship with a man who may or may not help her attain these things. Lori wants to be sure of her partner but she cannot be, and the reader is acutely aware of this uncertainty. Read from this perspective, Lori, in all her vulnerability, is a very realistically depicted character, one with whom millions of readers around the world could easily identify. And

they know why: Life does not always work out as we wish. One's desires do not always go hand in hand with one's experience in the world. Or with the real-world opportunities that one has. Saying what one wants is one thing, attaining it is something else. While Lori comes across as a painfully real character, one whose predicament many will understand and appreciate, her mentor and lover, Ulysses, seems wooden and stale, a caricature of what is too often available to young women like Lori and a parody of what a true equal partner in life should be.

The possibility that all will work out well in the end, for Lori and Ulysses, is not precluded in the narrative itself. It could be that Ulysses, too, has been transformed, and that he will henceforth be Lori's, just as she wishes to be his. Offsetting this line of interpretation, however, remains the already alluded to problem of possession; is it a good thing to speak of one person, even a lover, as possessing another? From beginning to end, the text of *An Apprenticeship* carries Lori, and the reader, to the realization of a deeply desired goal—a woman's sense of being equal to men. And it is clearly Lori who initiates not merely the sexual union with Ulysses but the perfect fusion of two beings that she is in quest of. Lori is the gatekeeper, as far as sex with Ulysses is concerned, though he, too, wishes her to be the person who makes this decision for them. Lori wants to break free from the solipsism that entraps her and find out if she can somehow learn (hence the apprenticeship of the title) to successfully love another human being. And be loved in return. What is interesting, and perhaps frustrating, is that while the reader is aware of this desire on Lori's part, she (the reader) cannot be sure, even at the end, if Lori does in fact attain what she most ardently desires. If this text is read as a form of self-therapy, as a kind of *roman à clef* in which Clarice is attempting to put her life back together and determine who and what she is, then the clunky, academic dialogues such as the one noted above could, perhaps, be excused. Or at least understood. And, when one considers this 1969 novel as a kind of political precursor to the later stories of *Soulstorm*, it is not difficult to see Clarice pushing the idea of women's liberation as a form of national liberation, one that frees not only women but men as well. When Lori finally takes Ulysses as her lover, and, one feels, as her intellectual equal, they come together as progressive-minded citizens demanding a return to democratic self-rule, freedom, and

equal treatment under the law. Read in this fashion, the step from Lori to Ruth Algrave, as we shall see, is not a big one.

In writing about the great 1973 novel, *The Stream of Life*, Elizabeth Lowe, one of the author's most perceptive critics and translators, argues that this intensely poetic narrative actually possesses a powerful political message, one that, in fact, "initiates," via the process of reading, an entirely new way of thinking about women and men, how they relate to each other, and how they establish social mores and structures, and "one that lives beyond the text which has been 'birthed' by the author. The process has to do not just with sexual politics but, more importantly, a holistic vision of an evolving society" (Lowe, "Liberating the Rose" 79). This is entirely correct. *The Stream of Life* is not about confrontation but liberation, for both the unnamed, and therefore eponymous, woman whose voice gives the text its peculiar ebb and flow and for the also unnamed man to whom she and her words refer. It is, in a sense, a novel of education, of learning how to be, not as merely a man and a woman but as a responsible human being. And as a global citizen. This unifying stance is, I suspect, like catnip for readers, both female and male, around the world.

Issues of gender and identity also turn up in the story, "Where You Were at Night," from *Soulstorm* (1974). Here, in the collection's title story, we learn that an anonymous woman "spat hard in the face of a man, and the rough spit dripped from his cheek to his mouth—avidly he licked his lips" (121). The reader can easily understand why the woman would spit forcefully in his face, but why does he then seem to be pleased to lick up her spittle? Could it be that, in Clarice's unrestrained subconscious, a social revolution is taking place, one in which men are finally pleased to give up the corrupting and enervating burden of their assumed sense of superiority? This hope, and the force by which the woman acts, would appeal to readers, and especially to female readers, around the world.

This plumbing of gender, gender relationships, and gender reversal continues in another short narrative from *Soulstorm*, "The Departure of the Train." Here, an elderly woman, Maria Rita, is described as being "closer to her beloved son" than with her daughter (103); "With him," the reader learns, "she could be a mother, she who was castrated by her daughter ... The old woman was nothing ... She was made of God ... The old woman was

vulnerable, ... vulnerable to love, love of her son. The mother was Franciscan, the daughter pollution" (103).

Miss Ruth Algrave, the main character in the story from the *Soulstorm* collection that bears her name as title, experiences both a psycho-sexual awakening and, less obvious, a political and economic self-realization, one closely linked to her sexual self-realization. While the first one, couched in comic images, lines, and scenes, most catches the reader's attention, it is the second one that the reader familiar with Brazil's situation in 1974 (when this story first appears), finds more serious. In 1974, Brazil has just suffered some of the most harrowing years of the dictatorship. Censorship, the suspension of civil rights, the systematic suppression of women, and the use of violence are all official policy. It is dangerous to protest what the military dictatorship is doing to the Brazilian people and what had been their democracy. And yet the stories of *Soulstorm* seem to do just that, albeit in a cosseted way, one rife with fantastic or risible events, a comic tone, and, on the surface, at least, a non-threatening posture toward the right-wing government. The collection's lead story, for example, "Miss Algrave," features a woman with an English name and takes place not in Brazil but far away in London.

It may well be that Clarice employed these very techniques in order to avoid being censured by the authorities. Or worse. Since their style and content mark a departure from her previous work, it is possible to think so. Then, too, Clarice was, by this time, a Brazilian writer with some degree of a global reputation, and the generals would not have wanted to see her case become a source of international embarrassment to them. They were very sensitive to how they appeared to foreign observers and shrewd at using the media as a way to make themselves look good. At the same time, the messages that could be taken by Clarice's Brazilian readers from the seemingly droll, even bizarre tales of *Soulstorm* would have been antithetical to everything the dictatorship stood for and had imposed on the Brazilian people. Read a certain way, as I propose here that readers today do, Clarice would have been regarded as a subversive, and therefore subject to censorship, arrest, or worse. A great many well-known Brazilian artists, musicians, and writers were being harassed. Many were forced into exile. Those who, like Clarice, chose to stay had to find ways of "writing between the lines," as Clarice herself once described her work (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 508–09).

But it was a dangerous game, and, if the authorities had decided that she was a threat to their regime, it is doubtful that even Clarice's fame would have protected her. Still, she stayed in Brazil and wrote, and the foreign reader must understand what this would have meant.[10] One can reasonably conclude, therefore, that while many, if not most, of the stories from *Soulstorm* could be taken as fomenting an organized and united resistance to the dictatorship, and as promoting a more just and democratic form of government, one in which women would be the equals of men, this potentially subversive reading (which officials in the censure's office would have been on the lookout for) could be hidden or mitigated by humor, especially of a sexual nature, sex being the kind of subject that might well have lured the attention of the censors away from the more dangerous political threats posed by the book. The censors, Clarice's 1971 chronicle seems to suggest, might well take the sexual bait and, their attention lured away by this, overlook the text's political implications, which her readers, however, would not miss.

And so it is that the character, Miss Algrave, was, we learn, so ashamed of sex that she thought "Even children," the product of sex, "were immoral" ("Miss Algrave," *Soulstorm* 10). She was also ashamed of her parents for begetting her. "She was," the text tells us, "ashamed of their not having been ashamed" (10). She "felt offended by humanity" (8). To complicate things, however, Miss Algrave "was very proud of her figure: generously built and tall. But no one had ever touched her breasts" (8, see also 11). When she took a bath, which she did once a week, "she would leave on her panties and her bra"[11] so that she did not have "to see her body naked" (8).

But one night, as she reposes in bed, Miss Algrave is visited by Ixtlan, a supernatural being from Saturn who has sexual relations with her. And, comically, she is utterly transformed. "She had never felt what she now felt," we learn (11). "It was too good ... It was as if a cripple had thrown his cane into the air" (11). But now that she knows about sex and, one presumes, orgasm, Miss Algrave knows that she will crave this form of pleasure and that Ixtlan will not be there to satisfy her urges. "I'll die from missing you!" she cries out, rather comically (12). "What can I do?" (12). "Get used to it,"[12] her less smitten interstellar lover rather laconically responds.

Now that God has "lit up her body," the formerly repressed (and, in more political terms, also oppressed) Miss Algrave has herself become an aggressive sexual predator (12). She goes to Hyde Park, where earlier the couples making out had offended her, and lays "down on the warm grass, opening her legs a bit to let the sun enter. Being a woman was something superb," she feels and thinks to herself, then adding, to her own delight, "Only a woman could understand" (13).

Unable to satisfy herself adequately, or as completely as she wished, Miss Algrave then decides to pick up a "long haired young man" to have sex with (14). She takes him to her room, fornicates with him, and then tells him he "didn't have to pay" (14). Quite surprised, but possessed of an admirable sense of economic justice, he leaves her "an entire one-pound note" for what he takes to be a service rendered (14). Now it is Miss Algrave's turn to be surprised because she had not intended to offer sex for pay but only to assuage her own vaulting desires. Nevertheless, we learn, she, a rational actor, decided to keep the note because "she needed the money" (14).

Still shrouded in dark humor, the story now closes, though not before also making its quite serious point about the need to demand political freedom and economic justice even in the face of the dictatorship. "On Monday morning" Miss Algrave, sounding like a citizen who has had enough, "made up her mind: she wouldn't work any longer as a typist, she had other gifts. Mr. Clairson," her boss, "could go to hell" (14). Merging her desires, and thereby muting a bit, the revolutionary fervor of her transformation, as a woman and as a citizen, Miss Algrave then declares to herself and the reader that she "was going to take to the streets," as a protestor might, "and bring men up to her room," as a worker in the sex trade might, but also as an aggressive and sexually liberated woman might (14; see Bergner 1–28). "She was," we are reminded, "so good in bed" that her customers "would pay her very well" ("Miss Algrave," *Soulstorm* 14). Lo, the power of the market to reward quality work!

Almost immediately, Miss Algrave's liberation returns to the political: "She had learned that she was very valuable. If Mr. Clairson, that hypocrite, wanted her to go on working for him, it would have to be in quite a different way" (14). For those who know Brazil's political situation in the early 1970s, which includes

some of the worst years of the dictatorship, it is difficult not to read this last line as a form of female-led protest against its many crimes and abuses. To wit: If, like Mr. Clairson, the generals wanted the Brazilian people to tolerate their policies, "it would," in both cases, "have to be in quite a different way" (14). Some changes would have to take place. And, indeed, the story ends with precisely this point, one simultaneously revolutionary and comic in appeal: "Enough typing! And you, you fraud," says Miss Algrave to Mr. Clairson (whom we can understand as representing the generals), "don't give me your phony manners.[13] Want to know something? Get in bed with me, you slob![14] And that's not all: pay me a good high salary, you skinflint![15] ... And when the full moon arrived—she would take a bath, purifying herself of all those men, in order to be ready to feast with Ixtlan" (14–15). If one reads Miss Algrave's taking of a bath as a rite of purification that results in both her cleansing and the cleansing of Brazil, that is, in the elimination of the dictatorship and "of all those men" who are generals, and if one reads the "feast with Ixtlan" as a return to democracy, it is easy to interpret these lines as a call for Brazil (and, by extension, any society suffering from oppression) to change the ways it governs itself.

Popular all around the world, *The Hour of the Star*, appearing at the end of Clarice's life, in 1977, gives new meaning to the term, "autobiographical fiction." And it does so even as it casts a harsh light on what happens when a society stops caring about its less fortunate people. It is a powerful fusion of how an ironic and self-conscious text can also deliver a stunning social critique. A particularly devastating example of this admixture is achieved comes in the scene where a confused and desperate Macabéa seeks help from a doctor who, we learn (and contrary to our hopes and expectations), is disgusted by having to deal with poor people, whom he loathes (67–68). Even worse, this character is a man (and, for whatever one wishes to make of this, not a woman) whose dream it is not to care for the sick but "to earn enough money to do exactly what he pleased: nothing" (67). Clarice's selection of a doctor as the character who will convey this moral and ethical indictment of an uncaring yet sanctimonious society is devastating because it shatters one of our most cherished cultural myths, the false sense of moral superiority that the rich and powerful claim to have over the poor and the weak. In 2020, when life on our planet

is becoming more and more a matter of whatever the leaders (male and female) of the super-rich and the multinational corporations that rule us say it will be, readers everywhere understand how this deceitful and shamelessly self-serving prattle works and for whom it works.[16] It is there for all to see in the last of Clarice's novels to be published in her lifetime. And her readers respond because they know what she says is the truth.

A critical though regularly overlooked manifestation of this same problem—the global abandonment of the poor and the weak by the rich and the powerful—appears in *The Hour of the Star* through the also painful characterization of the character, Olímpico. Though male, and in his deplorable conduct a beneficiary of the worst aspects of patriarchy, Olímpico is nevertheless a victim of the very same male-dominant system he so embarrassingly exemplifies. Damaged badly from growing up in a culture of ignorance, poverty, and violence, he abuses Macabéa, just as the codes of his—and her—impoverished culture demand that he does. Importantly, though, for the reader, he does not know this, just as Macabéa does not know it; they are both so lost they have no inkling of just how lost they are. Only the reader does. The reader of *The Hour of the Star*, in Brazil and around the world, is made aware of his history of violence. And, as she reads the story, the same reader also witnesses his mistreatment of his female counterpart, who, like him, is little more than the detritus of global capitalism. He and Macabéa are like the millions of men and women around the world who have been left behind.

But there is more. An example of the self-conscious text that is authored by a woman (Clarice Lispector) who creates a male character, one Rodrigo S. M., to tell her—and his!—story (involving a severely disadvantaged young woman) for her (because she cannot tell it for herself), *The Hour of the Star* (1977) challenges the reader (who cannot avoid thinking of Rodrigo as practicing a kind of "Sado-Masochism") on multiple levels of interpretation. In Macabéa's ostensible creator and the man who tells this tale, Rodrigo is keenly aware of the many injustices that are involved in both her story and in his. He clearly understands that, as an educated man, he benefits from the very system that devastates people like Macabéa and Olímpico, the latter a male character he (Rodrigo) also creates. As narrator, and a very reliable one at that, Rodrigo also understands that he both sustains this unjust system

and, as we see in his running commentary on Macabéa, and decries it—just, the reader perceives, as far too many citizens, both male and female, do of the injustices built into their own societies. The alert, engaged reader extrapolates this as she consumes the text.

While most of Clarice's readers (one hopes!) do not take pleasure in tormenting others, or in leaving them in torment, we tend, as global citizens, to allow ourselves to remain prisoners of our desire to maintain our own happiness, even at the cost of others. We take far too much pleasure in pointing out what we perceive to be the weaknesses of others and in then abandoning them, telling ourselves that they deserve what they get. This is the ethical basis, such as it is, of global capitalism. *Caveat emptor*, say our selfish and cynical corporate "leaders," even when they, the rich and powerful, are deliberately and systematically abusing everyone else. More hypocritically expressed, this same shameful argument is promoted by the bought and paid for pro-big business political figures who give our corporate majesties far more unrestricted power than they deserve. The result of this toxic wedding of corporate power and political expediency is that injustice simply goes on and on. For readers in Brazil and around the world, this is the damning political message that comes through loud and clear in *The Hour of the Star*.

Clarice's socially and politically aware reader, male and female, is led to ponder this key and unsettling question: If I am aware of such injustice, in my nation and in the world at large, then why do I not act to change things for the better? Why am I so quiescent? Is it, as Clarice's novel suggests, that I am so paralyzed by my selfish desire for my own well-being that I turn my back to the injustices suffered by others? That we will do so is what enables authoritarian and right-wing regimes around the world, and global readers, including those of Clarice Lispector, are becoming aware of it.

Selfishness, famously tagged by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) as the unfettered pursuit of self-interest, is, of course, the lifeblood of capitalism. Selfishness is also the great strength of conservatism, the political excuse for the waves of authoritarianism that have convulsed Western democracies in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. We know this. And we know that Smith genuinely believed unrestricted capitalism was the tide that lifted all boats, the economic system that would benefit everyone. But now, unlike Smith, who toiled in the realm of theory, we also know, and from experience, that while it makes a

tiny number of people fantastically rich and powerful, the practice of unbridled capitalism also produces a host of social, political, and ethical pathologies, pathologies that, as we see with both Macabéa and Olímpico, harm real people. And it has done so in every part of our planet, which itself global capitalism is despoiling by the pollution it causes. Why is it, Clarice's final novel asks us, that as citizens who claim some modicum of morality, are we so apathetic and uncaring about the plight of others? And about our environment, both physical and political? Why do we not replace injustice with justice? Why do we not demand something better? Her painfully honest and self-conscious narrator, Rodrigo S. M., skewers us, page after page, with these painful questions.

Read from this more politically aware perspective, *The Hour of the Star* asks us to consider how a patriarchal society shored up by a repressive political system damages not only women but men as well. Clarice's late novel is, in this sense, a searing denunciation of social, political, and economic systems that do not serve the interests of the people and that, worst of all, simply abandon those at the bottom. Men and women alike.

And yet for as openly political as it is in its denunciation of injustice, *The Hour of the Star* is still a text that, in the grand tradition of Clarice Lispector, shows us that language is always an unstable and self-referential semiotic system, one in which words mean different things to different people. Hunger, for example, an omnipresent specter in Clarice's world, is here presented simultaneously as a life-or-death problem for millions of people and as an issue of fashion and diet. A case in point is the scalding scene where poor Macabéa, who is suffering from malnutrition, goes to the doctor who deduces from her emaciated being that she is not seeking a svelte figure, which would be the concern of the more privileged patients he wants to have. Here, as in the cases of the dishonest and deceitful people in positions of power around the world, the language used is inevitably the mechanism by which injustice is promulgated, practiced, justified, and, ultimately, tolerated, even by the people who suffer most from it. As the reader comes to realize, in struggles where the ability to wield language to your advantage is crucial, Macabéa has no chance at all. And so she is exploited by everyone around her. Only Madame Carlota, the ex-prostitute-turned-fortuneteller (and herself a marginal), does not lie to Macabéa.

Nor does Clarice allow this problem to be restricted to the relationship between Macabéa, the doctor, and the good madam. Early in his narration, Rodrigo S. M. makes the reader painfully aware of her or his complicity in this crime. "I am a man who possesses more money," he says, "than those who go hungry," as Macabéa does, "and this," since he (read Clarice) is writing about his (and her) plight from a perspective that is free from want, "makes me in some ways dishonest" (*Hour of the Star* 18). This disclosure, which points an accusing finger at the magnates who run the global economy, makes the narrator and the reader accomplices—in the game of literature but also in the game of life, where real people die of hunger every day.[17] Then, telling us he does not lie when he writes (a point Clarice always makes about her own texts), he also claims that he belongs to "no social category" because he, too, considers himself to be an outsider and a "marginal," much as Macabéa is but also as Olímpico is. Though Olímpico imagines he has primacy and potential, he doesn't, and the reader knows it. Men as well as women, Clarice suggests, can both be marginalized and made mere cogs in the global economic machine.

Since we know that Clarice almost certainly saw herself in this portrait of a poor girl from the Northeast of Brazil,[18] the reader suspects that although it is clearly a painfully aware Rodrigo who is speaking here, the voice is really that of Clarice herself. We can further infer that the next words that Rodrigo utters about himself, as a writer and as a member of his society's elite, are really Clarice writing about her own sense of self, as a writer (an unconventional one), as a citizen, and as a human being: "The upper classes consider me a strange creature, the middle classes regard me with suspicion, afraid that I might unsettle them, while the lower classes avoid me" (*Hour* 18). The hypocrisy of a privileged figure, a writer, writing about the poor, the hungry, and the abandoned has rarely been laid out in so raw a fashion. But this same statement also stains the reader, who, like the narrator, is likely a member of society's privileged class, for her or his tendency to read about such injustice and then simply walk away it, going about her or his usual business. Clarice, on the other hand, does not abandon this theme; instead, she hammers it home again and again, even as she questions the efficacy of political fiction.[19] Speaking of his creation, the character, Macabéa, and all she represents, the narrator writes

> There are thousands of girls like this girl from the Northeast to be found in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, living in bedsitters or toiling behind counters for all they are worth. They aren't even aware of the fact that they are superfluous and that nobody cares a damn about their existence. Few of them ever complain and as far as I know they never protest, for there is no one to listen. (*Hour* 14)

Millions and millions of women and men around the world will immediately identify with the hopeless young women described here, for they are in much the same situation.

As Mara Galvez-Breton writes of *The Hour of the Star*, "Lispector's selection of a male voice to 'relate' the story of her female protagonist," the poorly educated and cruelly unprepared waif, Macabéa, "constitutes a question of gender that quite obviously intersects the social and linguistic surfaces" and that undermines "the phallocentric language" of domination and power (63). Even here, in perhaps Clarice's most political text, language is still the focal point, here, however, the instrument of "oppression" (63). Readers from around the world understand all too well how this works—and what they must do about it, in their private lives but also in their public lives. In both cases, we must learn to stop oppressing ourselves and allowing others to oppress us, but, with our public policies and our votes, we must seek to eliminate all forms of oppression. The reader, in Brazil and elsewhere, receives a kind of ultimatum here: If you are horrified, Clarice seems to be saying, at the tragedy of Macabéa, and of the millions of Macabéas in Brazil and around the world, then do something about it! This very point is alluded to on pages 13–14 of the text. Do whatever you can, her text suggests; do whatever your situation allows. That is all anyone can do. But do it! Become engaged! Poor, disadvantaged Macabéa may not understand the crisis of social, political, and moral responsibility that is being referenced here and the call to action that it entails, but the reader does.

In "One Day Less" (1977), gender again comes to the fore, and tragically so (see Dodson, *Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories* 614–24). Here, in a story that, as Clarice's work so often does, focuses one of life's small but exquisitely painful and revelatory moments, a comfortable middle-class woman comes to realize one day that her life has amounted to nothing. Overwhelmed by the devastating enormity of this realization, she commits suicide.

Tellingly, she does this by overdosing on pills her own mother had taken, thus suggesting that just as her own life has been a waste, so, too, was that of her mother, and, by extension, the lives of far too many women. The bleakness of "One Day Less," appearing late in Clarice's life, lacerates the sensibilities of the reader who is committed to justice and equality of opportunity for everyone. It is a sobering tale, as disturbing as anything Clarice ever wrote.

An earlier story, "The Obedient," from *The Foreign Legion* (1964) prefigures the catastrophe of the 1977 text. Once again, an outwardly comfortable middle-class woman takes her own life, this time by throwing herself out a window of her high-rise apartment building. The essential difference is that while in "One Day Less" the focus is entirely on the eponymous woman in question, here, in the earlier story, it is divided between an again nameless woman and man. In the key scene, the woman holding in her hand the fruit of the tree of knowledge, an apple (which, in a moment of painful irony, breaks one of her teeth), looks at herself in the mirror and is devastated by what she sees—the "pale face of a middle-aged woman" who is suddenly "touching rock-bottom" and who is "without a ticket," to ride, to live, or to do or be anything; she is nothing and she knows it ("The Obedient" 84). "Instead of going to the dentist," which, hitherto, she might have been expected to do, the woman kills herself (84). This condition, the unexpected confrontation of self and the world and the sense of worthlessness that can accompany it, is an all-too-common condition globally, for women, certainly, but, as the story's final paragraph makes clear, more and more for men as well.[20] Casualties of globalization and the reactionary politics that sustain it, the people who read Clarice recognize this plight and identify with it.

"Beauty and the Beast, or, The Wound Too Great" (1977), quite possibly, as noted above, the last bit of fiction Clarice ever wrote, is charged with political energy. Slightly less savage in its indictment of an uncaring society than *The Hour of the Star*, published in the same year, "Beauty" is every bit as powerful. And, again as in *Hour*, it is not without its cuttingly comic denunciations of falsity, pretense, and injustice. Set once again in Rio de Janeiro, Clarice's home city, and taking place on the toney Avenida Atlântica (a place as recognizable to the global audience as the Eiffel Tower), relates the story of one Carla de Sousa e Santos, a vain and superficial matron who, upon leaving her fancy beauty

salon in the Copacabana Palace hotel, encounters a one-legged man, "dragging himself along on a crutch," and with "an enormous wound" on his leg, who begs her for money so that he can buy something to eat ("Beauty and the Beast" 292). Thrown into a tizzy not so much by his request as by what she takes as his rude disturbance of her plummy world, Carla, hoping to get rid of the man, decides to give him what he wants. But the only cash she has on her is a five hundred *cruzeiro* note, which she offers him. This is an ample amount of money, and, ironically, the beggar does not at first want it since, if he were to try and buy some food with it, he would surely be turned in to the police, who would assume, logically enough, that he had stolen the money. It would be better, he says, if she could give him something smaller. "I don't have any change," she says, "all I've got is this bill" (293). "The man," the narrative voice tells us, "seemed startled. He said something that was almost incomprehensible because, having so few teeth, his diction was bad" (293). This comic yet pitiful clash of cultures continues, with Carla looking into herself as best she can (which is not much, the reader discovers) and wondering if the poor man knows English, if he had "ever eaten caviar while drinking champagne?" and "did he do his winter sports in Switzerland?" (293).

Then, in a moment full of both pathos and absurdity,

> she became desperate. She became so desperate that there came to her a thought made up of only two words: 'Social Justice.' Death to all rich people! That would be the solution, she thought happily. But ... who would give money to the poor?" (293)

At that moment, the tone of the story changes abruptly, and Carla experiences, as so many of Clarice's protagonists do, an epiphany, an instant of realization that throws her life completely out of whack. "Suddenly ... suddenly everything stopped. The buses stopped, the cars stopped, watches stopped, people in the streets were immobilized … only her heart was beating, and for what? She saw that she was an incompetent, … Other people did everything for her. Even the two boys ... for it had been her husband who'd determined they would have two children ..." (293).

The rest of the story focuses on what Carla only dimly perceives as a defining moment in her life. Will she continue on being this shallow child of wealth and privilege or will she now, having had

her moment of clarity, her moment of seeing the world as it really is, become a different person, someone now possessed of understanding and compassion. "Are you feeling ill?" her chauffeur, José, asks her as she gets into her limousine to leave (297). "I'm not ill ...," Carla replies in a way that suggests to the reader she is still struggling to decide how the rest of her life will go, "but I'm not well, either. I don't know ..." (297).

Then, in the story's final line, and as she is riding away, she suddenly has a thought (one that, riven with political import about how the rich regard the poor): "I didn't even remember to ask his name" (297).

Though readers tend to think of Clarice as being apolitical, to do so amounts to a serious error in judgement. Her work is never without a political consciousness; sometimes expressed directly, sometimes indirectly, it is always there. In a column from 29 August 1970, during some of the worst years of the dictatorship, she wrote "As a Brazilian, it would be difficult to ignore the social problems which plague my own country. I may not write about social problems but I live them to the full, and even as a child I used to tremble with indignation when I witnessed certain painful realities" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 403). In just a few years, with the stories of *Soulstorm*, Clarice would be writing about social problems, albeit in a comic and, for some, trashy fashion,[21] and, as we see in *The Hour of the Star*, she would use the Brazilian situation to comment on global problems.

Chapter Two

Clarice and Humor

Humor, too, permeates Clarice Lispector's work. In fact, it is omnipresent, from beginning to end. So why is it so often overlooked, or given short shrift, in critical studies? Perhaps because it is so frequently overwhelmed by the other aspects of her work. To my knowledge, only Valerie Lastinger's 1989 study focuses solely on this major aspect of her work, though Maria José Barbosa discusses the subversive role humor plays in several of Clarice's stories and novels, where, camouflaged by parody and irony, it is regularly employed to destabilize patriarchal authority (*Clarice Lispector: Spinning the Webs of Passion* 6, 20, 85 et al.). And a blurb on the back cover[1] of the New Directions 1992 paperback edition of *The Hour of the Star* makes reference to Clarice's "wild humor." Katrina Dodson, too, acknowledges Clarice's humorous streak, writing that she can mix a "perverse or warm humor" with "a solemn, mystical tone," and often in the same sentence ("Translator's Note" 633). And Benjamin Moser signals Clarice's "light touch and subtle wit" but also her capacity for farce (*Why This World* 343, also 347–48). Lastinger, however, concentrates only on the early collection of stories, *Family Ties*. Given the steady presence of the comic mode in Clarice's work, her fiction as well as her nonfiction, one must ask: Why this odd lacuna, and especially so in an author as meticulously scrutinized as she has been?

The answer may have something to do with both the diverse nature of Clarice's humor and the different ways she weaves it into her texts. The droll parts of Clarice's narrative worlds are rarely a matter of guffaws or laugh out loud comedy (the exception to this rule would be several of the stories of *Soulstorm*); rather, they elicit wry smiles. Or they function as sly asides, as if Clarice or one of her many mostly female narrators are giving a wink to the reader and calling her attention to the incongruity of the situation. As

Barbosa observes, "Lispector uses humor to parody the polarities that shape 'acceptable' behavior for women, analyzing the contradictions of androcentric rules, and pointing to social and cultural contexts in which discrimination is forged" (*Clarice Lispector* 86). Almost always ironic, or, on occasion, even sardonic (as in *The Hour of the Star*), Clarice's comic vein stems from a realization that things are rarely how they seem to be, much less how they ought to be. And from Clarice's skill at showing us how our thinking is so often guided by convention.

In *Near to the Wild Heart*, for example, the young Joana, now an orphan, is taken to live with her aunt and uncle. As always in Clarice's world, the female body is front and center. Speaking, seemingly, from within Joana's mind, the narrator tells us that "The cleavage between the aunt's breasts was deep. She," that is, Joana, "could have put her hand in there as if she were dipping into a bag and pulling out some surprise, an animal, a casket, whatever" (34). Distinctly original, and not at all how a woman's breasts would normally be described, what Joana is thinking here gives the reader a solid clue about her own development, physically and psychologically, in the rest of the novel. With the reader seeing what Joana sees, and privy to Joana's response to it all, we then learn that the aunt's enormous breasts "expanded with every sob" and "bulged out" of her clothing (*Near to the Wild Heart* 34). "Those breasts," we are told, as we take Joana's perspective in this situation, "could bury someone," the person in question being Joana herself (34). If one considers Freud's understanding of female breasts as the seat of a woman femininity and her sexual power, it is comic to have here a woman's depiction of another woman's breasts not as images of life and sustenance but a mechanism that could smother a person to death. The alert reader understands, of course, that it is not literally the aunt's bosomy flesh that would bury Joana, it is the conventional life she leads and all it represents. This scene ends with Joana wiping her face to rid it of her aunt's "kisses and tears," the "insipid taste of" her "warm saliva," and "the cloying fragrance that came from her aunt's bosom" (34). Even as a girl, Joana knows she wants no part of any of this, but it is the unorthodox use of female breasts that piques the reader's attention here and makes her smile with sympathy.

The cultivation of a comic but quite serious unorthodoxy continues later in the novel, when a now adult and married Joana

is conversing with Lídia, a woman who is the mistress of Joana's husband, Otávio, and who is pregnant with his child. This entire situation, comically bizarre as it stands, gains an extra dollop of humor when Joana declares to Lídia, "I, too, could have a child," her voice sounding "clear and pleasing" (*Near to the Wild Heart* 144). Startled, Lídia, who, also well-endowed, represents a younger version of Joana's aunt, does not know what to make of a now highly unconventional Joana. Pressing her funny but also revolutionary idea, Joana then declares "Yes ... I could give Otávio a child, not now, but whenever it suited me. I could have a child and then give you back Otávio" (144). Lídia, speaking for herself but, quite likely, for the male dominated society in which they all live, responds, "But this is monstrous!" (144). Joana's cool, reasoned response is both subversively funny and politically explosive: "But why? Is it monstrous to keep two women? You know damn well it isn't. I suppose it feels good to be pregnant. But is it enough for someone to be expecting a child or is that still too little?" (144). Clarice's female readers, who understand the positions of both Lídia and Joana, can easily identify with the multiple but conflicted desires that are playing out here. Moreover, as Clarice's text implies, if men are free to keep both a spouse and a mistress, then why can't a woman do the same thing? What is "monstrous" about that?

Toward the novel's open-ended conclusion, as Joana is about to set out in quest of life and authenticity of being, Joana muses about a mysterious *ménage à trois* in which she has chosen to involve herself. Merging, as Clarice not infrequently does, the maternal with the erotic, Joana feels that "the presence of the other woman was so powerful in the house, that the three of them formed a couple" (*Near to the Wild Heart* 154). Not, seemingly, emotionally attached to either the man or the woman (both of whom remain nameless), much less in love with them, Joana appears here to be in the process of liberating herself from conventional relationships. Then, in an arresting shift of thought, Joana drops her consideration of the man involved and suddenly begins to compare herself to the two other women she has encountered in her story: "Joana, that woman and the teacher's wife," she thinks to herself (155). "What was it that finally united them? The three diabolical graces ... Almond, bitter, poisonous and pure. The three graces, bitter, poisonous and pure" (155).

It is difficult to say why, exactly, but the reader does smile, ruefully perhaps, at the irony of the "three graces," three separate women struggling to deal with life in a resolutely patriarchal society, being portrayed as "bitter, poisonous and pure." Perhaps it is the incongruity of the linking that strikes one as funny. But if so, it is in a way that makes one wonder why. Why does it have to be this way? While the mode of delivery is comic, and thought provokingly so, the point, which relates to questions of justice and equality, is serious.

Clarice's third novel, *The Besieged City* (1949), stands out for several reasons, not the least of which is the nature of its protagonist, Lucrécia Neves. She "is the city of São Geraldo," whose development is reflected in her development (Lowe, *The City in Brazilian Literature* 138); she "personifies" São Geraldo, which, early on, was "mingling ... progress with the smell of the stable" (Lowe, *City* 123; *The Besieged City* 8). As a result, Lucrécia, whom, as global readers in 2020, we also see as "the personification of 'progress,' is consumed with material ambition," albeit one constantly surrounded by the smell of life (Lowe, *City* 140, also 126). Never portrayed as "bad," mean, or nasty, Lucrécia is, however, wonderfully superficial, and in this she emerges as a sympathetic and sometimes comic character. We all have at least one Lucrécia Neves in our lives. And sometimes many. Lucrécia is attractive to the reader because, concerned only with the surface appearance of things, she represents a certain kind of being, one that is unthinking and uncritical and that, therefore, is of immense value to both Clarice's critique of the human condition and of the power of global capitalism and the mindless consumer society that sustains it. Lucrécia Neves is the epitome of the old saying, "Ignorance is bliss." And she is very happy, very pleased with herself. Her novel even has what is, by her standards, a happy ending, a feature virtually unknown in the rest of Clarice's fictional world.

It is as if, with Lucrécia, Clarice wanted to create a character who was the virtual opposite of Joana, from *Near to the Wild Heart*, published six years earlier, and who was also quite distinct from Virginia, of *The Chandelier*, appearing three years earlier, in 1946. In fact, I believe this is the case. While it is easy to argue that Clarice's first three female protagonists are cut from the same bolt of cloth, they are far from identical—but with Lucrécia being the most different of all. Her characterization is deliberate and

strategic; it is not a mistake, or a step backwards for the author, as many have thought.[2] With Lucrécia, Clarice has gone to the other end of the spectrum; with "vain and superficial" Lucrécia, Clarice is seeking, in my opinion, to portray the nature—the unthinking nature—of a certain kind of human being and, more indirectly, a certain kind of human society, one driven by a certain kind of mindlessness about the idea of "progress," an idea conceived of and defined only in the most material of terms (Moser, "Obyezloshadenie" xvi). And she has no qualms about making the target of this criticism a woman. In Clarice's world, the actions and values of both men and women are open to question. For the Brazilian writer, men are not inherently "bad" nor women inherently "good;" nor are they innocent victims, hapless and weak. And while gender is decisive in Clarice's writing, it is not the only thing. It is not the only force that makes her characters who and what they are. Or that makes us in real life who and what we are. Personal responsibility plays a role, too. Read from this perspective, it requires no stretch of the imagination to see how and why her work speaks to readers today all around the world. Indeed, as Moser points out in his introduction to the English translation, the novel is built around verbs of perception and seeing, all of which get at the problem of understanding, which is so fundamental to Clarice's work ("Obyezloshadenie" xv-xvi). And since we humans are "meaning-haunted creatures," this quality may well provide us with yet another clue to her global popularity (James Wood 93).

The reception of *The Besieged City* in Brazil, largely negative in nature, must have piqued Clarice because she referred to it off and on throughout her lifetime. In *A Breath of Life*, for example, the text compiled by Clarice's friend and companion, Olga Borelli, and published posthumously, she (Clarice) makes reference to it.[3] But she had done so earlier as well.

In "Reminiscence of a Fountain and a City," a newspaper column from 14 February 1970, and in which Clarice refers to *The Besieged City* as her "least popular novel" but one that "people sometimes grow to like on second reading," and again in "Reply Overdue," a column appearing on the 21 February 1970, Clarice writes about this particular work (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering*, ed. Pontiero 350, 354–55). This latter piece is particularly revealing. After complaining that critics had tended to go on and on about

what they take as her unusual vocabulary and syntax, she turns to a particular review of *The Besieged City* and asks the pertinent question:

> So what was I trying to express through Lucrécia—this woman who is without the weapons of intelligence yet who aspires to that kind of spiritual integrity one associates with a horse, which does not *communicate* what it sees, which has no *verbal* or *mental* vision of things, which feels no need to complete an impression with its expression—the horse which is capable of this miracle whereby the impression is *total* and so *real* that any impression on the horse's part is already expression? (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering*, ed. Pontiero 354)

Clarice then goes on to say that, with Lucrécia Neves, she was trying to show how our human "vision" of "reality," our "way of seeing or point of view," can actually "change" that reality "even while creating it" (Moser, *Why This World* 354). She feels that she had "given" Lucrécia "the role of 'one of the people' who," through her identification with it, "helped to build the city" in which she lived (355). People want, Clarice contends, "to dominate external reality by spiritual means," and while Lucrécia, with her lack of intelligence, is "incapable" of this level of domination, she "adheres" to the physical reality surrounding her and, as many people do, "accepts as her own life the wider existence of the universe" (355). Funny, but in a pitiful sort of way, Lucrécia Neves exemplifies the human condition—and readers admire Clarice for not savaging poor Lucrécia's shortcomings. In contrast to Joana, but also to Virginia, understanding is simply beyond Lucrécia, just as it is for many of us. But she, too, is a living part of our *comédie humaine*.

Humor, again tending toward the wry and iconoclastic, also plays a significant role in *The Foreign Legion* (1964). Noting Clarice's talent for disturbing her readers and shaking them out of their complacency, Alexis Levitin also points to her talent for amusing her readers (Afterword, *Foreign Legion* 219). Clarice, he writes, "has an eye for all that is false and sham in human behavior. She has a responsive ear for the knowing absurdities uttered by children and the preposterous clichés uttered by their elders. And, like most great humorists, she is also strong on self-parody" (219). The humor of *The Foreign Legion* is of this sort. It also tends to be in a minor key; gentle in nature, but not without bite,

Clarice's humor here deals mostly with the little things of life, the events and verbal exchanges that annoy us but that do not crush or bury us. And they relate to Clarice's private and domestic life. This is particularly true of the chronicles that make us the second half of the book, though it also characterizes the stories as well. In "The Egg and the Chicken," for example, the narrator's musings about two very common items, a chicken and egg, splice themselves onto more serious contemplations of human existence, the words we use, and our ability to know pleasure and to understand. "Suddenly," the narrative voice tells us, "I look at the egg in the kitchen and all I see there is something to eat. I fail to recognize it and my heart is beating. A transformation is taking place inside me," though, painfully, it will prove to be one that does not lead to what is being sought—a solid and satisfying sense of self (*Foreign Legion* 51, see also 55).

In "The Obedient," another of Clarice's serious stories that is leavened by wry humor, the man and woman involved are seeking to take stock of their life, but they come away frustrated because they do not know if they could, or should, "include" in their evaluation "this attempt to live with greater intensity, or deduct it, as with income tax" (*Foreign Legion* 82).

And in "The Foreign Legion," a longer story and one replete with a number of Clarice's signature motifs—darkness, silence, desire, words, water, birth, the passing moment, and the interplay of love and hate, a sly humor off sets the tangled and frustrating complexity of a human relationship. In describing a discussion she'd recently had with a precocious and unafraid girl, Ofélia (who seems a lot like Clarice herself), the married female narrator observes, of her young friend, that she, the girl, liked to give her advice, even when it had not been asked for. "With her eight proud and well-lived years," Ofélia tells the woman (who also seems like Clarice) that, "in her opinion, I did not rear my children properly" (*Foreign Legion* 92).

