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A Lesson in Loving the Word: Translating Clarice Lispector into Polish

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A Lesson in Loving the Word: Translating Clarice Lispector into Polish

A Thesis Presented

by

AGNIESZKA GABOR

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
A Lesson in Loving the Word: Translating Clarice Lispector into Polish

A Thesis Presented
by
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Permission to include the translated works of Clarice Lespector is on file at the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

A LESSON IN LOVING THE WORD:

TRANSLATING CLARICE LISPECTOR INTO POLISH

MAY 2017

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The goal of this thesis is to discuss Clarice Lispector in the Polish context and address the potential gaps in the reception of her oeuvre. Since the principal vehicle of popularizing her writing outside of the Portuguese-speaking world is translation, my thesis also examines the current situation of the Polish translations of Lispector’s work. Based on my research, I contend that the angle of interpretation related to Lispector’s literary awareness has not been well explored in Poland. Given that the perspective related to the creation process constitutes a recurrent characteristic of Lispector’s narrative, I provide a textual analysis of four short stories which specifically deal with this aspect of her writing: “O ovo e a galinha” [The Egg and the Chicken], “A quinta história” [The Fifth Story], “Seco estudo de cavalos” [Dry Sketch of Horses], and “O relatório da coisa” [Report on the Thing]. In order to address and promote this sphere of Lispector studies in Poland, I propose a translation of the above-mentioned four short stories, followed by a description of the challenges I have encountered as a translator of
Lispector’s complex poetics. A survey of the most influential translation theories contextualizes both the suggested translations of Lispector’s stories and my own translation experience. With this project, I aim to reintroduce, revitalize, and rewrite – in the form of the presented textual analyses and the proposed translations – Clarice Lispector’s work in the Polish context.
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INTRODUCTION

All the world began with a yes.
One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born.
But before prehistory there was the prehistory of prehistory
and there was the never and there was the yes. It was ever so.

/Clarice Lispector The Hour of the Star, trans. Benjamin Moser/

Nearly forty years after her death and after more than seventy years of critical analysis of her writing, Clarice Lispector continues to inspire readers and critics to discover yet another angle of interpretation of her works. Clarice remains a mystery, a question, an enigma, although she herself disagreed with such a view, saying: “my mystery lies in not having mystery.”¹ She was even reluctant to reveal her birth date and often gave misleading answers to critics and biographers. The officially adopted version is that she was born on December 10, 1920 in Chechelnik, Ukraine. She died on December 9, 1977 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Described by the scholar and translator Gregory Rabassa as “that rare person who looked like Marlene Dietrich and wrote like Virginia Woolf,” Clarice has extended her aura of mystery onto her writing, considered by many critics as difficult to categorize: “blunt and pungent yet also intellectual and abstract” (Salamon). Clarice herself said: “The problem of artistic creation has always fascinated me,” and “The word is my means of communication. I could only love it.”² With her profound literary awareness and her intimate relationship with the word, it is clear that translating any of Lispector’s texts is not an easy undertaking. Nevertheless, translators and admirers of Clarice’s work are far from giving up, and this can be best illustrated by Katrina

¹ All translations from the book De corpo inteiro [Of the Entire Body] are my own. The original quote: “meu mistério é não ter mistério” (De corpo inteiro 209).
² The original quotes in Portuguese: “o problema da criação artística sempre me fascinou”; “a palavra é o meu meio de comunicação. Eu só poderia amá-la” (De corpo inteiro 61).
Dodson’s new rendition of *The Complete Stories*, which won her the PEN 2016 Translation Prize.³

Despite her literary renown, Lispector is most widely known in her native Brazil, where she has inspired poets, writers, and filmmakers. And, her works are still waiting to be discovered or more deeply explored in other parts of the world. She is certainly discussed and actively translated in the United States, and to a lesser extent in European countries such as France and Spain. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the manifold character of her writing, not all aspects of her poetics are known to international readers. This is related to the fact that first, the literary critics in a given country have not yet discussed these perspective(s) and second, there have not been sufficient translations of her works into a particular language. These two actions could shed light on the feature of her writing that is missing for the readership of the given country.

In view of addressing this issue, my Master’s thesis focuses on Lispector’s output and its translation, linking both to the literary situation in Poland, that is, the country of my origin. The objective of my work is to show that there are still some gaps to be filled in the general reception of Lispector in Poland.

The first chapter of my thesis is a survey of the critical reception of Lispector’s work, with an emphasis on Brazil, the United States, France, and Poland. The purpose of this presentation is to confirm Lispector’s significance as a major literary figure internationally, and

³ The PEN Judges justify their decision as follows: “Katrina Dodson’s translation of Clarice Lispector’s *Complete Stories* is a revelation that lays bare the breadth of both the author's and translator’s talent. Our unanimous selection of *Complete Stories* underscores the absolute pleasure of being steeped in Lispector’s deep intellect and her striking, varied portraits of human interaction and intimacy, rendered rich and vivid by Dodson’s steady hand. The *Complete Stories* are diverse in tone, mood, perspective, subject matter, and quirk, and Dodson’s dexterity in navigating these differences, while simultaneously lending Lispector a singular English voice all her own, is a thoroughly impressive feat of literary translation. Benjamin Moser’s insightful introduction and Dodson’s translator’s afterword situate the book within the contemporary resurgence of Lispector translations and accentuate the radical imagination of Dodson’s work. This is an extraordinary translation of an exceptional author.” Source: PEN America website. [https://www.pen.org/literature/2016-pen-translation-prize](https://www.pen.org/literature/2016-pen-translation-prize). Accessed 14 Mar. 2016.
to show the different ways in which her work was introduced and received outside of Brazil. The section devoted to Poland will also include a research on which and how many of her texts have been translated into Polish so far.

According to my findings, the pieces on Lispector published in Poland until now include the following: an article titled “Clarice Lispector – the great witch of Brazilian Literature” published in 2012 in the Polish cultural magazine High Heels [Wysokie Obcasy], a 1987 translation of one entire novel (Godzina gwiazdy in Polish; A hora da estrela in Portuguese, published in Brazil in 1977; The Hour of the Star in English, first published in 1992), four translated fragments of another novel (the excerpts come from Lispector’s 1943 novel Perto do coração selvagem; Near to the Wild Heart in English, first published in 1990), and translations of Lispector’s seventeen short stories from different collections.

We can also add to this (very short) list the biographical entries included in the volumes, in which Lispector’s translations were published. An analysis of these pieces, which combine biographical details and a list of characteristic features of Lispector’s writing, will allow me to answer the following questions: What is image of Lispector that was presented to the Polish reader by translators? Which aspect of her poetics has not been sufficiently explored?