The ostensibly "non-fiction" part of *The Foreign Legion* also abounds in humor. In "Sunday Afternoon," for example, we see Clarice practicing the kind of self-deprecation that marks her work, and especially that of her popularity as a newspaper columnist, while the in aphoristic "To Err," we have Clarice using an incisive irony to pop the balloon of pretentious people. And in "An Angel's Disquiet," which offers the reader a five-page summary, in

comic fashion, of inclement weather, an obnoxious woman, and a shared cab ride, Clarice details how she and another person wrangle over the same covered conveyance on a very rainy day in Rio de Janeiro. After a sharp exchange about whose trip requirements would take precedence, the woman says to Clarice, who has been happily imagining herself to be quite an angelic person, that "You ... would only have the slightest detour if you were to drop me off first" (131). Vexed by this request (which would inconvenience her), but determined not to be out done, Clarice then retorts, in a manner less angelic than haughty, and so that she can, in turn, insult the other woman, "I shall pay the whole fare" (131). Painfully aware that she has now "no desire to be assigned as an angel to the fervid stupidity of that woman," Clarice, still interested in thinking of herself as an angel First Class, then wonders if she should dial this desire back a bit, and if she could instead be an angel "rather low down in the hierarchy of angels," perhaps even "just a novice angel" (130). Finally, we read, she, Clarice, grandly exits the taxi and sweeps "through the imposing entrance of the Visconde de Pelotas apartment block as regal as a queen" (131). In a recasting of one of life's inconsequential skirmishes, and as if in a mock epic, Clarice vanquishes her foe. And in exquisitely human fashion, she takes pride, as ridiculous as the situation is, in having done so.

Later in the same collection, Clarice imagines a strange tea party in which "gratitude" and "rage" are mixed together along with tension-filled allusions to questions of race, class, and identity ("The Tea Party," *Foreign Legion* 170). In Clarice's conjuring, a sharp-tongued and likely black former housemaid who knows only "how to cook for the poor" and how to "show soured affection" to her employer remarks, caustically, one feels, that "To be a lady means being white" (171).

Also appearing in 1964 was *The Passion According to G. H.*, a powerfully introspective novel that few have ever described as "funny." And yet, toward the end, it does offer a scene that surprises the reader with its unexpected levity. After agonizing through her long night of self-inquisition, and after finally seeing what she must do in order to be who and what she wants to be, G. H., in a moment of honesty, decides she can't do it. Chucking her brutal process of self-realization aside, she decides what she really wants—and needs!—is to go out for a good time. She cannot bear,

or, more likely, does not wish to bear (because it is onerous to do so) all that is required for her to live an authentic life. It's just too hard to do so.

This then becomes the novel's major conflict, the one that, though the reader who begins on page one of the novel does not yet realize it, represents the alternative to all the existential turmoil that G. H. then describes as going through: Will G. H. pull herself together and determine to live as an enlightened woman, one who has abandoned the falsity and pretense of her earlier existence, or will she go back to her old ways? Although one should always be suspicious when a joke has to be explained, what's funny here is that, after all the agony that has passed in G. H.'s transformation, she suddenly feels the need to go out that evening to the "Top Bambino" club, to put on the dress that she feels most favors her, to eat *crevettes*, and to dance with her friends. Without any explanation or preparation of the reader, G. H. just decides it's all too much and that she needs to return to "normal" life—even as she also knows she really shouldn't, that she should be stronger than that. After all the anguish of her harrowing experience, the contrast of her desire to go out dining and dancing is both poignant and funny. And very humanizing. G. H. is suddenly less the long-suffering existential hero than a real and recognizable human being, one with all the weaknesses that go along with that status. It's easier for us to theorize about living an authentic life than to actually do so. And we know it.

Written ten years later, in 1974,[4] and after ten more increasingly violent and repressive years of the Brazilian dictatorship, the stories of *Soulstorm* possess a humor that, almost without exception, is much more political than that of *The Foreign Legion*, which appeared the same year (1964) the generals seized control. And it is mordant. Significantly, the political force of the stories in *Soulstorm* is spearheaded by women. Women carry it forward, often in a comic mode but always in a serious context, one often oriented to the status of women in a male dominated society. The very first story from the collection, "Miss Algrave," exemplifies this, as we have already seen. As important as the story's political message, one laid between the lines, as Clarice liked to say, is, in "Miss Algrave" it is camouflaged by a series of very funny moments. As part of the story's early presentation of the repressed Miss Algrave, we are treated to a scene when our female hero, greatly disturbed by

the endless "immoralities that appeared on TV," she is subjected to watching, with her elderly neighbor, dear, sweet Mrs. Cabot, a television scene in which a man kisses a woman "on the mouth" and, outrageously (in Miss Algrave's opinion), all this "without any mention of the danger of transmitting germs" ("Miss Algrave," *Foreign Legion* 10). Though "shamelessness" was rampant, and everywhere "in the air," Miss Algrave, who, we learn, had been "much struck" by coming upon two dogs copulating, resolves to strike back against all this licentiousness by writing a letter of protest to the newspaper (10).

But after having magically life-altering sex with Ixtlan, her interstellar visitor, Miss Algrave finds herself transformed; she now can't get enough sex, and, completely liberated,[5] she is enjoying life to the hilt. Concerned about how to handle her many now flowering desires, she begins to practice masturbation in between a steady diet of sexual encounters with other people. She no longer suffers from any "revulsion" at watching the intimate couples in Hyde Park because, she now "knew how" good "they felt" (13). Hilariously, we learn that Miss Algrave was now sure she was X-rated "for minors under eighteen," and she took such delight in this thought that "she literally drooled over it" (13). And, in a moment of supreme comic delight, we learn that sex has turned Miss Algrave into vastly better singer at her local church. At church, on Sunday, and finding that she now "sang better than ever," she "wasn't surprised when they chose her as soloist. She sang her hallelujah. Like this," Clarice notes, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" which leads the reader to equate her crying out "Hallelujah!" in the choir to her achieving orgasm (13).

In the story's very funny (but politically sharp) conclusion, when poor Miss Algrave is now "dying" of desire, she decides to go pick up someone for sex. "Unable to stand it any longer, she walked over to Picadilly Circus and approached a long-haired young man. She took him up to her room. She told him he didn't have to pay. But," apparently driven by a sense of fairness and economic justice, "he insisted" and so left her "an entire one-pound note," which, though something, was not, the alert reader notes, an excessive payment for what was undoubtedly quality work (14). Although Miss Algrave had in fact told the young man that he did not have to pay for her service—because, after all, she was the one who initiated the proceedings—she decided to keep the comically

impecunious bill. "In fact," we learn, drolly, I would say, "she," like the Brazilian people, "needed the money" (14).

The following story, "The Body," gives us another *ménage a trois*, this time more detailed and involving Xavier, a "fierce, full-blooded man," and two women, Beatrice, who was "fat and dumpy," and Carmen, who was "tall and thin" (*Soulstorm* 16). Although like the men who ran the Brazilian dictatorship Xavier is "very strong," he is also none too bright. The reader knows this because after going to see the film, *The Last Tango in Paris*, Xavier "got terribly excited. He didn't understand the film: he thought it was a sex movie" and didn't realize "it was the story of a desperate man" (16).

One day, the trio visits Montevideo, where they buy "a book of recipes" that was written in French, which meant that "they understood nothing" of it (18). In fact, when they looked at it, "The ingredients looked more like dirty words" (18). Intriguingly, while Xavier gained seven pounds and increased his "bull-like strength," the two women grew closer, becoming, finally, lovers (18). "Although they were not homosexuals," Clarice's narrator tells us, "they excited each other and made love. Sad love" (18).[6]

After this demonstration of female solidarity, the two women tell Xavier about it. Once again excited, he orders them "to make love in front of him that night" (18). But, "ordered up like this, it all ended in nothing," and, confronted with determined female power and resistance, Xavier "became furious" (18).

After this confrontation, however, "and without any" insistence on Xavier's part, "the two women went to bed together and succeeded" (18, see also 19). This time, however, the reader does not fail to note, their love making was not "sad." Male authority, it would seem, has been deftly thwarted.

With a rift now appearing between the man (the male run dictatorship?) and the two women (the female-led Brazilian people?), we are told, again comically, that the threesome did not go to the theater anymore; "They preferred television" (18).

Just as the dictatorship was not faithful to the Brazilian people, Xavier is not faithful to Carmen and Beatriz. One night he admits to consorting "with his favorite prostitute," which might be thought of as Brazil's rich elite and their financial solicitations of foreign investors (19). The women confront him, angrily, about what he has done and, absurdly, Xavier then races around the house "like a madman" shouting "Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me!" (19).

Carmen, "who," we are now told, "was more genteel" than Beatrice was also "revolted and ashamed" at Xavier, his habits, and his behavior, while Beatrice "was totally shameless" and began walking around the house stark naked" (19). So while the two women had their differences with respect to Xavier, just as the Brazilian people did as regards the dictatorship, they, the two women, come together to oppose his violence, his tyranny over them, and his infidelity. The Brazilian people would have to do this as well.

Carmen and Beatrice give Xavier an ultimatum; they would not do his bidding anymore and he would have to "work it out with his third woman," his prostitute (19). Saddened at being in this mess, Carmen and Beatrice "cried from time to time," but Beatrice rose to the occasion made some nice potato salad for the two of them and that made them both feel better (19).

Continuing to make love in front of him, which drives Xavier to distraction, Carmen and Beatrice "drew closer all the time" and, finally, "began to despise him," just as the Brazilian people were beginning to do with respect to the dictatorship (20). As a result, Carmen and Beatrice now determine to do away with their oppressor; they will murder him. But how? Carmen "felt really inspired" at the prospect though her partner, Beatrice, "who was less vindictive," was also a little slower to pick up on the subtleties of the plan (21). At this critical juncture, the following exchange ensues between the two wily conspirators:

> "There are two butcher knives in the kitchen," Carmen says to Beatrice.
> "So what?"
> "So there are two of us, and we've got two knives."
> "So what?"
> "So, you ass, we two have arms and can do what we have to do. God directs us."
> "Wouldn't it be better not to mention God at this moment?"
> "Do you want me to talk about the Devil? No, I speak of God who is the master of all. Of space and time." (*Soulstorm* 21)

Working together, the two women then stab Xavier to death, Caesar-like (in a scene of keen irony), and, humorously, bury the body under the rose garden in the backyard. They do this because Beatrice, "great romantic that she was," thinks it is a lovely idea (*Soulstorm* 22). And it is convenient.

Time passes and the roses flourish, nourished as they are on the blood of the deposed despot, Xavier. But one day the women, who have been happily living together, are betrayed (by men)[7] and found out. "Three men" tear up the beautiful rose bed, an act of "human brutality," to disinter Xavier's rotted body (23). Fearful of being arrested and separated from Beatrice, Carmen politely requests that they be placed "in the same cell" (23). The request is not denied, and, in fact, one of the policemen says, "it's best to pretend nothing at all happened," which echoes the final defense of the generals as their regime began to crumble because of the many crimes they committed (24). In the story's final and comic scene, the police decide that while Carmen and Beatrice are clearly guilty, to arrest them would involve "lots of paperwork" and "lots of gossip," and so they are instead told to "pack their bags" and "go and live in Montevideo" (24).

Though this last line is funny in and of itself (the two women will not be processed for their crime because it is too much hassle to do so and because people will talk), it also carries a political significance that every adult Brazilian citizen would have noted. On 4 April 1964, the day of the US supported coup that put the generals in power, the democratically elected president, João Goulart, fled Brazil for the safety of neighboring Montevideo.

But, again for Brazilians, this comic ending, where the two women go free for murdering their man, would have also echoed, albeit with bitter irony, an all too real phenomenon, that of men being acquitted for killing their spouses thanks to a statute known as "the defense of honor" argument (see Skidmore 206). By writing a droll and slightly fantastic story in which two female lovers execute their male lover and are not punished for it, Clarice inverts what, at the time, was the norm in Brazil. And, because she makes use of the comic mode in doing so, the censor's office would likely have taken no serious notice. But no Brazilian would have missed this parodic inversion of roles. Nor would the Brazilian reading public have failed to wryly appreciate the careless and unprofessional response of the authorities to the murder.

A later but also very funny story in the same collection, "A Complicated Case" is riven with irony, sarcasm, and authorial misgivings. Another tale of infidelity, "A Complicated Case" churns with confusion and uncertainty, a comically melodramatic violence, and a narrative voice that self-consciously seeks to make

sense of it all—much as we all do with our quotidian existences! In telling her story, the narrator blurts out, toward the end, "I think that I've lost myself again, all this is a bit confusing, but what can I do?" (*Soulstorm* 52). She struggles on, however, to tell her tangled tale. She discusses the importance of a "well-to-do businessman, as one says," and then acidly avers that "people respect and praise at great length the rich and the victorious, right?" (52). The narrator then winds the story down saying "How do I know? Look, I just know, the way one does with imaginative guessing. I know, and that's that" (52). Finally, the narrator throws her hands up and declares she doesn't know what became of her characters and the whole story is just a big mystery. "What to make of this story?" she says, "That, too, I don't know, I'm giving it as a present to whoever wants it, because I'm sick of it" (52, 53).

In "Plaza Mauá," another story from *Soulstorm*, we learn, humorously, that a young married woman whose stage name was Carla "'worked' at two jobs: dancing half nude and cheating on her husband" (54). As the story develops, the reader learns that she is a skilled worker, and at both jobs. Joaquim, her husband "was killing himself working as a carpenter" and, when at home, he, "short and fat," "drowned himself in minestrone" soup (56, 57). Though he is never described as violent or oppressive, as Xavier was, Joaquim is of little or no interest to his wife, Carla, whose real name was Luisa. And while Luisa was "timid," Carla was most certainly not (54). While the story turns questions of gender on their head, and in comic fashion, its key has to do with the related issue of female empowerment, something that was all but officially prohibited during Brazil's dictatorship. At "almost three in the morning," the club where Carla danced and cheated on her husband, The Erotica, was, as one would expect, "full of men and women" (57). What the reader then learns gives us a clue as to where Clarice is going with this tale: Taking the focus away from its male customers and placing it squarely on the women at The Erotica, the narrator tells us that "Many mothers and housewives went there for the fun of it and to earn a bit of pocket money" (57).

While the expression, "for the fun of it," can easily be understood as a female desire to cut loose and flaunt one's sexuality, or to experience something different, the latter part, "to earn a bit of pocket money" is both funny and intriguing. Should we condemn

a woman for being a nude dancer if it is how she can put food on her family's table? Or if she perhaps enjoys what she is doing? Or even if she sells her body to make a little more money? What is the difference between selling one's body and selling one's labor in a sweat shop, the assembly line, or (like Macabéa) in some other part of the global market system? For Clarice, female eros suddenly becomes the story's focal point, one that involves not only sexual desire and expression but financial gain as well. The club "Erotica" comes alive as a place for female (and male) transformation, a space where inhibitions can be dropped and where, in the sex trade (which ranges from exotic dancing to prostitution) one might make a little money on the side. While some readers have found this story offensive, others see another, darker question emerging from it: What kind of society do we live in where, for both men and women, sex is so fraught that it cannot be enjoyed outside of places like "The Erotica?" And that it has to be commodified and perverted by shame and guilt and fear? Without ever lapsing into polemics or pedestrian prose, Clarice leads her readers to ponder these questions.

Still later in *Soulstorm*, we get "But It's Going to Rain," which must be regarded both as one of Clarice's funniest stories but also as one of her saddest. A woman, Maria Angelica de Andrade "had sixty years to her credit," but she also had "a lover, Alexander, aged nineteen" (66). Early in their relationship, when Maria Angelica (the name, of course, is ironic) is working hard to seduce him we are informed that she "was now wearing a dressing gown of transparent lace. One could see the brand name on her underpants ... It was her way of informing him that she was available" (67). But, as is so often the case in Clarice's world, "the young man didn't understand" (67). This failure to understand leads to problems, and to the following exchange:

> "Come to bed with me ... ," Maria Angelica, now desperate, blurts out one day.
> "Me?!"
> "I'll give you a great big present! I'll give you a car!"
> A car? The boy's eyes glistened with desire. A car! It was all that he wanted in life. Distrustfully he asked:
> "A Karmann-Ghia?"
> "Yes, my love, whatever you desire!" (*Soulstorm* 68)

At this point, things begin to deteriorate, which is stupefying when one considers how bad they already are. "What happened next," Clarice's narrator delicately tells us, "was horrible" (*Soulstorm* 68). "You needn't know," Clarice tells us, pretending to save us from exactly what she is about to relate to us (68). "Maria Angelica—O Lord, have mercy on me, forgive me for having to write this," she says, "Maria Angelica give little screams as they made love" (68).

Before too long, the young Alexander tires of his older lover and runs away. But he eventually returns, bearing his *amour* a present, "a can of chunky guava jam," which, as she eats it, breaks one of her teeth and she has to get a false tooth put in (69).

"Then," as Clarice says, with mock drama and a sure sense of suspense, "it happened" (69). Alexander gives Maria Angelica an ultimatum—she will either pay him a lot of money or he will leave her:

> "I need a million cruzeiros," he blurts out.
> "A million?" gasped Maria Angelica.
> "Yes," he answered, irritated, "a billion old style!" (*Soulstorm* 69)

For Brazilians, this latter part is funny because it speaks to the question of their currency, which had been devalued, and to the switch, engineered by the technocrats[8] hired by the military and intended to save the Brazilian economy from collapse, from one kind of monetary system to a new one.

But the economy did collapse, as did the dictatorship and Maria Angelica's quest for love. And, at the end, her body aching, she is left alone. Devastated by rejection and abandonment, her situation at the story's conclusion is arguably the most painful and disturbing scene in all of Clarice's world. It must surely be one all too well known to both women and men everywhere.

In "The Departure of the Train," an elderly lady, "well-dressed" and wearing "jewels," boards a train at the Central Station (*Soulstorm* 85). Rather fierce in appearance and demeanor, the woman, one Dona Maria Rita Alvarenga Chagas Sousa, elicits various offers of assistance from a young man and a young woman in her car. "'No, no, no,' she" responded, "with a false tone of authority" and crossing herself three times (87). With a jolt, the train pulls away, and the "old woman said softly: 'Ah, Jesus!' She had soaked

herself in sweet Jesus. Amen" (87).[9] At the same time, she cannot help but hear, on the young man's transistor radio, that "it was six-thirty in the morning," that "Brazil was improving its road signs," and that "A certain Kissinger seemed to be running the world" (87).

In the same story, one of Clarice's longer ones, another woman, the protagonist, Angela Pralini, takes drugs and stimulants "that made her thinner and thinner" and that "kill her appetite," not merely for sustenance but for life itself (*Soulstorm* 99). Merging the comic with the painful, she says to a companion "I want to eat, Eduardo, I'm hungry, Eduardo, I'm hungry for lots of food!" (99). Then, "as proper as a tennis court" but still stumbling around "in darkness and ignorance," and plagued, poignantly, by "such deep thoughts that" she had "no words to express them," she seeks understanding in the *Reader's Digests* [*sic*] which, sadly, she felt she had to read "behind Eduardo's back" (99, 98). Nearly all of Clarice's female characters are hungry; they want more than they have, and this makes them powerfully attractive for readers around the world.

Offering an alternative to the desolation of "But It's Going to Rain," and the sadness of "The Departure of the Train," the end of "Where You Were At Night" has a good priest, Father Jacinto, lifting up "in his two hands," as if to honor the newly born day and end the heretical night, "the crystal chalice that contained the scarlet blood of Christ" and suddenly finding the whole effort complicated by a new and less sacred realization: "Wow, good wine" (*Soulstorm* 130). And in "The Conjurations of Dona Frozina" we meet a seventy-something lady who was widowed at twenty-nine, who "practically lives in churches," who eschews men and "dipping neck lines," and who "doesn't drink Coca-Cola" because she "thinks it's too modern" and because it tastes like "some tapeworm medicine" (144). Dona Frozina also takes "the name of the Lord" in vain "more than she should," and, although "she clings to the saints," they "must be sick of her" because "she's abused them so" (144). She is very religious but one night "disaster struck" as she "fell asleep in the middle" of her prayers (114). Vexed, she reported that she had been dreaming and that she had seen the Christ of Corcovado with his arms not open but "tightly crossed" and bearing a "disgusted scowl" on his face, as if saying: You people, go "take care of yourselves, I've had it" (145).

The humor of *The Hour of the Star* is different. There are, to be sure, funny moments in what is an otherwise very unfunny book. There is a note of bitterness to it, especially in certain scenes, and a sense of anger, the anger born of continuing poverty in the midst of abundance and great wealth. And at continuing injustice. The last of Clarice's novel's to be completed in her lifetime and written quite self-consciously, it would seem, as she was dying of cancer, *The Hour of the Star* radiates a variety of startling tone and mood shifts. It is also the novel in which Clarice adopts a self-conscious male narrator (one who nevertheless seems to speak for Clarice herself) to tell her tale, that of a poor and poorly prepared young woman who comes to the big city in a hopeless quest to find a better life. Her quest does not end well for her.

But in spite of these sobering facts, *The Hour of the Star* is neither a jeremiad nor a grim meditation on doom and gloom. Rather, it's a painful book that sometimes makes you laugh but that also packs a powerful punch. Early on, Clarice's narrator informs us that to write this abject story, he has had to make a number of sacrifices; he finds himself forced to seek nourishment "frugally" from "fruit" and drinking "chilled white wine," and, as if that were not enough, he has had to "give up sex and football" as well (22).

This same scene, sarcastic in its evisceration of how much privileged writers have to "sacrifice" in order to examine people, like the character, Macabéa, stuck at the absolute bottom of the social and economic scale, could well be an honest expression of how Clarice herself felt as she neared the end of her life. It is for this reason that the word, "sardonic," comes into play as we seek to understand this extraordinary text. We laugh at what is involved in her story, its pathos and its bathos, but we are slightly ashamed for doing so, for it points an accusing finger at our failures as citizens and as people. A successful and venerated writer, but also a woman who almost certainly saw herself in Macabéa, Clarice would have been acutely aware of this disparity between her position in society and that of her subject in this novel. She likely felt the frustration and the pangs of guilt that go with being an aware, engaged citizen who knows that poverty could and should be eliminated—but who also knows that it isn't. This is the source of the novel's unusual pain; even as Clarice is dying and writing about the disastrous effects of poverty, she also knows that it isn't

being eliminated. And that it won't be. She will die, hating it, but the blight of poverty, in Brazil but also around the world, seems destined to remain.

This is wrenching stuff, and it hits us where it hurts. As readers and consumers in today's globalized corporate plutocracy, we know only too well that where there is obscene wealth, so, too, is there obscene poverty. The selfishness, greed, corruption, and hypocrisy of our corporate "leaders" and their right-wing political lackeys prevent it from being done away with, and they do so all around the world. Indeed, the conservative politics of economic globalism ensure that it continues, and every man, woman, and child who has a job in a sweatshop, a dead-end minimum-wage job, or no job at all, knows this. Those who could change things don't, but those who can't, like the Macabéas and Olímpicos of the world, don't either. They're too beaten down to do so. Our global corporate bosses know this. They also know that it works to their advantage.

As the narrator (a thinly veiled version of Clarice herself) has already suggested, four pages earlier, the people who need to read revolutionary books cannot afford them, or they are so far behind that they are illiterate, and the people who write them, like herself, have to suffer the disconnect between the comfortable circumstances in which they live and the poor, abandoned souls they would write about. And, like Clarice, they get paid to do it. And, as always, the "upper classes," though oozing sanctimoniousness and possessed of plenty of money to buy books, just don't care (*Hour of the Star* 18). Or, more likely, they do not care enough about injustice to do anything about it. They've got theirs, and that's all that's important. At the same time, the "middle-classes" who have some money look askance at writers like Clarice Lispector and fear that they, their novels and stories might be a source not of entertainment but discomfort, and this they do not want (18); they do not wish to buy disturbing books or books that perturb them. And so they, too, do nothing. As a result, the grinding poverty, the hunger, and the cruel indifference that allows the rich and powerful to abandon the poor and weak continue on and on and on. Clarice knew all of this, including her part in the story; she knew that, if only in a small way, she, too, was complicit. This realization may help explain why, in this final novel, she is as disdainful of writers and writing as she is. It is painful to think that, for important as

writing and justice were to Clarice Lispector, this might have been one of her final thoughts.

Apropos of this, it is instructive to take a look at a few more of her, and her narrator's, asides. Although the narrative voice of *The Hour of the Star* is that of a man, Rodrigo S. M., the reader can feel, with considerable confidence, that when he speaks we are hearing Clarice Lispector. And with this final novel he/she/she/he talks to the reader from beginning to end. Early on, for example, we are told this: "In writing this story ... I know perfectly well that every day is one more day stolen from death. In no sense an intellectual," this being a point that Clarice made constantly about herself, "I wrote with my body" (*Hour* 16). Five pages later, the same voice tells us, again darkly, "I write because I am desperate and weary. I can no longer bear the routine of my existence, and were it not for the constant novelty of writing, I should die symbolically each day" (21).

Deeper into her/his text, the same voice, feeling more and more like that of Clarice herself, declares, "I have grown weary of literature: silence alone confronts me. If I continue to write, it's because I have nothing more to accomplish in this world except to wait for death. Searching," as we all do, "for the word in darkness" (70). And, finally, at the very end, the reader gets this: "And now—now it only remains for me to light a cigarette and go home. Dear God, only now am I remembering that people die. Does that include me?

Don't forget," Clarice admonishes her reader one final time, "in the meantime, that this is the season for strawberries. Yes" (86). The last word of a narrative about words, human existence, pleasure, meaning, and the struggle to understand, becomes an acceptance of death at the same instant that it also becomes an affirmation of life. Yes.

But between the beginning and the end, there is still reason to laugh, if not lightheartedly then at least with unflinching honesty. As Rodrigo/Clarice goes about constructing the character of Macabéa, she declares this, "with satisfaction," about herself and who she is in the world: "I am a typist and a virgin, and I like coca-cola[*sic*]" (35). This is Macabéa's life, but it is also the life of millions of people around the world.

After a chance encounter with a young man, whom we will soon know as the violent and pitiful Olímpico, he asks her, "What's your name?" (43). "Macabéa," she replies, cautiously but

also hopefully, and this leads him to respond, "Maca—what?" (43). "Béa," she finds herself "forced to repeat" (43). "It sounds like the name of a disease," he allows, "a skin disease" (43).

Terrified already that she will lose this unexpected prize, her "newly-found boy-friend," Macabéa struggles to think of something clever or interesting to say. In a moment of inspiration, she comes up with this: "I love nuts and bolts. What about you?" (43). The reader, sensing what is about to happen, does not know whether to laugh or cry. The poor girl doesn't "understand" her swain's name, Olímpico, either, and neither does she understand that while he had a job as a "metal-worker," he would never refer to himself as a *worker* but always as a *metallurgist*" (45). While, in contrast to the reader, Macabéa did not understand what was transpiring here, it delighted her because it highlighted "his professional standing" as well as hers, as a typist (45). "She and Olímpico," she felt, "had social standing" (45).

Later in their relationship, if one can call it that, Macabéa, working hard to sound intelligent, asks Olímpico the meaning of some things she has heard on the radio. Trying to follow a discussion of a man who was a mathematician and who had written a book called *Alice in Wonderland*, she wanted to know what "elgebra," meant, having mistaken the word "algebra" for "elgebra" (49). Although we can laugh Macabéa situation, we can also identify with it, and this imbues it with a poignancy it would otherwise not have. She is trying hard to learn things that will make her smarter, more useful, and more attractive, to potential employers as well as to romantic partners, but she makes mistakes, and thus exposes what she regards as her faults and weaknesses. Women, especially, know this difficult situation, though men are not strangers to it, either.

But if Macabéa's slip here can be regarded as funny, Olímpico's response comes across as mean spirited, petty, and cruel, all of which he is. "Only queers," he sneers, "are interested in things like that, men who've turned into pansies. Excuse the word queer. That's something no decent girl should know about" (49). The reader does not know whether to laugh or cry.

But Macabéa, determined to make her case, presses on. "On the radio they discuss 'culture' and use difficult words. For instance, what does 'electronic' mean?" (49). "I know," replies her meretricious mentor, "but I'm not telling you" (49).

Noting, in a jaw-dropping understatement, that there are so many things she doesn't understand, Macabéa then asks Olímpico, "What does 'income per head' mean?" (50). "That's easy," he responds, with an arrogance that offers a risible contrast with his job, "it has something to do with medicine" (50).

As things proceed between them, Olímpico one day decides he will "treat" Macabéa to a coffee (54). Thrilled, she asks if she can have a bit of milk in it. Ever the gentleman, Olímpico replies, "Sure, if it costs the same. If it costs any extra, you pay the difference" (54). As soon as she gets her drink, Macabéa, no fool herself, "added spoonful after spoonful of sugar ... She always added spoonfuls of sugar in order to make sure she got value for her money," even when, as in this case, to do so would cause her to feel like vomiting (54).

In my opinion, the funniest and most humane character in the entire novel is Madame Carlota, the retired prostitute-turned-fortune-teller who, as Olímpico has now also abandoned Macabéa,[10] steps up to serve as her life coach. When Macabéa, seeking some sort of comfort, goes to see the good Madame, she finds her classy place of work (her apartment) covered in yellow plastic; even the flowers were plastic. Macabéa is very impressed, as is the reader, who is informed that "Plastic was the last word in luxury" (72).

In stark contrast to the emaciated Macabéa, Madame Carlota "was voluptuous" (72). She had painted cheeks and a "rosebud mouth" and "looked," the narrative voice tells us, "like a large china doll that had seen better days" (72). And this, in fact, is the case.

After effusively greeting her new client, Madame Carlota tells her, "I'm a fan of Jesus. I'm just mad about Him" (72). She then goes on to explain how Jesus had always helped her live and work "with class," even in her "heyday," when she and her then trim body could command the highest prices in the sex trade industry (72). "Later on," however, when she "didn't rate so highly on the market, Jesus lost no time in helping me to set up a brothel with a friend" (72). But in spite of all of Jesus's help, Madame Carlota's business initiative had to close because the girls spent "most of their time cheating" her "out of money" (72).

A successful business woman, Madame Carlota, who was born poor and grew up with too little to eat, had prospered as a pros-

titute. She "enjoyed the work" because, as she tells us, she was "a very affectionate woman" and she "became very fond of all" her "clients (73). And, best of all, "there was a great deal of friendship among the prostitutes," who formed "a closely-kinit community" (73). But then her teeth rotted and the poor Madame was "left with dentures" and her current profession as a psychic (73).

Although Madame Carlota startles Macabéa by kindly helping her understand how miserable her life is (a thought that, both happy and sad, "had never occurred to her"), she also tells her that "a foreigner" named Hans is going to marry her and that she is going to be happy (75, 77). "He has lots of money," Madame Carlota excitedly goes on, "but then" of course he would because "all foreigners are rich" (77). He's also going to give Macabéa an expensive "fur coat" (77). When, showing a flash of intelligence,[11] Macabéa demurs a bit, observing that "I don't need a fur coat in this climate," the good Madame, not in the least deterred, replies, "well, you're going to have one just the same" (77).

Like Macabéa, the poor and exploited of the world have plenty of what they don't need, conservative lies and authoritarian propaganda, but very little of what they do need, education, health care, and economic opportunity. This point is not lost on Clarice's global reader.

And it is here that the humor comes to an end. The tenor of the story is taken over by a crushing sense of injustice, pain, and waste. Macabéa, now brimming with happiness and expectation, leaves the clairvoyant's office and is struck and killed by "a yellow Mercedes, as huge as an ocean liner" (79). She dies just as she had lived, alone and in the gutter with the rest of society's garbage. The reader does not miss this point, either.

Chapter Three

Clarice, Writing, and Language

For Clarice Lispector, writing was not something that she chose to do or that she did because it was her profession. It was both more visceral and existential than that; it was an irresistible urge, something she felt compelled to do.[1] For the Brazilian writer, writing was tantamount to living, to the pulsing of blood through the veins, this being, indeed, a metaphor she herself used more than once to describe her relationship with her texts. For Clarice, to write was to exist, to be. In a famous television interview in February 1977, only a short time before she died, Clarice made what must be her single most powerful pronouncement about what the act of writing meant to her: "When I am not writing," she declared, "I am dead" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 30).

This attitude about the connections between writing, creativity, and being helps explain, the peculiar intensity of her work. And its nakedness. Clarice understood human existence as a function of language. Rooted in the body, as Hélène Cixous correctly observed (via the French translation), her sense of language as a vital life-force also allowed it to flower in the mind, where, as we see in her texts, it begins to breath and pulse, erotically and intellectually, as a quest for understanding. For Clarice, there is no mind/body divide; all is one being, and it is animated by language.[2] Having considered mathematics, "the madness of reason," the female (and very Clarice-like) narrator of *The Stream of Life* chooses instead "to take possession of" a "thing's *is*" (3); to achieve this, she knows she must now do exactly what she wants to do, which is "to feed directly from the placenta" (3). She wants the "flowing" of life, its "'bio'" (10, 26); she wants "to be," to be alive, vitally, pulsatingly alive (28). But this quest, expressed through language, is endless, because a word always gives rise to another word and so on ad

infinitum. Like bodies touching each other, words rub together to produce an unending flood of diverse arousals. The process of signification never stops, and so we never quite attain what we want—or what we think (or are told!) we want. Meaning is never stable, and to be human means learning to live with this—for some unsettling, for others liberating—realization. This is Clarice's turf. Reflective of how language really works, how words speak endlessly to other words, her texts are, semantically speaking, utterly fluid in nature; no end point is ever reached. Considered from this perspective, Clarice Lispector puts a human face on what is too often the arcane terminology of poststructural theory. She shows us that this kind of thinking, about language, knowing, and existing, actually defines the human condition (see Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector*). For Clarice and her characters, as for the poststructuralists, the "signifier floats away from the signified, *jouissance* dissolves meaning, the semiotic disrupts the symbolic, *différance* inserts a gap between signifier and signified, and power disorganises established knowledge" (Selden 109).

Even her intensely socially conscious final work, *The Hour of the Star*, written only a few weeks before she would succumb to cancer, upholds this eternally elusive nature of language. The attractiveness of Clarice's work is not, however, poststructural theory; it is the language-based subject matter poststructural theory deals with, the human struggle to know, to understand, and to be. As *The Hour of the Star* poignantly makes clear, while the flesh gives out, words do not. They go on forever, breathing life into us, changing their meaning constantly as they interact with each other, and challenging us to see ourselves and the world around us in ever evolving ways. While this produces a systemic uncertainty to human existence, it also produces great potentiality, the sense of imminence that permeates Clarice's work, the sense of something new and unforeseen about to come into a state of being.

The world of Clarice Lispector is the world of language, one defined as a semantically fluid and self-referential semiotic system. It is not a question of style or literary embellishment, and it is not that of Flaubert and his search for the *mot juste*. And it is not autobiographical writing, as this term is understood in its conventional sense. Clarice's *escritura*, her writing, is a matter of being, of existing, and of trying to know, to make sense of life.

Awaiting the "orgasmic apocalypse" of "words that wrap themselves around" what she thinks, feels, and experiences, and that constantly "transform" all that she is, she watches think and exist (*Stream of Life* 54–55). In terms of critical theory, the world of is that of poststructural thought brought down from the clouds of abstract thinking to the vicissitudes of real human existence—and of the core role that language plays in it. Not assailed by academic jargon, her readers understand this; they understand that Clarice writes about what we all know to be true, that life is largely a struggle to understand, and that this struggle takes place by means of language, in language, and through language. Although we can imagine it, or imagine that we can imagine it, we can never have perfect understanding. But, even knowing this, we continue to want it anyway. Clarice's readers respond to this kind of writing because it speaks to them of their own, inner quests but also of their own uncertainties and doubts. Her readers feel this, even in translation, and they make it theirs. While they do not fret about being trapped by language, as theorists do, the women and men around the world who read Clarice understand that the mysteries, fears, and anxieties of life are perceived and dealt with by means of language. They understand because Clarice's narratives speak to them of their own interior existences, what they think and feel and fear. Reading Clarice reminds readers around the world of how tangled one's inner world is, and of how uncertain their lives are, how anxious they are to understand, and how difficult it is to accept that words do not lead to ultimate realizations of truth but only to more words. This is true of Clarice's female readers,[3] but we know it is also true of her many male readers as well. Clarice's novels, stories, and columns speak to us all about human existence, and they do so honestly. What she says smacks of the truth, of how it really is, and somehow we know this.

Today, at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century as we stumble along like prisoners in a chain-gang in the clutches of a globalism driven by conservative and authoritarian economic and political interests, and as we are lied to constantly by authoritarian leaders, people around the world are responding to Clarice's insistence that they become more aware of the semantically elusive nature of language and how it can be, and is, used to deceive them. From beginning to end, her texts insist that we, as readers and as citizens, think more about how, for better and for

worse, language determines who we are, how we think (and how others think), and how we try to understand themselves, others, and the world around us. This is a major part of her global appeal.

For Clarice, language is life; it is an eternally productive system, semiotically, ontologically, and epistemologically. Language functions in Clarice's writing as blood pulses through our veins. The "desire to write," the desire "to link women's diffuse sexuality to women's language," leads to "a powerful alternative discourse," one that undercuts long held assumptions about male dominated social structures and how things should be (Cixous, qtd. in Jones 366). For Clarice, language is the pulse of life. Indeed, the metaphor of pulsing becomes one that, in her most powerful texts, is linked to the idea of climax, emotionally, intellectually, and sexually. To write, in Clarice's world, was to *be*, to exist and to swell with the energy of life, and then to climax, again and again. Words, and especially words used to create, exude a "voluptuousness" that cannot be denied (*Stream* 12).

"Is what I write a single climax?" asks the narrative voice of *The Stream of Life*, a text that structures itself around the metaphor of climax (6). "My days are a single climax," she writes, as if to negate her own question by envisioning life itself as an orgasm (6). "I live on the edge" (6). "What I'm writing you does not come softly," Clarice's narrator tells us, "rising little by little to a climax, then to die softly afterward. No ... What I write you continues on" (23, 79). The images of pulsation and climax, then, fuse her sense of self, of being, and of language with the body. This may explain why the masturbation motif is so fundamental a part of Clarice's *oeuvre*. To write is to become aroused, in every sense of the term. It is to become more attuned to life itself. For the Brazilian writer, the one comes to embody the other, both literally and figuratively. The result is a kind of writing that, charged with the "sudden ecstasy" of words flowing together "in unison" and then climaxing, simply obviates binary thinking. It renders it non-applicable. Clarice's understanding of language systematically rejects rigidity in form and thought, and merges the erotic impulse, life, and creativity (Lispector, "The Pleasures of a Normal Life," *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 182–83; also Lispector, *Stream* 12). It is celebration of life, a paean to it, and a release of one's self to it.

Clarice herself made, and in explicit fashion, this intrinsic connection between writing and orgasm.

> Batuba jantiram lecoli? Adapiu quereba sulutria kalusia. J'ai du plaisir à parler ainsi: c'est un langage qui ressemble à un orgasme. Puisque je ne comprends pas, je me rends: tilibica samvico esfolerico mazumba! Je suis l'eau d'une jolie citerne ... Batuba jantiram lecoli? adapiu quereba sulutria kalusia. I enjoy speaking this way: it is a language that resembles an orgasm. Since I don't understand, I hand myself over: tilibica samvico esfolerico mazuba! I am the water of a lovely cistern. (Varin, *Langues de feu* 70; trans. Moser, *Why This World* 333)

This equivalency between writing and eros is especially apparent in her longer texts, from *Near to the Wild Heart* to *The Stream of Life*, where the use of language to bring a text to life finds its analog in the orgasmic impulse. In her stories, this same tendency, though still often present, is not as pronounced. It seems as if the question of genre, understood as freely as she regarded it, did affect the kind of narrative Clarice would produce, with the longer narratives tending to merge poetry with prose more consistently, to engage the great ontological and epistemological questions of life, and to explore the recesses of language, being, and our efforts to understand. What nearly all of her texts have in common, however, is a grounding in what could be thought of as the female perspective, one that, in Clarice's case, however, encompasses all of the human experience, that of women, yes, but of men as well. Martim, of *The Apple in the Dark*, is the primary example of how this works in Clarice's fictional universe, but there are others as well.

This salient and often overlooked fact goes a long way toward explaining Clarice's appeal to both men and women around the world. Hers is a powerfully unifying voice; it speaks to all of us. As Marília Librandi sees it, Clarice's writing

> is at once deeply personal and detached, biographical and cosmogonic, feminist and animal, feminine and mechanical. For this reason, Helène Cixous sings Lispector's praises, wishing that all women should write like her, as if she had opened up a portal in Rio de Janeiro through which all women could pass—their typewriters in tow—and gain access to the "it," the impersonal, the neuter gender, [a state of being in which we could relate to each other as equals]. (Librandi, *Writing by Ear* 124)[4]

The vital connection between language, being, and eros begins already in the character, Joana, of Clarice's first novel, *Near to the*

Wild Heart, which appeared in December 1943. As characters, Joana, and her husband, Otávio, are defined by the type of language each generates; while Otávio, whose characterization allows him to illustrate both the power of patriarchy[5] and its weaknesses, is a function of prose and his need not merely for "order" but for "Order," Joana comes to life as pure poetry (*Near to the Wild Heart* 109–15, 115). She embodies fluidity, whereas he exudes structural rigidity. And though he knows this, and though he envies Joana her freedom, Otávio also knows that he needs her and that he does not really want to give up his own power (114–15). A more complex character than he is commonly given credit for being, and one riven with the subtle inner tensions that define patriarchy, Otávio seeks always to control words and to make them mean what he wants them to mean; Joana, the novel's protagonist and his foil, allows words to ebb and flow as they will. She makes no effort to control or limit them or the multiple, often inconsistent, and even contradictory meanings they generate. In contrast to Otávio, who cannot abide disorder, Joana lives and breathes the anarchical fecundity of language as it really is. The reader of this astonishing 1943 novel from Brazil immediately sees the relevance it has for the theories of Julia Kristeva, most notably *La révolution du langage poétique*, which appeared thirty-one years later.

A kinetic amalgam of erotic energy and language, Joana epitomizes what Clarice understands human life to be—an irresistible force, the unquenchable urge to create and to exist, to live.

The reader feels this even more powerfully only a few pages later, when, as part of what seems to be one of Joana's liberating moments of orgasm and reverie, we are privy to this lush portrait of a moment of inner ecstasy:

> release came and Joana trembled at its impulse ... Because gentle and sweet as daybreak in a forest, inspiration came ... she uttered in a whisper words born at that moment, hitherto unheard, still tender from creation—new and fragile buds. They were less than words, merely disconnected syllables, meaningless, lukewarm, that flowed and criss-crossed, fertilized, were reborn in a single being only to separate immediately, breathing, breathing ... Her eyes moistened with sweet happiness and gratitude. She had spoken ... (Lispector, *Near* 127)

By 1964 and *The Passion According to G. H.*, Clarice had become a literary star in Brazil and, through translation, increasingly so in much of the rest of the world. Although roundly ignored in the United States, then struggling with its reception (again via translation) of a wave of superb and innovative Spanish American narrative, poetry, and theater, Clarice was revered in Brazil and, a bit later, throughout Spanish America, as well as in other parts of the literary world, including France, Germany, and Italy. In the United States, however, she was ignored. In France, where she was particularly well regarded, Clarice had, since the 1950s, been celebrated as a major international writer who, in addition to Cixous's fascination with her as the epitome of *l'écriture féminine*, fearlessly explored the often murky connections between language, desire, and our awareness of who and what we are (see Sousa, "Once Within a Room" vii). Her work was regarded as a kind of *tour de force* as regards genre theory and as providing poetic and philosophic insights into the interconnections between writing and being.

The French intellectual tradition has long provided a kind of prism for understanding Latin American literature and its reception on the global stage. Just as Borges was accepted here in the United States only after the French had praised his work, so, too, would Clarice also be granted an audience here only after being celebrated by Cixous. If, as I have argued elsewhere, the French viewed the Borges *ficciones* as the literary epitomes of the concepts and problems they were then discussing as structuralist theory, then the hybrid and semantically quicksilver *textes* being produced by Clarice Lispector could easily be read as being the epitomes what would later become known as poststructuralism (see Fitz, *Sexuality and Being*). The case for reading Clarice not as a rote poststructuralist but as a deeply sentient poet/philosopher whose vision of the human condition parallels the linguistic concerns dealt with by poststructural thinkers is a strong one. As I have said before, Clarice puts a human face on poststructural theory. In text after text, she shows us that the very real problems of poststructural thinking reflect, in fact, the core tensions of the human experience.

The inner struggle of G. H., the woman who, with painful self-awareness, tells the tale that bears her name, gives us precisely this struggle. Acutely conscious that her world is that of language, G. H. understands that there is always "an abyss" between the word

and the thing it refers to (Lispector, *Passion* 59). A gap always exists between language and reality. She also knows that in our quest to reach this reality, and to understand it, words speak more to each other than they do to the things they purport to describe. In seeking to understand what has been happening to her inside her apartment building in Rio de Janeiro, G. H. is led to ask herself: "What was it that happened to me yesterday? and now? I'm confused" (59). These words pretty well sum up the moment-to-moment mystery of the human condition as experienced by most people. The "abyss" that exists between words and what they intend to do—give meaning to the things that exist and that happen in life—is bad enough, but it pales before our other dilemma, the fact that we live out our lives in language, in a world where we use words to talk about other words. And if we regard words as linguistic signs, or symbols, which they truly are, then thought shows itself to be an unstable semiotic system in which signs and symbols speak to other signs and symbols. Yet we cannot escape words and the power they exert in defining us and in creating meaning for all we do and think. Language holds us hostage, and we are never to be redeemed. When, as in Clarice's *The Apple in the Dark*, we learn that "At some unidentifiable point," Martim "had become prisoner of a ring of words," it is this specifically human reality that Clarice is writing about (37). We are awash in a sea of words that simultaneously make and unmake us and, like most men and women, characters like Joana, Martim, and G. H. struggle to cope with this predicament.

A rational, middle-class Brazilian woman, and one whom we can think of once again as a thinly veiled portrait of Clarice herself, G. H. labors to understand the meaning of the epiphany-like moment she has experienced, and the consequences of which she is still contemplating. For as intellectual as her problem is presented to the reader, it is even more intensely human; it involves choosing between what Sartre termed "good faith" or "bad faith," with the former a matter of taking personal responsibility for what one says and does and the latter a matter of not doing this and, instead, simply allowing circumstance and conformity to determine who and what one is.[6]

"I'm free!" thinks G. H. as she revels in having broken out of her former "bad faith" life and thus given herself at least a chance to lead a more honest and aware life.

But does she really want to? But she also wonders, can she bear the burden of honesty that comes with determining to live a life of "good faith," that is, of heightened awareness and integrity? Can anyone, the reader thinks, responding to the quandary in which G. H. finds herself. Or does life involve too many compromises? Are we humans too weak to bear the burden of a life of "good faith" decision making? The answer is "yes," and, deep down, we all know it.

The appeal of "bad faith," and its embracing of the unthinking, uncritical, and unaware life, is that it is much more pleasant than living life while knowing the truth about it, how much deceit and cruelty and injustice there are in the world, and how little any of us can do about it. Should we just give in and live in "bad faith," or should we resist its temptations and struggle on, seeking always to live with honesty and integrity? This very honest and human realization leads G. H. to ask herself if she really wants to go back to her earlier and more disconcerting state of awareness. To live a life of "bad faith" is more pleasurable[7] than to live one of "good faith," which requires a level of honesty about one's personal identity and being that makes comfortable middle-class existence difficult.

This conflict torments G. H., and it is not resolved until the novel's latter pages, when, as we have seen, G. H. makes this surprising pronouncement to us:

> One thing I know: if I reach the end of this account, I'll go, not tomorrow but yet today, to eat and dance at the Top-Bambino, I mightily need to have a good time and distract myself. I'll be sure to wear my new blue dress that makes me look a little thinner and gives me color. I'll phone Carlos, Josefina, Antonio, I don't remember clearly which one of the two men I thought might be in love with me or if both were, I'll eat *crevettes* and not worry about how regular life will be starting again ... I, like everybody, need to forget. (Lispector, *Passion* 155)

Clarice's reader instantly recognizes this conflict, but, in G. H., a character who has tasted of the seriously contemplative side of life but who also enjoys a little clubbing, she also recognizes a kindred spirit, someone with whom she can identify. Having led us in one direction, Clarice and G. H. suddenly move us here from the sublime and the intellectually profound to the banal. While the reader who is committed to a certain kind of reading of Clarice's novel will likely be surprised, if not disappointed, at this unexpec-

ted scene, she will also be impressed by Clarice's honesty, for this is how human life really is. We do the best we can, but we also "need to have a good time" and "distract" ourselves a bit. Otherwise, we cannot cope with life as it is.

A melding of the best qualities of prose and poetry, and larded with a constant stream of philosophical divagation, *The Stream of Life* demands to be read as nothing less than the experience of being, of existing.[8] And as a quest for understanding. As Clarice herself wrote of her own style of writing, in "Humility and Technique," a *crônica* from 4 October 1969, "This way or 'style' (!) has been called several things, but never what it really and exclusively is: a humble quest" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 308–09, see also 240, 330–31, 400–01; also Douglass).

"If there is a subject of this text," observes Cixous, "it is on the question of writing" (Cixous, Foreword, *The Stream of Life* xv). For the French author and critic, *The Stream of Life* "is about writing, as a verbal activity ... the vital theme of this text is writing: all the questions of writing, ... the mystery of writing" (Foreword xv). But I would add, it is also, and simultaneously, about living, of being a sentient human being, and this is why both men and women respond to it. "I'm caught up with the joy of the words," the female voice of *The Stream of Life* tells us, "I feel a voluptuousness in creating what to tell you" (12). "I want to feel the quivering, vital nerve of the present in my hands and have that nerve of life interact with me like a pulsing vein" and in "the obscure eroticism of full life," one imbued with energy by the "nude bodies of strong women wrapped in serpents and carnal desires" (12).

"I embody myself," this female presence tells us, "in voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that spiral outward beyond words" (14). "I transmit to you not a message of ideas but rather an instinctive voluptuousness ... that is a feast of words" (16). A "dense jungle of words wraps itself thickly around what I feel and live ... I am ... sexually alive, ... savagely alive" (17). Then, merging her sexual desire with the essence of her being, she writes, in a poetic structuring that is at once strikingly poetic and ontologically orgasmic:

> I'm in the soft, living center.
> Still.
> It flickers and is elastic ...
> In the core where I am, in the core of the *Is*.
> (Lispector, *Stream* 20)

Approached as a form of lyrical narrative, *The Stream of Life* vividly demonstrates both the author's concern with words and language and the power of narrative to order our universe. Because it is a function of language, which is, as Clarice repeatedly shows us, a living, breathing thing, narrative is similarly alive, and in ways that link it to human evolution. As Ferris Jabr writes, "In many ways, stories are uncannily similar to living organisms ... They compel us to share them and, once told, they begin to grow and change," just as language does, "often becoming longer and more elaborate ... They find each other," just as words do, "intermingle, and multiply" (36). In *The Selfish Gene* (1976), British evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, "coined the word *meme* to describe a 'unit of cultural transmission' analogous to a biological gene. Memes, he wrote ... were not just metaphorically alive but technically living things" (Dawkins, qtd. in Jabr 36). So, too, is language, a point that is crucial to understanding the world of Clarice Lispector. And no where in Clarice *oeuvre* do we experience the merging of eros and language more deeply than *The Stream of Life*.

In *The Hour of the Star*, the role of language changes. Here, in a narrative that focuses on the devastating effects of poverty, we get a painful portrait of a young, tuberculosis ridden woman so abandoned that she scarcely has a consciousness, much less the rich inner life that has characterized so many of Clarice's protagonists before her. Macabéa, as she is called, is, like her similarly ill-prepared but more thuggish male counterpart, Olímpico, the left-over trash produced by the, for some, successful operation of capitalism. In this late novel, the language utilized struggles, self-consciously, to bring life to the female protagonist because it, like her, must be spare, simple, and unadorned. Lushly poetic and contemplative it cannot be. And it is not. To the contrary, it has a starkness and a barely subdued anger that is new to Clarice's work. Neither is it erotically charged, save for the narrator advising us at one point that, in spite of all outward appearances and in spite of her not even knowing it, his "withered" and battered character "was sensual" (60). And yet for all this, the text of *The Hour of the Star* is still borne forward by the same preoccupation with words, writing, and ontology that has characterized the world of Clarice Lispector from the very beginning.

In writing about the narrative he is spinning out, the narrator, Rodrigo S. M., expresses concern that he (that is, to say, Clarice

herself) is offering the reader here is one "from which blood surging with life might flow only to coagulate into lumps of trembling jelly" (*Hour* 12; see also Madeleine Gagnon, qtd. in Jones 372). What is being written and read here, Rodrigo asserts, "is not simply a narrative, but above all primary life that breathes, breathes, breathes" (13). His story, he informs us, "will consist of words that form phrases from which there emanates a secret meaning that exceeds both words and phrases" (14–15). For Rodrigo, as for Clarice, "the word is the fruit of the word," and, inescapably, at the tip of one word lies yet another word (20). This produces, for Rodrigo, for Clarice, and for the reader, "the ancient music" of words playing, endlessly, upon other words (84).

For critic, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, this very quality of Clarice's work, its awareness that, in writing, words speak more to other words in the same structure than to any reality outside that structure, made the Brazilian master a paragon of the new Latin American novel of the 1960s. For writers like Julio Cortázar, García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Clarice Lispector, it is "the theme of language" that leads to the most complete understanding of human society, its highs as well as its lows (Rodríguez Monegal, "The New Latin American Novelists" 28). For them, as we see so brilliantly deployed in Clarice's work, "Language is the ultimate 'reality' of the novel," just as it is of the human condition (28, see also 14–19, 21).

For readers of Clarice Lispector not familiar with Latin American literature, this fact is important because it makes manifest a Clarice who is part of a powerful and very language-centric kind of writing and yet a Clarice who, as a Brazilian, brings her own very distinctive literary and intellectual history to her work. It is always imperative that the student of World Literature understand authors and texts not in isolation but as products of systems of creative thought and artistry already in place and in relationships of influence and reception with other global systems. As the Monegal essay makes clear, this was very much the nature of Latin American literature during the 1960s. But it was particularly so in the case of Brazil, an intellectual culture from the beginning committed to circulating within the global market as an active participant.

About this same time, Clarice's work becomes the prototype for Cixous's theory of "L'écriture féminine" (Conley vii; Steiner

38–48; Lispector, *Passion* 119–24, 95, 132, *119*, 120–22, *135*, 150, 153–54). For as useful as this recognition by the influential French thinker has been to Clarice's reception as a global author, Cixous's "domestication" of Lispector has not been without its complications (Peixoto xii-xiii, 39–59; see also Klobucka). While Cixous deserves credit for helping to publicize Clarice's work, her readings of the Brazilian author have also led to some misconceptions about her and her writings. Many scholars of Brazilian literature and of Clarice Lispector in particular have felt that Cixous has overly domesticated a writer who, as in "The Sharing of Bread" (*The Foreign Legion*), "Sunday, Before Falling Asleep" (*The Foreign Legion*), and "Such Gentleness" (*Soulstorm*), is only occasionally the passive and nurturing female the French scholar wants her to be. As we see as early as "Happy Birthday," from *Family Ties*, there is a transgressive and even violent aspect to Clarice's work that is at odds with the interpretation urged by Cixous. And we should not defang her. As Marta Peixoto puts it, "Cixous finds in" Clarice's writing "a feminine libidinal economy" that, for her, reveals "itself in openness and generosity, or gentle, identificatory movements toward objects and beings" (*Passionate Fictions* xii-xiii). In reducing Clarice to this line of interpretation, and in promoting her as an exemplar of it, Cixous has appropriated Lispector "within a rhetoric that celebrates and imitates" what she, Cixous, takes to be "Lispector's nurturing, non-appropriative gaze" (xix). The result is that while Cixous has done Clarice a great service by praising her and by helping elevate her to the status of a celebrated world author, hers is far from the only way to approach Clarice's multifaceted but always language-defined world. And the reader must be aware of this. For readers closely aligned with the French artistic and intellectual tradition, and especially that of modern French feminist thought, there will be a danger in reading Clarice in ways that may prove to be overly limiting and therefore misleading. And given the global reach of modern French theory, this could be a real problem as far as receptions of Clarice Lispector the World Literature fixture are concerned.

More recently, we are seeing another kind of problem rear its ugly head with respect to Clarice's global circulation. For a variety of reasons, she is prone to being appropriated by readers and groups of readers. Certain people, and certain clans, seem to wish to "own" Clarice, to possess her and her work as if she were

some sort of talisman, or seer, a mysterious writer whose texts, too easily (and simplistically) lumped together as being sacred in nature, can be deciphered only by a certain, select few. Perhaps this is a sign of our globally tribalized times. Even so, it is a very real, and unfortunate, part of what happens when authors and texts, nearly always consumed in translation and by readers likely not aware of the writer's history and cultural context, who have lived and become known in their tongue begin to travel from their home cultures to readers from different places around the world. While this certainly happens to all writers who circulate globally, it happens to some more than others, and, I suspect, it happens to Clarice more than most.

Ruminating about "the splendor of having a language," G. H. comes to understand, as does Clarice herself, that we humans exist in a sea of words (*Passion* 170). Science gleans for us the facts of the universe, but it is through language that we assign value to these facts and determine what they mean, or what we want them to mean. "Language is my human endeavor," G. H. declares (170). "I have fatefully to go seeking and fatefully I return with empty hands. But—I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can be given me only through the failure of my language" (170). The same can be said for Clarice Lispector, and this is the key to understanding her work.

Chapter Four

Clarice and Eroticism

Overall, the erotic surge of Clarice Lispector's écriture manifests itself in three main ways: masturbation, lesbianism, and, somewhat more amorphously, the entwining of writing (and, indeed, all language use) and pleasure. When, in her foreword to *The Stream of Life*, Hélène Cixous writes that "*Agua* [*sic*][1] *viva* is the inscription of a certain kind of pleasure, of a pleasure that does not keep itself for itself ... Pleasure is all *Agua viva* is talking about," she is not wrong (xi, see also xii). Indeed, this is why the same celebrated French writer and theoretician celebrates Clarice's work as the epitome of "l'écriture féminine," as its most complete expression. "Cixous claims to have been overwhelmed by her encounter," presumably in its French translation, "with *Agua* [*sic*] *viva*," finding in it

> the finest practice of écriture féminine ... In the relation that Cixous holds with Lispector, écriture féminine ... suggests a writing based on an encounter with another—be it a body, a piece of writing, a social dilemma, a moment of passion—that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life. (Conley, Introduction, Reading with Clarice Lispector vii)

Following Cixous, many French feminists hold that "*l'écriture féminine* is connected to the rhythms of the female body and to sexual pleasure (*jouissance*)" (Showalter 9). To write, for Clarice, was to give free rein to desire, to enter into the flow of life, to savor its delights, its mysteries, and its physical and psychological pleasures.[2] At its allusive, seductive best, Clarice's erotically charged writing was both poetic and contemplative in nature. Her language does not seek the release of orgasm as much as it embodies it. For Clarice, words copulate just as people do, and the goals

are much the same. In a work like *The Stream of Life*, the *plaisir* (thinking of Barthes) is not merely of the *texte* but of language itself. And for readers around the globe, to read Clarice Lispector is to participate in an exciting and life affirming experience, one free from the artificial limitations of gender, class, or age.[3]

The erotic pulse of Clarice's prose appears already in 1943 and her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*. Here, sexual desire as a primal force, here as a vital part of, typically in Clarice's world, a woman's being (a pulsing, throbbing mixture of body, mind, and language). In one of the novel's most intriguing moments, and in a scene that blends the erotic and the maternal, Joana, the novel's protagonist, is having a conversation with another female character, Lídia. "Why is she so powerful?" Joana asks herself about Lídia, a woman who is simultaneously her antagonist and a woman whose body exudes a kind of deep seated erotic appeal, one that, as Joana realizes, makes her a potential lover[4] as well. The text itself seems to suggest that Joana is attracted to her husband's lover, a woman whose body is contrasted, at length, with that of Joana, with all comments being filtered through the consciousness of Joana. At another point in the novel, Joana, who has entered into an affair of her own, seems drawn to the unnamed man's unnamed woman. Joana, the reader surmises, is not in the least restricted in her sexuality by conventional norms or genres. For readers today, the character, Joana, offers a fascinating case study of what many studies of human sexuality show, that women possess a greater capacity for sexual fluidity than men do (see Diamond; also Bergner). Is there a sexual attraction between Joana and some of her novel's other women? Possibly. The suggestion is certainly there, and the reader is led to make of it what she or he will. As she does time after time in her career as a writer, Clarice's richly sensual and poetic language entwines itself to exude an ebbing and flowing sexual desire.

As if in contemplation of all of this, and trying, in her own mind, to decide what it is that she, a young and just married woman, most wants at this point in her life, Joana thinks to herself, "I know what I want: a woman who is ugly but wholesome with large breasts[5] ... A woman who will give me a warm bath, dress me in a white linen night-dress, braid my hair and put me to bed" (*Near to the Wild Heart* 137).

Clearly, there are several complicating factors here. In addition to the intertwining of the erotic and the maternal, an additional

complication is that Lídia is the mistress of Joana's husband and Joana is aware of this fact. Lídia, moreover, represents all that the conventional wife is thought to be, whereas Joana, in a series of comparisons, is presented as the antithesis of this, a woman who, though married herself, cannot abide what is, for her, the stifling institution of marriage and what it does to a person's ability to be, to grow, and to develop. "My God!" Joana thinks to herself while talking with Lídia (who very much wants to be a conventional wife and mother), "never to be by yourself, never, never. And to be a married woman, in other words, someone with her destiny traced out. From then onwards you simply have to wait for death ..." and "seeing your own frustration mirrored in your partner's habits, the burden of the bed you share" (*Near* 138). When asked by Lídia why she did so, Joana says she doesn't know why she got married, a question, one suspects, that many people, both female and male, would admit to asking. But having done so, the novel makes clear, Joana realizes the mistake she has made—and what she will have to do to rectify it. This will be the process of self-realization, physically and psychologically, that she, along with her reader, will set out to experience.

Onanistic fervor, almost always female, occurs often enough in Clarice's world as to be considered a motif. The only exception to its overwhelmingly female orientation (which we know only because of certain grammatical markers) is a twice cited male "morning masturbator" from "Where You Were At Night" (*Soulstorm* 129 and 121). That masturbation has today moved from out of the shadow of social opprobrium and into the light of normalcy and into the light of a more widely accepted human practice allows us to consider Clarice's cultivation of it more easily, and as having a presence in her writing as both an act of transgressive self-affirmation and as a pioneering kind of performance art.[6] For the many women and men around the world who see themselves in Clarice's texts, it is not difficult to understand how, in reading them, they, too, might feel themselves sufficiently liberated to enjoy the pleasure and release of masturbation (see Julian 81–83; also Jones 368). This response, an affirmation of what it means to be human, could well account for part of her global appeal. Clarice makes joyous and affirming what society has traditionally said was prohibited. For the reader who is troubled by the act of self-pleasuring, or by a desire to engage in it, reading Clarice Lispector

must serve as a kind of healing balm, a reassuring demonstration that there is nothing to be conflicted about in its practice. At no point in her narratives, however, does Clarice openly advocate masturbation, though her texts do seem consistently and unproblematically to represent it. And, at these moments, its depiction generates some of Clarice's most powerful and intensely lyrical passages. Clarice thus deals with self-gratification—and in her world it is overwhelmingly female in nature—not by telling the reader what to do but by showing her, or him, that it is a normal human activity that need not be draped in ponderous and far from certain discourse about "right" or "wrong." In Clarice's linguistically rooted universe, masturbation is merely another aspect of being human and seeking pleasure. But, at the same time, it is especially geared to the process of female self-realization.

Beginning in 1943 and Clarice's inaugural novel, self-pleasuring presents itself not as a form of shameful activity but as a natural and joyous celebration of life. And a freeing of one's body and mind. In reading these scenes, the reader feels Joana, the novel's female protagonist, experiencing a form of deeply satisfying self-liberation, one that gains richness and depth by generating a distinctly political significance. For a young, middle-class woman in early 1940s Brazil (as for women and men around the globe), to masturbate would have been considered a taboo practice, one that signals her rebellion from the mores of a society that seeks to constrain people and their most natural drives. Indeed, the mere fact that Clarice's female protagonist does seem to gain sexual satisfaction not by relying on a male partner but by her own hand constitutes a significant challenge to any patriarchal social structure. The rigidity and oppressiveness of such a society is opposed, in these scenes, by the fluidity, ecstasy, and freedom achieved through female masturbation. The text of *Near to the Wild Heart* offers three scenes in which Joana, the rebellious protagonist, seems quite freely to pleasure herself. Coming late in the novel's first half, which, alternating between the female protagonist's childhood and adulthood (specifically, her status as a married woman), is devoted to Joana's growth and development, Clarice creates a scene in which Joana gives every impression of masturbating to orgasm. Importantly, the achieving of climax is presented is not merely physiological but psychological as well, an erotically charged fusion of language and the demands of the body. "At

night, between the sheets," we read, "the slightest movement or unexpected thought," perhaps involving desire, "awakened" Joana "to herself. Mildly surprised, she opened her eyes wide, perceived her own body plunged into reassuring contentment ... 'Joana ... Joana she softly called to herself'" (92). And, the text tells us, her body then responds, "quietly echoing" her name (92).

Later, in part two, which concentrates on Joana's frustrated existence as a young wife, Clarice offers her reader a scene again charged with Eros but now, significantly, also with rebellion and a thirst for an unfettered life. Watching her husband sleep, and feeling further and further alienated from him, Clarice carries the reader into Joana's mind: "She was living, living ... When she had made love to him during those first months of their marriage, *she had been fascinated to discover her own body*. The renewal had been hers, she had not given herself rapturously to this man and had remained isolated" (*Near* 126, emphasis added). Discovering now a "desire" that she identifies with "that impulse which is life," Joana suddenly feels "the world gently throbbing in her breast, her body ached as if she were bearing the femininity of all women" (126, emphasis added). Engulfed by this new found desire for being and for experiencing all that life can offer, Joana appears once again to climax, psychologically and physically: "release came and Joana trembled at its impulse ... Because gentle and sweet as daybreak in a forest, inspiration came ... She uttered in a whisper words born at that moment, hitherto unheard, still tender from creation—new and fragile buds ... Her eyes moistened with sweet happiness and gratitude. She had spoken ...," she had come to exist (127).

Late in the novel, as a now determined Joana sets out, as the female protagonist of "The Flight" failed to do, on her voyage of self-realization and discovery, she seems yet one more time to experience a moment of psycho-sexual climax. "Something was trying to move inside her, responding, and through the dark cavities of her body, waves came surging, light, fresh and ancient. Almost frightened, she wanted to bring that feeling to her consciousness, but found herself being pulled further and further back in sweet vertigo, by gentle fingers" that give her "pink waves" of pleasure (174–75). Significantly, Clarice presents Joana's self-pleasuring as a matter of her coming-into-being, her becoming a human being, specifically a complete, full-fledged woman; it is never a matter of lasciviousness or licentiousness and even less as an appeal to

the so-called "male gaze" so often associated with conventional, male-oriented pornography;[7] invariably, hers is female oriented. Although traditionally it has been the title that links *Near to the Wild Heart* to Joyce,[8] the novel's final section, "The Journey," suggests an even stronger connection with the Irish master. Recalling the sexy Molly Bloom soliloquy that ends Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), the concluding pages of Clarice's narrative brim with the same kind of erotic energy, including that of auto-arousal, that sets free the flow of Molly's linguistically expressed becoming. "Yes," both Molly and Joana say.

Real or implied, masturbation appears in much the same liberating and exultant fashion in Clarice's second novel, *The Chandelier* (1946). In the later narrative, however, the female protagonist, another strong but frustrated young woman, seems, as if in an affirmation of self, to give herself over to if not actual orgasm then to recurring states of ecstasy at several different junctures, which, *Bildungsroman*-like, charts less her sexual and psychological awakening, as in *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), than her subsequent journey of growth and development. While these scenes in *Near to the Wild Heart* are far from being explicit or salacious in terms of their sexuality, those in *The Chandelier* are even less so; instead, they are woven into the throbbing, poetically rendered language of reverie that suffuses virtually the entire text, the heart of which is Virginia's vaulting consciousness. Early in the novel, as Virginia attempts to unburden herself from a diffuse but acute sense of inner oppression, the text, narrating from within her own mind, tells us that

> The dam was groaning, [now,] without interruption, shivering in the air and shaking inside her body, leaving her somehow trembling and hot ... A long empty well-being seized her, ... What she was feeling was without depth ... but what she was feeling ... above all fainting without strength ... yes, swooning in the sky ... like her ... Quick thick circles were moving away from her heart ... When she opened her eyes things were slowly emerging from dark waters and shining wetly sonorously on the surface of her consciousness ... My God, how happy am I, she thought in a weak and luminous jolt. (Lispector, *The Chandelier* 82–83)

As is often the case with Clarice's writing, images of moisture, wholeness, and life dominate.

Late in the novel, as Virginia is struggling to find her place, in the world and within her own sense of being, we learn that

> A presence with white lips was languishing in the air, the silence was inhaled in a dizziness, she'd lower her brow, a sound was coming from afar in the street, born of movements and words: yes, yes ... her breath was panting weakly, her eyelids blinking. Yes, yes ... The solution was in the quick surrender of her being, yes, yes, with eyes closed, without resistance. (Lispector, *Chandelier* 236)

Possessed of "a certain absorbed happiness" and "amazed," Virginia now seeks "the joy in the center of things," the center being, for Clarice, not the penis and its function as the site of phallogocentric domination but the female body, specifically the clitoris and its liberating energy (*Chandelier* 236). "Now," the reader learns of Virginia as she engages with her pleasure and power producing center, "she was possessing the responsibility of an adult and unknown body. But the future would come, would come, would come" and she would determine what it was going to be (236).

Near the conclusion, as Virginia is coming to terms with her still very body-based identity, we read that "Her radiant eyes were shining moistly at her own body, so much at herself, her movements were easy and rough—what was happening to her? ... As if suffocating, her face feverish, she took off her clothes and for the first time lay down naked ... her being swollen," swollen, one believes, with Eros and a desire for life. "Ah, ah, she was groaning," orgasm-like, "almost awake," and then again the same motif is repeated, "Ah, ah, she was groaning," her eyes staring into the darkness of the bedroom (276). This same lust for life drives *The Passion According to G. H.,* where the female narrative voice tells us that she "now knew that being human is a sensitizing, an orgasm of nature" (119).

The Chandelier differs from *Near to the Wild Heart*, largely because, in contrast to its predecessor, it cultivates an intensely poetic prose not in strategically selected sections and passages but throughout. One effect of this technique, for which Clarice is rightly famous, is that the question of orgasm—understood as a simultaneously occurring and intense moment of physical and psychological release—is both more omnipresent in *The Chandelier*

and more elusive, more difficult to pin point and separate from the rest of the text. In this sense, it is easy to read *The Chandelier* as the precursor of *The Stream of Life*, which, going further in this direction than the earlier work, presents the erotic impulse as a function of language, one in which the lubricious nature of language emerges as both the catalyst and the embodiment of expression. But the reader feels this same impulse already in the 1946 narrative, a prime example of the lyrical novel genre though, in Clarice's hands, one electrified by female eros and desire.

Another, later text, appearing in Portuguese in 1974 and known in English as *Soulstorm* (1976), also contains several stories in which female masturbation is treated differently. There, and in the context of an earlier generation of more sexually repressed women, it is presented more as a forbidden act, one for which a human being should feel shame. The result is that the reader feels the cruelty of this particular social more, this stigma that is assigned to masturbation and the social opprobrium that comes from practicing it, or, in the story, "Footsteps," of being old, alone, and yet in desperate need of sexual pleasure.

Taken as a whole, in fact, the stories of *Soulstorm* touch upon all kinds of sex and sexual activity, from homosexuality, geriatric sex, and prostitution to group sex, transvestism, gender fluidity, and masturbation. Though it is never presented as being pornographic, the sex presented here, in the midst of the Brazilian dictatorship, always has a serious, often liberating purpose—even though much of it is given a humorous twist, perhaps to get it past the official censors. The dream-like "Where You Were At Night," for example, features the words "Sex. Pure sex" (*Soulstorm* 124), "orgasm" (122), and "orgiastic" (115, 119), and "ecstasy" (122). Much the same is true for "The Dry Point of Horses," where the narrator declares "The night is my life with the diabolic horse, I, witch of horror. The night is my life, it grows late, the sinfully happy night is the sad life that is my orgy, ... and I have turned the dawn into a presentiment of the terror of demoniacal, unwholesome joy ... And the orgiastic joy of our murder consumes me in terrible pleasure" (113). We are far here, from the passive female and the "nurturing," "pre-Oedipal" Earth Mother "who brings back a lost harmony" that Cixous, most notably in the pages of *Vivre l'orange*, celebrates as the heart of Clarice's écriture *féminine* (see Peixoto 43, see also 39–59).

In the case of Clarice's women, from Joana and Virginia to the female voice in *The Stream of Life*, language and sexual climax are nearly always interwoven, the one becoming indistinguishable from the other and the one breathing life into the other. As a general rule, this characterizes her longer narratives, like *Near to the Wild Heart*, *The Chandelier*, *The Passion According to G. H.*, and *The Stream of Life*, more than it does her short stories, though even in that genre this fusion of language and sexuality is frequently present. In Clarice's most powerful texts, orgasm is not *described*, it is *experienced*, and the process of achieving it, a function of language, allows the reader to become an active and supportive accomplice in this most intimate and solipsistic of acts. And yet, as I have already argued, they are never pornographic, designed simply to arouse sexual desire in another. To the contrary, Clarice's erotic texts engage the reader in a unifying and uplifting quest for pleasure. "I move within my deepest instincts," the female narrator of *The Stream of Life* declares, "which carry themselves out blindly. I feel then that I'm close to fountains, lakes, and waterfalls, all of overflowing waters. And I'm free ... I'm breathing. In and out. In and out ... What I'm writing you does not come softly, rising little by little to a climax, then to die softly afterward. No: what I write you is made of fire, eyes glowing like coals" (21, 23). To feel that one understands, and to feel that one has utilized language, a semantic system of endlessly creative self-referentiality, to do so, is, for Clarice and her reader, a form of intense pleasure. And of release ... a release followed, endlessly, by the slow build-up and intensification of a new round of psycho-sexual desire and release. Although intermittent in Clarice's early novels, this pattern will find its most complete expression in *The Stream of Life*, where it comes to determine the narrative's entire style, structure, and delivery. Though far from what we usually understand as crude pornography, Clarice's *The Stream of Life* is beautifully, joyfully orgasmic in nature. It is, for this reason if no other, a true and celebratory book of life.

Because the experience of orgasm in Clarice's world is so organically woven into the moment of intellectual and emotional understanding (which manifests itself via language), we can better understand why the desire to understand emerges as an omnipresent motif of her narratives, becoming, finally, one of their basic building blocks. In *The Passion According to G. H.*, for example,

the verb, "to understand," appears throughout the text, from the opening page to the very end, which, of course, is not really an "end" but, as in language use, merely a continuation, one that in this text returns the reader to the novel's opening line. When the reader reaches the last line of the last page, she realizes that G. H.'s entire experience has existed entirely within the confines of language, albeit a language indivisible from her existence, her being, and her understanding of self[9] and world. Meditating on her desire for the "pleasure of ... words," G. H. asks herself: "is it my still wanting the orgasm of utmost beauty, of understanding, of the consummate act of love?" (135–36). Here and elsewhere in the language inscribed world of Clarice Lispector, the fusion of language and being is total and complete, and it produces a kind of ecstasy that is akin to sexual release. For her, the "is" of a person or a thing, its moment of most intense being and the basic structural motif of *The Stream of Life*, is its climax. This kind of writing, I surmise, is deeply appealing to a great many readers around the world.

Notably, this erotic impulse is almost entirely lacking in Clarice's third novel, *The Besieged City*, which, though published in 1949, was written in Berne, Switzerland, and completed just before she gave birth to her first child.[10] Its main character, Lucrécia Neves, comes across as being virtually devoid of the eros that had so distinguished her two predecessors, Joana and Virginia. Even when the novel's language begins to gather itself poetically to engage the reader with the linguistically rooted eroticism that Joana and Virginia had enjoyed, it pulls back, stopping short of producing any sort of climactic experience with Lucrécia. For the protagonist of *The Besieged City*, materialism has smothered eros, and the result is superficiality, a self-regard of the most fatuous sort. Limited as she is, Lucrécia Neves cannot rise to the occasion; she is unable to respond to life as Joana and Virginia could, and this places her in sharp contrast to her novelistic sisters. But it will also connect her to Martim, the male protagonist of her next novel, *The Apple in the Dark* (1961).

At the same time, however, Lucrécia shows herself to be a funnier creation than any of these others. This is also a new feature of *The Besieged City*. In her vanity and lack of depth, Lucrécia becomes a risible character, one whom we can both laugh with and laugh at. For Benjamin Moser, Lucrécia is "vain and pretentious,

content to remain on the surface" (Introduction, *Besieged City*, xvi). And in this sense, Lucrécia Neves, for all her pretense and concern with appearances, comes to life for the reader as a relatively sympathetic figure. Early in the novel, the narrator tells us that, at one "opportune moment in which people were living, each time something was seen—new extensions would emerge, and one more meaning would be created: that was the hardly usable intimate life of Lucrécia Neves," whose growth, such as it is, will be equated with the growth of her city, São Geraldo—and with the various forms of destruction its growth entails (Lispector, *Besieged City* 16).

Later, this same theme is picked up again. Anxious, always, to find "the loveliest way to see herself," Lucrécia, "impatient, courageous," sighs (30).

> She closed and opened her eyes, opened her mouth excessively in order to peer at her teeth: and for a rare instant she saw herself with a red tongue, in an apparition of beauty and calm horror ... She breathed more satisfied, without knowing why rejoicing: in the closed room, full of delicate chairs, everything was getting so burlesque with a red tongue! the young lady laughed with gravity as if she had a dwarf to torment. She then continued the disguise. Pleased, silent and crude while climbing into her patent leather shoes. Now she really was taller and more daring, the clarion call to plunder. (Lispector, *Besieged City* 30)

Finally, and in a scene where we see clearly the difference between her and both Joana and Virginia, we learn of Lucrécia that, "a bit bewildered, she noticed that she knew as much about herself as the cashier in front of the trashcan knew about himself. And, also like him, she took pride in, in such a way, not knowing herself ... 'Not knowing herself' couldn't be replaced by 'knowing herself'" (*Besieged City* 79). As Clarice had pointed out about her character, Lucrécia would see things "the way an animal would see a house: no thought going beyond the house. This was the intimacy without contact that horses had" (79).

Though no one would wish to emulate her, or be her, we nevertheless know Lucrécia Neves. She is one of us, the great unenlightened masses who make the world work. Easily seduced by bright, shiny objects and by false words, she is the person, male or female,

whom those who shill for what they call global progress want most to con. And they do. Readers around the world will immediately recognize Lucrécia Neves. She is not a particularly Brazilian type, she is a universal type, the kind of person who, lacking a critical self-consciousness and the ability to think things through, succumbs to hype.

Published when Clarice was forty years-old, and struggling with depression and her own marital problems,[11] the early story, "The Imitation of the Rose," from *Family Ties* (1960), is often read as a story of one middle-class married woman's mental disintegration. But, read from the perspective of its two main female characters, the story also invites a reading of it as a tale of unfulfilled same-sex desire (see Fitz, *Sexuality and Being* 71–72, 90–96). These readings do not cancel each other out; far from it. The unrequited passion the story's protagonist, Laura, holds for her also married friend, Carlota, can easily be seen as a major factor in the relapse of into a new state of mental illness.

Although "The Imitation of the Rose" has (and deservedly so) commanded attention as a poignant portrait of one woman's losing battle with depression, a great deal of the text itself deals not merely with the woman in question, the housewife, Laura, but with the complex though intense relationship she has, both real and imagined, with Carlota. Their friendship illustrates what sex researcher Lisa M. Diamond argues when (as summed up by Daniel Berger) she reports that "female desire was generated ... by emotional entwining" and that, for women, emotional attachments to other women were "so sexually powerful" that issues of assumed sexual "orientation" and such conventional gender distinctions as "male" and "female" "could easily be overridden" or simply ignored (Bergner 127). For Diamond, "female desire was, above all, fluid," a research-based conclusion that seems pertinent to the erotic experiences of many of Clarice's female characters (127). Playing a major role in the construction of this semantically rich relationship, the many references to "perfection" but also to "pleasure" (which an alert reader associates closely with "desire," which itself connects with the red roses Laura wants to give Carlota as a traditional symbol of love) become motifs of the text. Imbedded in the story of Laura's declining psychological health are several moments that seem to emphasize what Laura thinks, or desires, about Carlota, who, the text suggests, may or may

not reciprocate Laura's wishes or entreaties (paramount among with is her plan to gift Carlota the roses). The temptation that undoes Laura may well be not that of Christ but that of Carlota, the woman she loves but who spurns, or seems to spurn, her passion. Or it could involve both, setting up a conflict between the spiritual and the carnal. Laura's temptation, then, can be seen as that of the flesh, the body, and not merely that of the spirit. This is why the images of perfection (which allude simultaneously to both Christ and to the red roses) and pleasure/desire are so systematically yoked to her. In both readings the dominant metaphor is that of the disturbingly perfect roses, which reference both a well-known text by Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, and, less obviously, what may be what Laura now regards as her "perfect" love for Carlota. This image, simultaneously the passion of Christ and the passion of love, pulses as the heart of the story, however it is read.

While, the text tells us, Laura and Carlota had always been "different," Carlota, Laura thinks, had always admired her while also being "a little odd even as a school girl" ("The Imitation of the Rose," *Family Ties* 55). The complex but never revealed relationship between the two women, and between they and their husbands is alluded to in the context of whether Laura has "told her husband" "everything" she is thinking and feeling (61). "Not that Carlota had given cause for any scandal," the text tells us, "although Laura, were she given the opportunity, would hotly defend her ... She, Laura, was obliged reluctantly to agree that her friend had a strange and amusing manner of treating her husband, not because," she then adds, and in a way that clearly asks the reader to consider other interpretive options, "'they treated each other as equals,' since this was now common enough, *but you know what I mean to say*" (61, emphasis added).