From the critical reception of Lispector elsewhere in the world and in Poland, I shall proceed to presenting my research and the translation corpus. The second chapter will cover a textual analysis of two short stories: “O ovo e a galinha” [The Egg and the Chicken] and “A quinta história” [The Fifth Story]. In the third chapter, I shall examine the remaining stories: “Seco estudo de cavalos” [Dry Sketch of Horses] and “O relatório da coisa” [Report on the Thing]. Both chapters will also approximate the critical reception in and outside of Brazil of all the four texts and of the volumes in which they were published. By investigating these texts, I
aim to stress the importance of such aspects of Lispector’s poetics as the writing process itself, its key elements, and the creative expression associated with it, in order to give the Polish reader another tool for understanding the complexity of her works. I will also attempt to answer the question: Why have I chosen these particular stories? Why are they essential – in my view – to better understanding the complexity of Lispector’s writing? This analysis will be followed by my translation into Polish of the four stories mentioned above, which I have included in Appendix B of the thesis.

As a means to contextualize the translation task, I will dedicate the fourth chapter to translation. First, I will discuss the relationship between Lispector and translation, aiming to find out what views she held on this profession. Although her works had not been extensively translated while she was alive, she did witness the publication of a few of her translated texts, and even critiqued one French translation. Actually, “criticized” or even “scolded” would be more appropriate. Was Lispector equally demanding in relation to herself as a translator? Yes, she was. While she did not translate extensively, she did share her views on translation in a chronicle “Traduzir procurando não trair” [To Translate but Not to Betray], which I shall discuss in the same chapter. I am especially interested in learning about how her translation practice has affected her approach to writing, and how her literary awareness manifests itself via this creative experience.

Next, I will leave an open floor to Lispector’s translators: Ronald W. Sousa, Gregory Rabassa, Katrina Dodson, Idra Novey, to learn about the ups and downs they have experienced on their translation journey into Lispector’s fascinating world. The examples of the specific challenges encountered by the translators will provide more details into the particularities of their translation experience in comparison with my own.
The chapter will end with a survey of the theories from the realm of Translation Studies, which combine the problems identified by Lispector, her translators, and myself. My analysis will include theoretical approaches that discuss fidelity from a variety of angles and the translator’s position in relation to the author and the translated text. Furthermore, I will discuss the following concepts: Friedrich Schleiermacher’s methods based on bringing the reader closer or distancing him or her from the author; Vladimir Nabokov’s perspective on translation and literalness; Eugene Nida’s concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence; Lawrence Venuti’s concepts of “domestication” and “foreignization”; Rosemary Arrojo’s views on the “limits of translator’s visibility”; “the trial of and for the Foreign” as proposed by Antoine Berman; the concept of “pure language” and the approach to literalness as put forward by Walter Benjamin. The presented theories will help address the following questions: What is translation – is it always a choice between foreignization and domestication or can it contain both? What impact do these decisions have on the translator?

An inverted inquiry about the translation process is also necessary: What are the consequences of the translator’s decisions on the translated text? And let us follow up on it: How do the translation choices influence the way a foreign author is presented to the audience? I will address these questions in the fifth chapter and take a closer look at some of the existing translations of Lispector’s works into Polish. I do not wish to rebuke the texts as a way to justify the need for more Polish translations of Lispector; I do not have the proper experience as a translator reviewer to do that nor do I believe that the existing translations of Lispector into Polish are by all means poor. However, some of the translations contain issues on which I would like to comment. Overall, I aim to establish a common ground between myself and the
translators, which will help define and refine existing gaps when working on my own translations of Lispector’s works.

Since the fifth chapter also discusses the variety of implications of translation choices, I attempt to emphasize the responsibility that the translator has not only toward the translated text, but also in relation to the readers and the author. This kind of obligation was described by the theoretician and translator Philip E. Lewis, for whom translation exerts a “double pressure” put on the translator: to make the translation sound fluent in the target language and to convey the message of the source text.

This two-fold pressure discussed by Lewis has accompanied me ever since I started translating Lispector, and I shall elaborate on my experience and my translation choices in the same chapter. I am interested in tracing how Lispector’s literary awareness and preoccupation with the word is transferred onto the translator who – after all – is also a creative (re)writer. The translator is also the careful reader, the silent listener, the decipherer of the meaning, the recreator of the form, the one who introduces or universalizes the word, the one who turns the unfamiliar (linguistic system) into the familiar (language), and the one who decides to what degree the enigma of the original can or should be preserved in the translated text.

And yet, when I think about the objective of my project – turning the Polish reader’s attention to Lispector’s work – I ask myself the following question: Is revitalizing Lispector studies in Poland the sole responsibility of the translator? The immediate answer is no, of course not, because Luso-Brazilian scholars are also responsible for spreading their knowledge of the field, thus contributing to the body of criticism in Poland. In the absence of a researcher specializing in Lispector, however, it begs the question: “Who should take the floor?” The final
section of the fifth chapter will end with a projection of the future – What is next? And lastly, the concluding chapter will summarize the overall approach and goals of the research.
CHAPTER 1

CLARICE LISPECTOR IN THE WORLD: A CRITICAL RECEPTION

*You, Clarice, belong to that tragic category of writers who do not write their own books. They are written by them. You are a character that is greater than the author of your novels. And you well know that this author is not of this world…*  

/Alceu Amoroso Lima in an interview with Clarice Lispector/

*Júlio Lerner: In your view, what is the role of the Brazilian writer nowadays?*  
*Clarice Lispector: To speak as little as possible.*  

/From the interview with Clarice Lispector for the Brazilian channel TV2 Cultura/

**Clarice Lispector in Brazil**

Clarice Lispector’s path to recognition in the literary world in Brazil began when she was not even twenty years old. In 1940, she published a short story titled “Triunfo” [Triumph] in the journal *Pan*. Three years later, her first novel *Perto do coração selvagem* [Near to the Wild Heart] found its way to Brazilian readers. It was immediately noticed by a small group of critics and writers, who discerned its distinctness in relation to the literature available and written at that time in Brazil. Sérgio Milliet and Antonio Candido, two noted Brazilian scholars, both pointed out the innovative character of Lispector’s literary debut. Milliet expressed his admiration in the Rio-based supplement *Diário Crítico*, published on January 15, 1944, recognizing Lispector’s talent as a successful, introspective novelist: “Well, this is excellent! The sobriety, the

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4 Translation mine. The original quote: “Você, Clarice, pertence àquela categoria trágica de escritores, que não escrevem propriamente seus livros. São escritos por eles. Você é o personagem maior do autor dos seus romances. E bem sabe que esse autor não é desse mundo…” (De corpo inteiro 52).

5 Translation mine. The original quote: “No seu entender, qual é o papel do escritor brasileiro hoje em dia?” – “De falar o menos possível” (Interview by Júlio Lerner). The interview was conducted on February 1, 1977, but released only on December 28, 1977. It was Lispector’s request to publish her words only after her death. She died on December 9, 1977, one day before her birthday.
penetration and, at the same time and despite this nudity of style, so much psychological richness!”\(^6\) In a review published nearly two months later, on March 11, 1944, Milliet indicated Lispector’s “gift of giving words a new life”: “She creates them, in the sense that she lends them a new, unexpected content, which surprises the creator herself, filling her spirit with imagination” to the point that “she does not control them anymore – they take charge of her.”\(^7\) Milliet’s observation would later be shared by a number of critics worldwide. It will also prove relevant to my discussion of Lispector’s writing in the chapters to follow.