The narrator then adds, as if to underscore for the reader the point just made, "Carlota was ... a little different, even she had remarked on this once to Armando," Laura's husband, "and Armando had agreed without attaching much importance to the fact" (61). But if Armando is oblivious to what Laura is trying to tell him, about Carlota and, possibly, about Laura and Carlota and their relationship, the text then makes certain the reader is not. "But, as she," that is, Laura, "was saying," "her reverie," possibly concerning Carlota and her different ways of being, "filled

her with" the kind of "pleasure" that thrilled her entire existence (61). Fully aware that to have the red roses delivered to Carlota entailed a degree of "risk," of exposing her true desires, and that Carlota might be puzzled by Laura's not bringing the roses to her "personally," Laura then imagines what Carlota might say to her: "These things aren't necessary between us, Laura!," to which Laura would then "exclaim in a subdued cry of rapture, 'Oh, no! no!,'" it's "not because of the invitation to dinner! It is because the roses are so lovely that I felt the impulse to give them to you!'" (63). Or, the reader is led, at this moment, to suspect, could it be because Laura loves Carlota and wants, now, to show it, to let the person she loves know how she feels? In the context of the story, both interpretations are plausible, and neither diminishes the other; to the contrary, they enrich each other.

"And what exactly would happen next?" the text asks, intimating that something is going on here that exceeds the mere giving of a gift to one's dinner host (63). Laura, too, we now learn, had her own "secret feelings," and, if these have to do with her love, her passion, for Carlota, would be, quite understandably, "a little frightened" about making her feelings manifest (65). The roses in question, we are quickly told, were "perfect," they were hers, and she, Laura, was giving them to Carlota, the object of her desire (65).

But what would happen now? Would Carlota accept the perfect red roses, would she accept them in the spirit in which they were given (as a sign of the passionate love Laura has for her friend), and would the two women consummate (or possibly re-consummate) their love for each other? Or would she not?

We do not know; ambiguity reigns supreme in the story's final pages. If the reader now believes in the possibility of a blossoming love affair between the two married women, she would understand why, as Laura thinks to herself about why she and her husband did not "touch on the subject" and why "they did not speak about it (70). But, as far as Laura is concerned, this same "subject" made her "smile," a word repeated twice, perhaps, as a clue for the reader as to what Laura is now thinking about (70). Would one afflicted with it likely "smile" at the return of some form of mental illness? Or is Laura smiling about something else, something, perhaps, more pleasurable? It is at this point, at this same climatic juncture, that Laura then declares, "calmly and sweetly," to her husband, "It

came back, Armando, It came back" (70). But what is this "it?" What is it, the reader wonders, that came back? Laura's madness? Or her hitherto repressed love for Carlota? Or, conceivably, both, the one (her still socially unacceptable love for her friend) possibly serving as the seat of the other (her apparent mental distress)?

The closing scene of the story tends to underscore this line of interpretation. Laura is described, rather obliquely, in terms of her "not having been able to resist," though what it is, exactly, that she cannot resist is not made explicit (71). "I couldn't help myself," she says to her husband, then adding, "It was on account of the roses," the full symbolism of which is now more open to a variety of possibilities (71). Interestingly, Armando receives this news as might a man who has suspected his wife of being in love with another woman but who has avoided confronting what this might mean to him, as a middle-class husband in an otherwise conventional marriage. As the text puts it, "he averted his eyes, mortified by his wife's shamelessness as she sat there unburdened and serene" (71). If it were only the return of his wife's insanity that were at issue here, it seems unlikely that he would have been "mortified" to learn about it or that he would have been upset about his wife's alleged "shamelessness." The fact, moreover, that she is described here in the story's closing moments, as being, first, "unburdened and serene" and then "luminous and remote," suggests less that she has made peace with her madness and more that she has finally found peace in having given vent to her true desires, the consequences of which we can only speculate about (71, 72). The text's final words reinforce this line of thought. Armando is looking at Laura, whom he now sees as sitting upright on their couch, "alert and tranquil as if on a train. A train that had already departed" (72). If Laura is now gone for Armando, is it a real train that has taken his wife away, her mental illness, or her newly ignited love for Carlota? The text, and Clarice, leave it for each reader to decide.

In considering how she wishes to interpret this story, the reader is well advised to consider this as well: Although *Family Ties* was first published in English in 1972, and in Portuguese in 1960, it included six stories that Clarice had written and seen published several years earlier, in 1952, as *Alguns Contos* (*Some Stories*). "The Imitation of the Rose," which was likely completed early in 1955, was not one of those original six. This means that it, along with

several of the others, can be taken as an elaboration of the kinds of things, human relationships, gender, and female sexuality, that Clarice was mulling over already in the late 1940s and early 1950s and that infuse her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, in 1943. While love between women is only hinted at in the earlier novel, it could be seen as making a more pointed appearance in the later stories, and most especially in "The Imitation of the Rose."

Lesbianism, in fact, could also factor into Clarice's global appeal, and for people of all genders and sexual persuasions. At the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, studies show that love between women is steadily increasing in terms of its acceptance. And, perhaps, its appeal. In a late 30 December 1967 chronicle, "A Pleasant Interview," Clarice seems to contemplate this very possibility for herself. Upon meeting a young woman named Cristina whom Clarice has granted an interview, Clarice reports that she found her interlocutor "a most attractive and delightful girl" and that the two of them "took to each other immediately" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 81). In the process of describing a pleasurable conversation she then had with the young woman, Clarice explores less the content of the interview than the fast developing but intense relationship involving them. On this score, "A Pleasant Interview" could be said to exemplify what the French have in mind when they speak of *l'amour fou*, that suddenly altered state of being when one is unexpectedly engulfed by an overwhelming passion for another person. The narrative also leads us to consider how a friendship between women can blossom into sexual attraction (see Diamond 126–30, 137–70). Citing the research, Daniel Bergner asserts that women are biologically wired to be aggressive in terms of their sexual desire and that they manifest this aggressiveness in a variety of ways (1–41). This could help explain what happens here. So taken is Clarice with Cristina that, as the interview proceeds, she tells us she reclines "so far down on the sofa that" she "was almost lying on" her "back" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 83). Later, Clarice tells Cristina that her "boyfriend had better watch out" and invites her back so that the two of them can enjoy dinner together (83–84). The narrative ends with Clarice noting that she felt Cristina liked her, too, and that response made her "feel good" (84).

Are these details entirely innocent? Or do they suggest that something else is in play here, something erotic in nature? It is possible to read "A Pleasant Interview" merely as a discussion of an exchange that unexpectedly went well. But is something else involved, some spark of desire now linking Clarice and Cristina? The reader cannot be certain. But the two possibilities do not negate each other. Research done by Meredith Chivers suggests that sexual attraction between female strangers is especially potent. Of one of her experiments shows that "Genital blood throbbed when" an audiotape "described X-rated episodes with female friends—but the throbbing for female strangers was twice as powerful" (Chivers, qtd. in Bergner 25). Does this finding have relevance for our appreciation of the brief but seemingly intense relationship that develops between Cristina and Clarice? While Clarice is clearly not writing about the response of subjects to an experiment involving sexual response, the experience both described and alluded to here, a mutual attraction between two women who had not met before, could easily be one that many women (and men!) around the world identify with but are hesitant to articulate or act on. There is a scientific basis for thinking so. The honesty with which Clarice writes of this mysterious, tantalizing experience, moreover, one enhanced by the delicious ambiguity that envelops it, only adds to its very human appeal. It requires no procrustean rending of "The Imitation of the Rose" and "A Pleasant Interview" to read them in this fashion. Indeed, given what Clarice has already made clear about the need to both write and read "between the lines," and with words serving as bait to attract other words, or interpretations, it could be argued that, in these two cases, the reader is being invited to do exactly this, to consider something not obvious.

As investigator Kate Julian reports, "Pornhub, the top pornography website," recently "released its list of 2017's most popular searches. In first place, for the third year running, was *lesbian* (a category beloved by men and women alike)" (83). Research cited by Bergner confirms this conclusion, stressing that both men and women respond to sexually explicit material, and most especially that occurring between women (26, 13–28, 61–62).[12] While the reasons for this latter fact (that both men *and now women* enjoy lesbian pornography) are not entirely clear, one possibility is that

women around the world are beginning to see lesbianism as an increasingly viable alternative to heterosexual love. This could easily be the case in "The Imitation of the Rose," where Laura simply finds herself in love with Carlota, and in "A Pleasant Interview," where Clarice and Cristina are similarly smitten with each other. In *The Hour of the Star*, on the other hand, the question seems more an issue of male conduct than anything else, particularly though not exclusively of the violent, oppressive, and painful variety. Under these circumstances, the logical question would not be "Would the woman in question entertain the possibility of entering into a lesbian relationship?" but *why would she not*? What woman would freely choose a violent, abusive sexual relationship involving a man if she could be part of a happy and satisfying lesbian one? This is essentially the question Madame Carlota will pose to Macabéa in *The Hour of the Star* (74).

There are, of course, many other reasons why women might wish to enter into same-sex relationships. And many of them have nothing to do with men, violent or otherwise. As early as *Near to the Wild Heart* and "The Imitation of the Rose," Clarice was exploring this very issue. It was not alien to her vision of human reality, specifically that of women. As the research of Julian and Diamond shows, the times are changing with respect to sexual activity, and change, or, more specifically, our ability to change, anthropologists argue, "is our most important innate trait. Human beings are uniquely, biologically gifted at imagining new ways that people and the world could be" (Gopnik 35). Alison Gopnik, in fact, argues that it was the early twentieth century anthropologist, Margaret Mead, who first "showed how sexual patterns and expectations could vary and change," through time and between cultures (34). Among those who, like Julian, Bergner, and Diamond, study human sexuality scientifically today a

> consensus is gradually building on why women appear so different from men. Specifically, we have found that one of the fundamental, defining features of female sexual orientation is its fluidity ... Sexual fluidity, quite simply, means situation-dependent flexibility in women's sexual responsiveness ... Women of all orientations may experience variation in their erotic and affectional feelings as they encounter different situations, relationships, and life stages. (Diamond 3)

These findings tend to confirm an argument made in 1980 by poet, Adrienne Rich, to the effect that women who enjoy "intense bonds" with other women, even if these are not necessarily sexual in nature, form part of an arc of lesbian connection that ranges from "purely emotional relationships to sexual liaisons" (Diamond 5, see also Rich). By Rich's standard, Clarice, who enjoyed a long relationship with her companion, Olga Borelli, could, whether sex was involved or not, be considered a lesbian. Moreover, one would not be remiss in concluding that, as with Clarice and Cristina but also as with other of Clarice's female characters, two happy and well-adjusted women who found themselves attracted to each other might simply choose to deepen their relationship by becoming lovers. The old reasons for not making such a decision, or change—repressive religious training, social convention, timidity, and so forth—seem less and less to obtain. Intriguingly, this very idea emerges, briefly but openly, in the Clarice's great, late novel, *The Hour of the Star* (1977), which appeared shortly before her death in the same year. But, in truth, it was there, in Clarice's work, from the beginning.

The plot structure of the earlier, 1961 novel, *The Apple in the Dark* recalls "The Fox" of D. H. Lawrence, one of Clarice's favorite writers and one whom, writing in November 1971, she remembered "with affection" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 514). Is there a case of influence and reception here? It is not impossible to think so.

A common motif in Lawrence, here and elsewhere, has to do with the various forces that tug at men and women involved in erotic triangles, and this is true of both the novella, "The Fox," and Clarice's "dense slow moving" 1961 novel (Rabassa, Introduction, *Apple*). But, as Marta Peixoto has shown, it is also true of the 1943 novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*. In *The Apple in the Dark*, the heart of the plot structure centers on three people, two women (Vitoria and Ermelinda) living together in an isolated setting and a man who unexpectedly enters their life. As in "The Fox," the text of *The Apple in the Dark* is ambiguous as to exactly what manner of relationship the women have. While it is clear that, in both cases, they have a powerful emotional bond, it remains uncertain as to whether they also have a sexual relationship. In considering this possibility, it is worth noting that there is a major difference at play here; famously, or infamously, we know that Lawrence was

hostile to lesbianism, whereas Clarice, in her texts, at least, seems quite amenable to it. Then, too, it is worth nothing that "The Fox" is more about the two women, Nellie March and Jill Banford, than *The Apple in the Dark* is about its two women, Vitoria and Ermelinda. In Clarice's novel, moreover, it is the man, Martim, who has the novel built around him, although his relationships with the women, and most especially Vitoria, constitute a major part of his development as a character. *The Apple in the Dark* also differs from "The Fox" in that it features an additional woman, an unnamed woman known only as the *mulata*, also living on the farm operated by the two main female characters. She and the man, Martim, appear to enter into a sexual relationship, though his main relationship, psycho-sexual in nature, remains with the primary female character, the powerful and dominant Vitoria.

As in the Lawrence narrative, the novel's core structure is a function of the fluid and evolving nature of the complex relationship between the three main characters, Vitoria, Martim, and Ermelinda. If we think of Vitoria as being Clarice's version of Ellen (Nellie) March (both, for example, are depicted as dressing like men and giving orders), then Ermelinda could be seen as Jill Banford and Martim as both the young soldier, Henry Grenfel, and as the human manifestation of the fox, which, for Lawrence, serves as a symbol of masculine predation and sexual force. In contrast to the aggressive and manipulative interloper, Grenfel, however, Martim is much more muddled and confused, himself a victim of the same repressive and patriarchal structure that, the reader presumes, has made life difficult for Vitoria and Ermelinda. And while, for Lawrence, Jill Banford dies (struck down by a tree being felled by the man, Grenfel), and thus exits the narrative, leaving behind only Ellen and Henry to resolve, or not, the erotic conflict that had existed between the three of them, Clarice does not kill off Ermelinda; she lives on, thus allowing (inviting?) the reader to think that her relationship with Vitoria, in whatever form it takes, could continue on. For Clarice, indeed, it is the man, Martim, who must retreat from the farm—and from the domain of the women—and return, literally and figuratively as a captive, to the masculine society from which, at the beginning of the novel, he had been shown to be fleeing. For Clarice, the two women are able to continue living together and it is the man who has to leave their world.

In "The Fox," by way of contrast, a deeply conflicted Nellie March is coerced into considering a proposal of marriage from Henry. Jill Banford, Nellie's companion at the farm, objects passionately to the possibility that she might go off with Grenfel. After eventually committing to a life with Henry, however, Nellie realizes that, deep down, she harbors serious doubts as to whether she could ever be happy with him, with, in effect, the predatory man who has taken her, just as the fox had so violently done with the farm's chickens. In Clarice's novel, things turn out, as we have seen, quite differently, with the two women remaining together and the man forced to depart.

In addition to this possible connection with Lawrence, there is another writer, Anaïs Nin, who might also figure into the same equation with Clarice. Nin, who was influenced by Lawrence and who, in 1932, wrote a still highly respected critical study of his writing, is an author much of whose best work, famous for its erotic allure and its experimental nature, recalls that of Clarice. A clear difference, however, is that whereas for Nin the focus is more on the sexual act itself, in a text like *The Stream of Life*, it is language that is the erotic force. Here perhaps most nakedly, but elsewhere in Clarice's world as well, language use is a form of erotic expression and self-realization. For Nin, who, in works like *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds*,[13] wrote overtly (though not crudely) about sexuality, as for the Clarice of *Near to the Wild Heart*, *The Apple in the Dark*, and *The Stream of Life*, the critical difference between pornography and erotica was in what she felt was the latter genre's embracing of the techniques of poetry, a kind of writing that infuses Clarice's entire world, including, perhaps most notably, her erotic one (see also Ferreira-Pinto).

There is more to the Clarice/Nin comparison. In addition to Lawrence, Nin was influenced by Djuna Barnes,[14] a writer who has already been compared to Clarice (see Fitz, "Caracterização e a Visão Fenomenológica"). Further, Nin believed that the erotic language of men and women was quite distinct, this being a point of view to which Clarice, given her interest in androgyny, would not have entirely subscribed. Closer to Clarice's position, I suspect, is *Little Birds*, which, in contrast to *Delta of Venus*, explores not only physical love between women but the full range of female intercourse, both linguistic and non-linguistic and both social and sexual. It is in this latter context, that we see emerge the strongest affinities between Nin and Clarice.

While no one would ever equate a text like *The Stream of Life* with either *Delta of Venus* or *Little Birds* (both originally written at about the same time as Clarice was composing *Near to the Wild Heart*), these works do have in common a distinctly poetic form of expression. Clarice, however, goes further on this score than Nin. For the Brazilian writer, the techniques and values of poetry are deeply attuned to, and reflective of, the ways language, understood as a fluid semantic system, actually works. And, as Alexis Levitin declares, "Clarice Lispector is fundamentally a poet" (Afterword, *Soulstorm* 173). In contrast to Nin, poetry, for Clarice, is not merely a superior and enriching way of writing about a specific topic, in this case, the erotic impulse; it is more the linguistic equivalent of the erotic *frisson* of life itself. In the 1964 story, "The Message," in fact, poetry and sex are closely equated (see *The Foreign Legion* 34–35). For Clarice, poetic language pulsates just as life does, the two things becoming, in her best, most powerful moments, one in the same.

But while sex, or, perhaps better said, the force of human sexuality, appears everything in Clarice's world, it is never presented explicitly, or as the main point, as it is in pornography. There are no pornographic scenes in the writing of Clarice Lispector. There is eroticism, yes, and in abundance, but there is no pornography. In fact, the most explicitly sexual scene that Clarice offers us is more clinical than arousing. Coming, curiously, from what is almost certainly her least popular novel, *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights* (1969), there is a description of a sexual encounter between a woman and a man that has less to do with sexual congress than with the need for psychological transformation and with a new, and more egalitarian, way of being in love. In bed together, and nude, Lori and Ulysses are together trying to find this new way of dealing with each other. "She was not startled," the narrative voice tells us, "to feel his hand rest on her stomach. His hand was caressing her legs now. At that moment there was no passion between them, although she was filled with wonder as if starstruck. Then she extended her hand and touched his sex organ, which was quickly transformed, but he remained quiet. They both seemed calm and a little sad" (*Apprenticeship* 116).

In what must be considered one of the all-time worst examples of pillow-talk we have anywhere in world literature, Ulysses then says to Lori "Do you think love is making a mutual gift of one's

solitude? After all, it's the greatest thing that one can give of oneself" (116). While its point is well taken, and while it undoubtedly enhances one's mental and emotional health, this snatch of dialogue smacks more of what the careful psychiatrist would say to the patient than of the kind of vitally alive writing one expects from Clarice Lispector. The rich and alluring eroticism inherent in the orgasm-like language use that marks the story of Joana, of the characters in *The Apple in the Dark*, of G. H., in *The Stream of Life*, and in *A Breath of Life* puts to shame the wooden and all but lifeless narrative here.

But of all Clarice's texts, it is *The Stream of Life* that most celebrates what Francine Masiello terms "the pact" that exists "between eros [*sic*] and writing," the "infinite flows of meaning set in motion by sexuality and language" (219, 221). According to psychology professor, Gopnik, the renowned anthropologist, Margaret Mead, concluded much the same thing, arguing that "sex and ideas," which are formed, framed, and processed through language, "were inextricable" (Gopnik 34). It is the text in which "Eros and language mesh at every point," the one in which "Intercourse and discourse, copula and copulation," become "subclasses of the dominant fact of communication," whether with self or other (Steiner 38). And it is the Clarice text that, more than any of the others, is structured as if by waves of orgasmic pleasure. For Clarice, "Sex is a profoundly semantic act. Like language, it is subject to the shaping force of social convention, rules of proceeding, and accumulated precedent ... It is likely," posits George Steiner, "that human sexuality and speech developed in close-knit reciprocity" (Steiner 38, see also 41). Nowhere in Clarice's world is this bond between language and the orgasmic impulse more exquisitely felt than in the extraordinary fusion of narrative, poetry, philosophy, and erotic self-realization that is *The Stream of Life*.

Androgyny, as I have suggested, is a staple of Clarice's writing, and especially so after *The Passion According to G. H.*, and running to the end of her career.[15] In "The Departure of the Train," for example, the aged protagonist, one Maria Rita, speaks of having been "castrated by her daughter" (*Soulstorm* 103). And in "In Search of Dignity," a story from the same collection, a male character, Roberto Carlos, is described as having a "virginal-girlish face," one that ultimately produces "a climax" "without shame or guilt" for the seventy-year-old woman, Senhora Jorge B. Xavier,

who is the main character (*Soulstorm* 82, 83, 84). Presented in the form of gender blurring, the same issue takes center stage in the *crônica*, "Hateful Charity," where a little boy is "dressed in girl's clothes" to the point that he/she is referred to as "the baby boy-cum-girl" and, finally, as "that tiny hybrid infant" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 325, 326).[16] The concept of an existence freed of gender distinctions but nevertheless based in the body also drives *The Stream of Life*. "I'm still not ready to speak of 'him' or 'her,'" the text's narrative voice tells us (28). "I'm pure *it* that" is "rhythmically pulsating ... *It* is soft and is an oyster and is a placenta" (28).

And then there is the *Walpurgisnacht*-like "Where You Were At Night," which stands as one of the most intriguing narratives Clarice ever wrote. Opening not merely on a "night" but "in the midst of darkest night," one that alludes both to an absence of light and the dark of one's unfettered unconsciousness, "Where You Were At Night" tells us that a strange but compelling creature, "He-she," also known, in alternating fashion, as "She-he," "was already there at the top of the mountain, and she was personified in the he and he was personified in the she. The androgynous mixture had created a being so terribly beautiful, so horrifyingly stupefying, that the participants could not look at it all at once" (*Soulstorm* 114–15). A "mixing" of everything, "men, women, elves, gnomes, and dwarves," was taking place in the "darkness" and the "orgiastic" experience (115).

In "A Report on a Thing," also from *Soulstorm*, the narrative voice, which we can take as that of Clarice herself, writes that "The smell of the sea mixes masculine and feminine and there is born in the air a child who is" (139). Is this androgynous child another version of "he-she" / "she-he"? It seems entirely possible to think so—just as it also seems entirely possible to think of androgynous being as Clarice's vision of how human society ought to organize itself, as one in which female and male should circulate freely and equally, the one part enriching the other in an endless process of life affirming creativity.

Though not erotic, as is *The Stream of Life*, or even *Near to the Wild Heart*, *Soulstorm* ranks as the most openly sexual of Clarice's texts. Surprisingly, however, its sexuality is not arousing; rather, it functions, in story after story, as an expression of human, and especially female, solidarity. Built around references to a variety of sexual acts, including, as we have seen, lesbianism, voyeurism,

masturbation, geriatric sex, and transvestism, it also cultivates a series of sudden, surrealistic images involving sexual organs, birth, and female breasts.[17] And, given its time of publication and its uncoupling of eroticism and sexuality, it can also be read as possessing a powerful political message, one stressing the importance of women to Brazil's resistance to the dictatorship. Something Clarice says in her "Explanation," the short, rather sly statement of authorial intent that she offers, seems to suggest exactly this. Remarking on how one of her readers complained that the stories in *Soulstorm* were not "literature" but "trash," she says that she agrees, adding, however, that "there's a time for everything. There's also a time for trash," just as there is, in any society, a time for protest and resistance (4).

This same political awareness of the importance of women to post-dictatorship Brazil continues in Clarice's final novel, *The Hour of the Star*. Here, the marvelous character, Madame Carlota, who has tried them both, lauds lesbian love over heterosexual love; men are too violent, she says, though only after comically offering Macabéa a quick review of her experiences with men, including one she liked enough, on occasion, "to let him give me a good thrashing," which, she says, she "enjoyed" because "it was love," whereas with her other men the beatings were "simply a job" (*The Hour of the Star* 74). Rarely has the parallel between domestic abusive relationships and the abuse of the Brazilian people by the patriarchal dictatorship been more succinctly, or more wryly, depicted. "After he disappeared," Madame Carlota continues, as if also speaking of the generals, "I took up with another woman to try and forget him. To be loved by another woman," that is, one can think, by an open and democratic political system, "is really rather nice. It would even be preferable in your case," she avers to Macabéa, "because you're much too delicate to cope with the brutality of men. If you can find yourself a woman friend, you'll soon find out how nice it can be. Love between two women is more affectionate" (74).

At this point, the good Madame asks Macabéa the critical question: "Is there any chance of you finding yourself a woman friend?" (74). In a response the engaged reader finds both funny and tragic, Macabéa replies, "No, Madame" (74). Except for whatever consideration the reader brings to it, there is in the text itself no further explanation or discussion of the point. Macabéa's response just hangs there, painfully, in the original Portuguese and

in the translation. The reader understands the logic of Madame Carlota's point here; she is essentially correct, and the reader knows it. Once the dictatorship comes to an end, Brazil must not slide back into the old ways of male domination; it must move forward, and women, in Brazil and globally, must lead the way. But, Macabéa, who does not control language well enough to explain herself, even if she had wanted to do so, offers no further explanation for her decision. Nor does Madame Carlota or the narrator. It is left to the reader to decide the value of the quite reasonably posed question. Tragically, Macabéa is alone in the world, with no one to love and no one to love her, and the reader feels it. The scene, one loaded with both pathos and bathos, then continues on to take up other topics, including what is going to be Macabéa's "miserable" future—unless, the reader continues to wonder, she can find herself "a woman friend" (74, 75, also 75–77).

What is Clarice suggesting here? How is the reader to respond to it? If this is merely a throw-away line, a rhetorical question of little or no serious value, then why does Clarice devote so much time and attention to it? It could have been passed over much more quickly. But what if Madame Carlota's querying Macabéa about her seeking out a female lover is meant to be taken quite seriously, as an entirely viable alternative to love, or sex, with men? Or to oppressive structures in general? This line of interpretation seems quite reasonable; indeed, it seems even compelling, given the larger context in which it is presented.

One notable feature of the scene noted here is that it is shorn of all the poetic eroticism that drive so much of the female characterization in *Near to the Wild Heart* and *The Chandelier* and, in sharp contrast, here comes across as the cool and logical voice of experience; indeed, what Madame Carlota tells Macabéa is all but clinical in nature: "You'd be much better off with a female lover," the good Madame seems to tell her charge, "so why don't you heed my advice and take up with a woman?" And the charge of violence she levels against male lovers, and conservative patriarchal regimes, resonates today, I suspect, with readers around the world, male and female alike.

And yet there is room to wonder. Is this once again parody, as Peixoto has suggested with respect to the stories of *Soulstorm*, or serious advice (Peixoto 72–81)? Or both? Or something else entirely? It only adds to Peixoto's very convincing argument about

the earlier texts to consider the possibility that this scene, like so many of Clarice's scenes, suggests something in addition to a parodic rendering of the tired genre of male-oriented pornography, something that, in contrast to the latter but related to it, enriches and empowers female being and sexuality. And they do so by being both funny and transgressive.

There are ample reasons to think so. As we can surmise from the extant evidence, a global shift in sexual attitudes and mores could be in play, and this would directly influence how people around the world read Clarice's works. This seems likely to be true for young women today who could be more openly and honestly desirous of good sexual relations and with not feeling so stuck forever in bad sexual relationships and who therefore might regard the exchange between the experienced Madame Carlota and inexperienced Macabéa as being a form of seriously good advice.

Exactly this type of sexual alterity—and the powerful sense of human solidarity, and more specifically female solidarity, that goes with it, occurs in this same late novel. In this case, the pitiable waif, Macabéa, suffers shame when she masturbates, something that the film version of the novel[18] captures with more power than the written version, where it is only hinted at. As Macabéa slept, the narrator tells us, "she often dreamed about sex, she, who to all appearances was completely asexual. When she finally woke up, she was overcome by feelings of guilt without being able to explain why" (*Hour* 33). From her blighted perspective, "everything that" was "pleasurable" was either "forbidden" to her or beyond her reach (33). Later in the novel, the same narrator declares "I forgot to mention that Macabéa had one unfortunate trait: she was sensual. How could there be so much sensuality in a body as withered as hers ...?" (60). Seeing Macabéa's pitiable plight, which, as the text notes, obscures the powerful sensuality that nevertheless courses through her constantly, serves as a powerful reminder that even the most wretched among us know desire. And, as the novel suggests and as the film make clear, Macabéa masturbates because of the psychological and physical imperative *of* desire. We all understand this, what the poor girl is experiencing, in her dreams if not in her life. The film version of *The Hour of the Star* devotes ample attention to both the desire for pleasure that she feels and the guilt she also feels when, awakening from a deep sleep, or from a state of reverie, she realizes what she is doing and

immediately stops, seemingly ashamed and embarrassed. And her solitary masturbation occurs in a room full of women all of whom suffer from the same economic deprivation that afflicts Macabéa; there is, among these oppressed women, no discernible sense of solidarity, sexual or otherwise, and this is a pain both the global reader and viewer feel acutely.

Women long oppressed by society's overwhelmingly male condemnations of masturbation, and, like Macabéa, burdened by a crushing sense of guilt about practicing it, may well see in Clarice's novels and stories a powerful antidote, one that celebrates masturbation and that frees women (and men) to practice it without shame and as a form of self-satisfaction, of pleasure.[19] Indeed, the practice of self-satisfaction is one of the very few pleasures available to them. And, as we see in several of the stories of *Soulstorm*, as a way of coping with the loneliness too often imposed on us by life. The plight of eighty-one-year-old Dona Candida Raposo, in whom "the desire for pleasure" had not passed away, is particularly poignant ("Footsteps," *Soulstorm* 48). In discussing the issue with her doctor, Dona Candida decides to "take care of it" by herself, and so "That very night she did what she could and, along, satisfied herself" (49). But the outcome was not what she had hoped for. It was, instead, "Silent fireworks," and "Afterward she cried. She was ashamed. From then on, she used the same method. It was always sad" (49). "That's life, Senhora Raposo," we're told, "until the blessing of death" (49).

In the story, "In Search of Dignity," another mature woman desperately seeks "a climax," one that could be referring to a desire for a life that would have yielded a more satisfying result but that here is given an overwhelmingly sexual context (*Soulstorm* 83). Though the mirror shows her, externally, to be "dried up" and lifeless, Senhora Jorge B. Xavier knows that on the inside she was alive and "moist" with desire (82). "Lost in the corridors of her sensuality," as Barbosa points out, and burdened by the sexual taboos that constrict women of her age, "Mrs. Xavier feels ashamed of her body's disobedience and embarrassed about the impropriety of such a discourse. Her body assumes the complex and multipurposed structure of the labyrinths of ancient times: it generates and constrains the demons of her sensuality" (43). Aching to come, she is painfully aware of dealing with "the insurrection" of her almost seventy-year-old body and the force with which it carried her to "a

dark passageway of sensuality" (83). Worried that "lechery" would be "her damnation," and that hers "was a lowly hunger," she also knew that, no romantic, "she was coarse in matters of love" and that she "wanted to eat" her would-be lover's "mouth" (83). Alone in her bed, she then cries out, as if in orgasm—before sinking back into the "shattering silence" of her lonely existence (84).

In discussing this topic (a change in how women in 2020 see relationships with other women that may or may not involve sex) with one of the subjects involved in her study, reporter Julian writes that she, the young woman in question,

> and various platonic female friends—most of whom identified as straight—were starting to play roles in one another's lives that they might not be playing if they had fulfilling romantic or sexual relationships. For instance, they'd started trading lesbian-porn recommendations, and were getting to know one another's preferences pretty well. Several women also had a text chain going in which they exchanged nude photos of themselves. "It's nothing but positivity," Julian's subject said, "describing the complimentary texts they'd send one another in reply to a photo ('Damn, girl, your *tits*!'). She wasn't ready to swear off men entirely. But, she said, "I want good sex." (Julian 92)

This woman's very human, very understandable desire for "good sex" would seem quite close to Madame Carlota's own feelings and to be the driving force behind her advice to the novel's protagonist, Macabéa—that she should try to find herself a female lover because "love between women is more affectionate" (*Hours* 74). Madame Carlota's advice to Macabéa seems to be consistent with what sex researcher Diamond argues is a defining aspect of female sexuality—an "openness" that can accommodate different kind of relationships and "unexpected feelings and experiences" (164). Given the evidence that researchers are finding (Julian 80–94), it is not impossible to imagine that the good Madam's recommendation about what she (and others) see as the superiority of love between women could be resonating with readers (and especially female readers) around the world. Why would it not be? And why, Clarice's wonderful character, Madame Carlota, asks, would battered, sexually frustrated women who feel they have to endure violent, painful sex with men *not* consider sexual relationships with other women? While there certainly are other reasons for doing so, this is a valid one, too.

Though taken up less often than female homosexuality, male homosexuality is also depicted in Clarice's narratives. This theme is taken up, one can think, in "A Sincere Friendship,"[20] where, though not explicitly sexual (indeed, the text seems to carefully avoid this), it is both more developed and more allusive than Clarice's female relationships. Since this story dates from 1964, the year Brazil's military dictatorship installs itself, it also seems to call for a socio-political reading (the injustice of repression, specifically the repression of male homosexuality by society's conservative factions). Read on its own, however, the story seems like a small tragedy about the complexities of human love. Including the kind of love known as friendship. No where does what can here easily be taken as the amorous passion enjoyed by two young men receive any measure of condemnation or censure; rather, it appears merely as yet another form of human sexual expression, one as real and as subject to the ups and downs of love as are heterosexual unions.

At first glance, "A Sincere Friendship" comes across as a mysterious but intense text, one ripe with suggestive statements and references. For a reader interested in psychoanalysis, it could be taken as a kind of "coming to terms with" account of Clarice's love for the gay writer, Lúcio Cardoso, who was a close friend of hers.[21] But the same story can also be read as a study of the difficulties of being bisexual in early 1960s Brazil (and elsewhere, since nothing in the text specifically references Brazil). It can also be taken as a poignant consideration of the pain and frustration involved in being a closeted gay man—anywhere. The story opens with what comes across as a summary of a torrid love affair between two male "friends." Or is it a tale of a torrid friendship between two friends? Eventually, the two men move in with each other, at which point the text pointedly speaks of "our apartment," "our books," "our friendship," and "our home" ("A Sincere Friendship," *The Foreign Legion* 79). But are they merely friends and roommates or are they lovers, seeking their own place, domestically and in society at large? These references involving communality (not *mine* but *our* this and *our* that) could easily be interpreted as signs of a solid and committed relationship, one based on love and mutual support. But, in a more political context, it could be read as what a free and just society needs to do, how it needs to think (collectively and always including "the other") about itself and the different people who make it up, if it wishes to survive. Defending the rights of

others, even, or especially, when we do not agree with them is crucial for a healthy, functioning democracy.

All goes well for a time, but then an unidentified complication arises. This could involve the relationship between the two men but it could also suggest some form of conflict between their relationship and established social mores, a society's so-called morality laws. And, as noted above, it could also call attention to Brazil's falling prey to the dictatorship. But whether one reads the text as a love affair gone awry, a clash between one's sexual proclivities and social convention, or as a political allegory about the imposition of the dictatorship in a fragmented Brazil, there is textual evidence for viewing the unfettered pursuit of self-interest as the culprit. In life and in society (and especially for a democracy), the text implies, selfishness is a destructive force.

The crisis of the story then arrives when one of the young men encounters some again not specified "trouble with the Authorities" (80).[22] The fact that the word is capitalized (as it is in the original Portuguese) and then, a few lines later, repeated, suggests that it is intended to pique the reader's interpretive attention. And indeed it does, as this part of the story seems strongly to suggest that Clarice is here using a gay relationship to cloak a call for an organized political resistance to the new and very repressive state of military rule that has seized power. Both (possible) love between same-sex adults and democratic self-rule are under attack. At the end, the still unnamed young men are described as being "worn out and disillusioned," from struggling to live their lives together and to survive as citizens of a democracy—and, Clarice's global reader today might well conclude, in an increasingly authoritarian, oppressive, and undemocratic world, one still reluctant to accept gay people as equals.

Although one can read "A Sincere Friendship" in different ways, it does, even at the surface level, seem to deal with a relatively short but intense love affair between two males who are found out and who are charged with having violated some sort of unnamed law. A "morality" statute, for example. Everything is opaque and murky, however, and left for the reader, who is also a voting citizen, to decide.

Male homosexuality is also featured, and more openly, in two stories from *Soulstorm*. The first of these, "He Soaked Me Up," deals with a male hairdresser and make-up artist who is gay.

"Good-looking," and "tall and slender," Serjoca "wanted nothing from women. He liked men" (*Soulstorm* 36). As the story progresses, the reader learns that both he and his friend, Aurelia Nascimento, were smitten by a forty-year-old manufacturer and industrialist, Affonso Carvalho. And, sadly, they enter into a competition for his attention. Like Aurelia, Serjoca "was on fire for Affonso," who would, ultimately, reciprocate Serjoca's desires (38). At dinner one evening, "Affonso spoke mostly with Serjoca, hardly looking at Aurelia," who, with Serjoca's expert help, had gone to great lengths to make herself look attractive (39). But it was to no avail; Affonso "was interested in the young man" (39). But because the story is more about Aurelia than Serjoca, it ends unhappily, with her concluding that she was "nothing anymore," just "a human face. Sad. Delicate.," and that, in recognizing this, "She had just been born. Nas-ci-men-to" (39).

The second story, "Plaza Mauá," is more complicated in terms of plot and features another pair of working-class comrades, if not exactly friends, a young man, Celsinho, and a female dancer, Luisa (whose stage name is Carla), who works at a club, "The Erotica." Because of his sexuality, however, here Celsinho is presented as "a man who wasn't a man," a description that smacks of the concept of gender as a social construct that the story probes (*Soulstorm* 55). A "successful transvestite," Celsinho listened to all of Luisa's concerns and complaints about life and love, just as a good friend, or loyal compatriot, would do, and, in turn, "gave her advice" (55). Importantly, in a political context, and in contrast to what happens in "He Soaked Me Up," Celsinho and Aurelia, though different, did not compete with each other and they did not antagonize each other. They were both struggling to make a living and to live happy, productive lives, but they "weren't rivals. They each worked their own turf. Celsinho came from the nobility. He had given up everything to follow his vocation," being a "successful transvestite" (55). Celsinho did not dance, as Luisa/Carla did, but he did "wear lipstick and false eyelashes. The sailors of the Plaza Mauá loved him," we learn, but, hilariously, "he played hard to get. He gave in only at the very end. And," the very real economic issue coming into play once again, "he was paid in dollars," which he then invested (55).

The sadness that marks the end of the story derives from the problem of gender. Celsinho, who is a man who, by conventional

(that is to say, patriarchal) standards, is not a man, shows himself to be a better parent than does Luisa/Carla, who, again by conventional standards, cannot do the things associated with being a woman and a mother. The normative gender roles are reversed here; the biological man will emerge as more of a woman than the biological woman is. Sadly, this causes conflict. Late in the story, Celsinho and Luisa/Carla, who up to this point have been mutually supportive, fall prey to a spat over the question of who is "a real man" and who is "a real woman" (57). Even in the liberating atmosphere of the club Erotica, which is "full of men and women" seeking what they cannot find, or have, in the repressive social, political, and economic structure that surrounds them, contention is a threat to their happiness. Both Luisa/Carla and Celsinho/Moleirão (the latter being Celsinho's nickname as a transvestite in the club) are attracted to "a tall man with broad shoulders," and this provokes a schism between them, just as in a society of scarcity one group ends up fighting with another for meager resources (57). "You," screams Celsinho/Moleirão at Luisa/Carla, "are no woman at all! You don't even know how to fry an egg! And I do! I do! I do!" (57).

Shaken to her core by these angry words from her former compatriot, "Carla turned into Luisa. White, bewildered. She had been struck in her most intimate femininity" (57). Angry and hurt, but also confused, she exits the club into the dark night. Outside and now alone, and feeling both lowly and utterly vulnerable, Luisa/Carla suddenly realizes that "It was true: she didn't know how to fry an egg. And Celsinho was more of a woman than she" (58). Then, as the text makes explicitly clear, the only person left at the end is neither Celsinho/Moleirão nor Carla; it is Luisa, the unhappily married woman who, like "Many other mothers and housewives went" to the Erotica "for the fun of it and to earn a bit of pocket money" but who now may not even find solace and satisfaction there (57). The reader is left thinking that Luisa has no where to go now except back to the dismal life as a wife she'd had before and from which she had sought to escape via the club Erotica.

Clarice's writing exudes erotic force to the very end. Even the posthumous *A Breath of Life* shows it. In *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights*, one of the few Clarice Lispector narratives to feature a happy ending, the female protagonist, a young woman

named Lori, finds the complete love, both psychological and physical in nature, that she seeks. Though no stranger to sexual experience, satisfaction, in sex and in life, has eluded her. In the novel's conclusion, the text is quite explicit in telling us that it is she who takes the man's penis in her hands and that it is she who initiates sexual congress. Significantly, this climactic scene is not pornographic in the least, yet neither is it what we would call clinical. But it is deeply, poignantly human, and in this it is vintage Clarice Lispector.

Boyed up by living in a time when scientific evidence shows overwhelmingly that issues of gender and sexuality are not binary and static but adaptable and evolving, women and men around the world can see themselves in the work of Clarice Lispector (see Rippon; also Williams). Neuroplasticity is all, throughout life. And through it they can see themselves in a positive, life-affirming light. Highlighted by its women but inclusive of men as well, hers is a world in which sexual fluidity and non-binary gender identification emerge if not necessarily as the norm, then certainly as perfectly normal and natural states of being.

Chapter Five

Clarice and God

Omnipresent in her work, God remains a slippery subject in Clarice Lispector's world. Reading her work from beginning to end, it is possible to conclude that there are three kinds of God in Clarice's world: there is the Christian God (whose presence reflects Clarice's life as a Jewish woman living in a nominally Christian culture), there is the Hebrew God (whom we feel as being closely connected to questions of language and interpretation), and there is God understood in terms of how she, he, or it should be. This God exists as a concept, a force, we hope, for truth, justice, and understanding, but one who seems always at odds with, or indifferent to, our fraught human condition. Of these three categories, it is the latter one that occupies the bulk of Clarice's attention.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that Clarice's awareness of her Jewish roots was not a significant factor in her understanding of God. For Benjamin Moser, in fact, "part of Clarice's odd grammar can be traced to the powerful influence of the Jewish mysticism to which she was introduced by her father" ("Glamor and Grammar" xx). Arguing that Clarice's intellectual "roots" lie "in Jewish mysticism," Moser further contends that "As the Kabbalists found divinity by rearranging letters, repeating nonsensical words, parsing verses, and seeking a logic other than the rational, so did Clarice Lispector" ("Glamor and Grammar" xxi). In one of her 1971 newspaper columns, "To the Rhythm of My Typewriter," Clarice references the Talmud, noting that in it "there are some things one must reveal to others, things one can reveal to some, and things one must reveal to no one" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 446). Clarice goes on to wonder whether she is capable of understanding these things, concluding that "certain truths" cannot be "put into words" (446). Underscoring the sense of the ineffable that so marks her

texts, she then then makes a critical and, seemingly, very personal distinction: "No. I am not referring to God: truth is my secret" (446). Along these same lines, Moser concludes that "to see Clarice Lispector's writing as a whole is to understand the close connection between her interest in language and her interest in what—for lack of a better word—she called God" ("Glamor and Grammar" xxi).[1]

In two often cited essays, "A Expressão Judaica na Obra de Clarice Lispector" ("Judaic Expression in the Work of Clarice Lispector"; 1989) and "A 'Linguagem Espiritual' de Clarice Lispector" ("The Spiritual Language of Clarice Lispector"; 1987), scholar Nelson H. Vieira examines the presence of Jewish culture in Clarice's work. In the 1987 study, "A 'Linguagem Espiritual' de Clarice Lispector," Vieira compares the character of Macabéa, from *The Hour of the Star*, with both the biblical Maccabees and with Moses, while in the 1989 essay, "A Expressão Judaica na Obra de Clarice Lispector," Vieira avers that while Clarice certainly came from Jewish stock, she considered herself more Brazilian than Jewish. This led to a certain complexity in terms of how Clarice saw her personal identity, which was deeply hybrid, a condition many people around the world would immediately recognize and sympathize with. Vieira also calls attention to the Talmudic qualities of the novel's style and elaborates on his earlier comparison of Macabéa and the famous Maccabee defenders. He further considers Clarice's thinking about death and how it can be read in terms of Jewish tradition, "which," "sensibly grounded in the here and now," "lacks," according to James Wood, "the intense emphasis on the afterlife characteristic of Islam and Christianity."[2] The Clarice-like voice of *The Stream of Life*, for example, denounces "the delirious horror of death" and sees her post-death reality only, but quite specifically, in terms of language, which "continues on" (77, 79). In addition, Vieira discusses how the function of the star in *The Hour of the Star* recalls not merely the hopeless and utterly absurd desire of its protagonist to achieve the celebrity status of film star Marilyn Monroe and the insignia of Mercedes-Benz automobiles but the history behind the Star of David (see also Varin 178). Vieira's work explains how, as a writer and as a person, Clarice negotiated her life as a woman of Jewish ancestry and as the daughter of a devout father who resided in a Christian culture. And while it is clear that Clarice defined herself

as a Brazilian, it is also clear that, as a writer, she made extensive use of images and themes germane to both Judaism and Christianity.[3]

Clarice's referencing of God, a constant querying in her post-1949 narratives, rarely, if ever, seems to stem from any kind of orthodox religious belief on the part of the author. Rather, it seems more of a personal quest for affirmation—and, more generally, for a kind of final authority, a way of knowing and being, and of dealing with a nagging fear that one has been abandoned by God.[4] Or that the whole idea of God is merely a myth, a story that we tell ourselves in our human quest for order and meaning in life, which many people experience as an unfathomable admixture of pain and pleasure. "God," thinks Angela Pralini, the protagonist of "The Departure of the Train," "if you exist, reveal yourself! For the hour has come. It is this hour, this minute, and this second. And the result was that she had to hide the tears that came to her eyes. God in some way had answered her. She was happy and swallowed a sob. How painful life was. Living was an open wound" (*A Breath of Life* 103).

Clarice's are not religious texts as this term is understood conventionally or by someone who believes in a particular religious creed, who is interpreting the world from that perspective, or who finds comfort and solace in her or his belief. Though her stories, novels, and columns regularly mention God, she could not be considered a religious writer. Nor is she one who deals with religious issues, except, possibly, in a philosophical sense. Taking a different tact, Clarice's near constant referencing of God concerns itself more with how we think and make decisions and how we live out our lives. Why do we human beings seem to need if not a real God then certainly the concept of God, Clarice and her texts ask, and, once discovered or created, what are we to make of her—or him, or it? In this sense, one can see an affinity between Clarice and Spinoza, "who rejected a creator God but saw God as an eternal substance in all creation" (Cep 70).

But even this essentially pantheistic avenue of understanding becomes problematic in Clarice's world. "Were God to exist," we are told by the narrative voice of *Near to the Wild Heart*, "surely He would abandon" the natural world of "pure air," a "summer's evening," and "lush trees" as being "too clean by far" (30). While we can delight in envisioning God in trees, flowers, and a bird

on the wing, it is more difficult to do so when we are confronted with the problem of people, also said to be God's creatures, doing monstrous things to each other—and often invoking God's name as they do them.

This early connection between Spinoza and Clarice, however, becomes explicit in the same text when the character, Otávio, thinks to himself, "Neither understanding nor volition pertain to God's nature, Spinoza affirms" (*Near to the Wild Heart* 114). What is interesting here is that while it is Joana's husband who formulates these words, the reader understands that their real significance comes alive only with respect to Joana. And, in a critical distinction between the two characters, while Otávio, who is obsessed with order and rigidly structured thought, is depicted here writing a meticulously crafted legal essay, Joana, who is the quintessence of fluidity, and of fluidity of thought, writes poetry (114–15). For Clarice, as for Walt Whitman, another great American poet, God can be seen everywhere and heard "in all things" (Edmundson 104). For Clarice, however, the problem is understanding; what do we mean, she asks, when we claim that we see and hear God in all things? And why do we feel compelled to make such a declaration? For Clarice, the very existence of God becomes a questionable point, though nowhere does Clarice openly and directly take up this issue as such; her writing is not a matter of theological debate. It has to do with the seemingly incomprehensible nature of God and the human condition. Also moot are the questions her texts raise about God's gendering, the ethics of his, or her, apparent acceptance of violence, hatred, and cruelty, and our human confusions about who and what God is and of God's relationship to us.

In "Day By Day," a story from *Soulstorm*, Clarice gives the typically male gendering of God a going-over, one that also engages the issue of violence. In a voice that sounds very much like that of the real Clarice Lispector, the text tells us the female narrator is going to tell the reader a story about a girl named Nicole and her older brother, Marco. Nicole teases Marco about his long hair, saying it makes him look like "a woman," to which Marco responds with a violent kick, "because," we are told, in a line dripping, one feels, with sarcasm, "he's a real little man" ("Day By Day," *Soulstorm* 46). Absorbing the blow but unvanquished, Nicole then retorts, "But don't worry about it. God is a woman!" (46).

We quickly learn that, as Nicole whispers this not to her father but to her mother, the girl does not really believe that God is a woman but, for the reader, the seed has been planted. Why can't we think of God as female? Why are we prohibited from doing so? Why does it have to be "God, He ...?" No fool, Nicole also knows that she doesn't want to "get beaten up" by her brother, the word evoking ironic connotations about religious people who love to speak sanctimoniously of how we should take care of our brothers and sisters but who, in practice, don't really do that (46). In the universe of Clarice Lispector, even simple words we think, or assume, we understand, lead us to question established verities and to confront, honestly, new and challenging realities.

Now broached, the issue of God, gender, and violence is quickly complicated by two additional stories, one told by Nicole to her cousin whose behavior one day at their grandmother's house led to her getting "such a slap" from her grandma that she was "knocked cold," and one from Marco, who relates how the same grandma once hit him so hard he "slept for a hundred years" (46). Women as well as men, Clarice's story makes clear, are fully capable of violent acts, and while no explicit connection is made between God and "grandma," the family matriarch, the reader is led to contemplate it.

This dilemma, our fraught relationship with God, gets something of a comic treatment in "Forgiving God," a chronicle, dated 19 September 1970 (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 406–09). Here, a woman, pondering the nature of God and her relationship to Him, unexpectedly drops her mystical reverie when, on the iconic and quite posh Avenida Copacabana, in Rio de Janeiro, she steps on a dead rat. This unsettling event then leads her to wonder what God was trying to tell her with this sign. At this point, the narrative becomes a jarringly funny mix of the ethereal and the grotesquely real. Subtly, it also gets at the ancient and seemingly intractable problem of people who do horrible things in the world, a world we like to think is controlled by our concept of God. Unless we envision a God who is cruel and who enjoys causing human suffering, how can our God allow these atrocities to happen? What does God want of us, we wonder as we read Clarice, and what do we want of God? These questions, riven with the well-known problems of failure (our failure to understand God) and frustration that accompany them, is one that millions

of Clarice's readers will identify with for it amounts to a moving and sympathetic statement about the truth of our parlous human predicament.

In a late 1968 "crônica," Clarice, of Jewish heritage, writes that she "was not religious" (Lispector, "My Christmas," *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 212; see also Varin 223). She says this even though God is a constant player in the intellectual peregrinations that characterize her texts, and especially her longer ones. Eight years later, and discussing how hard she prayed that her mother might be allowed to live longer, Clarice declares much the same thing: "But she died and for a long time I stopped believing in God. I'm in that anti-mystical and unbelieving frame of mind again" (Lowe, "The Passion According to C. L." 37). But then she adds, "But at the same time, I feel strong and alive and I'm working again" (37). While she does not say anywhere that she is an atheist, Clarice's position with respect to God, or to our human thinking about God, is perhaps more easily understood if we remember that "in Greek, *atheos* means 'without gods,' not anti-God" (Cep 71; see also Moser, *Why This World* 105, 321). In Clarice's case, the distinction is telling, for, as Martin Buber argued, "the human need for God" did not necessarily result in a belief in God (Kirsch 64). This may well be the Brazilian writer's case, as it is for millions of people around the world. The result, with Buber as with Clarice, is the creation of a special kind of *Angst*, one that afflicts people who are less religious believers than seekers of meaning.

In a column published earlier in 1968, one entitled "God," Clarice asks: "Even for non-believers, there is a dubious question: What comes after death?" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 102). Continuing on with this referencing of the non-believer, she then declares that "God must come" to her since she has "not gone to Him ... I need God," she admits, adding "Come to me, God, before it is too late" (102). Reflecting the anxiety of human beings in the face of such momentous questions, Clarice then goes on to say, as if seeking to clarify her own predicament, "There is a great silence inside me. And that silence has been the source of my words" (103).

For Clarice, the question of guilt, so prominent in world literature and, to a degree, in her personal life,[5] is typically cast less in orthodox religious terms than in human terms.[6] This helps ex-

plain, for example, the line that appears late in the 1961 novel, *The Apple in the Dark*, when the narrative voice declares, enigmatically, that "we are not so guilty after all; we are more stupid than guilty" (361). In our more honest moments, we all understand this. And, in fact, the words "stupid" and "stupidly" occur so often in *The Apple in the Dark* as to become deeply humanizing motifs of it. Prisoners in endless webs of words, in the often conflicting and self-deluding systems of thought they produce, and in the throes of social, political, religious, and economic leaders who lie to us, we are prone to making stupid decisions. And to not learning from them. But can we? Can we really be "guilty" of something we cannot help, of something that is beyond our control? Are we, as we read in *The Apple in the Dark*, really "more stupid than guilty?" But if that is true, then should we not feel guilty for acting as stupidly, as selfishly, and as cruelly as we so often do? This would seem to be the spirit that animates *The Hour of the Star*, the disturbing thought that we who could make things better fail to do so. That kind of guilt is excruciating for a particular kind of human being, like Clarice Lispector, who feels responsibility for the suffering of others.

While, as Clarice's texts tell us, it may not be exactly edifying to think of ourselves as being more stupid than guilty, but it may well be an accurate description of how we make decisions and live out our lives. The problem of free will, for example, unites several if not all of Clarice's narratives, and relates directly to how we define ourselves, how we choose to relate to other people, and how we view our social and political responsibilities. And in being accurate and honest about how life really is, and in not blaming us for our ignorance and confusion, Clarice's text offers the reader some measure of solace. Because they accurately describe much of our doubt riddled and error plagued human experience, novels like *The Apple in the Dark*, *The Passion of G. H.*, and *The Hour of the Star* reflect a tangled, conflicted, and all but indecipherable condition that most people know only too well. We never know for certain what to do or what to believe, and this is a dilemma we human beings can recognize—and accept. We know it well. All too well, perhaps, a point discerned with acuity by Clarice's global audience.

A careful review of Clarice's writing, her fiction as well as her non-fiction, reveals a constant connection between the nature of God, as we imagine him, or her, to be (and as we wish her or him to be), and the issue of silence.[7] For Clarice, the problem of silence

applies to both the sender and the receiver of messages, that is, to both God and the human creature. While we know perfectly well how confused we are as human beings, what bothers us is the possibility that even what we envision as God suffers from silence, that God, too, is enveloped by silence and exists in it. Clarice was cognizant of this, and it is a constant of her work (see Fitz, "A Discourse of Silence"). In *The Stream of Life*, the narrative voice declares that she is "fearful of God and of His silence" (21). This concern also plays a role in the short piece, "Silence," where she tells us that "hours are lost in the darkness, imagining that the silence is judging" us, only to discover that "we wait in vain to be judged by God" and that, "humiliated from birth," God and silence may be the same thing (*Soulstorm* 151). Late in her life and career, in the 1977 novel *The Stream of Life*, she writes, as she contemplates her existence as an "orgy behind thought," an "orgy of words," that both God and our concepts of God are "an enormous silence," and to consider this possibility "terrifies her" (70). So recurring a presence that it becomes, finally, a leitmotif of her work, silence means many things to Clarice (see Librandi 140–50; also Namorato). In an earlier work, *The Apple in the Dark*, as Gregory Rabassa points out, the "symbolism" she employs to speak of silence, along with that of darkness, "is both biblical and Darwinian" (Introduction, *The Apple in the Dark* xiii). Silence functions, in the beginning of the 1961 novel, as a powerful harbinger of imminence, though in the end it loses its energy as a conveyer of revelation and the gaining of knowledge and falls back into the silence of ignorance and misunderstanding. And language lies, restively and opaquely, at the heart of it all. The concept of the *Ur-Sprache*, the original, pre-Babel language of God that permitted perfect communication in all respects and between all people and God, speaks directly to this issue (see Steiner 58–59, also 43, 64–68).

In the novel's last two pages, however, Clarice suggests that perhaps even God, presented here as an all-knowing and authoritative father figure, is subject to confusion and uncertainty as well. Twice on the novel's final page the phrase "In the name of God" is used, and, in both cases, as a plea for someone, the construct we imagine as God (always white and male) or the people (men once again) who serve as society's keepers and law givers, to know "what they were doing" (*Apple* 361). Infusing this final page of *The Apple in the Dark* is the fear that no one does, not even God. And this pros-

pect terrifies us. Yet it may be the truth of the human condition. As Rabassa puts it, Martim, the protagonist, "wants language, but he also rejects the form in which he has known it," a form in which society chooses to regard as absolute what he now knows to be arbitrary and relative—the meaning of words, even those we want to regard as sacred or divine (Introduction xiii). As Clarice intimates here, the socio-political consequences of this realization are enormous; they affect everything, from our ability to see human existence, and indeed human society, as a stable, manageable affair, to our thoughts concerning love, justice, and human relationships.

But, as Clarice's texts force us to consider, to believe that life, its institutions, and intellectual systems are more stable than they really are is to live a lie. Although we may not be better off for doing so, she intimates, as is the case with Martim at the end of his novel, we should, as human beings who want to understand, choose to confront the truth of our condition (see Rabassa, Introduction xvi). For *homo sapiens*, "religious experience" can be comprehended as "a natural human quest for meaning" (James Wood 93). And we should try to deal with life from a clear-eyed realization about this truth. Martim's "struggle for language," the one human invention we hope can order and explain the world, stands, for the reader, as the "symbolic track of the futility of his rebirth and rebuilding as," finally, and now defeated, "he goes back to what he had been before," to the same condition, that of a man trapped in an impenetrable but also indecipherable web of words, from which he had earlier sought to escape (Rabassa, Introduction xviii, xiv). While we humans seem fated to stumble around in the darkness of our ignorance, and hoping all the while not to drop the apple, the supposed fruit of the tree of knowledge, in the muddle of our own confusion, we also know, if we are being honest, that this is the human dilemma—though tantalized by it, we will never gain the perfect understanding (a function of language) that we so anxiously seek (see xv-xvi). It will forever elude us, and, like G. H., Martim, and a host of other of Clarice's characters, we know this. We create a host of systems of thought, religion, and law, for example, but also philosophy and poetry, to try and control or at least mitigate this basic uncertainty, but, on some level, we know it's there. We know, too, that its ineradicable presence is an inescapable truth of our common human condition, and we love Clarice for putting its mystery into words and confronting it for us.

God plays a more prominent role in Clarice's later narratives. In *The Passion According to G. H.,* for example, God and the law are conjoined in what seems a larger context of Jewish mysticism (88–89); there are, we learn, "forbidden words," words that, sometimes pointing to the "impure," can be neither spoken or understood (*The Stream of Life* 77, also 7, 63). But while the Kabbalistic tradition plays a major part in *The Passion According to G. H.,* so, too, do the traditions of Christianity, a fact borne out in the title itself and in several moments in the text. In one of the most famous of these moments, when G. H. enacts a kind of profane communion when she puts into her mouth the residual matter of a cockroach she has killed by smashing it. As she expresses it, with a characteristically enigmatic syntax, "I was putting my mouth into the matter of life," of life itself and at its most primitive level (Lispector, *Passion* 71). As grotesque as this scene can appear at the level of a surface reading, it appeals to readers around the world because it deals with something common to the human creature: our desire to be part of life. While, as humans, we are aware that to understand our place in the great swirl of life we need God, or the idea of God, we do not know what this means or how it should manifest itself. And, at bottom, we are not certain God really exists or if she, or he, or it is a merely a figment of our imagination, a sign of our parlous condition and of our need to know and understand the nature of our existence. As the voice of this 1964 novel declares, "I don't know what it is I'm calling God, but it can be called that" (*Passion* 143, see also 125 for a similar utterance).

God "enables us," the voice of G. H. avers, but in a way that links both the problem of people who do terrible, violent things in the world and the question of responsibility that accompanies this reality (144). If God exists, why does he permit bloody, heinous deeds to be committed? God "doesn't keep people from joining Him," G. H. informs us, "and, with Him, being occupied in being, in an interchange as fluid and constant ... as the interchange of living," then we appear to be forever doomed to seek that which we will never find—perfect understanding (144). "With God," G. H. says, "you can make your way through violence. He Himself, when he especially needs one of us, He chooses us and violates us. But my violence toward God has to be a violence toward myself. I have to do violence to myself so I can need more. So that I become so desperately greater that I become empty and needy. I shall thus

have touched the root of needing," a neediness that also contains a desire for "pleasure" and for love, which may itself be "full of anger" (144, 145). What if, G. H. suggests, ungodly cruelty, hatred, and violence are also part of God's plan. What then? But, if so, what good is God to the suffering of real-life women and men? Is simply saying that God works in mysterious ways a sufficient response to the injustices, great and small, being practiced in the world? Clarice's reader is left to cogitate over this disturbing possibility. The reader is further disturbed when she remembers that the female voice that animates *The Stream of Life*, in fact, openly declares that "God is a monstrous creation," one who inspires fear in us (76). Late in this same text, published shortly before Clarice would die, she writes, carrying on, perhaps, with the same sentiment, "I rebel against God ... everything," she concludes, returns "to nothingness," "to the Force of what Exists and is sometimes called God" (78).

It is a commonplace now to regard Clarice as a mystic, or as a mystical writer (see, for example, Pontiero, his Afterword to his translation of *The Hour of the Star* 92; also Dodson, "Understanding," *Clarice Lispector*). And there is ample reason to do so. Those who hold this position argue that mysticism enters Clarice's world through various portals, one of which being her affinity for the German philosopher, Leibnitz, who, we know, was "in active contact with Kabbalistic ... thought" (Steiner 73, also 64–65). Clarice mentions Leibnitz specifically in "The Fifth Story," a tale made up of five interlocking tales from *The Foreign Legion*. In this underappreciated piece, another of her self-conscious narrator/protagonists ponders "the depravity of existence" as well as the meaning of a "double existence as a witch" and of the "depraved pleasure" that springs from it (*The Foreign Legion* 77; see also Helena). It is, interestingly, only in the titular fifth story, called "Leibnitz and The Transcendence of Love in Polynesia [*sic*] ... " that Leibnitz is invoked, though without any explanation or elaboration (77).

We also know that the concerns and styles of the Kabala compare quite tantalizingly with those of Clarice, whose writing, and especially that which concerns itself with origins, with "God's occult design in the groupings of letters and words," and with our human efforts to understand, links her with the Kabbalistic tradition. This same linkage also connects Clarice and her work to that of Walter Benjamin, a renowned writer, scholar, and translation

theorist, and Kafka, who, like Clarice, struggled with "the opaqueness of language" and with 'the impossibility of not writing'" (Steiner 65; and Kafka, qtd. in Steiner 65).

Is there a quest for discovery that animates her best work? Yes, absolutely, and this is a deeply human and deeply attractive quality of Clarice's work. But one also needs to proceed with caution here. Is it a good idea to describe her writing as mysticism, a word that, in the English-language tradition at least, carries connotations that are, if not exactly prejudicial, then slightly frivolous, and of perhaps of dubious value? Is what our Brazilian writer produces, to put it another way, our mothers' mysticism? Or is Clarice's "mysticism" something different, a kind of writing that is more *sui generis*, the expression of a writer with a different, highly distinctive, and very unique voice, though one often thought of as that of a female Kafka? I believe it is.

But while comparing Clarice to a writer as important as Kafka is gratifying, what is to prevent us from thinking of Kafka as a male Clarice? Wouldn't such an overturning of a conventional hierarchy be a possible, and legitimate, consequence of the logic behind the arguments for World Literature? In my view, it would. But would we be able to accept the notion that an immigrant Brazilian woman has supplanted Kafka and knocked him from his pedestal? Or is this idea an example of an outcome we prefer to theorize about rather than actually embrace as true? Either way, it involves an aspect of World Literature that has not yet received the attention it merits. There is ample reason to come at Clarice's work from these perspectives, and to do so remembering that a young Franz Kafka was an early adept of Buber, many of whose views are, as we have seen, not altogether alien to those of Clarice Lispector (Kirsch 63). "Traditional Judaism held that living according to law was itself a source and an expression of spiritual fervor," one in which God, or our sense of what God is or should be, could speak directly to individual women and men, a point that could easily be applied to any number of Clarice's texts, though perhaps nowhere more so than *The Passion According to G. H.* (Kirsch 62).

The female voice in "A Mischievous Little Girl (I)," who believes that her role in life was to be "wicked and dangerous," feels that only God could forgive what she was (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 337). For her, this is so because, since God had made her, being "God's matter was" her "only virtue" and "the

source of a nascent mysticism. Not mysticism for Him, but for His matter, for a raw life filled with pleasure" (337). Clearly, the mysticism referred to here, by the girl and, one feels, by Clarice herself, is less that of a divine being than of life itself, which, for Clarice, was a fountain of desire and wanting as well as an abyss of fear and confusion. "The world is holy," argued Martin Buber, "because it is where we," trapped by all our doubts and desires, "can encounter God," this being a sentiment to which Clarice herself might well have subscribed (Kirsch 63). For Clarice Lispector, the living of life is a mystical experience, one replete with an awareness of language, an erotic impulse, and a desire to know, to understand, a desire that, while it may well involve discussions of God, is not limited to God himself, or herself, or itself.

With respect to this latter point, we can see that, in exemplifying it, Clarice enters into an ancient tradition of philosophic thought that is characterized not by the mysticism typically associated with theology but by a powerfully noetic orientation. Probably no other of Clarice's texts illustrates this tendency toward intense intellectual inquiry more than *The Passion According to G. H.,* though several others, *The Chandelier*, *The Apple in the Dark*, and *The Stream of Life*, do so as well. These texts all make manifest a very unique kind of consciousness, one that we could think of as being altered, or heightened, in that it tends to see the self in new and different ways and to apprehend the orthodox relationships between subject and object in highly imaginative and densely poetic ways. On these grounds, it is quite possible to read Clarice as a poetically powered phenomenologist, at the level of theme but also of characterization (see Fitz, "Caracterização e a Visão Fenomenológica"). So while several of Clarice's narratives evince mystical tendencies, they are better described as intellectual inquiries into the nature of human existence but writ not in the objective language of traditional philosophy but in that of actual human experience, that of one honest human mind trying to understand the nature of life. And this, I further contend, explains a great deal about why she is as globally popular as she is. A unifying force in a time of division and fragmentation, Clarice writes about all of us.

This thought is worth our consideration. In a world dominated by lying, by hunger (the kind that gnaws the belly, not the kind slaked by spiritual quest), by hatred, by torture, mutilation, and murder, one could be forgiven for thinking that some form of

release, if not escape, could be found in texts such as certain of those written by Clarice Lispector, that she provides some sort of surcease from the cruelty and tribalism of human reality. But in a world so riven with violence and injustice, is this what we want from our writers—a way of escaping from the ugliness of so much human behavior and of ignoring the national and "international threats of fascism and totalitarianism" (Jarrett 677)? This is basically the argument that Carol Armbruster makes in her article about Lispector's work (see also Jones 371–75; Cixous and Clément xv-xviii). And, indeed, some members of Clarice's global audience may well respond to her writing in this fashion.

But is it an accurate reading of her work? In certain respects, perhaps, though as an overall definition of it, I think not. To categorize Clarice as a female writer who indulges in mysticism and who, therefore, is of little use to the liberation of women worldwide may be a bit constraining, though to do so is not without its logic.[8] Scenes of rebellion, transgression, violence, and of the contemplation of violence not uncommon in Clarice narratives.[9] They are, in fact, characteristic of it, and often, though not always, call attention to the many ways women are oppressed in male dominated societies (see Peixoto xii-xiii, xv-xvi; Barbosa, *Clarice Lispector* 6, 45, 85–86). Joana, the rebellious protagonist of Clarice's first novel, exults in hitting a pitifully querulous man in the head with a book and causing him to simper and cry. The middle-class white woman, G. H., of *The Passion According to G. H.*, thrills at the idea of killing (*Passion* 45–46, 68, 86). And there is the jealous woman who, in "A Complicated Case" (from *Soulstorm*), pours "boiling water direct from the spout of the tea kettle into" the ear of her sleeping but unfaithful lover (51).

Clarice is, at times, even disputatious with God, whom she views as being too incomprehensible, too detached from human life, and too distant. Indeed, her anger at God appears regularly in her work.[10] In "Wrath," for example, from *The Foreign Legion*, Clarice's male narrator rails at a God who is portrayed as a tyrant, a divine "monarch" who requires that, once created by him and in his image, we grovel at his feet (164). And that we simply accept the horrors and injustices of actual human life. The social and political overtones associated with gender and our gendered sense of God are impossible to ignore here. Consumed by a "lust for life," "fury," "rage," Clarice, her narrator, and her reader struggle,

in ways that are deeply and recognizably human, to reconcile these conflicted feelings (164, 165).

This same contentiousness over our apparent desire for divine order and guidance and our frustration at what appears to be its absence in the world, appears in other of Clarice's texts as well. In "Vengeance and Painful Reconciliation," a story again from *The Foreign Legion*, a female voice (and one that the reader can take as that of Clarice herself) excoriates God for confronting her with a dead rat at the very moment she is celebrating him, even thinking of herself, "out of sheer affection" for God, as God's "Mother," and as "the Mother of all things" (*Foreign Legion* 193–94). Although at the beginning, the story is both serious and funny (a woman, seemingly Clarice herself, is strolling along the famous Avenida Copacabana while reveling in the greatness and glory of God when, unexpectedly, she steps on a large dead rat), in its second half it becomes a bitter denunciation of any God who answers her exultations thusly and who makes a rodent her "counterpart" (194). The woman, who has done nothing but exalt God is, suddenly and without any apparent reason, brought her down to the level of a dead rat; she and her system of belief are shattered. And, in one of the many epiphany-like moments that mark Clarice's work, she is thrown into an intellectual maelstrom of doubt, fear, and anger.

At this point, the alert reader begins to suspect that she is involved in less of a story than a parable of human existence, one whose subject is our desire, or need, to create a God, or a God-like figure to deal with the horrors of reality, even as, because of these very same horrors, we ourselves suspect that no such God really exists. This fear likely strikes home with Clarice's readers, many of whom will share this same doubt. Speaking of how "God's vulgarity wounded and outraged" the woman here, the reader learns that, in trying to understand what has happened, she now believes God wants to crush her, and for reasons she cannot fathom (195). For her, as a result, "God was behaving like a savage" (195). And she now wanted vengeance. "I could only think of revenge," the narrative voice tells us, "But what revenge could I hope for against an Almighty God, against a God who only needed a rat crushed to death in order to crush me? Such was my vulnerability as a mere creature. In my thirst for revenge, I was unable even to confront Him" (195). Once again, the questions of gender and our conventional gendering of God come to the fore, as do those of the nature

of living in a patriarchal society. Alienated, because of reality, of lived experience, from God and all that God should stand for (a just society), the female narrator, filled now with "hatred," concludes, as in their private moments many people do, that "in me, He no longer existed! In me, He was no longer to be seen!" (195). She then adds, at the very end and rather enigmatically, "So long as I go on inventing God, He does not exist" (196).

Clarice's skepticism about the nature and existence of God continues on into her final novel. The pitiful Macabéa "did not think about God, nor," devastatingly, "did God think about her. God belongs to those who succeed in pinning Him down," to those, in other words, who have the power, the knowledge, and the wherewithal to do so (*The Hour of the Star* 26). And Macabéa, like so many people around the world, is not one of these. In this life, at least, God has abandoned her. Macabéa, like her readers, can only conclude "that there were no answers," only endless questions, and endless suffering (26). But then, and assuming a more critical stance, the narrator (whom we can take to be Clarice herself) declares that if anyone has a better response, then she or he should speak up because "I have been waiting for years" to hear it (26). "Why," this same voice concludes, "is there so much God?" and always "At the expense of" the lives led by men and women around the globe (26). And later, as the novel's two "universal victims," Macabéa and Olímpico, are sitting on a park bench, "indistinguishable from the rest of nothingness," they are described, caustically, as doing so "For the greater glory of God" (47).

This is not the voice of a religious mystic; it is that of a writer who wonders about the seemingly incongruous relationship between God and the human experience.

But, more importantly, does the conclusion Armbruster arrives at lead to an accurate overall assessment of Clarice Lispector as a writer, artist, and intellectual? Again, I think not. If one's appreciation of Clarice Lispector came only from a text like *The Passion of G. H.,* for example, it would be possible to think so. But there is much more to the world of Clarice Lispector, and this extraordinary 1964 novel is merely one piece of the puzzle. To judge Clarice as a self-indulgent mystic misses her concern with our very real world and the myriad injustices that we allow to define it. As we see even in her earliest stories and novels, this commitment to engagement, if not necessarily to *littérature engagé*, begins with

what are nothing short of revolutionary considerations of gender and the artificial limitations it imposes on people (both women and men!) but it flowers in what I consider to be a very nearly overt political resistance to the repressive conservative ideology of the generals who ran Brazil's dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. This is most clear in her 1974 collection of stories, *Soulstorm*, but the same social consciousness clearly continues in her much-heralded novel, *The Hour of the Star* (1977). One needs to be leery about declaring Clarice a mystic and dismissing her on this account. To do so illustrates quite vividly the complex and still not adequately understood problem of reception, and the sundry social, political, and economic factors that are involved, as it relates to the development of World Literature.

Chapter Six

Clarice, World Literature, and Translation

The renewed interest in World Literature has had a great deal to do with Clarice Lispector's new-found global celebrity, and it does so both positively and negatively. On the positive side, World Literature gains for the Brazilian master an audience and an acclaim she would not otherwise have had; on the negative side, she can easily be misread and miscategorized, as the Carol Armbruster case shows. If, in a World Literature class, one reads only one text by an author, then one's opinion of that author will be shaped by that one book. And if, to speak of Lispector, the one book read were *The Passion According to G. H.*, then the reader might well define Clarice as a mystical writer and nothing more. That this would be a tremendous error should, by now, be obvious. Clarice is much more than this, but the typical World Literature student, confronted with so many books by so many authors (about whom little or nothing is known), will simply not have time to read Clarice further; her assessment of her will be limited to that one book. And unless the instructor can somehow offset this effect, a skewed conclusion will result. Superficiality is the bane of World Literature study. Although David Damrosch does not discuss Clarice's work, he might well have, as she exemplifies both his arguments in favor of this particular approach to twenty-first century literary study and the complications that accompany it.

While readers in Brazil have, since the early 1940s, hailed Clarice as a great writer and a renovating force in their national literature, global readers new to her work respond to it as well. This is abundantly clear. But why? How can one explain this phenomenon? To offer an explanation has been the subject of this book. There are many reasons.

For one thing, her work almost always evinces a powerful note of personal involvement on the part of her reader, female

or male. People can come to lose themselves in her work, and to identify with it (see Masiello 217–22; also Librandi 6–7). As Katrina Dodson puts it, "Clarice inspires big feelings," and "those who love her want her for their very own" ("Translator's Note" 635). There is nearly always a naked honesty to Clarice's writing that draws the reader to it; she and the characters in her texts come across as vulnerable, and we want, perhaps instinctively, to protect them. Often, this feeling is achingly intense. As Laura I. Miller observes, "devout readers" of Lispector will often cultivate a "private relationship" with the always seductive texts of "this obscure Aphrodite" who never talks down to us but, rather, with us ("10 Reasons"). This key quality of Clarice's texts, which come alive for the reader as a living, pulsing fusion of mind and body and of wanting, is, I submit, one compelling reason for her global popularity. Everyone can feel it, this integration of physical and intellectual desire, no matter one's age, gender identification, sexual orientation, social standing, skin color, or political persuasion.

The Translation Question

A brilliant writer from a culture, Brazil, not commonly heralded as a literary force in global letters, Lispector suffers, when she is taken out of her Brazilian context, from misreading. In this, she represents both a problem that the advocates of World Literature would like to solve and the reason World Literature is needed. Today, readers and citizens of other countries need to know much more about Brazil than they do. Although, like the United States and many other nations, Brazil is currently suffering from the same strain of authoritarianism and reactionary thinking that is engulfing, or being inflicted upon, much of the West, it is a nation of tremendous importance, in the Americas and globally. Even in this era of fiscal turmoil and crisis, Brazil is consistently ranked as one of the world's most powerful economies. Its mellifluous language is one of the top five or six most widely spoken languages on earth. So, too, is its literature, which, dating from 1500, can be regarded as one of the New World's richest and most vibrant. More Brazilian writing, literary and non-literary, needs to be translated and disseminated to other cultures. And it is. To do so, in fact, is a major and on-going project in Brazil. So Brazilians know as well as anyone these days that language and meaning cannot be

easily moved through time and space, yet that is precisely what the translator is asked to do. And the literary translator is tasked with rewriting texts from different periods and with differing stylistic flourishes that replicate the original text. Indeed, the entire practice of World Literature is inseparable from translation, which always involves the language of a specific aesthetic object as it exists in a specific place and time, a specific cultural *milieu*.

But Clarice's reception abroad suffers from an additional problem, one stemming from her being from a region that is part of a vast and complex region know, all too vaguely, as Latin America and one that, in the United States has traditionally been not highly regarded. Books from Europe and Asia tend to be afforded an at least initially favorable response but books from Spanish America and Brazil are not. About them, assumptions are made that too often prejudice how their reviewers react. One of the most prevalent of these today is that, in order to be "authentic," all creative writing from Latin America must cultivate "magical realism." And Clarice's work is not that. If readers come to her work in anticipation of that kind of writing, then things will go awry. One wonders if the fact that such cultural blind spots come into play as often as they do in the United States of 2020 could be a sign of a society too long self-segregated from the rest of the world. For many in such a society, the appeal of World Literature would be immense and sincere, but it would also run contrary to a great many deeply rooted biases. And dealing with those, while also seeking to appreciate complex literary texts from cultures not well understood, would constitute a worthy if challenging endeavor. The case of Lispector exemplifies this problem.

In spite of its long and deep ties to the United States, Brazil continues to be discounted by the US cultural machine. It is doubtful, for example, that readers and critics here in the States are aware that the United States was the first nation to recognize Brazilian independence in 1822, that Brazil was the only South American nation to ratify the Monroe Doctrine (and thus align itself with the United States), that Brazil has been our war-time ally and long-time trading partner, that, in 1889 and out of admiration for the system of government established by their North American neighbor, Brazilians referred to their newly minted republic as the United States of Brazil, or that as early as the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt the United States "regarded Brazil

as the keystone" of its Latin American policy (Burns 329). Or that, and returning to a more literary vein, no less a figure than Walt Whitman penned a poem, "Welcome, Brazilian Brother," to commemorate the establishment of the Brazilian Republic in 1889.

The problem of simply being ignored has always been more pervasive for Brazil than Spanish America, which readers, writers, and critics in the United States even now tend to regard *as* "Latin America," as defining it in its entirety. It is a mistake to do so because Brazil and Spanish America are quite different. This curious condition has adversely affected the reception of Brazilian literature in the United States, to the point of rendering it all but unacknowledged. The World Literature movement offers us an opportunity to correct this long-standing lacuna in our literary and cultural consciousness. It is for this reason that the always complex issue of translation, which determines so much of a writer's reception, turns on how well, or how poorly, Clarice is able to transcend these obstacles and gain the hemispheric respect she deserves. The rise of the field known as inter-American literary studies, where Clarice has a major presence, owes its growth and development, in fact, to translation (see Lowe and Fitz, *Translation*).

Moving from the American context to the global, Clarice's texts, it might well be said, exemplify the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual "untranslatability" of which Emily Apter speaks of in her discussion of World Literature (see "Untranslatability"). For the professor of French and Comparative Literature, "Untranslatability" is a matter not merely of language but of cultural and historical "invisibility" as well, of a particular writer not being a recognized product, as a book from France or Germany would be, and therefore as not being seen as immediately marketable (196). For Apter, "untranslatability" is called upon "to do political" and educational "work beyond addressing the limitations and compromise formations of world literature. It opens onto ventures in political philology, itself understood as a medium for taking stock of the heteronomy and nonbelongingness of languages," like Portuguese, a not widely studied language, "or for analyzing from a comparative perspective, the vocabulary of territorial disenfranchisement" (196). In Clarice's world, such issues cover a multitude of sins, from gender discrimination to the global problem of hunger and from more philosophical problems of how we know who and what we are as human beings to trenchantly funny lines about the self-delusional nature of our existences.

Clarice's novels, stories, and "crônicas" surge with alterity and difference; a great writer from a rich but undervalued culture, she personifies the legitimacy of World Literature as a field of study. But in every way, she is unexpected. She is Brazilian (and not what global readers too often think of as "Latin American"); she is a woman born to a Jewish family fleeing Russian pogroms to reside in a nominally Catholic country that is deeply infused with African and indigenous belief systems; and she is a transformative literary giant in a diverse culture famous for its synthesizing of global thought and modes of expression with its own domestic histories. Finally, Clarice's texts do not indulge the stereotypes of Brazil that do exist, that's it's a place of sun, sand, *favelas*, and bacchanalian revelry. Hers is a different Brazil. It is knowing and being that Clarice seeks in her texts, but it is the infinite slip and slide of language that she and her characters encounter, that they exist in, and that they must learn to deal with. If readers come to Clarice already programmed to expect other, more trivial things, they will be disappointed when they read her. As noted earlier, Clarice's writing exemplifies alterity, and, because it does, it defies foreign expectations, even as it exemplifies a venerable tradition of its national literature. As Apter understands this term, Lispector is as "untranslatable" as a writer can come.