Antonio Candido also applauded Lispector’s audacity with which she took ownership and adapted the Portuguese language to suit her literary needs. He voiced his views in two articles published in 1944 in the Rio-based newspaper *Folha da Manhã*, which he later included in his collection of essays titled *Vários escritos* (1977):

This novel is an impressive attempt at taking our clumsy language to poorly explored domains, forcing it to adapt itself to a thought that is full of mystery, for which we feel that fiction is not an exercise or an emotional venture but a real instrument of the spirit, capable of making us penetrate some of the most twisted labyrinths of the mind.\(^8\) (Candido 127)

Some critics attributed Lispector’s experiments with language to her Slavic roots and to the fact that her native language was not Portuguese. She would later refute those comments: “I

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\(^{6}\) Translation mine. The original quote: “Mas isso é excelente! Que sobriedade, que penetração, e ao mesmo tempo, apesar do estilo nu, que riqueza psicológica!” (Milliet *Diário Crítico*, vol. 2, p. 32).

\(^{7}\) Translation mine. The original quote: “Clarice Lispector, a estreante de *Perto do coração selvagem*, já notou um crítico dos mais argutos, tem o dom de dar às palavras, uma vida própria. Ela as cria, nesse sentido de emprestar-lhes um conteúdo novo, inesperado, que acaba espantando a criadora e lhe enchendo o espírito de fantasmas. Não as domina mais, então; elas é que tomam conta dela” (Milliet *Diário Crítico*, vol. 2, p. 87).

\(^{8}\) Translation mine. The original quote: “Este romance é uma tentativa impressionante para levar a nossa língua canhestra a domínios pouco explorados, forçando-a a adaptar-se a um pensamento cheio de mistério, para o qual sentimos que a ficção não é um exercício, ou uma ventura afetiva, mas um instrumento real do espírito, capaz de nos fazer penetrar em alguns dos labirintos mais retorcidos da mente” (Candido *Vários escritos* 127).
think and feel in Portuguese, and only this painful and dreadful language would satisfy me”
(Borelli “Clarice Lispector: Esboço para um possível retrato” 67). Other readers, such as Álvaro Lins, compared Lispector to foreign authors. In Lins’s view, her writing had been influenced by the works of two major modernist writers: “By using James Joyce’s and Virginia Woolf’s techniques, Ms. Clarisse Lispector wrote her own novel with the content dictated by her own human nature” (Lins 188). The purpose of the analogy was to compliment Lispector because for Lins, *Perto do coração selvagem* might as well be considered the first successful effort in recreating the lyrical novel in Brazil: “I am not afraid to affirm that the novel (...) constitutes the first positive experiment with the lyrical novel in Brazil, a genre that belongs to James Joyce’s or Virginia Woolf’s school of thought” (Lins 188). Still, Lispector objected to Lins’s view, even writing him a letter affirming that she had not read either Joyce or Woolf when working on her novel.

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9 All translations from Borelli’s book are my own. The original quote: “Eu penso e sinto em português, e só esta língua penosa e terrível me satisfaria” (Borelli 67).
10 Translation mine. The original quote: “Usando, porém, os processos técnicos de James Joyce e de Virgínia Woolf, a Sra. Clarisse Lispector escreveu o seu próprio romance, com um conteúdo que lhe veio diretamente da sua natureza humana” (Lins 188).
11 Translation mine, the original quote: “Não tenho receio no afirmar que o livro (...) é a primeira experiência definida que se faz no Brasil do romance lírico, do romance que se acha dentro da tradição de um James Joyce ou de uma Virgínia Woolf” (Lins 188).
12 In his review, titled “A experiência incompleta: Clarisse Lispector” [The uncompleted experience – Clarisse Lispector], Lins points out some inadequacies regarding the novel, namely, that it gives an impression of an unfinished work and that there is no unity of images. According to Lins, in *Perto do coração selvagem*, the “author’s personality” stands out much more in comparison to the “reality of the novel” itself, making the entire piece fall under the category of “women’s literature” and preventing it from being considered “independent and whole” (“Há, neste livro, além da experiência que representa, dois aspectos a fixar: a personalidade da sua autora e a realidade da sua obra.” (...) “Um romance, em si mesmo, deve ser visto como obra independente, esquecidas no momento todas as circunstâncias. Ora, neste caso, acima do próprio romance, o que mais se destaca no livro é a personalidade da sua autora. Um romance bem feminino, como se vê. Mas este caráter feminino não dispensa a obrigação que há, em todo autor, de transfigurar a sua individualidade na obra independente e íntegra em si mesma” 189). He attributed these flaws to Lispector’s lack of “experience” or “intuition” as a writer but noted her potential to become a great author in the future, since she had already manifested a “pre-mature development of spirit” and an “intellectual power above her age” in *Perto do coração selvagem*: “Apresenta ela um precoce amadurecimento de espírito, um poder de inteligência acima de sua idade, mas não toda a experiência vital que vem do tempo ou da intuição necessária ao romancista” (...) Aqui estão pedaços de um grande romance, mas não o grande romance que a autora, sem dúvida, poderá escrever mais tarde” (189-190). Lins’s review highlights Lispector’s subjectivity – an essential aspect of her writing many critics of her subsequent works will also note. And yet, I believe that he too
Overall, the debut novel received much acclaim and granted Lispector the position of an original young writer on the literary map in Brazil. This breakthrough event constitutes, according to the Brazilian literary critic Benedito Nunes, “the first phase of criticism” of Lispector’s oeuvre (Gotlib “Readers of Clarice” 183). More than twenty years later, in 1966, Nunes published a collection of essays dedicated solely to Lispector, titled *O mundo de Clarice Lispector (Ensaios)* [The World of Clarice Lispector: Essays], establishing himself as one of the most significant scholars specializing in Lispector. He was also among the first ones to have explored the close connection between Lispector’s works and existentialism and phenomenology, the philosophical theories formulated by Jean-Paul Sartre.  

Between 1943 and 1944, several pivotal events marked Lispector’s life: first, in January of 1943, she married a Brazilian diplomat Maury Gurgel Valente; a few months later her debut novel was published; at the end of 1943, she graduated from National Law School in Rio de Janeiro (Faculdade Nacional de Direito da Universidade do Brasil); in July of 1944, she left her home country to accompany his husband’s diplomatic assignments and continued her writing career from afar. In total, she spent fifteen years abroad and came back to Brazil in 1959.