As a result, Clarice emerges, for the translator and for the general reader, as exactly what she is: a notoriously "difficult" writer, one whose best work resists easy categorization or thematic reduction and that challenges the reader to think every step of the way. This is so in her original Brazilian Portuguese, but it is also true for her various translations, which, as we have seen vary in terms of how she is reproduced and read in other language systems and cultures (see Schmidt, "Crossing Borders" 245–47). Indeed, the heterogeneity of Clarice's écriture might be said to manifest itself even more dramatically in English translation than in her Portuguese texts, where the schism between the absolute and the possible is not so certain. Ronald Sousa, the first English translator of *The Passion of G. H.*, points out that, in her native tongue Clarice is skilled at violating traditional norms of "grammar and syntax" and in the "employment of complex verbal-conceptual ambiguities" that challenge the reader's interpretive range and imagination (ix). "The result," Sousa continues, referencing his own translation, "is a text that has lost something of the ambiguity and

idiosyncrasy that is part and parcel of the original from which it arises and has become more expository in tone than the original. What is enticing and captivatingly vague in her texts is all too often transformed, through the act of translation, into meanings and fields of reference that are more cut and dried than they are in the original," which we can typically regard as a shape-changing *textes* that oscillate between anguished meditation and a kind of practical realism and that features the constant play of language much more than the translation (viii, ix).

The seductive openness of her texts does not always "come across," as German describes the process of translation, as fully as one would hope for. With only a few exceptions, Clarice in translation suffers from being overly explained, or clarified. There is loss here, and it involves the loss of an essential aspect of Clarice's work, its opaqueness. If, as Maynard Mack does, we argue that prose tends to be "referential" in nature and that poetry is more "iconic," we see the degree of delicious complexity we face, as readers and translators, in Clarice's writing, which lives precisely by being a semantically rich and fluid mix of both the poetic and the referential, and, I would stress, by a generous dollop of the philosophical (1735, also 1736). The goal of the translator is not to allow what is deliciously complex and provocative in the original text to become merely confusing in the translation. And while everyone understands this, only a skilled reader of the original language and a skilled writer can bring it off. As if describing the world brought to life by Lispector, George Steiner opines that poetry and philosophic discourse, two qualities that consistently characterize her writing, "embody those hermetic and creative aspects which are at the core of language" (252; see also Varin 24, 99-107).

Also linked to poetic expression, I would argue, and expressive, perhaps, of the very essence of language itself, is eros, a life-force that can be moved surprisingly well from Clarice's original Portuguese texts into her various translations. For those experienced in the art of literary translation, this comes as no surprise. As Francine Masiello argues, there is a visceral link connecting "translational practice and sexual pleasure" (220). The same critic then continues, "the memory of all sexual pleasure is in itself an act of translation" (220, see also 217-18). The erotic play of language and meaning are inseparable, and so it can be no surprise that

nothing exemplifies the validity of poststructuralist thought more than the act of translation (Fitz, "Translation and Poststructural Theory"). As translators know, words are not easily interchangeable, like cogs in a machine. Always different, they constantly rub up against each other in a process of endless semantic arousal. Although they are being read in a moment when language use has been debased with rampant lying and prevarication, and thereby shorn of this vital energy, this vitally human rooting, Clarice's texts pulse with the eroticism of life and thought. They ooze it. Readers around the world recognize this quality of her work and respond avidly to it. While, it must be said, what Clarice loses in translation is substantial, both stylistically and substantively, and while what she gains often moves her away from what she and her texts are in their original Portuguese, she exists as a global phenomenon because of translation. And on this point, she has, in the main, been well-served.

In critical ways, in fact, the complicated and rarely resolved issues of translation form the foundation of World Literature. The several versions of Clarice and her writing that now exist in different languages demonstrate how and why this is so. As Damrosch contends, "World literature is writing that gains in translation" (*What is World Literature?* 281, see also 288–97). For Damrosch, the different versions of the same Clarice texts that we now have can serve to expand the reader's apprehension of her. Thomas M. Greene has come to a similar conclusion, arguing that "What we learn from these alternative translations is the amount of emotional logic, the amount of coherence, motivation, and rational connection that the English-language" translator "feels" she or he "has to bring to the bare bones of the ... original in order to make it acceptable to the Western reader" ("Misunderstanding Poetry" 75). And veteran translator and literary scholar, Suzanne Jill Levine, asserts that "Current translation scholars ... emphasize that translation as creative interpretation is the ultimate humanistic task, not only because it keeps literary works alive, but because it is an interpretive act that varies the form, meaning and effect of the source text" (Preface 1).

This is all true, and both the author and the student can benefit from it—if the various translations of the same text are compared and contrasted, to each other and to the original text. But will this happen in the typical World Literature classroom? Maybe, maybe

not. Much would depend on the selection and training of the individual instructor, who may well not know either the language the text was originally written in, the culture and literary traditions from which it stems, or the other translations that exist. At what point, however, does the need, or the pressure (from a publisher or an editor, perhaps) "to make" a translation "acceptable to the Western reader" or to the reader from any culture, distort a text and turn its translation into something that it is not, or that it does not do, in the original? At what point does even a "creative interpretation" become a mistake, a mistranslation? And how can we know the difference? Nevertheless, the arguments in favor of World Literature and translation are strong, as we can see from the above quotes, but we would be remiss if we come away from them believing that a translation—any translation—is the same as the original text. It is not, and, in our enthusiasm for World Literature, we must allow ourselves or our students to think that it is. Literary translation in particular is not just the rewriting of a text in another language; in fact, this is the least of it, as any grammar student knows. Literary translation involves the creation of a new literary text, one that has a close yet variable relationship to another text, the one being interpreted and reconstructed. The two texts have much in common, but they are far from being identical. Ditto for their consumption.

To read Clarice's *A Maçã no Escuro* is to gain access to one set of experiences, but to read Gregory Rabassa's *The Apple in the Dark*, as superb as it is as a translation, elicits quite another. They are different texts, though they exhibit commonalities. Both quiver with meaning and tantalize the reader with what can be gleaned from them, but they are not the same. And we should not blithely assume that they are. Not to put too fine a point on it, but it is useful to remember that the novel known as *The Apple in the Dark* was not written by Lispector but by her translator, Rabassa. To do so is neither to exalt the original text nor to diminish the translation, only to recognize a fact. While we commonly say things like, "as Lispector writes in *The Apple in the Dark* ..." we know we are not uttering a true statement. It behooves us, moreover, to keep this truism in mind, about any text we consume in translation, because it forces us to remember that translations are never the same as the original text. And by remembering that, we are being constantly prodded into discussions of how different languages,

different cultures, and different histories all figure into our study of World Literature. We are never reading literary texts alone; we are at every moment reading social, political, and economic documents as well. And their meanings are limited only by each reader's imagination.

This is why each and every reading of any text, the original or its translation(s), produces a different experience, one that is nearly always richer in semantic possibilities than the readings that came before. This is the point made by Borges in his famous *ficción*, "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," a text that Steiner, reading it in two of its English translations, refers to as "Arguably ... the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation. What studies of translation there are, including this book, could, in Borges's style, be termed a commentary on his commentary" (*After Babel* 70). And since Borges believed, as only a handful of translators have, that the translator has the right to alter the original text in order to improve it (something he felt he did in his very influential Spanish translation of Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*; see Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges* 372–73; also Fitz and Fitz, "Faulkner, Borges, and the Translation of *The Wild Palms* 3–31, 34–35), the questions concerning certain kinds of "mistranslation" versus a simple error or slip have become not only even more elusive but also a new approach to translation study (Bigelow 243, also 242–43, 254–55).

Then, too, there is an additional complication; although the reader can indeed learn a lot by comparing different translations of the same text, how, in the final analysis, can she compare these several translations of Clarice against the original text, against Clarice's famously elusive writing, if she does not know Portuguese? Knowing some Spanish or French will not do. Clearly, this is a problem that besets World Literature, at least to the extent (the very great extent) that it relies on translation to propagate it. An interesting and illustrative case of this occurs in Clarice's story, "Where You Were At Night." In the original Portuguese, the line is "Adeus. A-Deus" (*Onde Estivestes de Noite* 79). For translator Alexis Levitin, this same final line stays the same, "Adeus. A-Deus," whereas for translator Dodson, it becomes "Adieu. A-Dieu" (*The Complete Stories: Clarice Lispector* 470). The reader of all three versions of this story would not be wrong to wonder why the difference.

And yet, while this very real problem is unquestionably a serious one, it does not necessarily fatally flaw the reading of a story, novel, or poem in translation. In the Clarice tale just noted, the fact that one translator leaves a final line as "Adeus. A-Deus" and another transforms it into "Adieu. A-Dieu" does not in and of itself constitute a ruinous decision, though it can, and should, spark a lively discussion as to why said decisions were made. To do so engages each reader with the decisions a translator must make in the process of creating one text out of another. And with how, in literature as in life, the meanings of words are multiple and can lead to new ways of thinking about things. It is at this juncture that literature can inspire us to demand new and more just laws and political positions. When we link it to the public domain, literary study can make a useful contribution to a host of urgent extra-literary issues. Difference, we can learn in such a setting, does not always have to result in acrimony and suspicion, an automatic antipathy toward people not like ourselves. It can result in a greater awareness of our common humanity and of our need to work together, to recognize the rights of others, and to avoid violence in the resolution of conflicts. And in today's World Literature classrooms, where the very admirable goal is to foster better understanding between different cultures and ways of life, the chance to learn more about people and languages we had hitherto known little or nothing about is well worth the effort it takes to do so.

In the final analysis, then, the benefits that can come with being translated into other languages and read in other parts of the world, can be said to outweigh the problems. In Damrosch's view, for example, "World literature is writing that gains in translation" (281). If for no other reason, this is true in the sense that a work that is translated and consumed by another culture gains new readers, a new and different audience. This is certainly the case with Lispector. Further, he believes that "works become world literature by being received *into* the space of a foreign culture" where they then become sites of cultural "negotiation" and appreciation (283). In terms of its reception in the United States, Latin American literature, and especially that of Brazil, with its long history of racial mixing, could exert a very salubrious effect, one that could mitigate our racial tensions and help us become a more tolerant society. "The receiving culture," Damrosch continues, "can use

the foreign material in all sorts of ways: as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition" and "as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined" (283). This is why, for Damrosch, "World literature is ... always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture" (283).[1] It is also why the study of World Literature is at least as much political as it is aesthetic, and quite possibly more so. And perhaps, in the year 2020, as we struggle everywhere with global warming, with the pernicious effects of globalization, and with the dangers of environmental depredation, that is a good thing.

As we have already seen, Apter, who, to be fair, endorses the "deprovincialization of" a nation's literary "canon," a development that would very much benefit readers in the United States, offers a very different take on the argument put forth by Damrosch (see Apter, *Against World Literature* 2, and "Untranslatability"). She expresses "serious reservations about tendencies in World Literature toward reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability, or toward the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded 'differences' that have been niche-marketed as commercialized 'identities'" (*Against World Literature* 2, see also 328–30). This danger, of reading literary texts from cultures we don't know and that, in some cases, we may suspect of activities we don't approve of, and falling prey to pre-programmed thinking or to cultural stereotypes, is very real. And how it is handled in World Literature classes will depend heavily on how well prepared and trained the instructor is. It would seem that the chances for superficiality of treatment are high. And that the greater the diversity of literary texts and cultures involved, the greater the chances for superficial readings and discussions become. But in spite of all this, the need to "deprovincialize" and dispense with old prejudices is, arguably, greater today than it has ever been.

To understand the conflict laid out by, on one side, Apter, and, on the other, Damrosch, is to understand why the texts of World Literature always involve one of Comparative Literature's most venerable concerns—the twin issues of influence and reception. On this point, and in the case of Lispector (a "Latin American" writer), Héctor Hoyos offers some important and helpful comments about the global reception of Spanish American and Brazilian literature. "Latin America," he writes, "is as utopian a bedrock for

literary study as 'the world' is" (9). Given its ancient indigenous roots, its bloody history of conquest, and its rich, often conflicted history of cultural intermingling (one which continues to the present day), it may well be exemplary of global studies, and on a number of different fronts. When he proposes "a Latin American-inflected take on world literature," Hoyos calls attention to the closely entwined processes of how and why certain texts, and not others, have an impact in a receiving culture and how they are there received (8–9). "Traveling abroad," which they usually do via translation, Clarice's texts, for example, do "indeed change, both in" their "frame of reference and ... in language as well. In an excellent translation," however, as we have with Rabassa's marvelous *The Apple in the Dark*, "the result is not," Damrosch argues, "the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a *heightening* of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text" (292). Hoyos is of a similar position, arguing that texts from Spanish America and Brazil also gain from "conversing" with "World Literaturism" (8). In the case of Rabassa's luminous translation, I would say this is largely so; or, at least, the textual mechanisms are there, re-created in English, for this *heightening* of the interaction between text and reader to happen. Whether it will happen, of course, is another question. As always, much will depend on the knowledge and preparation of the instructor. Taken as a whole, however, Apter has a less sanguine view of this interaction, as does Hoyos, who wonders about how fairly Latin American literature will be judged in this "interaction" (particularly in the United States) and, citing the work of Cuban scholar, Roberto Fernández Retamar, to what extent the revival of interest in World Literature merely represents one more form of "cultural imperialism" (Apter 6, 8).

They are right to caution us. Perhaps one's view of World Literature depends upon what perspective, what discipline, one views it from, the perception from a department of English, for example, differing from that of a department of Spanish and Portuguese or a department of French or German, to say nothing of departments of Asian or African languages. In my experience, scholars who work in a single language tend to assume that translation is the simple exchange of one word for another; a *Tisch* (German), they feel, is a table (English) is a *table* (French) is a *mesa* (Spanish) is a *mesa* (Portuguese). But these terms, linguistic signs with always different frames of reference, nevertheless do not mean quite the

same thing, a fact of which every translator is keenly aware. They all exist in social, political, and temporal contexts that are not interchangeable. Words cannot be traded one for another in this fashion. Each one is expressive of a certain kind of knowledge, understanding, and awareness, a particular and unique way of seeing the world, and this is what the translator has, first, to get and then to reconstruct (or attempt to reconstruct) in another language and cultural system.

Surprising though it may seem, the case of Lispector as a celebrated world writer is not unlike that of Han Kang; both writers come from rich albeit little studied national literatures (Brazilian and Korean), both work in what are often classified as "less commonly taught" languages (Brazilian Portuguese, and Korean), and both have complicated relationships with their existences in translation.[2] Overall, however, Lispector is today a celebrated World Literature writer largely because she has had not one but several good to excellent translators, each of whom has heightened her work in precisely this expansive and thought provoking fashion—and in ways that allow readers around the world to respond, through their own languages, literary traditions, and cultural experiences, to the many and diverse qualities that give her writing life.

Nor is the practice or promotion of translation ever a value-neutral enterprise. This is never the case. Questions of who does the translation (and what her or his beliefs are), who markets it and for what audience, and who reads it are all in play. As is the too often underestimated role an editor plays in the final version of the translation. A variety of personal as well as cultural biases, both for and against, obtain. And they must all be considered. "In the United States," as Amy K. Kaminsky has correctly observed, "translation occurs within the constraints of hegemonic notions of particular languages, attached to particular cultures. English in the United States often apologizes for not getting French quite right, but it never assumes such a subordinate attitude toward Spanish" or toward Portuguese, the other major language system of Latin America and the third most widely spoken language in the hemisphere (1). Thomas Paul Bonfiglio comes to much the same conclusion, adding that here "in the US, it is often assumed, by academics and non-academics alike, that faculty in" departments other than English "teach their courses in translation" (139). That such an absurd idea still exists in 2020 is astonishing, and yet we

know it does. Distressingly, moreover, it cannot help but distort how foreign texts and ideas are evaluated here in the United States, where, even in the academy, certain languages and literatures are automatically prized while others are, again automatically, dismissed as inferior.

While English departments routinely teach, in translation, texts from other world literatures, they often object when other language and literature departments wish to teach their writers. I myself have experienced this; I have, in my professional life, been required to gain permission from Dean-level administrators to teach works judged to be the province of English departments. Departments of English have long felt free to offer courses on Cervantes, Borges, and Lispector, but departments of Spanish and Portuguese may have to ask first in order to be allowed to offer classes on Shakespeare, Faulkner, or Whitman. How can this position be construed as anything but cultural arrogance coupled with an unjustifiable sense of privilege?[3]

In the fall of 2020, Cornell University's Department of English officially changed its name to the Department of Literatures in English. In addition to texts originally written in English, this new appellation arrogates unto itself all literature that exists, now and in the future, presumably, in English translation. In its justification for this change, the faculty majority argued that since the world's literature is already the domain of the unit at Cornell formerly known as the English Department, the new title merely reflects current reality.

While one can understand the desire of English departments here in the United States to de-provincialize and, in their enthusiasm to do so, take this, for some, disturbingly appropriative step, why would scholars in other language and literature units regard it as anything but neo-colonialism, a hostile take-over of the world's literature by a single US academic discipline—English? And that it will do so without bothering to insist that its students and faculty learn, in serious, professional fashion, the languages and literatures of other nations. Will a smattering of some other language, or none at all, suffice for departments of literatures in English? Is this a consequence of the World Literature movement?

But whether it is or not, another, more urgent question emerges: Are US English departments that advocate this global reach now also going to proclaim that scholars in other departments can

freely teach authors and texts traditionally associated only with English departments, and that they can do so without any kind of permission or oversight? This is exactly what English department faculty with this outlook are today demanding for themselves, but will they defend the right of other language and literature units to do the same thing? Will they allow a professor, say, of Spanish and Portuguese, to henceforth give classes (including graduate seminars) on American literature and that feature texts written in Spanish and Portuguese as well as English? After all, it could be argued, the Spanish (since 1492) and Portuguese (since 1500) were living in and writing about "América" more than a hundred years before the English arrived in 1607, at Jamestown, Virginia. And the poems, stories, novels, plays, essays, and histories from the United States would not have to be read in translation. To my knowledge, no such position has as yet been proffered or taken. Adriana Jacobs is not wrong when she warns us about "the dominance of English in the global literary market and academia" and of the attitude of superiority that too often accompanies it (n.p.). Both factors directly influence how foreign writers, like Lispector, are interpreted in the United States and elsewhere in the English-speaking world.

To paraphrase Orwell on this matter, we could say that, apropos of which languages get translated for consumption here in the United States (the seat of the World Literature movement), while English departments like to think that all linguistic and cultural pigs are equal, they also seem to believe some pigs (their authors and texts) are more equal than others. And, as a result, these are still the ones that gain the attention and respect of the U. S. critical establishment. And they continue to be the ones to whom and to which other writers and texts are compared, and always from a position of superiority. Sometimes this is justified; but always? What if these "other writers and texts" are the better ones, as works of literature and even as read in translation, to the models against which they are being compared? Are the proponents of World Literature prepared to admit that?

As Kaminsky rightly points out, the "racism and xenophobia that results in this country's devaluation of the Spanish language," to say nothing of the Portuguese language, which is shockingly disregarded here, "also devalues the thinking that is expressed in" those languages (1). This is an accurate assessment, and, though the

times have changed somewhat (Kaminsky was writing in 1993), the respect owed to Spanish American and Brazilian literature in the United States is nowhere near where it needs to be. Cultural disdain can be checked, but the ignorance it fosters cannot be so easily sluffed off, even by people of good will. With respect to the Americas and inter-American literary study, the same thing is true for Canadian literature, culture, and history. Behind only English and Spanish, Portuguese is the third-most spoken language in the Americas, and yet it and its giant American culture, Brazil, remain virtually unknown to most people in the United States.

To invoke Orwell once again: Is the real issue here more akin to Orwell's thinking in *Animal Farm* (1945) about our delusions of equality in a political context? Do we believe that while all pigs are equal, some pigs are more equal than others? If we read "all pigs" as all languages and literatures, then should we who toil in the vineyards of language and literature here in the United States read "some pigs," the ones who regard themselves as "more equal than others," as English departments? There is, unfortunately, reason to think so (see Bonfiglio viii-xii, 1–24; see also Jacobs). The question involves more than mere peevishness; it has to do with the ways writers and texts from other cultures are received here in the States, and, as we see in the case of Lispector, how their artistic and intellectual traditions are treated.

To pursue this line of thinking a bit further, we might do well to ask ourselves this question: Do English departments here in the United States think of themselves as more important than the other language departments and as therefore justified in exercising a more potent form of hegemony and political power within the academy (see Levander 160–61)? Since scholars in other language and literature departments ask themselves this question, so, too, should their colleagues in departments of English. Do English departments in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, or Bogotá, or in other parts of the world, wield the same influence? To understand this question better might well help us determine if US departments of English are indeed what they seem to be, the driving force behind the World Literature movement. And if they are, what is this likely to mean for the study of World Literature? Especially if the writer in question is Lispector, who hails from a nation, Brazil, not well understood or appreciated in the United States?

Could part of the problem also be the parochialism so long attributed to the United States? Speaking of this, scholar John S. Brushwood has written, of our traditional "resistance to foreign literature," that "We are an intensely provincial people, in spite of the lives and money we have scattered around the globe. We resist foreign literature in general, and this basic position is exacerbated with respect to countries that are not financially or militarily powerful" (14). The consequences of this still living tradition are far-reaching and of tremendous import. Are we here in the United States using this revival of interest in World Literature to finally free ourselves of this blinding and warping parochialism or are we using it as a new and more insidious form of global domination, one germane to the literary realm? Writers, artists, and intellectuals in a host of nations around the world are asking this question, and the answer is far from evident.

We know that here in the United States, the number of English majors is declining, as is also true for majors in Spanish and Portuguese. But both English departments and departments of Spanish and Portuguese still have robust enrollments overall, and this bodes well for their futures. As the two languages of the United States, moreover, Spanish and English have potential for growth, and for cooperative activity, in a wealth of areas. The already established value of the entire inter-American initiative, for example, one inherently comparative and integrative in nature, will only grow in importance as the years go by. And, along with the United States and Spanish America, Brazil (where Portuguese is the national tongue) will continue to play a leading role in it. Working together, departments of English, Spanish and Portuguese, French, and indigenous studies could easily serve as the locus for a variety of inter-disciplinary teaching and research initiatives involving, in addition to language and literature, such disciplines as history, anthropology, music, art history, sociology, environmental studies, political science, law, medicine, and economics. The collaborations geared to inter-American and global studies are limited only by our imaginations. But language competency, preferably real, if only in some elementary fashion, must be a fundamental part of them all, for there are few ways to insult people in a more profound way than to tell them you are going to (deign to?) study them but that you do not find their language important enough to study.

Sadly, we here in the United States, where too many people find the study of other languages to be subversive and "un-American," have a long history of doing exactly this. And, to judge by the figures, we are still doing it. We like to talk about the value of international literary study, for example, but we want to practice this without learning any other languages. Or without learning them in any serious fashion. Can it be surprising to anyone that this arrogant and dismissive attitude might make people in other cultures suspicious of our motivations?

In the United States today, English departments today are pleased to think of themselves as "transnational" in their reach. But even as they promote this position, they wish to remain apart from the other languages and literatures. This is understandable. They are in a position of some power and can, to a degree, dictate the terms of their relationships with other university units. But in taking this position, they also call attention to their monolingualism and insularity. The result is that US-based English departments find themselves forced more and more to rely on translations of foreign materials and on readings that too often fail to contextualize the poems, novels, stories, plays, essays, and critical studies they are evaluating and that reflect the various historical, intellectual, and artistic contexts that are required knowledge for a proper understanding of the texts being read. This is true here in America, where, hemispherically-speaking, several quite distinct national literatures are involved (including those of Canada, which further subdivides into literatures expressed in English, French, plus several indigenous languages, and Brazil), but it is also true globally. We who work on a regular basis with texts in more than one language know already that to discuss literary works, authors, and cultures about which we know little or nothing risks superficiality—superficiality of treatment and superficiality of understanding. So, how much superficiality are we willing to accept in the name of World Literature? How much is too much?

Although the desire to get beyond the confines of a single language and literature is laudable, the training that is required to make that effort successful, and meaningful, is too often not there in current English and American Literature PhD programs. As a result, readings of foreign texts are unable to get beyond what is obvious at the textual level. This is the fundamental problem that besets World Literature, and it will not be resolved until the old

bugaboos of linguistic, literary, and cultural hegemony are erased. And this will not happen until readers around the world can be educated to the point that they stop thinking "Wow! How could a writer like Clarice Lispector come out of a place like Brazil?" While discussions among well-meaning people about the circulation (via English translation) of hitherto unknown texts through different world audiences is a useful thing, "Twenty-first-century globalization must not be viewed or studied through the lens of a single language" (Bonfiglio 142).

Still and all, it is probably better, on balance, to learn even a little about a foreign culture than to remain completely ignorant about it. I do not know if this is what Goethe had in mind with his concept of *Weltliteratur* (world literature) or not, but it is the question we face today.

The venerable comparative question of reception thus speaks rather dramatically to how Lispector's work is read—here in the United States and in other cultures around the world. While I am at the moment writing specifically of how this problem pertains to the reception of Clarice here in the United States and globally, it lies, restively and unresolved, at the base of all arguments in favor of world literary study as a formal discipline. Not to put too fine a point on it, but we must ask ourselves: How can we say anything meaningful about a writer (whose texts we likely consume in translation) from a culture and tradition that exists as a cypher to us? And that we routinely disdain? The chances of misinterpretation—of the text being read, of its author, and of her or his literary and intellectual tradition—would seem to be quite high. On the other hand, what one reader considers misreading or a "misinterpretation" can be a form of "richness" to another. And yet all of this is in play as Lispector continues to gain a diverse global audience.[4]

Translators, like Clarice's readers all around the world, come to feel very possessive of her; she is a writer whose texts elicit an intensely personal response, one not unlike what occurs in a particularly intimate friendship or affair. The best, most complete readers of a text, translators often end up feeling that they have mysteriously merged with the author's being. While this is understandable, it is also unrealistic, since it cannot really happen. No matter how good a translator is, and no matter how well she or he knows the language in which a text is written, it is simply impossible to know

what was going on in a writer's mind as a text was being written. Or, as Clarice might say, as it was coming into being. Since Clarice is no longer whinnying with us, to paraphrase a line from Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales," the only thing we readers and translators have to go on is the text itself. But, as we know, literary texts are, semantically speaking, slippery and elusive things. They inspire multiple readings and interpretations. They beguile and challenge and unsettle us. And in the texts written by Lispector, this fundamental characteristic is carried to the maximum. As Dodson says, correctly, "Reading Clarice Lispector is a disorienting experience," one whose "most dizzying feature" exists at "the level of the sentence," that most basic of writerly (and readerly) creativity ("Translator's Note" 629, see also 630–31).

It follows, then, that the question of translation error is far more complicated an issue than it is commonly thought. It is true, of course, that errors of a certain basic kind[5] do occur and even in the best translations, but they are of a different category than the far more common ones that involve differing interpretations, stylistic decisions, rhythm patterns, shades of meaning and tone, and even differences of cultural usage.[6] In the case of Lispector, for example, one of her earliest and most committed translators, Giovanni Pontiero, gave us this line from Clarice's debut novel: "The teacher was like a great tom-cat reigning supreme in a cellar" (*Near to the Wild Heart* 105). The simile equating the teacher and the tomcat, with all its sexual energy and roguishness fully implied, is strong and unmistakable. The reader does not miss it. Unfortunately, this is not the image or the thought the original text seeks to convey. In the original Portuguese version of this novel, the line reads thusly: "O professor parecia um grande gato castrado reinando num porão" (*Perto do Coraçã̃o Selvagem* 114). For Clarice, the cat is clearly castrated, which, of course, radically changes the nature of the comparison between the teacher, a man, typically, and one who wields a great deal of power over his pupils (one of whom, in this case, is a girl) and the cat. While the rendering of "gato" as "tomcat" is moot, the deletion of "castrated" in the translation is not.

Did Pontiero fall prey to a simple error here, or was some sort of deliberate translational manipulation involved, one that sought to bend the translation in some interpretational or ideological direction? We will likely never know. Nevertheless, the question

is worth asking because other slips—or intentional decisions; we just do not know—occur at other points in this English translation. And, as in the case just noted, we can see that a serious question involving gender and power is involved, one that plays directly into the complicated relationship the novel's here young protagonist has with her teacher and that involves her own growth and development. This issue is thus not a minor one. In the view of scholar Marta Peixoto, Pontiero's version of this very powerful and, even today, influential novel amounts to a revision of Clarice's original work, one whose "inaccuracies reflect issues of gender" ("The Young Artist and the Snares of Gender," *Passionate Fictions* 104, note 5, see also 104, note 3).

There is, however, another issue that swirls around Clarice's existence in English translation and it is a serious one. It has to do with the voice she presents to the reader in her many different texts—to wit, should it differ, work to work, as it does in the original, or should Clarice speak in a single, unified voice? According to Magdalena Edwards, who is another of Clarice's talented new translators, Benjamin Moser, who, in his role as the Lispector series editor for New Directions Press, has sparked a global interest in Clarice's work, "wanted to create a unified voice for Clarice in English" (Edwards, "Benjamin Moser and the Smallest Woman in the World" n.p.).[7] Longtime Clarice scholar and translator, Elizabeth Lowe, strongly disagrees with this intention, arguing that even the idea of being forced, in a series of new translations, to speak with a single, "unified" voice "would have offended" Clarice, who was fiercely aware of speaking—and of needing to speak!—in several quite distinct voices (see Edwards, "Benjamin Moser"; also Jacobs). I concur, as does Dodson, who writes that although Clarice's readers want to possess her, "no one can claim the key to her entirely, not even in the Portuguese. She haunts us each in different ways" ("Translator's Note" 635). Lowe, who knew Clarice and who worked with her, further reports that "Moser felt that one of the problems with existing translations of Lispector was that different translators did them at different times and that the 'voice' changed from translation to translation" (qtd. in Edwards, "Benjamin Moser" n.p.). If the reader of the new translations of Clarice that are currently available through New Directions Press is led to the conclusion that she always speaks with the same voice, or even one that is much the same, then that reader will come

away from the experience badly misunderstanding the true nature of the Brazilian writer's work. And why each original text elicits such different readings from different translators.

This aspect of translation, where the act of interpretation, perhaps exacerbated by a desire for uniformity, determines the re-creation part, should never be minimized or curtailed, for it is where the author's imagination and diversity shine through most vividly. Clarice is one of those writers whose work breeds possessiveness, a sense that one's own reading is superior to all others. But it is hubristic to think so, and when a translator or editor takes this position trouble can result. So in addition to the usual problems that accompany Clarice's global reception in English translation, there is this question concerning the forced standardization of voice to contend with as well. Clarice has not one but many voices. These vary widely, always between texts but often within the same text. There is no single Lispector. She is a profoundly non-monochrome writer, and we must beware of seeking to homogenize her different voices. The reader and the instructor of Clarice are well advised to remain vigilant of this fact.

And, if these types of problems were not enough, the translator of Lispector, more than any other kind of reader of her work, knows full well that to make a decision that improves, or intensifies, a text's fidelity to what the translator believes is a particular trait of the original text very often means a loss of fidelity in another, similarly essential trait. This is very common when her translators labor to replicate a text's style in their alchemy. In Clarice's case, the question of style is never incidental, it is crucial to the reader's appreciation of what she is saying. In truth, Clarice's style is inseparable from her thought process. The fusion of the two is a benchmark of her writing; the one is bound up in the other. As Clarice's translator works, she understands that changes in diction necessarily affect issues of syntax, which, in turn, complicate issues of rhythm and rhyme, to say nothing of meaning. Important questions concerning tonal shifts come into play as well, and while loss in one instance may allow for gain in another, the exchange is never equal; the translation is never quite what the original was. As translators know, while content normally translates reasonably well, style, which is much more linked to the sound patterns and semantic structuring of a particular language system, does not (Michael Wood, Forward x-xi).

Clarice's famously "odd" style offers an instructive case in point. Playing her role as the meticulous and imaginative reader, the one who considers all the possibilities for a text's semantic reverberations, diction choices, syntactical plays, and tonal shifts, the translator of Lispector is constantly faced with this dilemma: Should I "fix it up," that is, standardize her style, either a lot or a little, or, opting for a closer fidelity to the original, leave it as it is? All of us who translate Clarice know this tension. If one goes for the former approach, she runs the risk of denaturing Clarice, and of making her appear more conventional, in the ways she organizes the human thought process, than she really is. This position is not infrequently taken by editors who know that readers tend to respond more favorably to, and therefore buy more of, books that speak to them in ways that they find comfortable. And since the world of publishing rests upon its ability to sell books, its editors must be concerned with decisions that will enhance that outcome. Obviously, this reality of the market system can work against a writer, like Clarice, who is regarded as "difficult," or unorthodox, in both stylistic and thematic matters.

If one goes the other way, however, and elects to leave her style as much as possible "as it is" in the original, then she risks making Clarice appear to be an awkward, clumsy, and close to unintelligible writer, one who writes not tantalizingly engaging texts built around syntactically seductive lines and deliciously ambiguous images but one who traffics in off-putting gibberish. Clarice, to put this another way, is one of those writers who, largely for stylistic reasons, can be easily damaged in the process of translation. But because what she writes *about* is so much an expression of *how* she writes, the two are separated only at considerable cost. Those who know her from what scholars have long felt was her idiosyncratic handling of Brazilian Portuguese and who seek to translate her are exquisitely aware of this fact; those who, as in a World Literature class, would seek to know Clarice as well need to be fully cognizant of the differences that come into play here, the qualities lost in translation but also the qualities gained, and that are brought out by different translators. Clarice's English-language bibliography is large and contains a great many books and articles that can help a reader learn more about her famous style and how it infuses her sense of writing and of life itself. These must be consulted.[8]

But the difficulty of achieving this level of understanding must not preclude us from trying to enter into the universe created by this great writer from Brazil. Rather than close off possible lines of interpretation, the faithful translator must keep them open—and, to the best of her ability, just as they are in the original text. A matter of linguistic and creative skill, this is easier said than done, of course, and the final decision (made by the translator) inevitably involves some kind of interplay between a careful reading of the text in question and what the translator judges its best recreation in a different language system to be. Or, to cut to the quick of the matter, what the translator, fully aware in this moment of her status as a creative writer, albeit one still tethered to another text, knows is the most faithful job of recreation she can do. "To dismiss the validity of translation," argues Steiner, "because it is not always possible and never perfect is absurd. What does need clarification, say the translators, is the *degree*," and, I would add, *kind*, "of fidelity to be pursued in each case, the tolerance allowed as between different jobs of work" (251).

In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, for example, Hélène Cixous claims (via her translators) that a Lispectorian sentence she particularly likes (because, for her, it "begins inside, in the body") "is the first sentence" of the book she is here talking about, *O Lustre* (which Cixous and her publisher refer to incorrectly as "*O Lustro*" 82). Readers who can partake of this novel in its original Portuguese version know that this statement is not accurate. The line Cixous cites, and that so pleases her, is this: "She would be fluid all her life, but what had accused her contours and had attracted the contours to a center, what had illuminated her against the world and had given it an intimate power, that had been the secret" (*Three Steps* 82). Only the first part of this translation ("She would be fluid all her life") reflects the first sentence of *O Lustre*.[9] In Clarice's text there is a period, and not a comma, after "life," and there is no "but" connecting it to what, in the original, is clearly the second sentence. Two sentences have been turned into one.

The problem here is that, in contrast to *O Lustre*, Cixous has given her readers a now rather longish single line that does not accurately reflect what Clarice wrote. Although the reasons are not clearly stated, someone (Cixous, presumably, though perhaps in consort with others) elected to splice the first two sentences of

Lispector's second novel together into a single construction.[10] This is a not insignificant change for a translator to make. Edwards suggests that the decision was Cixous's and that the justification was to stress the image of "flowing fluidity" that, along with musicality, so marks this text and its protagonist ("The Real Clarice").

But even if this was Cixous's not unreasonable judgement, Edwards is right to point out that the fusion of the two sentences into a single one "changes the punctuation and the music of the original" ("The Real Clarice"). Is this a mistake? Not necessarily, but it does show why a translation can never be the mirror image of another text. It cannot "be" the original text, and we cannot speak of it as if it were. It is misleading to do so. Rabassa, for example, is the author of *The Apple in the Dark*, not Lispector. The reader, along with the person who teaches a translation, must be aware of this. To make an alteration in any one of the issues relating to syntax, vocabulary, imagery, cultural context, and musicality, as the translator must inevitably do, is to disrupt the rest of them. Though always a question of *degree* (Steiner 251) and of kind, change occurs; both gain and loss are in play. For the translator, this simple truth is a fact of life, and one is cognizant of it at every step of the process. However, this same predicament is also true of creative writing in any form, and, in fact, it shows why, in the final throw of the dice, literary translation truly is a form of creative writing. They have very much in common; indeed, they are essentially the same thing.

When discussing imperfections, or differences, in translated texts, it is therefore useful, I find, to think of translation *as* a form of creative writing. To conceive of it in this fashion allows us to better understand what is involved in the act of translation and what a translation really is. The difference, of course, is that the translation must, by definition, be some kind of re-presentation of the original text. Otherwise, one could call a text a translation even if it is little more than a distant echo of the original work. Inescapably, translation is both a form of creative writing and a form of übertragen or *übersetzen*, a bringing across and a re-rooting, or re-settling, of a text in an alien language and culture. This is why a text and its translation are never the same thing. They can't be. Karen Emmerich puts it succinctly: A translation "is a text that didn't exist before; *all* the words are added; *all* the words are different" (13, see also 175). The one is a re-creation of the other, a special

case of imitation. Nevertheless, the many decisions an author has to make in the writing of a text can be productively applied to the decisions a translator must make in rebuilding the original work in a different language and cultural system. And when one begins to do this (as I have done, in my classes and in my own work), the entire process of translation becomes more understandable, more satisfying, and (slightly) less frustrating. Like the original author, the translator must make determinations about which word to use, about issues of syntax (crucial in Clarice's case), punctuation, imagery, theme, and (especially in poetry but also in the kind of poetic prose Clarice writes) the interplay of rhythm, rhyme, and sense. And, again like the original author, the translator may wish, endlessly sometimes, to keep making edits to the text being rewritten in another language. So while a translation is always different from the text on which it is based, and that it seeks to re-produce, it is, like this original text, a form of creative writing, albeit with a special limitation.

Scholar and translator, John Felstiner, writing about the translation of verse, moves us toward this point when he observes that

> Translating a poem often feels essentially like the primary act of writing, ... In its own way the translator's activity reenacts the poet's and can form the cutting edge of comprehension. At times it even seems (to the enthusiast, at least) that only those insights feeding into or deriving from the task of translation are exactly legitimate, germane to the poem. This is not to limit or belittle the act of comprehending a poem, but to enlarge the responsibility of translating one. (Felstiner, "Can Verse Come Across into Verse?" 124)

I would go a bit further; I would say that the translating of a poem not only "feels" like "the primary act of writing," it *is* like that original writing. Going still further, we can say, in fact, that translation, truly is a form of creative writing, albeit one with a unique aspect to it. As Lowe has pointed out, Clarice herself took this very position (in a Facebook posting, 17 August 2019). As did Rabassa, for whom the translator is a kind of "ideal writer" (*If This Be Treason* 8). No act of re-writing can ever *be* that original act of writing, of course, just as no reading can ever *be* an earlier reading, but the act of translating a text is, quite literally, an act of creation, of creativity. It maintains, however, a relationship with

the original text that a re-writing, or re-drafting, of that original text does not have. A translation exists as an entirely separate text, not as a subtle polishing of a previous version. Because it exists in the same language as the original text, a re-write is different from a translation, which, again by definition, stands apart because it exists in a different language system and must live as a different text, one that will be consumed by readers in a different culture.

The translation, therefore, is always the more radical of the two creative acts. Though it is not going to produce the original poem (unless the reader/translator is Pierre Menard), the act of translating that original text is a form of literary creativity that gives birth to a new poem, story, or novel. And it will be read and discussed as a new poem, story, or novel by readers who may well not know its relationship to another work in another language and who may not be able to comment on this relationship. This is a fact of World Literature as consumed via translation, and it must not be elided or minimized. To translate is to read, to write, and, within limits, to be inventive doing it. And, at every moment, the translator can err in either of two forms—by hewing too closely to a literal, word to word, rendering and, inspired, by too freely recreating the original text, by departing from it too much. At some point, what starts out as a close and responsive reading can, thanks to the creative impulse, move so far from the original that it can no longer be thought of as a true translation. We can see this in the poems included in Robert Lowell's *Imitations*, which are so inventive as to warrant our appreciating the texts he offers more as adaptations than translations. To further complicate things, this new poem, unlike the original (which gets to stand by itself), must be judged in two conflicting ways: as a poem in and of itself and as a translation. Água Viva is one thing, *The Stream of Life* is another, as is every subsequent translation. Although both the original text and its translation involve the act of creative writing, they do so via differing modes and for different reasons. But, again with the magical exception of Borges's character, Pierre Menard, in no case can they be the same thing.