Her subsequent novels *O lustre* [The Chandelier, 1946] and *A cidade sitiada* [The Besieged City, 1949] were not received as enthusiastically as her first one. Such a shift in reception disturbed her, and she found the silence around her post-*Near to the Wild Heart* works readily wanted to categorize Clarice as an author rather than provide an exhausted critique of the novel. Interestingly, Lispector claims that when she gave her manuscript to Lins asking whether it was worth publishing, Lins in fact claimed not to have understood *Perto do coração selvagem* after his first reading. He changed his mind only after learning about Sérgio Milliet’s positive review on the novel (Gotlib *Clarice* 172-173).  

Apart from Candido and Nunes, other noted Brazilian critics of Lispector’s works are Gilda de Mello e Souza, Olga de Sá, Assis Brasil, Nádia Batella Gotlib, Teresa Montero, Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna, Bella Jozef, Nelson Vieira, Yudith Rosenbaum, Berta Waldman, Lúcia Helena, Vilma Arêas, and Igor Rossoni.
vexing. One of the few critics who voiced his views on _O lustre_ was Álvaro Lins. He praised Lispector for her clever use of the interior monologue and for her “audacious combination of words, surprising word play” aimed at “revealing images that are all together new, unexpected and beautiful” (Lins 192-193). Yet, he also noticed that the novel contains elements that are “vague” and “insufficiently characterized,” which do not allow for a full development of the form and scenes. As we can see, Lins again pointed to Lispector’s lack of experience that would turn her work into an independent and mature piece of writing.

Sérgio Milliet noted parallels between Clarice’s debut and _O lustre_, pointing to the “total isolation” of the protagonists in both novels, who are caught between “sensuality and pessimism.” He described Lispector’s style as “full of images, in which the sensuality of the word, the sentence, the sound and the color unfolds in a permanent harmony,” which at times is, however, “exhausting.” This richness of images became overabundant, according to Milliet, in Lispector’s third novel _A cidade sitiada_. Even though he praised the book’s original style, where the “mixture of the most vulgar words brings about the most unexpected results,” he expressed

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14 In a letter dated May 8, 1948, Lispector expressed her anxiety (translation mine): “I received a letter from Fernando Sabino, from New York, he says that he doesn’t understand the silence around the book [The Chandelier]. Neither do I, because I think that a critic who praised an author’s first book is almost obliged to comment at least on the second one, either destroying or approving it.” The original text in Portuguese: “Recebi a carta de Fernando Sabino, de Nova York, ele diz que não compreende o silêncio em torno do livro. Também não compreendo, porque acho que um crítico que elogiou um primeiro livro de um autor tem quase por obrigação anotar pelo menos o segundo, destruindo-o ou aceitando-o” (Gotlib _Clarice_ 224).

15 Translation mine. The original quote: “[A sua personalidade de escritora] destaca-se, principalmente, pela audaciosa combinação de vocábulos, pelo jogo imprevisto entre certas palavras com o fim de revelar imagens igualmente novas, inesperadas e belas” (Lins 193). The review was originally published in May, 1946 and later included – just like the review on Lispector’s debut novel – in his 1963 collection of essays _Os mortos de sobrecasaca: obras, autores e problemas da literatura brasileira_ [The Dead in Frock Coats: Works, Authors, and Problems in Brazilian Literature].

16 Translation mine. The original quote: “Trazendo talvez dentro dela o material de um grande romance, como acredito, a Sra. Clarisse Lispector não conseguiu ainda despedaçar uma espécie de casca que está envolvendo este mundo de ficção, impedindo-o de tomar forma e exprimir-se numa existência independente” (Lins 192).


18 Translation mine. The original quote: “É servida [a plenitude emocional admirável] por um estilo exuberante de imagens, em que a volúpia da palavra, da frase, do som e da cor se expande numa permanente, e por vezes exaustiva, sinfonia” (Milliet _Diário Crítico_, vol. 3, p. 41).
his criticism of Lispector’s triumph of form over content, where the “rococo masked the
structure of the novel with an endless series of ornaments, preventing us from seeing and
penetrating its spirit,” and so the “form became the formula.”19

Despite Lispector’s preoccupation with the sparse reception of her novels, her career as a
short story writer took off during that time. In 1952, during a few months stay in Rio de Janeiro,
she published six short stories in the volume titled Alguns contos [Some Stories]. This time the
balance between the “sensuality of the word” did not overwhelm Lispector’s “psychological
insight and her sensitivity,” although, as Milliet affirms, her creative imagination did not fit in
the narrow frames of the short story, and he would rather see her compose a prose poem because,
for him, Clarice Lispector was “first and foremost a poet.”20

While in Rio, Lispector started working for the journal O Comício, in which she regularly
wrote a column for women under the pseudonym Teresa Quadros. Soon after, she moved again,
accompanying her husband on another assignment to Washington D.C. But in 1959, she and her
husband divorced, and she returned to Brazil – this time for good – with her two sons. She
moved to an apartment in Rio’s neighborhood Leme and devoted herself fully to her writing
career.

The stories published in Alguns contos were later included in the 1960 collection Laços
de família [Family Ties]. According to Benedito Nunes, the publication of the latter volume was
significant for Lispector’s writing career as it popularized her as an author of short stories and, at

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19 Translation mine. The original quote: “Ninguém negará a Clarice Lispector a originalidade de uma química
sintáxica em que a mistura das palavras mais vulgares produz os mais espantosos resultados” (...) “o rococó
mascarou com sua interminável série de ornatos a estrutura da obra, impedindo-nos de perceber e penetrar-lhe o
espirito” (Milliet Diário Crítico, vol.7, p. 33).

20 Translation mine. The original quote: “A volúpia da frase, do som e da cor, permanece a caracteristica de sua
maneira, mas sua inteligência, sua penetração psicológica e principalmente sua sensibilidade sabem dar ao que
escreve um equilíbrio suficiente” (...) “Porque, na realidade, Clarice Lispector é principalmente um poeta” (Milliet
the same time, turned readers’ and critics’ attention toward the largely ignored *O lustre* and *A cidade sitiada*. These events, according to Nunes, comprise the second phase of criticism of Lispector’s writing (Gotlib “Readers of Clarice” 183). *Laços de família* continues to be Lispector’s best known collection and, as Earl Fitz states, the stories included there “rank among the very best produced by a Latin American author in the mid-twentieth century”, establishing Clarice Lispector “as a major force in Brazilian narrative, especially the story form” (107).

After *Laços de família*, Lispector published the following works: *A maçã no escuro* [Apple in the Dark] in 1961, her longest and, as Nancy Gray Diaz affirms, “most complex novel”; *A paixão segundo G.H.* [The Passion According to G.H.] in 1964; *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* [An Apprenticeship or the Book of Pleasures] in 1968; *Água viva* [The Stream of Life] in 1973; *A hora da estrela* [The Hour of the Star] in 1977; and *Um sopro de vida: pulsações* [A Breath of Life: Pulsations], published posthumously in 1978 (Marting *A Bio-Bibliography* 93). The last two novels, according to Benedito Nunes, mark the third phase of criticism of Lispector’s writing, as these particular texts “enabled the reader, retrospectively almost, to discover certain motifs articulated throughout the writer’s oeuvre in a singular process of creation centered on plumbing the depths of the psyche, which had begun with her very first work” (Gotlib “Readers of Clarice” 183). With little consensus, Marta Peixoto claims that *A hora da estrela* is “one of Lispector’s most written about and unanimously praised texts,” while Luiza Lobo affirms that *A paixão segundo G.H.* “is often held to be CL’s greatest work” in Brazil (Marting *A Bio-Bibliography* 42, 113).

The published collections of short stories include the aforementioned *Laços de família* in 1960; *A legião estrangeira* [The Foreign Legion] in 1964; *Felicidade clandestina* [Covert Joy] in 1971; *A imitação da rosa* [The Imitation of the Rose] in 1973, which contains stories previously
published in the three volumes mentioned earlier; *Onde estivestes de noite* [Where Were You at Night] and *A via crucis do corpo* [The Via Crucis of the Body], both published in 1974; and finally, *A bela e a fera* [The Beauty and the Beast], published posthumously, in 1979.

Apart from novels and short stories, Lispector wrote children’s literature, and, in order to make ends meet, she published individual short stories in newspapers such as the *Jornal do Brasil* and *Senhor*; contributed with articles and chronicles for the papers *Correio da manhã* and *Diário da Noite*; and conducted interviews with Brazilian artists for the magazine *Manchete*, which would be later published in the 1975 book *De corpo inteiro*. Her chronicles were published in the following volumes: *Visão do esplendor: impressões leves* [Vision of Splendor], in 1975; *Para não esquecer* [Not to Forget] in 1978, which comprises chronicles originally published as *Fundo da gaveta* [Back of the Drawer] and included in the volume *A legião estrangeira* (1964); and *A descoberta do mundo* [Discovering the World], published in 1984. On top of that, she worked as a translator and translated the works of such writers as Anton Chekhov, Edgar Allan Poe, and Agatha Christie.

Her journey to literary renown was marked by sudden successes, periods of silence and of low productivity (particularly during her residence outside of Brazil), the search for editors willing to publish her works, and, finally, financial difficulties. She admired authors who were able to make their living solely from royalties. For example, in an interview with Érico Veríssimo for *Manchete*, she described Veríssimo as “the only Brazilian writer, along with Jorge

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Amado, who is capable of living off the sale of his books,” which “sell like hot cakes” (Lispector De corpo inteiro 22). She did not strive for fame: “If I were famous, my private life would be invaded and I would no longer be able to write,” but, still, she seemed to want more recognition as a writer: “I write with love and attention and tenderness and pain and diligence, and I would like at least a minimum of attention and interest in return,” which would have also ensured her a better financial situation.

Despite these hardships, she persisted in her profession. At the time of her premature death in 1977, she had already established her position as one of the most significant writers of Brazilian literature. Nowadays, she is often mentioned in one breath along with such influential Brazilian writers as Machado de Assis (1839 – 1908) or João Guimarães Rosa (1908 – 1967). Her texts, however, continue to be characterized by a “difficulty in comprehension,” which, according to Igor Rossoni, is shared by readers in general and also by some teachers and even critics (21). I find his observation convincing because whenever I tell a Brazilian – a friend or an academic – about my interest in Lispector, the person usually reacts by saying, “Good luck!” or “Well, that’s difficult!” This does not discourage me, though, from proceeding with my work.

Fortunately, this “stigma,” noticed by Rossoni, surrounding the name “Clarice Lispector” also did not prevent critics and readers from delving into the complex world that Lispector created, or university students from writing theses and dissertations analyzing her poetics, be it in

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23 “Érico é escritor que não preciso apresentar ao público: trata-se, com Jorge Amado, do único escritor no Brasil que pode viver da vendagem de seus livros. Vendem como pão quente” (Lispector De corpo inteiro 22).

24 The original in Portuguese: “Se eu fosse famosa, teria minha vida particular invalidada, e não poderia mais escrever,” “Eu escrevo com amor e atenção e ternura e dor e pesquisa, e queria de volta, como mínimo, uma atenção e um interesse” (Borelli 26, 67).
Brazil or worldwide. In fact, the U.S. is one of the countries in which Lispector has been most read and analyzed.

**Clarice Lispector in the United States of America**

The dissemination of Lispector’s works in the U.S. was made possible by translators of Portuguese into English, and by scholars, who provided a deep insight and an interpretation of her poetics. Before I proceed, however, to talk about Lispector’s reputation in the U.S., I would like to briefly discuss the context in which she had been introduced there.

Teresa Montero describes in detail how the interest in Luso-Brazilian studies increased and how the publishing market responded to that shift in the 1960s and 1970s. Montero considers this particular period of the twentieth century as a “‘boom’ in Latin American fiction,” as during that time “the government of the United States started to invest in research and teaching about Latin America in reaction to the political repercussions arising after the Cuban Revolution” (165). The relationship between the U.S. and Brazil became stronger when the latter joined the Allied forces in World War II in 1942 and became part of the “Good Neighbor” policy, a project aimed at promoting “the exchange of cultural and material values between the States and the other countries in the Americas” (Montero 166). Some pioneers of Brazilian studies in the U.S., like historian Stanley J. Stain and anthropologist Charles W. Wagley, benefited from this orientation and conducted research in Brazil; this later became fundamental to the development

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25 On the website of Instituto Moreira Salles, an organization founded by the Brazilian philanthropist Walter Moreira Salles and aimed at promoting Brazilian culture, I counted 464 Master’s theses and Doctoral dissertations about Clarice Lispector (either solely dedicated to her or with a comparative approach including other writers) that were submitted in Brazil between 1987-2010. Source: [https://claricelispectorims.com.br/artigos-sobre-clarice/teses-e-dissertacoes/](https://claricelispectorims.com.br/artigos-sobre-clarice/teses-e-dissertacoes/). Accessed 25 Feb. 2017. Russotto mentions 8,000 theses in Brazil and 3,000 in other countries, according to the data published in the Spanish newspaper El País in October 2013 (Russotto 33).
of Lusophone studies (Meihy 70, 81). Before the 1960s, as Meihy affirms, the reason for the interest in Brazil in the U.S. stemmed mostly from “academic curiosity” to get to know the “other,” that is, the exotic and the unknown, rather than from plans to implement a project incorporated into a field of study (43).26

Another vehicle for transmitting Brazilian values to the U.S. was through popular culture, especially in music and cinema. Carmen Miranda, a Portuguese-Brazilian singer and dancer, who performed on Broadway, popularized the exotic side of South America in the 1940s and the 1950s. The 1940s in the U.S. also brought first translations of Brazilian literature into English, thanks largely to Samuel Putnam, an American scholar of Romance languages, who translated such authors as Euclides da Cunha, Jorge Amado, and the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (Montero 166).