If it seems odd to think of translation as creative writing, perhaps it could help to ask these three questions: One: What is creative writing? Two: What distinguishes creative writing from non-creative writing? And, three: When is writing of any kind not creative? To approach our problem from the perspective of actual

language use, of which all writing is a form, helps us understand more clearly why, in its own special way, translation is indubitably a kind of creative writing. As a function of language, it has to be. It cannot be otherwise. All manner of writing, from a first draft of something to the fifth version (of an original text but also a revision of it, or of a translation of it), involves creativity, the making of decisions about available materials, in these cases, words. And just as a writer will never mistake an original draft of something with whatever one she or he judges to be the last one, so, too, will a translator never mistake a "final" version for another one that—if only the better word, phrase, or image would have been thought of in time to meet the deadline—could have been better (or, on second thought, worse). To work with language, and especially to write language, is to be creative. It is curious that while we are more and more willing to recognize translators as writers, we struggle to conceive of translation as creative writing. We might well understand it better if we did.

We might also understand translation better if we thought of it as a literary genre, a specific kind of writing that comes with its own definitions and rules. Approached from this angle, translation would reveal itself to be creative writing in the same way that writing poetry is the same as writing prose fiction. They're both ways of doing things with words. A sonnet comes with certain formal expectations and conventions, just as a short story or novel does. Or writing for the theater. So, too, does translation. The value of genre to literary study is that it allows us to group or organize into manageable units what would otherwise be a hopeless welter of diverse works and to do so on the basis of some quality they have in common, theme, form, technique, or subject matter, for example. Similarly, translations might be categorized for study on the basis of, say, literality, how closely they adhere to the diction, syntax, and rhythms of their original text; or at the opposite extreme, their freeness, now much they depart, in form and content, from the original; or, thinking here of the endless decisions that have to be made, they might be grouped according to how they move between these two poles, literality and total freedom, in the process of writing a new text, one that seeks, at every step, to re-create the creative energy of the original, to re-create it as literature. Readers who know the translation in its original language would be able to evaluate the two texts separately but also together; those who

don't, who know it only in translation, will have to treat it as they would any other literary text. Any notes that explained the decisions made in the process of translating the text, what is lost and what is gained, for example, could be very useful. To think of translation as a literary genre would allow us to view it as a form of creative writing guided by certain conventions and considerations. One of these, of course, has to do with the special relationship a translation has with its original text.

Casual readers and translation critics often regard the original text as if it were some sort of sacred shrine, the ultimate, perfect, and final expression of the author. But, in truth, this is probably not a very accurate assessment of the situation. As Karen Emmerich demonstrates in *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*, texts are never as stable as we like to think they are. And they are always subject to creative interpretations (3, 13-14, 189). This is especially true semantically; at the level of the word, at the level of the text in its entirety, and at the level of the text as a social document, uncertainty reigns supreme. And no one feels this sense of both gain and loss more acutely than the translator, who, also driven by a strong creative impulse, is responsible both for fidelity to the original and for its pleasing and accurate re-creation in another linguistic and cultural system.

Yet this curious, and perhaps misleading, perception endures—that while the original work lives on forever, just as it is and enshrined in all its supposedly unchanging glory, the poor translation must always be a function of "impermanence," an art form subject to constant change (France 5). This dubious assumption can lead us astray when it comes to thinking about how we should regard translation. It is true that, because of copyright laws, a published text does enjoy a certain, and powerful, kind of permanence. And yet, to accept this position too unthinkingly is to wander off into the weeds of translation theory, which, to my knowledge, has never produced a great translation. A text may stay the same but each reading of it becomes something different. Clarice's readers who know her work in its endlessly lyrical, self-inquisitional, and semantically productive original understand this truism perfectly well, for example.

This difference in readings, or interpretations, however, is rarely as great as the difference between translations of said text, as the case of our two translations of Clarice's *O Lustre* demonstrates.

Cixous reacts one way to the novel's opening while Moser and Edwards respond in another, and both make their re-writing/re-creation decisions accordingly. Different texts result. And while reading them both shows what they have in common, it also shows how widely they differ on certain points and issues. This is especially so if the person comparing the two translations is also able to read *O Lustre* in its original language. So while an original text does stay the same in a physical sense, it is always producing different readings, and it is her "best" reading that a translator works from. This is specifically the point Edwards makes about Cixous's decision, but it surely guided her and Moser's version of the same novel. In my experience, translators tend to be fiercely loyal to their authors and want to do the best they can by them. And this is certainly the case with Clarice and her translators.

But is one's "best" reading necessarily the "best" reading possible? It is impossible even to know, much less to prove, that it is. But we nevertheless want to perform this kind of reading on our text. We want something that we know we cannot have, a perfect, complete reading of it. And it is this dilemma that drives translators crazy while also provoking controversy. While we understand how this discussion about what we think a text means works in the seminar, where everyone's opinion gets a hearing, it leads to a much more difficult decision for the translator, who, responsible for re-constructing all aspects of the original text in a different language system, has to pick the one that, out of many possible readings, "best," and most completely re-constructs the original. And it is the translator who comprehends better than anyone else just how impossible this task is. Even more than the average careful reader, the translator understands why it is difficult to argue that one interpretation is "correct" and that all others are less so, or flat out incorrect. But the translator also understand that this is as true for the original text as it is for any translation of it. The pertinent question has to do with the re-writing, the act of re-creation. As a result, this widespread assumption about the so-called "stability" of the original text and the "impermanence" of its translation is considerably more misleading than we too often assume it is, this being the point famously made by Borges about the catalytic impact of reading in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote."

In addition to this, however, most authors I have known are notorious tinkerers; they can't resist the urge to change a word

here and there, to try an alternative punctuation, or to otherwise expand or shorten a text, sometimes even during the process of translation itself. Or they are open to a good editor making some such alteration, however small. Improvement is always the goal, and the desire to make a good text better is always there. If, for example, Clarice were with us today and re-reading one of her texts, it is easy to imagine her wanting to change something. And, of course, this is exactly what the translator does. Like the original author, the translator (also an author), seeks the perfect word in the perfect place and working in perfect consort with everything else in the text being recreated. And neither will be successful, or, at least, not entirely so. The original author and the translator share this frustration.

Moreover, the translator is also tasked with the additional problem of interpretation, something the original author did not have to worry about. Her task dealt with the realization of the original idea. The translator, of course, is not charged with coming up with the initial inspiration, so this amounts to a basic difference between the two writers, the original author and the translator. But since she is required to work from an already existing literary creation, how can the translator know that her reading of said text is the most complete one, much less the perfect or even correct one? Or that it is the one closest to the meaning, or (more likely) meanings, produced by the original text? She cannot; she cannot know this, at least in any perfect sense. This is why translation can be thought of as the most radical form of interpretation, the one that, when compared to all the other possible interpretations, emerges, in the judgement of the translator, as the best. This is why the job of the translator is different from that of the student in a literature seminar; while the student can (and should) contemplate several different lines of interpretation at once, the translator, who must render a judgement about which interpretation reproduces the original text most faithfully, cannot.[11]

On the other hand, perhaps the original author is not aware of all the possible means her text produces either. It is the reader/translator, after all, who brings any text to life, who imbues it with meaning and significance, and who allows it to speak to people of a specific time and place. And then there are the innumerable problems involved in trying to guess what the author wanted to do, the semantic complications that the translator must deal with that

are caused by shifts of time and place, or the intellectual, artistic, or ideological baggage the translator herself brings to the job. Nor have we touched on the question of the translator's knowledge of the languages involved. If it is at all faulty, trouble will result. And, to top it all off, we have this: If the translator is not a very good creative writer herself, then no matter how solid her grasp of the original language is, the translation is not likely to sing as it does in its original tongue. If it's good literature going in, as it lives in its original language, it has to be good literature—and in closely parallel ways—coming out, that is, as it now lives in its translation. This is where the translator's skill as a creative writer must shine through.

After years of teaching language, literature, and translation, and after years of trying to translate myself, I have come to feel that the task of the literary translator is actually more difficult than that of the original author. In saying this, I do not mean that translation is superior to or better than the original text; only that it is more challenging, more complicated, and with fewer chances for total success. The translator carries an extra burden. While the author is completely free to invent the story, create the plot, and create the characters or voices involved, the translator has to make all of the same decisions, plus those involving questions of style, many of which are deeply rooted in their language. The difference is that the translator cannot create freely, as the original author can. The translator's choices are more limited; another novel, story, poem, or drama must not only be rewritten but in such a way that the original's literary aspects are maintained, in the same ways, and in the same proportions. It is at this point that we can understand translation as creative writing. But because the translator is more restricted than the original author was in making decisions, her job is therefore more difficult; she has fewer options to achieve the same end. The degree of difficulty in performing the same trick, as it were, is greater. For the translator, there are more questions, of the maddeningly unknowable nature, that cannot be answered but that must be answered, which explains why the task of the translator is, in the final analysis, impossible. The translation is always at least one step removed from the original, and often several. Though it tries, the translation can never be the thing it strives to be. And the translator is sharply aware of it.

Because the translator struggles endlessly to bring about the perfect fusion of the original and her reconstruction of it, a translation regularly takes longer to complete. Indeed, as Miranda France writes the translating of a book can easily "take two or three times as long" to do as its original writing did (3). While the author of the original text can finish a manuscript and feel satisfied, the translator never does. Unlike the original author, the translator is always burdened with the feeling of having come up short, of having failed, either to reproduce exactly what the author said or meant or of having explained too much or too little. The translator's sense of failure is palpable because it must always be judged against the original, and *that* it is not. And no one is more painfully aware of this fact than the translator. But whether one agrees with this position or not, translation is clearly a form of creative writing. And, complex and challenging, it deserves more consideration as such.

In what is, then, the arguably more difficult case of translation, we have to try and understand a text as the original author did, and this is where the trouble starts. We can't. But we are tempted to think that we can. To believe that we really can, in fact, know what the author was thinking, or what the author intended, is a figment of the translator's desire to understand not merely what a particular writer is saying (which is difficult enough) but how and, most especially why, it is said as it is. In contrast to the reader, who, as an interpreter of the translated text, will work only in one language, the translator must, as reader and writer, work in the two languages that are involved. As Gregory Rabassa liked to say, the translator is always a text's most attentive, most complete reader, the one who understands every nuance the original language deploys but who is also able, crucially, to discern the differing patterns that evolve as well as their differing levels of importance. But, he would then add, with his sly grin, the translator must then also be herself an outstanding writer, the kind, in fact, who can reproduce these in another language system, who can recreate what (she thinks) is what the writer would have said had she been working in modern, American English. And, in fact, Greg always thought of himself as more of a writer than a translator. His labors as a translator, he felt, allowed him to merge two of the great loves of his professional life, language learning and creative writing. It was a source of considerable satisfaction for him when, as in his

luminous recreation of Clarice's *The Apple in the Dark*, he was able to transform great literature in one language system into great literature in another language system. This was always his goal, and to achieve it he counseled the importance of being both a careful, imaginative reader and a good writer.

Lewis Galantière comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that "if the literary translator is not a writer," she or he cannot be successful, or as successful and as complete as a translator of literature must, finally, be (xi). What Galantière is getting at here is an essential point, one that separates literary translators from other types of translation work. To translate poems, stories, novels, and plays means to write poems, stories, novels, and plays, but to do so in another language system and for a different audience, one that may or may not be aware of all the cultural references and implications that are involved. If these are lost, obscured, or otherwise misrepresented, a great deal of the original work's significance will be lost, and it will live on in the translated language in a diminished state. Indeed, this is an intractable problem of translation, and it plagues the development of World Literature, along with those who read it and those who would teach it. At the same time, however, once can argue that a careless or indifferent reader will miss much of a work's deeper resonances even when they share the same culture. And this is true. Yet the problem is exacerbated in a text like Clarice's *Soulstorm*, which requires that the reader and instructor both be informed in some depth about life under the Brazilian dictatorship. An example of this can be seen in the story, "Pig Latin," would have registered with a Brazilian reader of the time because it makes an implicit connection between the rape of a young Brazilian woman and the rape of that nation's democracy. Fortunately for Lispector, her stories exist in English thanks to two excellent translations, both of which capture even the subtlest of her numerous references to the time and place.

For many translators, it is the act of reading that leads one into a close, almost visceral identification with the original author. In the case of a writer as committed to freedom of thought and expression as Lispector was, and to the essential polysemy of words, it is especially ironic to think that this sort of near mystical union of author and translator could be attainable in her case. And yet this is a not uncommon experience for those who, even in translation, read Clarice closely and those who translate her narratives.

To read Clarice is to have an intense, intimate, and even orgasmic experience. Whether we consider ourselves male, female, transgender, or more gender protean, we end up feeling that we *become* Clarice, that we merge with her being, and that we see and understand (or seek to) as she does. Her texts entice and titillate us. All of us who have translated Clarice know this feeling well. It is less a matter of being sucked in, which has a negative connotation, than of being transformed, and in a way that underscores the old question of androgyny that marks her writing.[12]

Examples of this issue abound in Clarice's work, in the original and in her various translations. The egregiously understudied early play, originally translated into English in 1986 by Giovanni Pontiero as "The Woman Burned at the Stake and the Harmonious Angels," makes what amounts to a substantial alteration in the title by changing its original form, "A Pecadora Queimada," which, more literally, means the "burned female sinner," or the female sinner who is burned (as in to death and, replete with deeply disturbing evocations of very real Christian savagery, at the stake), to "The Woman." In a later, 2015, translation, Dodson opts for the more literal, "The Burned Sinner," but, in so doing, eliminates the crucial issue of gender that is clearly present in the Portuguese and that Pontiero elects to emphasize, arguably too much, in his English translation. With the Dodson version, the reader does not understand the gender question (the fact that the "sinner" in question is a woman) until she gets well into the text, where the signal importance of gender discrimination in society is definitively and vividly fixed. Pontiero, on the other hand, had, apparently, chosen to emphasize the plight of women, which is the gist of the entire play (a kind of medieval "morality" play gone terribly wrong) already in the title. In contrast to both these versions, however, Clarice's original Portuguese is able, because of the grammatical nature of the language itself, to feature all these issues at once: a female "sinner" who is going to be burned—presumably, the reader knowledgeable about the Western literary tradition will surmise, to death. She will suffer this unconscionably cruel punishment for her alleged "sin," adultery. She has a (male) lover and a husband, both of whom appear and speak at her trial/inquisition. She, by way of contrast, never speaks a single word, not even when she is condemned to death by this most barbaric of means, one sanctioned by all the male representatives of society who are present.

Only a nameless woman, a member of crowd of people watching the trial, voices opposition to what is transpiring. What the reader who completes the text is led to consider, however, is that the same "sin," when committed by a man (as it so commonly is), effects no punishment whatsoever on him, thus demonstrating the double-standard Western society has long forced upon women.

Should the alert reader, and the one fortunate enough to be asked to read both the Pontiero translation and the Dodson one, conclude that in one or the other there is an error? Or should she conclude that the difference between the two translations is more a matter of interpretation and decision making by the translator? And what will the person charged with teaching this Clarice text, or these Clarice texts, say about them? How many cultural stereotypes will come into play? And how many of them will damage, or impede, the reader's reception of the Clarice text in front of her? And how many times will an instructor of a World Literature class be able to compare and contrast two or more translations of the same text? How often will that actually happen, as valuable as it is to do so?

If, as Damrosch, Sarah Lawall, Hoyos, and others believe, such differing translations can actually enrich a mono-lingual and mono-cultural reader's understanding of a foreign text, it will come about only if the instructor is sufficiently aware of the original text's language, of how the original text functions as a part of a larger literary tradition, and, last but far from least, of the author's history of writing about the main topics under consideration in a particular text.

But, again, how often will this enrichment actually occur? How often will an instructor who knows no Brazilian Portuguese and who knows little or nothing of Brazilian literary and cultural history be able to teach Lispector in a way that enriches her students? This is rarely, if ever, a problem for, say, an English department faculty member or graduate student who is asked to offer a class on Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson, or on a writer from some other part of the English-speaking world, but how well will that same person do when asked to teach a writer like Lispector? Will the instructor be sufficiently aware of Clarice's other work and how the text being read figures into it? Or her other writings and the ways that they relate to the one under consideration? Or the nature of Brazilian literary history, the rich cultural stew out of

which Clarice comes? While some instructors, tenure-track professors, instructors, or graduate teaching assistants, will undoubtedly do their homework and learn the answers to these important questions, it seems likely that many (most?) will not. And so the question must be asked: How well, in these, I fear, all too common situations, will Clarice be taught and understood?

But (as in all language use) this question begs another: Are we better off knowing even a little about Lispector, albeit imperfectly (or even incorrectly), than to know her not at all? My feeling is that, yes, on balance we are. But disturbing doubts persist: Do we deem it adequate that monolingual readers in a stubbornly monolingual culture, like that of the United States, simply know that a writer named Lispector exists in a (for them) strange place called Brazil? Is that adequate for our "trans-national" desires? My fear is that, yes, it will be. And is this condition the fate of those who, from the perspective of English departments in the United States, pursue their World Literature agenda? Until English departments do what good programs in Comparative Literature do and require extensive, graduate seminar-level in at least three languages and literatures (which, taken together, form one's intellectual base), the answer to this last question will, once again, be yes.

Damrosch is aware of this problem. His belief, honed, presumably, from years of teaching in a US English department, is that the person who reads a writer like Lispector will be challenged to see differently and to think otherwise, to question the assumptions and values of her or his own cultural and national environment. The basis of all good humanities education, this is a powerful argument. And, when the readings are led by a knowledgeable, well-prepared teacher, the outcome could be positive.

But how often will this be the case? Or, more troubling, how often will it not be? Regardless, one can conclude that, in our splintered and fractious world of 2020 there are worse things than allowing English department students in the United States to learn a little about a lot of world literature authors and the issues they address. It cannot hurt and it could be a good thing. And, in fact, it almost certainly *is* a good thing. After all, English departments have, thanks to the efforts of translators, been including non-English language authors on their reading lists for a long time. And the purpose of translation is to bring a foreign writer to the attention of people in another culture and who speak another

language. This is why translation exists, why it is practiced. There are consequences, however, for readers who rely only on translated texts. For generations of English students here in the United States, writers like Cervantes and Borges now live on as English-language authors. They have been appropriated. Will that become the fate of Clarice as well?

To proceed in this fashion, however, only throws into greater clarity the importance of learning at least a few other world languages well enough to speak and write them and to read their literatures not in translation but in their original tongue. Or, at the very least, to understand that reading a work in translation is not the same as reading it in its original language. The experience is different, and for reasons that are not only linguistic but historical and cultural as well. We can—and need—to understand difference; the error lies in thinking that what we take from a translation is exactly what a native speaker takes from it. Unless the instructor of a text taught in translation is aware of what is lost, as well as what is added, the student runs the risk of interpreting a novel, poem, or story about a very different place through the lens of his or her own time and place. And this can lead to the very kind of arrogance and cultural misunderstanding that, as a discipline, World Literature seeks to guard against. And, when they rear their ugly heads, overcome.

I can easily see the study of World Literature as being of considerable political, cultural, and economic importance, but I cannot so easily see it as having a similar level of literary value, this thing that we think of as "literature," its euphonies, its multiple frames of reference, and its ambiguities, having so much to do with the language in which it is originally written or spoken and with the specific time and place the original text originates. Good translators can bring across and recreate themes, characters (including social types), and even cultural particularities, but they can only rarely recreate word play, slang, semantic suggestions and images that are historically rooted, or the music of a line of poetry or the rhythms and motifs of a particular run of prose from a particular time. Famously, some translations have attained a status of excellence as poems, narratives, or dramas in their own right. And this is fine; the more good literature we have, the better. But no matter how good it is, a translation is never the same as the original text. "No translation," as David Bellos rightly insists, "is the

same as its source," and, to understand the process of translation properly, we must disavow ourselves of the erroneous notion that it is (322). While they will have much in common (usually in the areas of content and structure), they are unalterably different. Those who can read both *Perto do Coração Selvagem* and *Near to the Wild Heart* understand this; those who can't, don't. This is true, of course, as regards the relationship between a translation and its original text, whatever the language. As Edith Grossman says, "it seems clear that a translated work does have an existence separate from and different from the first text" (70–71). This point, so easily glided over with little or no thought about what it means, bears remembering, for it affects how we think about the entire question. To repeat, then: translation and the original text are never the same, not in their writing and not in their reading. To pretend they are the same, or to simply ignore the differences, will lead us astray.[13] And this fact becomes more and more salient as World Literature grows and develops as a discipline.

And yet, as comparatist, classicist, and translator, Emily Wilson, reminds us, "Cultural alienation, and engagement with difference, can be created and enabled by" by the translator's skill and knowledge of the original text, its sister texts (if such exist), and of the author's worldview (5). But these same qualities are also facilitated (or not) by the translator's ability to reveal to her readers "a world" and a human consciousness they "can understand" even though they might not initially think they could (5). Whether realized at the level of a single author and text or in a more comparative and global context, this is the value of literature and its study. And for the reader of World Literature, this value comes to life via translation, which, as we have seen, begs the question: If a translation is not the original text, then what is it?[14] The answer, as we shall soon see, is simple, deceptively simple but still simple: Translation is a form of creative writing.

The conclusion is clear: To know even a little about a foreign culture by reading a translated novel or two, a story, a play, or a similarly rewritten poem from it can only help raise the consciousness of our students about our larger, interconnected world and the various systems that give it an identity and bind it together. And, if the learning can take place in a classroom marked by honest inquiry and by teachers who have done their homework, this would be a good thing. Here in the West, the connections between

literature and society are ancient, dating from the days of Plato and his great student, Aristotle, and their considerations about the role of creative writing in the Republic. So we must not be chary, today, of discussing literary texts in extra-literary contexts. This is especially important for a writer like Lispector, whose work has a great deal to say to us about the interplay of language and identity, about the status of women in society, and about issues of social justice.

For Hoyos, a major plus of Latin American literature has always been its political acuity, and, as we have seen, this is certainly true of Lispector, a writer who merges politics, philosophy, and aesthetics at almost every turn (10; see also Williams). As global citizens, we, here in the United States, are better off knowing about, and perhaps learning from, an estranging and disturbing text from Brazil, *The Hour of the Star*, where we can see the consequences of things that we do, or that we allow to be done, than we are from not reading it at all. Perhaps we will be led to think differently. Perhaps the experience of seeing ourselves through the eyes of others will help us here in the United States to rethink what we want to stand for and what we want our political leaders to do. From issues of gender and human rights to those of tyranny, injustice, and economic exploitation, literature can have a great deal to say to us. The linkage between World Literature and political awareness, both national and international, is an important one, and it should not be minimized. Its ability to help us learn to think globally, even as we remain engaged and responsible citizens of our respective nations, may well become World Literature's greatest importance.

Conclusion

In 2017, Indian-born writer and translator, Madhu H. Kaza, who currently resides in the United States, had just finished "an essay about Clarice Lispector" (Kaza 138). Enthralled with what she had read of Clarice in translation, she had then begun studying Portuguese so that she could gain "more intimacy with her work" than reading it in English had allowed her (138). This is an outcome that all lovers of language and literature can applaud. As good as Lispector's translations are, the experience of reading a poem, a novel, a story, or a play in its original language is always different. Of this, there is no doubt. And it is always good to study more languages. Those who do so know that there are many superb writers who, because they labor away in the lesser studied languages (like Portuguese), fully deserve a greater audience. So they often take it upon themselves to translate these worthy authors. Beyond this question, however, the case described by Kaza exemplifies what is most worthy about World Literature, and how it benefits a nation like Brazil, which is graced by an extraordinary, though not widely studied, national literature. While few would deny that World Literature is saddled with problems both conceptual and methodological, the now global circulation of a marvelous though hitherto little-known writer like Lispector can only be regarded, in the final analysis, as a positive thing.

This book has sought to examine the current world-wide popularity of Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, and to consider the most likely reasons for it. By extension, it also seeks to consider Clarice's place in the World Literature movement. In coming at these questions, it is important to remember that her multiform texts are being read today in a context globalized as never before and in the light of three great movements. The first, the rise of authoritarian, if not outright fascist, political rule around the

world; second, the rise, everywhere, of racism, anti-Semitism, and other, equally pernicious forms of bigotry (including violence against women); and, third, the rise of a now profoundly interconnected international business order, one that rewards rapacious multi-national corporations and conservative political interests while also pollutes the global environment and enslaves millions of people in social, political, and economic systems that are designed not to benefit them in any meaningful ways. World Literature is in a position to help alert people to the dangers we face today, nationally and internationally, and it must do so. Reading Clarice can help.

As someone who has spent the majority of his professional life studying, writing about, and teaching the work of Clarice Lispector, it can nevertheless seem odd that Clarice, as exceptional a writer as she is, has gained this kind of extraordinary international appeal. There are so many other Brazilian writers whom one might well have predicted would be able to escape from the invisibility that so often prevents them from winning widespread international respect— Gregório de Matos, Gonçalves Dias, Castro Alves, Júlia Lopes de Almeida, João da Cruz e Sousa, Machado de Assis, Raquel de Queirós, Cecília Meireles, Jorge de Lima, Patrícia Galvão, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Nélida Piñon, Hilda Hilst, Guimarães Rosa, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Márcia Denser, Lya Luft, João Gilberto Noll, João Paulo Cuenca, Regina Rheda, and Chico Buarque among many others (for more on Buarque, as an exemplar of World Literature, see Hoyos 65-95). Clarice, by way of contrast, has long been regarded by readers in Brazil as so hermetic, so esoteric, and so resistant to easy reductionism that she seemed the least likely of her country's writers to win this kind of global audience. And yet, as they say, here we are.

So, what is it that Clarice's stories, novels, and non-fiction pieces bring to this greatly stressed global audience? What is it about her work that appeals so much to people around the world?

The answer, as I have tried to show, lies in the fact that there is not just one Clarice Lispector; there are many, with each Clarice, as strong and as vital as it is, enriching the others. So no matter which Clarice portal one enters, it will be utterly engrossing, it will touch the reader's most vital humanity, and it will lead to the other Clarice's. While there are many different Clarice's, from the mystical to the political, and from the erotic to the comic, Clarice

Lispector the writer is not a tortured and hopelessly fragmented being; to the contrary, she is a coherent, if mercurial, whole, a complete fusion of mind and body. She is a human being. Tangled, yes, and often agonizing over the contradictions and desires of life, she attracts the reader precisely because she is honest in exposing her true, fluid self in this fashion. Nothing is held back. While reading Clarice can, because of this extraordinary honesty, be an excruciating experience, the reader also senses the basic unity (albeit a unity that constantly ebbs and flows) that is inherent in her writing and that breathes life into it. Clarice's reader both identifies with this exquisitely human expression of existence and situates herself and himself in it. To read Clarice Lispector is to experience what is real—about life and about language, about what it means to be human.

Language, Clarice constantly reminds us, "is the means by which we articulate reality, observe the universe around us, and narrate our lives. Stories," whether consumed in their original language or in translation, are a source of well-being" and understanding, of self and world (Noodin 6). "Translation and negotiation, both centered in language" and both so fundamental to World Literature, "are the highest forms of empathy" and, I would add, respect (6).

As Clarice's global circulation continues, the concept of "respect" becomes increasingly important for her diverse readers. It is undoubtedly true that because Clarice hails from Brazil, a culture widely judged, for better and for worse, to be "exotic" but not much respected certainly works in her favor these days. Also helping her, though, is the fact that she represents a national literature that, though truly rich and diverse, has been badly neglected by the arbiters of global literary value, the high priests of the privileged languages and cultures who pontificate about which national literatures have value and which do not. Clarice Lispector and Brazilian literature generally still suffer, particularly here in the United States, from what Yale professor, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, described as "blind literary prejudice" ("The New Latin American Literature in the USA" 3). On this score, not much has really changed, although there are signs that Spanish American literature, at least, is gaining some serious recognition (see Levander). Respect has been slow to come. Lamentably, I see nothing similar happening for Brazilian literature, which, if it is

considered at all (and Levander does not), seems to get lost here in the States under the vague rubric, "Latin America." But in time this long overdue respect will be won. And, like it or not, translation will have a lot to do with it. This is why it is so important for US-based scholars like David Damrosch and Héctor Hoyos to remind us that Latin America involves both Spanish America and Brazil. Overall, though, even affirmative talk has struggled to lead the US intelligentsia and critical establishment to a heightened knowledge of literature and language beyond our borders, much less to a serious understanding and appreciation of them. The need to do so is undoubtedly the yeast that is causing the World Literature movement in the United States to rise. Linguistically and literarily we need to understand the world better, as Clarice herself did—and as she expects her readers to (see Librandi 6).

Working powerfully in Clarice's favor, is the fact that her texts exude even in their various translations a powerful sense of authenticity, and readers around the world respond to this elusive yet essential quality. They see that Clarice cultivates both the deeply private, secretive, and often subversive "inward discourse" that George Steiner speaks of as being characteristic of human language use as well as what we might think of as our various forms of public discourse, the words we use to present ourselves to others (18). Clarice's admirers see themselves in all of this, along with the tensions and anxieties that result from being aware of the complicating interplay between the inner and outer language use that accompanies it. As writer Lizzie Skurnick observes, "Readers hunger for anything they actually experience," or, we might say, that they know and recognize (qtd. in Bosker 20).

Clarice's characters and voices offer this quality to their readers. Her creations and her texts speak for our multiple selves, our diverse, fluid, and often conflicting identities. We recognize ourselves, or parts of ourselves, in her narratives. In her work, people are presented "as the sum of their race, gender, sexuality, ableness, and other identities: they 'own' them," and in this they touch what is most poignantly and perplexingly human about us (Menand 69). To be attracted to, or seduced by (which seems a more accurate way of putting it) the philosophic and poetic Clarice, for example, leads one eventually to the other Clarices, the erotic one, the funny one, the domestic one, and the political one. And to the one who constantly reminds us of the role language plays in the creation

of our multiple beings. Just as Clarice was many people, or had many, often contrasting identities, so, too, do most people. And this allows her exceedingly variegated global audience to identify with her and to trust her voice, which is always involved, one way or another, in a quest for understanding and authenticity of being. In a global culture built more and more on deceit and falsity, we thirst for a voice like hers. In ways both painful and pleasurable, and both vulnerable and honest, Clarice's world smacks of the real human experience, the one that is *lived* and not merely contemplated. In a world desperate for the truth, her words speak the truth. More than that, they and her memorable characters live it out, and always in intensely human ways. Not just her women but her men as well. This, I believe, is the heart—the "Wild Heart"—of her global appeal. And it is no small thing. Indeed, it is everything.

Notes

Chapter One

1. Dodson translates this same story, known in Portuguese as "A Fuga," as "The Escape."

2. In "A Pointless Scandal," a 1968 "crônica," Clarice writes about how sad it is that some men seek "to transform their wives into possessions" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 130). This problem, of wishing to possess things, including people, had first been explored in *Near to the Wild Heart*, where the protagonist, a young woman named Joana, yearned to be free of all such restrictive forces.

3. Appearing on 25 May 1940, "The Triumph" may be Clarice's first published story.

4. For a revealing statement of how Clarice viewed her own adolescent sexuality, see the 6 July 1968 chronicle, "Discovering the World" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 152–53).

5. For Dodson, "anguished masculinity" becomes "afflicted masculinity" (*Complete Stories* 322), which hangs closer to the original, "masculinidade aflita" ("Os Obedientes," *A Legião Estrangeira* 104).

6. The original Portuguese is "Cada coisa parecia o sinal de outra coisa" ("Os Obedientes," *A Legião Estrangeira* 104). In Dodson's version, which stresses less the issue of linguistic signs and semiotic play, this quote is rendered thusly: "Each thing seemed to signal another" (*Complete Stories* 322).

7. Though Clarice had originally written the story in English, she later translated it into Portuguese as *O Mistério do Coelho Pensante* (Gotlib 582).

8. As Clarice writes, the "word" is a form of bait, one that the writer uses to lure the reader toward the point she wants to make. When the reader bites on it, that is, assimilates it, she understands it as existing "between the lines" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 509)

9. A similar doubt about the degree to which one can ever completely be in control of one's life also animates "A Report on a Thing," from *Soulstorm*. Here, and couched in the fluid interplay of moisture (associated with writing) and dryness, male and female, and life and death, the problem is summed up in the concept of "Sveglia."

10. "Writing Between the Lines" appeared on 6 November 1971, only

three years after the promulgation of Institutional Act–5. The odd, oblique language of this text seems not to be about fishing but about how readers might respond to the conditions under which their lives are being played out.

11. Dodson translates this as the much more British "knickers," perhaps because the entire story takes place in London and Miss Algrave is "of Irish descent," her father having been "a Protestant minister" and her mother hailing from Dublin ("Miss Algrave," *Soulstorm* 8). The Portuguese word, "calcinhas," carries no such British connotation, and is usually translated as "panties" (Lispector, *A Via Crucis do Corpo* 17).

12. Interestingly, it is Dodson who here, in translating the Portuguese "Use-se" (*Via Crucis do Corpo* 21) to English, stays closer to the original usage, her version being the blunter "Use yourself" (*Clarice Lispector* 512).

13. For this line, Dodson offers "Don't play dumb with me!" (*Clarice Lispector* 514).

14. Dodson goes here with "you bastard!" (*Clarice Lispector* 514). The Portuguese word in question here is "desgraçado," which offers up other possible translations as well, including "you miserable wretch," "you creep," or even "you miserable creep" (*A Via Crucis do Corpo* 25).

15. For Dodson, the Portuguese word used here, "sovina," is brought across as "cheapskate" (*A Via Crucis do Corpo* 25; Dodson, *Clarice Lispector* 514).

16. Macabéa's all but hopeless situation stems from political and economic policies that are designed to benefit only very wealthy individuals and large corporations. As corporate globalization assumes control over our planet, there will be more and more people like Macabéa and Olímpico in the United States and around the world. In reading *The Hour of the Star*, we are looking at our collective future. This point, deeply political in nature, is not lost on Clarice's global audience.

17. The need to eliminate hunger, in Brazil and globally, is a constant refrain in Clarice's world (see "Twenty-Five Years Hence," *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 47; also "Excess and Privation," *Discovering* 179–80).

18. See, for example, Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, where the narrator comes close to identifying with the girl he has created (38); see also 12–13 for the same sentiment.

19. Clarice harbored no illusions about the capacity of literature to bring about change (see Moser, *Why This World* 63).

20. In these final lines, Clarice shows us that the woman has been the life-giving water in their life together and that, though he, her husband, only dimly (if at all) glimpses this, she has been the strength behind their relationship. It does not take much to read the man presented here as representing the blindness and stupidity of patriarchy and of those who continue to uphold it.

21. It is possible to think that Clarice might well have chosen this mode of writing in order to slip these only seemingly innocuous texts past the censors.

Chapter Two

1. Unsigned and without a date, the quote comes from the *Saturday Review*.

2. Clarice reports that when critic San Tiago Dantas first read *The Besieged City*, "he was shocked," telling her that, though later he would change his mind, her "writing had deteriorated" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering*, ed. Pontiero 355).

3. Lispector, *Um Sopro de Vida (Pulsações)* ("*A Breath of Life [Pulsations]*" 102; trans. mine)

4. Also from 1974, another children's story, "Laura's Intimate Life," makes its appearance. In it, Laura, a little hen, decides that if it is her destiny to be killed and eaten, then she would like to be eaten by the legendary soccer player, Pelé.

5. It is difficult to believe that for the Brazilian citizen of 1974, this question of becoming "liberated" would have not resonated in ways not only sexual but also political.

6. Why does Clarice specify that the two women are not homosexual? It is a question worth asking. Are we to think that she does not approve of female homosexuality? There is no textual evidence to support this hypothesis. Nor has she ever been reported making such a statement. A more likely explanation, I propose, is that Carmen and Beatrice exemplify the sexual fluidity that researchers like Lisa M. Diamond and Daniel Bergner attribute to women (Diamond 3'4, 19–25, 54–90; Bergner 9–28, 74–75, 193–97). Under the right circumstances, they argue, women can easily move from emotionally and intellectually intense relationships to sexually engaged ones. In "The Body," Carmen and Beatrice are threatened by a domineering Xavier, and while he is presented as something of a joke, they band together to resist him. In the process, they become lovers—not because they are homosexual but because they are allies.

7. It is interesting to note that the secretary who notices Xavier's absence from the office and who notifies the authorities is not a woman, as one might well expect, but a man.

8. Many of these advisors were adepts of the Milton Friedman school of economics, which argued that corporations had no social responsibilities at all and that the increasing of profit was their only goal.

9. For those readers interested in comparative translation work, it is worth noting that, for Dodson, this line becomes "She bathed in the waters of Jesus" (*Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories* 429). Neither translation opts for "broth" as the English equivalent of the Portuguese word, "calda," which is used in the original line: "Ela se banhava na calda de Jesus" and which, emphasizing more the use of the verb in the imperfect tense, could have been rendered as "She was bathing in the broth of Jesus" (*Onde Estiveste de Noite* 27).

10. In a novel that could be said to be about abandonment, it is interesting to note that Olímpico will, in turn, be abandoned by Gloria, Macabéa's more zaftig workmate and the woman for whom he had abandoned Macabéa in the first place.

11. It is important to note that, at no point, does Clarice/Rodrigo present Macabéa as being stupid. Having been left behind by her society, she is the

living symbol of what it means to be disadvantaged, in Brazil but globally as well.

Chapter Three

1. See, for example, the column, "Passing Themes," 24 May 1969 (Lispector, *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 258; also "Adventure," 4 October 1969, *Discovering* 308).

2. Is it possible that this very basic connection between language, eros, creativity, along with our human desire for play, could explain the seemingly endless production of puns, plays on words, and *double entendres* involving sex that exists—and for both men and women?

3. Research indicates that, from early childhood on, females are more attuned to language than are males. If this assumption continues to hold up, it would suggest that there may well be a biological or genetic link between language, creativity (in both the biological and artistic sense), and human existence. And if such a linkage does indeed exist, it would find one its finest literary expressions in the texts of Clarice Lispector.

4. Clarice would explore this concept of "the 'it,' the impersonal, the neuter gender," most profoundly in *The Passion According to G. H.*

5. An attorney, Otávio understands the law and the Civil Code as mechanisms for keeping things in what he regards as their proper place and their proper order.

6. This concern, particularly in the arena of ethics and politics, with Sartrean "good faith" and "bad faith" helps explain Clarice's enduring popularity in Brazil as an existential writer. At the same time, however, one should also remember that Clarice claimed she had "read Sartre" (most likely in French, as she knew French well) only "after" she had "finished her second book," *The Chandelier* (Lowe, "The Passion According to C. L." 36). "Before then," Clarice states, she "didn't even know he existed" (36).

7. The seductiveness of pleasure enjoys a major presence in Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.* See, for example 19–25, 113–20, and 149–55.

8. For more on this topic, see Earl E. Fitz, "Clarice Lispector, Writing and the Language Novel."

Chapter Four

1. The correct Portuguese spelling is Água. The two exemplary cases are Joana, in the early *Near to the Wild Heart* and the unnamed female voice in *The Stream of Life*, whose entire narrative is orgasmic in nature.

2. This same trend infuses the still widely read 1964 Lispector's novel, *The Passion According to G. H.*, with its many images of "preclimax" (19), "climax" (20), "pleasure" (20–24, 120, 130, 145 et al.), "orgasm" (119, 135), "ecstasy" (145, 153, 154), "orgy" and "orgiastic" (150).

3. In the 1964 story, "The Misfortunes of Sofia," adolescent sexuality plays a not insignificant role. The narrator, seemingly Clarice herself as a young girl, is keenly aware of early sexuality, her own as well as that of the

children around her. "We lived life to the full; we rolled down every slope," she says of how she and her youthful cohorts played together where the "bees made honey," adding, lest the reader miss the suggestion being made here, that "we ... whispered earnestly behind every pile of bricks, ate the different varieties of flowers, and into all the tree trunks we carved with our penknives dates, sweet obscenities and hearts pierced with arrows: girls and boys made their honey there" (Lispector, *Foreign Legion* 18).

4. Lesbianism appears to also play a role in "The Solution," a 1964 story the heart of which centers on two women, Alice and Almira. At one point, for example, we are told that "Some people insinuated that there was something odd about their relationship" (Lispector, *Foreign Legion* 67).