In 1958, there was another event that marked the cultural and political relationship between Brazil and the U.S., this time mainly on the educational level. The NDEA (National Defense Education Act), signed on September 2, “became one of the most successful legislative initiatives in higher education. It established the legitimacy of federal funding of higher education and made substantial funds available for low-cost student loans, boosting public and private colleges and universities” (“Sputnik Spurs Passage of the NDEA”). As a result of the actions in the 1940s and the 1950s, a number of Luso-Brazilian Institutes (for example, at New York University, and later at the University of North Carolina, University of Pennsylvania and Vanderbilt University) and Centers (at the University of Wisconsin) were formed around the country, committed to teaching Portuguese language and Luso-Brazilian literature. These

26 In his book A crônica brasileirista: história oral de vida acadêmica, Meihy discusses in detail the complex relationship between the U.S. and Brazil, distinguishing between the historic and the political factors. For the purpose of this thesis, I shall only briefly discuss the topic and focus on the events that contributed to the surge in Brazilian studies in the U.S.
institutions also started to invite guest speakers from Brazil such as Cecilia Meireles, Gilberto Freyre or Erico Veríssimo (Montero 167-168). This is the context in which Lispector’s writing would bloom, yet not without difficulty.

The first Lispector’s texts to have been translated into English were the short story “Tentação” [Temptation], which appeared in the journal Américas in 1955; the second was “Amor” [Love], co-translated by Clarice and published in 1957 in New Mexico Quarterly 26; and third, “O crime do professor de matemática” [The Crime of the Mathematics Professor], published in Odyssey Review 1 in 1961 (Montero 169). The texts, however, did not have great impact on the readership, and Lispector’s recognition in the American literary world lay in wait.

In the 1960s, another attempt was made to translate Lispector, this time by a famous American poet then living in Brazil, Elizabeth Bishop. Her comment about the author being “better than Borges” was widely quoted, since it captured the poet’s fascination with the emerging Brazilian writer who was so little known in the U.S. Bishop was determined to translate Lispector’s works, but their rather poor and irregular collaboration bore little fruit. Of five of Lispector’s short stories translated by Bishop, three were published in a June 1964 issue of The Kenyon Review: “Uma galinha” [A Hen], “Macacos” [Marmosets], and “A menor mulher do mundo” [The Smallest Woman in the World].27 Despite the rather unsatisfactory results, “Bishop’s enthusiasm,” as Hicok states, “was instrumental in Alfred Knopf’s decision to publish a book-length translation of Lispector’s novel The Apple in the Dark in 1967” (75).

The translator of A maçã no escuro was Gregory Rabassa, a professor at Columbia University, who had received the 1967 National Book Award for his translation of Julio Cortázar’s Rayuela [Hopscotch]. Rabassa, who died on June 13, 2016, had been introduced to

27 The titles of the three short stories are Elizabeth Bishop’s.
Lispector in 1963 during the 11th International Congress of the Ibero-American Literature Institute held at the University of Texas, Austin. In a letter to Giovanni Pontiero, another translator of Lispector, Rabassa later admitted that he was “astonished to meet that rare person who looked like Marlene Dietrich and wrote like Virginia Woolf” (Moser *Why This World?* 260).

As a scholar, Rabassa, later taught at City University of New York, where he mentored Earl Fitz, another intellectual and translator of Clarice Lispector’s works. Apart from just translating *A mulher que matou os peixes* and *Água viva* into English, published in 1982 and 1989 respectively, Fitz has written a number of books and articles on Lispector, strengthening the field of criticism dedicated to her poetics. He is the author of the first book (*Clarice Lispector*, 1985) published in the U.S. that was dedicated solely to her writing. Fitz’s contribution to Lispector studies continued to draw attention to Brazilian literature as an independent literary and cultural tradition, free from the rather unclear category of “Latin-American literature,” usually focusing on the Spanish-American input. Fitz also collaborated with Elizabeth Lowe, a scholar in Luso-Brazilian studies and translator, on the translation of

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28 Elizabeth Lowe, a brazilianist, a scholar and a translator of Lispector, expressed her positive reception of the book: “This Twayne publication is an excellent introduction not only to the author, but to a mode of contemporary Brazilian fiction, and is a useful guide for students, specialists and the non-specialist reader of Lispector’s work in translation” (106). Fitz’s second book on Lispector, titled *Sexuality and being in the poststructuralist universe of Clarice Lispector: the dифérance of desire* and published in 2001, applies poststructuralist views to her writing and discusses the themes of sexuality and desire, investigating Lispector’s style, characters and socio-political awareness present in a variety of her texts: chronicles, stories, novels, and children’s literature.

29 Fitz expressed his views about the Brazilian situation, and how the Brazilian literary tradition is overall neglected when encompassed by the vague term “Latin-American” in the article titled “Ambiguidade e gênero: Estabelecendo a diferença entre a ficção escrita por mulheres no Brasil e na América Espanhola.” *Entre resistir e identificar-se: Para uma teoria da prática narrativa brasileira de autoria feminina*, edited by Peggy Sharpe. Florianópolis: Editora Mulheres; Goiânia: Editora da UFG, 1997. 17-32. What is more, both Rabassa and Fitz were familiar with the research done by Teresinha Alves Pereira, a Brazilian scholar “responsible for setting up courses in Latin-American studies” and “a key figure in promoting Lispector’s works” (Montero 172). Montero states that there were six PhD dissertations on Lispector submitted between 1971 and 1979, four of which presented a comparative approach – one of them was written by Pereira, titled “Julio Cortázar, Clarice Lispector e a nova narrativa latino-americana” (Montero 172). The remaining four also discussed Lispector in the Latin-American context, confirming the close relationship between the fields.

Although Giovanni Pontiero worked on the other side of the Atlantic, namely in the United Kingdom, his renditions of Lispector’s works into English – along with Rabassa’s – have long served as the only available translations. He first became known in the translation world with his version of the short story “Amor,” for which he won the Camões prize in 1968 (Montero 174). He also won another “prize,” i.e., Lispector’s recognition of his excellent skills. Lispector liked the translation so much that she asked him to translate the remaining stories from the collection Laços de família, which were eventually published as Family Ties in 1972 (Montero 174).

In 1971, there were two important articles published in the literary journal Studies in Short Fiction 8: “The Drama of Existence in Laços de família” by Giovanni Pontiero, and “Clarice Lispector: Fiction and Cosmic Vision” by Massaud Moisés and translated by Sara McCabe, both of whom contributed to Lispector studies by adding criticism written in English. Pontiero and Moisés proposed an analysis of Lispector’s works from the point of view of phenomenology – thus echoing Nunes’s interpretation – and drew attention to the philosophical tradition suggested by her texts, represented mainly by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus. Montero claims that based on her analysis of the critical material published between 1967 and 1979, it appears that “Brazilian critics working in the States published more or less the same number of articles as North-American scholars” (175). Moreover, they also contributed to spreading the work of their fellow critics in Brazil by quoting their research in their own writing.
In the 1980s and in the early 1990s, more of Pontiero’s translations into English became available: *The Foreign Legion: Stories and Chronicles* in 1986 by New York-based New Directions and by Carcanet in Manchester; *The Hour of the Star*, also in 1986 by Carcanet; *Near to the Wild Heart* in 1990, by New Directions and Carcanet; and the chronicles gathered in the 1992 collection titled *Discovering the World*, also published by Carcanet. There were two additional translations published in the 1980s: Ronald W. Sousa’s *The Passion According to G.H.* in 1988 by University of Minnesota Press, and Alexis Levitin’s *Soulstorm*, which appeared in 1989 thanks to New Directions and comprised two volumes of short stories: *A via crucis do corpo* and *Onde estivestes de noite*. The beginning of the new millennium brought new translations of Lispector’s texts published by New Directions: the first biography on Lispector written in English, *Why This World?* (2009), by Benjamin Moser, the novel *The Hour of the Star* in 2011 with Moser’s translation; and four other novels all published in 2012, including *Near to the Wild Heart*, translated by Alison Entrekin; *The Passion According to G.H.*, translated by Idra Novey; *Água viva*, translated by Stefan Tobler; and *A Breath of Life (Pulsations)*, translated by Johnny Lorenz.

Moser, who edited all of the 2012 publications, claims that his intention to present the English-speaking reader with another translation was motivated by the need to preserve Lispector’s “strange language” that the previous “translators tried to smooth out” by correcting “her odd punctuation and her weird phrasings” (Moser “Brazil’s Clarice Lispector”). Although I appreciate Moser’s efforts to revitalize Lispector’s texts in translation, I do not believe that discarding the previous translations altogether is appropriate. After all, those first translators – Elizabeth Bishop, Gregory Rabassa, Giovanni Pontiero, Elizabeth Lowe, Ronald W. Sousa – are responsible for introducing Lispector to the English-speaking readership. What is more, most of
them also contributed with their academic work, establishing and grounding the field of Lispector studies. Moser’s publications, however, appeared when Lispector was already a well-known author in the U.S.

As mentioned above, the English translations of Lispector’s works were not the only factor that helped spread her fame internationally. Despite the clearly important role of translation as a vehicle for inserting a writer to a foreign language and culture, it is not sufficient when it comes to establishing an author’s position in the literary world. This gap is filled by academic scholars and critics, who engage in literary criticism in the form of reviews, articles, books, theses, and dissertations, all offering various angles of interpretation, and at times linking the writer’s works to different authors and theories.

The growing interest in Lispector’s writing in the academy, however, did not directly correspond to the curiosity in the publishing world. Montero asserts that “only in the following decades, in the 1980s and 90s, were these two important audiences of her work to reach a balance,” given that feminist theory, which gained importance in the 1970s, was already an established field at that time (177). The feminist perspective of Lispector’s writing was popular in Europe, especially in France. This was mostly thanks to Hélène Cixous, a French philosopher and writer, who coined the term “écriture féminine” (“women’s writing”).

30 I would like to clarify that I am not talking about authors who are extremely popular among readers, but whose works are not considered high literature and are not subject to literary criticism. In Brazil, such an author is Paulo Coelho (born in 1947 in Rio de Janeiro), a novelist and lyricist, whose 1988 book O alquimista [The Alchemist] became one of the best-selling Brazilian books of all time.

31 In the famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” published in 1976, which became one of the core sources of feminist studies in France and abroad, Cixous states that “it is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded” (35). In the introduction to Reading with Clarice Lispector written by Cixous, Verena Andermatt Conley provides the following definition of “écriture féminine”: “It 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” (Cixous Reading with Clarice Lispector vii-viii). Cixous’s theory, although influential, has also been widely criticized. The presence of the feminist perspective in Lispector’s writing
Clarice Lispector in France

The emergence of women’s studies with its focus on politics and gender has created a space for international writers such as Lispector. Nonetheless, she first appeared in France much earlier, in July 1952, when one chapter from her third novel *A cidade sitiada* (1949) was translated by Beata Vettori and published in the French journal *Roman 8*. Two years later, in 1954, her debut novel *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943) was translated by Denise-Teresa Moutonnier as *Près du coeur sauvage*, and it was the first publication of Lispector’s complete work in a foreign language.\(^3\)\(^2\) As Pereira notes, it was not until Lispector’s fourth novel, *A maçã no escuro* (1961) was published in 1970 as *Le Bâtisseur des ruines* (literally “The Builder of the Ruins”), with Violante do Canto’s translation, that critics in France took note of Lispector’s work (111). Despite the poor translation, which was characterized by do Canto’s tendency to normalize and explain some of Lispector’s intricate structures, Pereira notes that this text initiated a discussion about the novel. The first contributor to the debate was Portuguese-born critic Álvaro Manuel Machado, who contrasted the complexity of the original in relation to the “smoothed-out” translation by do Canto (111).

In 1977, the year of her death, critics Maryvonne Lapouge and Clélia Pisa interviewed Lispector in her apartment in Rio. This interview was published in a 1977 collection titled

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\(^3\)\(^2\) Lispector herself found the translation “scandalously poor.” I describe her reaction in detail in chapter 4 of my thesis.
Brasileiras: voix, écrits du Brésil. Both scholars, among many others, would later comment on the 1978 French translation of *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964). The book, translated by Claude Farny and titled *La pasion selon G.H.*, received much greater attention from the French critics than the previous translations of Lispector’s work. One of the reasons for this interest was, again, the poor quality of the translation. According to Pereira, the translator “abolished the syntactic crudeness and the sentence cadence” of the novel, opting for a “highly literary language” and “refined vocabulary and structures,” which ran counter to Lispector’s dislike for “estheticism” in the novel. 33 It seems that Lispector was less fortunate with her French translations than with the English ones, which – despite Moser’s comment on the alleged “smoothing-out” technique applied by the earlier translators – were not so severely criticized for their distortion of the author’s vision. 34

In 1979, Hélène Cixous published her own interpretation of Lispector’s writing in *Vivre l’orange*, in which she analyzed *A paixão segundo G.H.*, *Água viva*, and the short story “A imitação da rosa” (originally published in the 1960 collection *Laços de família*). Cixous first encountered Lispector through the novel *Água viva* on October 12, 1978: “(…) this voice was unknown … this voice was not searching for me, it was writing to no one, to all women, to writing, in a foreign tongue, I do not speak it, but my heart understands it” (*Vivre l’orange* 10).