5. References to female breasts abound in Clarice's work, as do references to the female body in general. As they are in Clarice's first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart*, where they play an important role in Joana's self-differentiation from her bosomy aunt and the smothering passivity she stands for, they are also a recurring motif in the 1946 novel, *The Chandelier*. While in the main these images of female breasts are of the type noted here, occasionally they are quite different. In "Journey to Petrópolis" (1964), as in the above citation from 1943, a woman's "big bosom" is noted (Lispector, *Foreign Legion* 63), while in "Torture and Glory," a 1967 chronicle that may feature Clarice speaking about herself, we are told that while one girl had a "bust" that "had become enormous," "the rest of us were flat-chested" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 39). Other references to breasts from Clarice's newspaper columns include a description of a woman with an "ample bosom" and "broad hips" (373, see also 537), women whose breasts are "deformed from constant breast-feeding" (537), the asking of a question, "Why do women have breasts?" (485), a woman going about "without a bra" 516), and a dancer "with hardly any breasts" (550). The development of breasts through puberty is stressed in "The Bath" section of *Near to the Wild Heart* and again in the 1964 story, "The Message" (*Foreign Legion* 41). Later, in *The Stream of Life*, the narrative voice, that again of a woman, says "My vast night takes place in a primary state of latency. My hand rests upon the earth and listens hotly to the beating of a heart. I see the large white slug with a woman's breasts" (29). It is perhaps worth nothing, given Clarice's fondness for the work of the British writer, that this reference to a heart beating beneath the earth recalls a similar image in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915), a novel she might well have known since she was an admirer of his work. More typical is how the narrator describes Carla, an exotic dancer at the club, "Erotica." Though "beautiful" and with "well-shaped hips," we are told, Carla "had scarcely any breasts" (Lispector, "Plaza Mauá," *Soulstorm* 54). "Sometimes," we learn, Carla "danced in blue jeans and without a bra, her breasts swinging among the flashing necklaces" (55). And of Aurelia, in "He Soaked Me Up," also from *Soulstorm*, we learn that while she wore "falsies," "her own breasts were pointed" and "pretty" (36). In "The Sweater," a *crônica* dated 3 August 1967, Clarice speaks approvingly and seemingly in her own voice of wearing a "slightly tight" sweater, one "proudly flaunting

the glorious state of womanhood" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 163–64). Finally, and once again from *Soulstorm*, a narrative voice that seems to be that of Clarice herself seeks to understand (that motif again!) what "Sveglia" is. Through the journey to find out, which is the text of the story, "A Report on a Thing," the definitive discovery eludes us, though "Sveglia" does seem to be a lot like life itself – elusive as to its meaning, in a state of constant change, and often contradictory. But, through it all, we do learn a few things about "Sveglia:" a soccer game is "Sveglia" but (for reasons never given) the immortal Pelé is not (Lispector, "A Report on a Thing," *Soulstorm*, 136). Water is, as is the act of writing (136). More to the point here, "breasts" are also "Sveglia" though, interestingly, the "male organ is too much so" (137). In less mysterious ways, images of female breasts infuse Clarice's world, becoming, finally, a basic motif of it.

6. In "Fleabag," a 2019 one woman play at London's SoHo Theater starring Phoebe Waller-Bridge, masturbation plays a central role in the protagonist's exploration of self (for a review, see Brantley C4). For a discussion of performative techniques in Clarice's work, see Barbosa, "Performative Devices," in Albuquerque and Bishop-Sánchez.

7. As Diane E. Marting reports, however, Clarice may have enjoyed pornography herself (see *Clarice Lispector: A Bio-Bibliography* xxx, also 221). For more on Clarice and pornography, see Moser, *Why This World* 344–49.

8. Clarice's title, of course, alludes to a line from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

9. In "Not To Understand," a column dated 1 February 1969, Clarice writes about what "understanding" means to her (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 227).

10. For more on this topic, and on what Clarice thought of Berne, see Lispector, "Reminiscence of a Fountain and a City," *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 350–51.

11. For more on this, see Moser, *Why This World* 236.

12. Julian reports a more than three-fold increase in the number of women who now say they enjoy sexually explicit love scenes between women and masturbation (82, 82–83, 92). Her findings, moreover, are consistent with those of other researchers. See, for example, Diamond 54–90, 86, 99–104; and Bergner 61–62, also 127–28. In seeking to explain this dramatic increase in rates of female masturbation, Julian speculates that "Easy access to porn is part of the story, of course; in 2014, 43 percent of men said they'd watched porn in the past week," but now women are watching it as well, and in ever-growing numbers (82; see also Bergner 61–62). And, the same numbers suggest, they are responding to it with enthusiasm. "The vibrator figures in," Julian notes, citing "a major study 10 years" earlier which found that "just over half of adult women had used one, and by all indications it has only grown in popularity ... This shift is particularly striking when you consider that Western civilization has had a major hang-up about masturbation going back at least as far as Onan" (Julian 82).

13. Though *Delta of Venus* was published in 1977 and *Little Birds* in 1979, both texts were originally composed by Anaïs Nin sometime during the early 1940s.

14. Barnes' 1936 novel, *Nightwood*, comes alive for the reader as an introspective, and at times anguished, prose poem, much as Clarice's most powerful work does.

15. Claire Varin has suggested that even the character, G. H., whom we could think of as being "pour genre humain" ("gênero humano"), could be considered androgynous (81, also 79–83).

16. Other examples of androgyny from Lispector's *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* include "Spain," in which a male and female flamenco dancers seem to exchange genders (424), "Love, Raccoon, Dog, Feminine and Masculine," where the living of life puts gender-based identities put into question (502–04), "The lady is a perfect gentleman," from "Too Good to be True" (544), and, from "The Morning Sea," where the ocean, in which Clarice loved to bathe every morning and which plays a crucial role in the transformation of her female protagonist in *Near to the Wild Heart*, is described by her as being "Perhaps a perfect fusion of the masculine and the feminine" (605).

17. In one of the text's most striking images, it says, "The women who had recently given birth squeezed their own breasts with violence, and from their nipples a thick, black milk squirted forth" (Lispector, "Where You Were At Night," *Soulstorm* 121).

18. For a comparison of the novel and the film adaptation of it, see Herrero.

19. Although Clarice's texts make it clear that masturbation is pan-sexual in its appeal, and not limited to women, there are, unless I have missed them, no scenes in her work where men are depicted as masturbating. Her concern, one can conclude, is with the female libido and the role it plays in becoming a healthy, well-adjusted human being.

20. While it first appeared in Lispector's *The Foreign Legion* (1964) under the title of the same story, but bearing a different title, "An Emptying," appears later in *Soulstorm* (1986) as well (153–56). Under the title of "Esvaziamento," this same tale, known earlier, in *A Legião Estrangeira,* as "Uma Amizade Sincera," is reprised in *Onde Estivestes de Noite* (1974), which forms part of the *Soulstorm* collection.

21. For further information regarding the relationship between Clarice and Lúcio, see Moser, *Why This World* 101, 102, 113, 115, and 117.

22. Katrina Dodson translates the same Portuguese word, "Prefeitura," as "City Hall" (Dodson, *Clarice Lispector* 315; for the citation of the Portuguese word, see Lispector, "Uma Amizade Sincera," *A Legião Estrangeira: Contos e Crônicas* 97, 98). While "Prefeitura" carries certain connotations for the speaker of Portuguese and who knows Brazilian history and culture, the English-language reader has an interpretive choice between "Authorities" and "City Hall."

Chapter Five

1. Benjamin Moser also finds that Clarice's 1961 novel, *The Apple in the Dark*, takes up several issues relating to God, sin, language, being, and Jewish culture; indeed, he feels it can be considered "a Jewish parable" (*Why This World* 225, see also 225–26). Moser believes, Clarice "reverses" the biblical creation story" by having the novel's protagonist, a man named Martim, invent God (228). In doing so, Martim becomes "related to that most famous figure of Jewish folklore, one Clarice surely knew from childhood: the Frankenstein-like Golem," who relates to "the mystical reversion of the creation of Adam," a role Martim ironically plays (228, 229). "The similarities," Moser writes, "between Martin" [*sic*] "and the Golem are striking" and numerous (229).

2. Several of Clarice's *crônicas* recount her thoughts and feelings about death. See, for example, *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, ed. Pontiero 168–70 (where she says twice how much she loathes death and asks God what he is willing to give her "in exchange for" her "dying" [191]) (here, and with an existential twinge, she writes that her death will be a return to "Nothingness"); and 570 (where she says she is "afraid of dying" and that "Death is so awful").

3. In a 21 December 1968 newspaper column, for example, Lispector writes about how every pregnant woman "knows she will give birth to a human being who will be forced to follow in Christ's footsteps" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 210), while in "This Day a Child is Born," a column dated 24 December 1971, she writes about how "a little Jewish family" gives birth to "the child Jesus" and that "The silence of Almighty God was speaking" on a happy and "sacred night" (*Discovering* 519).

4. For Moser, this concern is characteristic of many Jewish writers (see *Why This World* 100–01). For Clarice, however, it is also a problem for Christians. In *The Stream of Life*, for example, her anguished narrator writes of "a Christ who is absent" (63).

5. Of her own experience, Clarice writes "My mother was in poor health and there was a well-known superstition which claimed that a woman could be cured of illness if she gave birth to a son. So I was deliberately conceived: with love and hope. Only I failed to cure my mother. And to this day I carry this burden of guilt: my parents conceived me for a specific mission and I failed them" (Lispector, "Belonging," *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 149; see also from *Discovering*, "Learning to Live" 270; and "A Mischievous Little Girl (IV)" 345; see also Moser, *Why This World* 63–64).

6. Guilt is the core issue in another of Clarice's "children's stories," "The Woman Who Killed the Fish," and it plays a fundamental role in one of her most famous early stories, "The Crime of the Mathematics Professor," from *Family Ties*.

7. Some of the more intriguing references, all from Lispector's *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* include pgs. 73 (where, writing of her "need for silence," Clarice also says that she can "express" herself "without even

speaking"); 265 (where she allows that silence is necessary for language); 330; 466 (wherein Clarice, in discussing her relationship with God and language, describes herself and her state of being as "ineffable"); and 493–94 (where we learn that splintering "silence into words is one of" the author's "clumsy ways of loving silence. And by shattering silence I have so often killed what I understand. Although—glory be to God—I am more familiar with silence than with words"). See, too, Moser, who, in reference to Clarice's work, writes of "the silence of a God" who withdraws from people time after time (*Why This World* 100).

8. In *Myth and Ideology*, Daphne Patai takes up these concerns; see pages 76, 90–98, 106, 110; see also Patai, "Clarice Lispector and the Clamor of the Ineffable."

9. See, for example, "Dies Irae" (*Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World* 500–01), "Anxious to Learn," (*Discovering* 99), and the girl, Sofia, in the story, "The Misfortunes of Sofia," who, full of "vicious poison," takes "pleasure in persecuting" her teacher (*The Foreign Legion* 26, 17).

10. Aside from the many variations on this topic from Clarice's stories and novels, there are many others from the pieces in *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World*, where, where, we can assume, she speaks more often in her "real" voice. Two of the most notable of these references include: "Anxious to Learn" 99; and "The Uncontrollable Machine" 358 (where we are told that "God has created a problem for Himself" and that, by touching on the problem of "ignorance" and "the apple," also seems to reference her 1961 novel, *The Apple in the Dark*).

Chapter Six

1. The point David Damrosch makes here, how a translated text that is imported into a foreign environment can actually exert a salubrious, even liberating effect on the host's culture, is essentially what Johnny Payne argues happened when, during the 1960s and early 1970s, a plethora of excellent English translations of Spanish American literature began to gain an audience in the United States and, in the process, changed what US writers had thought was possible or desirable in their fiction. "An infusion of the tropic," writes Payne, "staved off the entropic," entropy being a condition to which he believes US fiction of the time had succumbed (*Conquest* 15, also 11–36); John Barth made this same argument in two important essays, one, "The Literature of Exhaustion," published in 1967, and the other, "The Literature of Replenishment," in 1980 (see Barth); for Barth's comments on the importance of Brazil's Machado de Assis to him, see *Further Fridays: Essays, Lectures, and Other Nonfiction, 1984–94* 44, 166, 259.

2. A controversy has erupted over the nature of some of the work done by Han's English translator, Deborah Smith. Some believe Smith has gone too far in embellishing, or amplifying, Han's prose. In response, Smith argues that "the phrases she added are images 'so powerfully evoked by the Korean that I sometimes find myself searching the original text in vain, convinced

that they were in there somewhere, as vividly explicit as they are in my head'" (Fan 64). The questions of simple error and excessive expansion aside, "what Smith describes" here "is the effect that any writer might hope to coax from her reader," and especially the reader who is also the translator, namely, to exact "a feeling so visceral that it's as if she had absorbed the text into her own experience" (Fan 64; see also Felstiner's comment about the translation of poetry at 124).

3. Many years ago, a professor of English asked me, of another Brazilian author (whose work I had been praising), "If this Machado de Assis is so good, why haven't I ever heard of him?"

4. Miranda France mentions Clarice Lispector as one of the "usual suspects" in the new World Literature pantheon ("Between Worlds" 7).

5. David Damrosch notes, for example, that a widely used translation of Kafka done by Willa and Edwin Muir appears to contain a mistaking of "Leid," which means sorrow or pain, for "Lied," which is the German word for "song" (*What Is World Literature?* 199).

6. For additional reading on the question of translation error, and on the difficulty of assessing it, see Alfred Mac Adam's "Pragmatic Translation." For an example of what involves, perhaps, a question of British English as opposed to the American variety, see the Lorca poem, "Alto pinar!" (translated by Stephen Spender and J. L. Gili), in which the Spanish word, "paloma," is translated as "pigeon" rather than "dove," which, to these colonial ears, at least, smacks a bit more of the poetic, and it is the poetic that is needed here (see Mack 1876–77). Of this second kind of translation error, one could cite the Scott-Buccleuch version of Machado's *Dom Casmurro*, in which, apparently to straighten out what the translator deemed the main narrative line, several chapters were simply omitted and others spliced together (for more information on this, see Patai, "Machado in English"). Along these same lines, one could also consider the final line of the inspired English translation, done by Electra Arenal and Amanda Powell, of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's very difficult "Hombres necios," in which "juntáis diablo, carne y mundo" becomes "we have devil, flesh, and world: a man" (158, 159). If the Scott-Buccleuch translation deforms Machado's great novel by taking out far too much, does the Arenal/Powell translation of Sor Juana's also great poem add too much? While the decisions in the first case seems indefensible, the decision in the second (to sharpen and emphasize in the translation what is more opaque, and left to the reader's imagination, in the original) does have its logic.

7. The Benjamin Moser quote cited here first appeared in the *Paris Review*.

8. An excellent place to begin is Diane E. Marting's *Clarice Lispector: A Bio-Bibliography*. Marta Peixoto's *Passionate Fictions* is also highly recommended, as is Marília Librandi's *Writing by Ear*. Finally, my own contribution to how and why Clarice writes as she does can be found in Earl E. Fitz's *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Desire: The Différance of Desire*.

9. In the Benjamin Moser and Magdalena Edwards translated version, which tracks Clarice's text more closely, this opening line becomes "She'd be flowing all her life" (*The Chandelier* 3). As we can see, however, "She would" is here transformed into "She'd" and "fluid" emerges as "flowing," these being choices that Hélène Cixous did not make. For Moser and Edwards, the second sentence then becomes this: "But what had dominated her edges and attracted them toward a center, what had illuminated her against the world and given her intimate power was the secret" (*The Chandelier* 3).

10. In note 7 of this same section, Cixous speaks of "our translation" (*Three Steps* 159).

11. For more on this question of translation as interpretation, see Emmerich 14, 161, 196.

12. In her essay, "Understanding is the Proof of Error" and in her "Translator's Note," from *The Complete Stories*, Dodson offers a useful discussion of what happens when one is tempted into trying to translate Clarice's work.

13. I was once in the presence of a professor of English who, without knowing a word of Japanese, declared himself/herself "an expert" (yes, this was the word used) in Japanese literature because she/he claimed to have read "everything that was available" on Japanese literature in English translation.

14. For more on this question, see Bellos 291, 310–14.

Works Cited

Abdala Júnior, Benjamin. "Biografia de Clarice, por Benjamin Moser: Coincidências e equívocos." *Estudos Avançados*, vol. 24, no. 70, 2010, pp. 285–92.

Albuquerque, Severino J., and Kathryn Bishop-Sánchez, eds. *Performing Brazil: Essays on Culture, Identity, and the Performing Arts*. U of Wisconsin P, 2015.

Amaral, Electra, and Amanda Powell. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: The Answer/La Respuesta*. Translation by Electra Amaral and Amanda Powell. Feminist P, 1994.

Apter, Emily. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. Verso, 2018.

———. "Untranslatability and the Geopolitics of Reading." *PMLA* vol. 134, no. 1, 2019, pp. 194–200.

Armbruster, Carol. "Hélène-Clarice: Nouvelle Voix." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1983, pp. 145–57.

Assis, Machado de. *Quincas Borba*, 1891. Translation by Gregory Rabassa. Oxford UP, 1998.

Barbosa, Maria José Somerlate. *Clarice Lispector: Spinning the Webs of Passion*. UP of South, 1997.

———. "Performative Devices in Clarice Lispector's Texts." *Performing Brazil: Essays on Culture, Identity, and the Performing Arts*. Edited by Severino J. Albuquerque and Kathryn Bishop Sánchez. U of Wisconsin P, 2015, pp. 269–84.

———. "Women Novelists in the Early Decades of Brazilian Modernism." *Chasqui: Revista de Literatura Latinoamericana*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2008, pp. 3–24.

Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*. Faber and Faber, 1936.

Barth, John. *Further Fridays: Essays, Lectures, and Other Nonfiction, 1984–94*. Little, Brown, 1995.

———. "The Literature of Exhaustion." *Atlantic*, August 1967, pp. 29–34.

———. "The Literature of Replenishment." *Atlantic*, January 1980, pp. 65–71.

Barthes, Roland. *Le plaisir du texte*. Tel Quel, 1973.

Beecroft, Alexander. *An Ecology of World Literature*. Verso, 2015.

Bellos, David. *Is That A Fish in Your Ear?: Translation and the Meaning of Everything*. Faber & Faber, 2011.

Bergner, Daniel. *What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire*. Ecco, HarperCollins, 2013.

Bernardo, André. Email message to author. 12 September 2020.

Bigelow, Allison Margaret. "Transatlantic Quechuañol: Reading Race through Colonial Translations." *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 2, 2019 pp. 242–59.

Bonfiglio, Thomas Paul. *Why Is English Literature? Language and Letters for the Twenty-First Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Bosker, Bianca. "Crowdsourcing the Novel: How Reader Reactions Help the Writer Anna Todd Shape Story Lines and Hook Young Fans." *Atlantic*, December 2018, pp. 18–21.

Brantley, Ben. "Sex and Loathing In Modern London." *New York Times*, 11 March 2019, Weekend Arts I, C1+.

Brushwood, John S. "Two Views of the Boom: North and South." *The Boom in Retrospect: A Reconsideration*. Special issue of *Latin American Literary Review,* vol. 15, no. 29, 1987 pp. 13–31.

Burns, E. Bradford. *The History of Brazil*. 2nd edition. Columbia UP, 1980.

Callahan, Monique-Adelle. *Between the Lines: Literary Transnationalism and African-American Poetics*. Oxford UP, 2013.

Cep, Casey. "Without A Prayer: Why Are Americans Still Uncomfortable With Atheism?" *New Yorker,* 29 October 2018, pp. 66–71.

Cixous, Hélène. *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*. Edited and translated by Deborah Jenson. Harvard UP, 1991.

———. Foreword. *The Stream of Life*. Translation by Elizabeth Lowe and Earl E. Fitz. U of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. ix–xxxv.

———. *L'Heure de Clarice Lispector, Précédé de Vivre L'Orange*. des femmes, 1989.

———. *Reading with Clarice Lispector*. Edited and translated by Verena Andermatt Conley. U of Minnesota P, 1990.

———. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. Translation by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers. Columbia UP, 1993.

———. *Vivre l'orange*. des femmes, 1979.

Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. Translation by Betsy Wing. Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert. U of Minnesota P, 1986.

Collins, Michelle. "Translating a Feminine Discourse: Clarice Lispector's *Agua* [sic] *Viva*." *Translation Perspectives: Selected Papers, 1982–83.* Edited by Marilyn Gaddis Rose. Vol. 1. Binghamton: National Resource Center for Translation and Interpretation, SUNY-Binghamton Translation Research and Instruction Program, 1984, pp. 118–24.

Conley, Verena Andermatt. "Introduction." *Reading with Clarice Lispector* by Hélène Cixous. Edited and translated by Verena Andermatt Conley. U of Minnesota P, 1990, pp. vii–xviii.

Coutinho, Eduardo F., ed. *Brazilian Literature as World Literature*. Translation by Thomas O. Beebee, Jizelda Ferreira Galvão, and Dr. Lisa Shaw. Bloomsbury, 2018.

———. "Introduction." *Brazilian Literature as World Literature*. Translation by Thomas O. Beebee, Jizelda Ferreira Galvão, and Dr. Lisa Shaw. Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 1–20.

Covington, Paula. Email message to author. 7 December. 2018.

Cunha, Euclides da. *Rebellion in the Backlands*. Translation by Samuel Putnam. U of Chicago P, 1967.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton UP, 2013.

Davidson, Cathy N. *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux*. Basic, 2017.

Diamond, Lisa M. *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. Harvard UP, 2008.

Dodson, Katrina. *Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories*. Translation by Katrina Dodson. Introduction by Benjamin Moser. New Directions, 2015.

———. "Translator's Note." *Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories*. Translation by Katrina Dodson. Introduction by Benjamin Moser. New Directions, 2015, pp. 629–35.

———. "Understanding is the Proof of Error." *Believer*. 11 November 2018, pp. 1–4.

Donadio, Rachel. "My Search for Elena Ferrante." *Atlantic,* December 2018, pp. 96–207.

Douglass, Ellen H. "Myth and Gender in Clarice Lispector: Quest as a Feminist Statement in 'A Imitação da Rosa.'" *Luso-Brazilian Review* vol. 25, no. 2, 1988, pp. 15–31.

Edmondson, Mark. "Walt Whitman's Guide to a Thriving Democracy." *Atlantic,* May 2019, pp. 100–10.

Edwards, Magdalena. "Benjamin Moser and the Smallest woman in the World." *Los Angeles Times Review of Books*, 16 August 2019.

———. "The Real Clarice: A Conversation with Magdalena Edwards; David Shook Interviews Magdalena Edwards." *Los Angeles Times Review of Books*, 23 November 2018, pp. 1–10.

Emmerich, Karen. *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Fan, Jiayang. "Buried Words: Han Kang and the Complexity of Translation." *New Yorker*, 15 January 2018, pp. 62–64.

Felstiner, John. "Can Verse Come Across into Verse?" *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*. Edited by Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz. State U of New York P, 2002. 119–26.

Ferré, Rosario. "On Destiny, Language, and in Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal." *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*. Edited by Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz. State U of New York P, 2002, pp. 32–41.

Ferreira-Pinto, Cristina. *Gender, Discourse, and Desire: In Twentieth-Century Brazilian Women's Literature*. Purdue UP, 2004.

Ferreira-Pinto Bailey, Cristina, and Regina Zilberman, eds. *Clarice Lispector: Novos Aportes Críticos*. Instituto Internacional de Liberatura Iberoamericana/La Universidad de Pittsburgh, 2007.

Fitz, Earl E. "Caracterização e a Visão Fenomenológica nos Romances de Clarice Lispector e Djuna Barnes." *Travessia,* vol. 14, no. 1, 1987, pp. 135–47.

———. *Clarice Lispector*. Twayne/G. K. Hall, 1985.

———. "Clarice Lispector, Writing, and the Language Novel." Edited by Tyler Malone. Special issue of *Scofield*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, pp. 189–205.

———. "A Discourse of Silence: The Postmodernism of Clarice Lispector." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1987, pp. 420–26.

———. *Machado de Assis and Female Characterization: The Novels*. Bucknell UP, 2015.

———. "'A Pecadora Queimada e os Anjos Harmoniosos': Clarice Lispector as Dramatist." *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1997, pp. 25–39.

———. *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire*. U of Texas P, 2001.

———. "Translation and Poststructural Theory: The Unexpected Convergence." *Exchanges: A Journal of Translation,* vol. 3, 1991, pp. 25–39.

Fitz, Earl E., and Ezra E. Fitz. "Faulkner, Borges, and the Translation of *The Wild Palms*: The Evolution of Borges' Theory Concerning the Role of the Reader in the Game of Literature." *Faulkner: Beyond the United States*. Edited by Barbara Ladd. Special issue of *Faulkner Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2008, pp. 29–61.

France, Miranda. "Between Worlds: In Praise of the Literary Translator." *Prospect Magazine,* March 2019, pp. 1–11.

Galantière, Lewis. Introduction. *The World of Translation*. Papers delivered at the Conference on Literary Translation, held in New York City in May 1970, under the auspices of P.E.N. American Center. PEN American Center, 1970, pp. ix–xv.

Galvez-Breton, Mara. "Post-Feminist Discourse in Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*." *Splintering Darkness: Latin American Women Writers in Search of Themselves*. Edited by Yvette E. Miller. Latin American Literary Review, 1990, pp. 63–78.

Gildea, Kevin. "If You Were to Read One Clarice Lispector Book, Which Should it Be?" *Irish Times*, 12 July 2014.

González Echevarría, Roberto. *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*. Duke UP, 1998.

González Echevarría, Roberto, Enrique Pupo-Walker, and David Haberly. "Introduction to Volume 3." *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*. Edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker. 3 Volumes. Cambridge and Cambridge UP, 1996. 1–10.

Gopnik, Alison. "The Students of Sex and Culture." *Atlantic*, August 2019, pp. 33–35.

Gotlib, Nádia Battella. *Clarice Fotobiografia.* 2nd edition. Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2009.

Greene, Thomas M. "Misunderstanding Poetry: Teaching Outside the Western Canon." *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*. Introduction by Sarah Lawall. U of Texas P, 1994, pp. 69–86.

Grossman, Edith. *Why Translation Matters*. Yale UP 2010.

Hahner, June E. *Women in Latin American History: Their Lives and Views*. UCLA Latin American Center, 1976.

Helena, Lúcia. *Nem Musa nem Medusa*. Editora da Universidade Federal Fluminense, 1997.

Herrero, Alejandro. "The Filming of a Novel: An Analysis of Lispector's *The Hour of the Star* and Amaral's Adaptation." *Aleph*, vol. 5, 1990, pp. 4–11.

Hoyos, Héctor. *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*. Columbia UP, 2015.

Jabr, Ferris. "The Story of Storytelling: What the Hidden Relationships of Ancient Folktales Reveal about Their Evolution—and Our Own." *Harpers*, March 2019, pp. 35–41.

Jacobs, Adriana. "The Trouble With Moser." *Medium App,* 23 August, 2019.

Jackson, K. David. *Machado de Assis: A Literary Life*. Yale UP, 2015.

Jarrett, Gene Andrew. "'Come, Let Us Reason Together': New Research and the Public Good." *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 3, 2018, pp. 673–77.

Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *L'Écriture feminine*." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. Edited by Elaine Showalter. Pantheon, 1985, pp. 361–77.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. B. W. Huebsch, 1916.

Julian, Kate. "The Sex Recession: Why Young People are Retreating from Intimacy—and What This Means for Society." *Atlantic*, December 2018, pp. 78–94.

Kaminsky, Amy K. *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers*. U of Minnesota P, 1993.

Kaza, Madhu H. "Engaging the New Knowledge." *Two Lines.* The Future of Translation. 25th anniversary edition, vol. 30, 2019, pp. 138–51.

Kempis, Thomas à. *The Imitation of Christ (c. 1418–27).* Translation by William Creasy. CreateSpace, 2015.

Kirsch, Adam. "Divine Guidance: Modernity, Faith, and Martin Buber." *New Yorker,* 6 May 2019, pp. 60–64.

Klobucka, Anna. "Hélène Cixous and the Hour of Clarice Lispector." *SubStance: A Review of Theory and Criticism*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1994, pp. 41–62.

Kristeva, Julia. *La revolution de langage poétique*. Éditions du Seuil, 1974.

Lastinger, Valerie. "Humor in a New Reading of Clarice Lispector." *Hispania*, vol. 72, no. 1, 1989, pp. 130–37.

Lawrence, D. H. "The Fox." *Dial*, June 1922, pp. 569–87.

Levander, Caroline F. *Where Is American Literature?* Wiley, 2013.

Levine, Suzanne Jill. Preface. *Untranslatability Goes Global*. Edited by Suzanne Jill Levine and Katie Lateef-Jan. Routledge, 2018, pp. 1–9.

Levine, Suzanne Jill, and Katie Lateef-Jan, eds. *Untranslatability Goes Global*. Routledge, 2018.

Levitin, Alexis. Afterword. *Soulstorm*. By Clarice Lispector. Translation by Alexis Levitin. New Directions, 1989, pp. 171–75.

Librandi, Marília. *Writing by Ear: Clarice Lispector and the Aural Novel*. U of Toronto P, 2018.

Lindstrom, Naomi. "A Feminist Discourse Analysis of Clarice Lispector's 'Daydreams of a Drunken Housewife.'" *Latin American Literary Review*, vol. 1, no. 19 1981, pp. 7–16.

Lispector, Clarice. Água *Viva*. 2nd edition. Editora Artenova, 1973.

———. *The Apple in the Dark*. Translation and introduction by Gregory Rabassa. Knopf, 1967.

———. *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights*. Translation by Richard A. Mazzara and Lorri A. Parris. U of Texas P, 1969.

———. "Beauty and the Beast, or, The Wound Too Great." Translation by Earl E. Fitz. *The Oxford Anthology of the Brazilian Short Story*. Edited by K. David Jackson. Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 291–97.

———. *The Besieged City*. Translation by Johnny Lorenz. Introduction by Benjamin Moser. New Directions, 2019.

———. *A Breath of Life*. Translation by Johnny Lorenz. Edited by Benjamin Moser. Preface by Pedro Almodóvar and Benjamin Moser. New Directions, 2019.

———. *The Chandelier*. Translation by Benjamin Moser and Magdalena Edwards. New Directions, 2018.

———. *Clarice Lispector: Discovering the World.* Edited and translated by Giovanni Pontiero. Carcanet, 1992.

———. *Clarice Lispector: Selected Crônicas*. Translation by Giovanni Pontiero. New Directions, 1992.

———. *Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories*. Translation by Katrina Dodson. Introduction by Benjamin Moser. New Directions, 2015.

———. *Family Ties*. Translation by Giovanni Pontiero. U of Texas P, 1972.

———. "The Flight." Translation by Darlene J. Sadlier. *One Hundred Years After Tomorrow: Brazilian Women's Fiction in the 20th Century*. Edited and translated by Introd. Darlene J. Sadlier. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992, pp. 53–57.

———. *The Foreign Legion: Stories and Chronicles*. Translation by Afterword Giovanni Pontiero. New Direction, 1992.

———. *The Hour of the Star*. Translation by Giovanni Pontiero. New Directions, 1992.

———. *A Legião Estrangeira: Contos e Crônicas*. Rio de Janeiro: Editôra do Autor, 1964.

———. *Near to the Wild Heart*. Translation by Giovanni Pontiero. New Directions, 1990.

———. *Onde Estivestes de Noite*. Rio de Janeiro: Artenova, 1974.

———. *The Passion According to G.H.* Translation by Ronald W. Sousa. U of Minnesota Press, 1988.

———. *Perto do Coração Selvagem*. Editora Rocco, 1998.

———. *Soulstorm*. Translation by Alexis Levitin. New Directions, 1989.

———. *The Stream of Life*. Translation by Elizabeth Lowe and Earl E. Fitz. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1989.

———. "Uma Amizade Sincera." *A Legião Estrangeira: Contos e Crônicas*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora do Autor, 1964, pp. 95–98.

———. *Um Sopro de Vida (Pulsações)*. 3rd edition. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1978.

———. *A Via Crucis do Corpo*. Rio de Janeiro: Artenova, 1974.

Lowe, Elizabeth. *The City in Brazilian Literature*. Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson/Associated UP, 1982.

———. "Liberating the Rose: Clarice Lispector's Água *Viva* [*The Stream of Life*] as a Political Statement." *Splintering Darkness: Latin American Women Writers in Search of Themselves*. Edited by Yvette E. Miller. Latin American Review, 1990, pp. 79–84.

———. "The Passion According to C. L.: Elizabeth Lowe Interviews Clarice Lispector." *Review 24*. Center for Inter-American Relations, 1979, pp. 34–37.

Lowe, Elizabeth, and Earl E. Fitz. *Translation and the Rise of Inter-American Literature*. Foreword by Ilan Stavans. UP of Florida, 2007.

Lowell, Robert. *Imitations*. Farrar, Strauss, & Cudahy, 1961.

Mac Adam, Alfred. "Pragmatic Translation." *Untranslatability Goes Global*. Edited by Suzanne Jill Levine and Katie Lateef-Jan. New York and Routledge, 2018. 10–17.

Mack, Maynard. "A Note on Translation." *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. 4th edition. Edited by Maynard Mack. Volume 2. W. W. Norton, 1979. 1731–38.

Marting, Diane E., ed. *Clarice Lispector: A Bio-Bibliography*. Westport, 1993.

Masiello, Francine. "Bodies in Transit: Travel, Translation, and Gender." *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*. Edited by Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz. State U of New York P, 2002, pp. 213–23.

Menand, Louis. "Faking It: Literary Hoaxes and the Ethics of Authorship." *New Yorker,* 10 December 2018, pp. 68–73.

Miller, Laura I. "10 Reasons You Should be Reading Clarice Lispector Right Now." *Bustle*, 10 August 2015.

Moisés, Massaud. "Clarice Lispector: Fiction and Cosmic Vision." Translation by Sara M. McCabe, *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1971, pp. 268–81.

Monegal, Emir Rodríguez. *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography*. Dutton, 1978.

———. "The New Latin American Literature in the USA." *Review '68*. Center for Inter-American Relations, 1969, pp. 3–13.

———. "The New Latin American Novelists." *The TriQuarterly Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Literature*, Edited by José Donoso and William A. Henkin. Dutton, 1969. 9–28.

Moser, Benjamin. *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector*. Oxford UP, 2009.

———. "Glamour and Grammar." *Clarice Lispector: The Complete Stories*. Translation by Katrina Dodson. New Directions, 2015, pp. ix–xxiii.

———. Introduction. *The Besieged City*. By Clarice Lispector. Translation by Johnny Lorenz. Edited byIntrod. Benjamin Moser. New Directions, 2019, pp. vii–xxi.

———. "Obyezloshadenie." A preface to *The Besieged City*. Translation by Johnny Lorenz. New Directions, 2019, pp. vii–xxi.

———. *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector*. Oxford UP, 2009.

Namorato, Luciana. "A Tentação do Silêncio em *Ela Não Sabe Gritar* (ou *A Hora da Estrela*) de Clarice Lispector." *Hispania*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2011, pp. 50–62.

Nin, Anaïs. *Delta of Venus*. Harcourt Brace, 1977.

———. *Little Birds*. Harcourt Brace, 1979.

Noodin, Margaret. "The Importance of Indigenous-Language Programs." *MLA Newsletter*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2019, pp. 6–7.

Nunes, Benedito. *Leitura de Clarice Lispector*. Editora Quiron, 1973.

———. *O Mundo de Clarice Lispector*. Edições Governo do Estado do Amazonas, 1966.

Oliveira Machado, Regina Helena. "Spinning Form: Reading Clarice Lispector." *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*. Edited by Susan Sellers. St. Martin's, 1988, pp. 98–112.

Paley, Grace. Introduction, *Soulstorm*. By Clarice Lispector. Translation by Alexis Levitin. New Directions, 1974, pp. ix–xi.

Patai, Daphne. "Clarice Lispector and the Clamor of the Ineffable." *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1980, pp. 133–49.

———. "Machado in English." *Machado de Assis: Reflections on a Brazilian Master Writer*. Edited by Richard Graham. U of Texas P, 1999. 85–116.

———. *Myth and Ideology in Contemporary Brazilian Literature*. Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1983.

Payne, Johnny. *The Conquest of the New Word: Experimental Fiction and Translation in the Americas*. U of Texas P, 1993.

Peixoto, Marta. *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector*. U of Minnesota P, 1994.

Pontiero, Giovanni. Afterword. *The Foreign Legion: Stories and Chronicles*. By Clarice Lispector. New Direction, 1992. 217–19.

———. Afterword. *The Hour of the Star*. Translation by Giovanni Pontiero. New Directions, 1992.

———. "The Drama of Existence in *Laços de Família*." *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1971, pp. 256–67.

———. Introduction. *Family Ties*. By Clarice Lispector. Translation by Giovanni Pontiero. U of Texas P, 1972, pp. 13–23.

Rabassa, Gregory. *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents, a Memoir*. New Directions, 2005.

———. Introduction. *The Apple in the Dark*. Translation by Gregory Rabassa. Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, pp. ix–xvi.

Resende, Beatriz. "Rio de Janeiro y otros modernismos." *Cuadernos de Literatura*, vol. 18, no. 35, 2014–2015, n.p.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 5, 1980, pp. 631–60.

Rippon, Gina. *Gender and Our Brains: How New Neuroscience Explodes Myths of the Male and Female Brain*. Pantheon, 2019.

Sá, Olga de. *A Escritura de Clarice Lispector*. Vozes, 1978.

Sadlier, Darlene J. *One Hundred Years After Tomorrow: Brazilian Women's Fiction in the 20th Century*. Indiana UP, 1992.

Sapiro, Gisèle. *Les écrivains et la politique en France: De l'affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie*. Seuil, 2018.

———. "Globalization and Cultural Diversity in the Book Market: The Case of Literary Translation in the United States and France." *Poetics*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2010, pp. 419–39.

———. *La responsabilitéde l'écrivain, droit et morale en France, XIXe–XXIe siècle*. Seuil, 2011.

Schmidt, Rita Teresinha. "Clarice Lispector and the Poetics of Transgression." *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1989, pp. 103–15.

———. "Crossing Borders: Clarice Lispector and the Scene of Transnational Feminist Criticism." *Brazilian Literature as World Literature*. By Eduardo F. Coutinho. Edited and translated by Thomas O. Beebee, Jizelda Ferreira Galvão, and Dr. Lisa Shaw. Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 243–63.

Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 2nd edition. UP of Kentucky, 1989.

Sellers, Susan, ed. *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*. St. Martin's, 1988.

Showalter, Elaine. "The Feminist Critical Revolution." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. Edited by Elaine Showalter. Pantheon, 1985, pp. 3–17.

Skidmore, Thomas E. *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*. Oxford UP, 1999.

Sousa, Ronald W. "Once Within a Room." Preface. *The Passion According to G.H.* By Clarice Lispector. Translation by Ronald W. Sousa. U of Minnesota P, 1988, pp. vii–ix.

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford UP, 1977.

Thomas, Dylan. *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. New Directions, 1959. Originally broadcast by the BBC, 1937.

Toíbín, Colm. Quoted by Kevin Gildea, "If You Were to Read One Clarice Lispector Book, Which Should It Be?" *Irish Times*, 12 July 2014. http://www.colmtoibin.com/content/if-you-were-read-one-clarice-lispector-book-which-should-it-be-irish-times

Varin, Claire. *Langues de feu: Essai sur Clarice Lispector*. Édition Trois, 1990.

Vieira, Nelson H. "A Expressão Judaica na Obra de Clarice Lispector." *Remate de Males*, vol. 9, 1989, pp. 207–09.

———. "A 'Linguagem Espiritual' de Clarice Lispector." *Travessia*, vol. 14, 1987, pp. 81–95.

Williams, Claire. *Encounter between Opposites in the Works of Clarice Lispector*. U of Bristol, 2006.

Wilson, Emily. "Translating Scholarship." Interview by Paula Krebs. *MLA Newsletter*, vol. 81, no. 2, 2019, pp. 4–5.

Wood, James. "The Time of Your Life: Can Secularists Bring Religious Intensity to Redeeming our Actual Experience?" *New Yorker*, 20 May 2019, 90–95.

Wood, Michael. Foreword. *The Collected Stories of Machado de Assis*. Translation by Margaret Jull Costa and Robin Patterson. Liveright, 2018, pp. ix–xv.

Index

About the Book

Earl E Fitz
Clarice Lispector: From Brazil to the World
PSRL 90

Clarice Lispector: From Brazil to the World explains why the Brazilian master was so transformative of modern Brazilian literature and why she has become such a celebrity in the world literature arena. This book also shows why Lispector is not one writer, as many think, but many writers. By offering close readings of her novels, stories, and nonfiction pieces, Earl E. Fitz shows the diverse sides of her literary world. Chapters cover Lispector's devotion to language and its connection to identity; her political engagement; and her humor, eroticism, and struggle with the concept of God. The last chapter seeks to explain why this most singular of modern Brazilian writers commands such a passionate global following.

About the Author

Earl E. Fitz is Professor of Portuguese, Spanish, and Comparative Literature at Vanderbilt University, where he teaches classes on Brazilian and Spanish American literature, inter-American literature, and translation. He is the author of *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector* (University of Texas Press, 2001), *Machado de Assis and Female Characterization* (Bucknell University Press, 2015) and *Machado de Assis and Narrative Theory: Language, Imitation, Art, and Verisimilitude in the Last Six Novels* (Bucknell University Press, 2019).

"*From Brazil to the World* impacts the literary criticism and translation of Clarice Lispector's texts in very meaningful ways considering that there is a genuine interest in her literature worldwide. The discussions are informed by the latest theories in the field, and the close readings and lucid analyses of Lispector's texts make considerable contributions to the studies of Brazilian and world literatures."

— Maria José Somerlate Barbosa, University of Iowa