33 Translation mine, the original quote: “O tradutor empregou o nível de linguagem altamente literário, com vocabulário e estruturas rebuscadas, contrariando a linguagem do original e o projeto da autora que queria livrar-se do esteticismo” (Pereira 112).
34 Other translations of Lispector into French, all by Des Femmes publishing house, include: *Água Viva*, 1980 (bilingual edition); *Près du cœur sauvage* [Perto do coração selvagem, 1943], 1982 (re-edited in 1998); *La belle et la bête* [A bela e a fera, 1979], 1984 (re-edited in 2012); *Où étais-tu pendant la nuit* [Onde estivestes de noite, 1974], 1985; *L’heure de l’étoile* [A hora da estrela, 1977], 1985; *Liens de famille* [Laços de família, 1960], 1989; *Le lustre* [O lustre, 1946], 1990; *La ville assiégée* [A cidade sitiada, 1949], 1991; *Un apprentissage ou Le livre des plaisirs* [Uma aprendizagem ou o livro de prazeres, 1969], 1992; *Corps séparés* [literally “separate bodies,” original title *A legião estrangeira*, 1964], 1993; *La découverte du monde* [A descoberta do mundo, 1984], 1995; *Un souffle de vie* [Um sopro de vida: pulsações, 1978], 1998; *La vie intime de Laura* [A vida íntima de Laura, 1974], 2004; *Comment sont nées les étoiles* [Como nasceram as estrelas, 1987], 2005 (Portuguese-French edition); *Mes chéries* [Minhas queridas, 2007], 2015; *Lettres près du cœur* [Cartas perto do coração, 2011], 2016.
Cixous became overpowered by the reading experience because she discovered there “the finest practice of ‘écriture féminine’” (Cixous *Reading with Clarice Lispector* vii). This fascination resulted in a number of essays characterized by profound admiration of and even exaltation at Lispector’s work as an example of women’s writing. Moreover, Cixous included some of Lispector’s works such as *Água viva*, *A paixão segundo G.H.*, *A maçã no escuro*, in her seminars she taught in the 1980s at the Université de Paris VIII-Vincennes and at the Collège International de Philosophie, strengthening the link between Lispector’s works and philosophy. Cixous is also the author of one of the most cited comments about Lispector, describing and categorizing her writing, and, at the same time, hinting at the very impossibility of doing so:

> If Kafka had been a woman. If Rilke had been a Jewish Brazilian born in the Ukraine. If Rimbaud had been a Jewish mother, if he had reached the age of fifty. If Heidegger had been able to stop being German, if he had written the Romance of the Earth. Why have I cited these names? To try to sketch out the general vicinity. Over there is where Clarice Lispector writes. (Cixous “By the Light of an Apple” 132)

Cixous’s overall contribution to Lispector studies not only in France but also beyond is impressive:

> It should be acknowledged that the Brazilian writer, few of whose works had been translated into French and/or English before the fateful year of 1978, has come to achieve considerable prominence on the Franco-American literary and academic circuit due to precisely Hélène Cixous’s passionately personal involvement in the propagation of Lispector’s writings. (Klobucka 42-43)
Indeed, this “personal involvement” noted by the Polish-born critic Anna Klobucka\textsuperscript{35} is very characteristic of Cixous’s approach to Lispector. The French author treats Lispector as a teacher, a mentor, and, above all, as an admirable writer:

All the paradoxical movements of the human passions, the painful marriages of opposites that make up life itself, fear and courage (fear is also a kind of courage), madness and wisdom (one is the other, just as the beauty is the beast), lack of satisfaction, thirst equals water…All the secrets are discovered for us, and she hands us, one by one, the thousands of keys to the world. (Cixous “By the Light of an Apple” 133)

Nonetheless, Cixous’s “intimate” approach towards Lispector’s works has been interpreted by some critics as invasive. In view of the extent to which Lispector’s writing influenced Cixous’s, Klobucka notices that the Brazilian writer becomes more “Cixousian” than Cixous herself more “Lispectorian,” as if the French philosopher was trying to mold Lispector’s poetics so that it would fit into her own writing (44).

Rosemary Arrojo, a critic and a Translation Studies scholar, analyzed the Cixous-Lispector relationship based on the dominant-subaltern dichotomy, and noticed similar issues in Cixous’s approach to Lispector’s works. According to Arrojo, Cixous does not allow for Lispector’s voice to sound amidst the French philosopher’s interpretation, nor does she treat her alleged mentor with “extreme fidelity” (Arrojo 144). Although Arrojo considers Cixous “the

Brazilian writer’s best-known reader so far,” she questions her translations of Lispector’s works used in her own writing. Arrojo agrees with Marta Peixoto, who argues that some quotations that seem to be Lispector’s are actually “Cixous’s own paraphrases and conflations of several Lispector’s texts” (Peixoto *Passionate Fictions* 44).

For Arrojo, Cixous’s approach represents a relationship of power and, what is more, it contradicts the French author’s feminist theory by which she aims to dissolve and abolish “the basic ‘masculine’ oppressive dichotomy between subject and object, which she [Cixous] appropriately associates with patriarchy and colonialism” (160). Arrojo contends that “Cixous’s textual approach to Lispector’s work is in fact an exemplary illustration of an aggressively ‘masculine’ approach to difference (160).

The observations made by Klobucka, Arrojo, and Peixoto shed light on the textual relationship between Cixous and Lispector, exploring its “dark sides” and possible motives based on the French author’s self-interest. Nonetheless, Cixous’s efforts in popularizing Lispector in France and in Europe are worthy of analysis. At the same time, the Cixous-Lispector controversy makes me think about the importance of translation, in this case of Lispector’s texts. In order to appreciate her writing, it is indispensable to read her own words, if not in the original Portuguese, then in translation that would not be, as Arrojo considers Cixous’s renditions, “interfering” (Arrojo 145).

Despite the above issues with Cixous’s reading of Lispector, I agree with the explanation of “the two great lessons of living” that in her view Lispector teaches us: “*slowness and ugliness*” (Cixous “Clarice Lispector: The Approach” 61). As Cixous argues, Lispector teaches us how to properly approach life: “the slow time that we need to approach, to let everything approach, life, death, time, the thing; all the slowness of time that life must take in order to give
itself without hurting us too much” (“Clarice Lispector: The Approach” 62). This observation reminds me of João Guimarães Rosa’s appreciative comment on Lispector: “Clarice, I don’t read you for literature, but for life” (Castello).36

Cixous’s “slowness,” in my opinion, is also about coming closer to reading literature: to approach it with all the time necessary to experience it to the fullest possible, to let oneself be driven by the text, to follow the narrator’s gaze, and to let oneself be surprised, shocked, enchanted – whatever is the sensation that the prolonged stare at the world imposed by the author evokes in the reader. Hahn notes how “slowness” is also reflected in Lispector’s writing: “Each reality is expressed in its own pace and time. The flow of time is the flow of the word” (125).37

In Lispector’s texts, the reader is often made to look at something unpleasant, such as an open wound, and this is where the lesson of “ugliness” as pointed out by Cixous is being taught. Although Cixous’s intimate way of reading Lispector might seem abusive in the sense of serving the author’s interests, as Klobucka, Arrojo, and Peixoto noticed, it does serve as another element of the puzzle that is part of Clarice Lispector’s writing.

**Clarice Lispector in Poland**

In the previous sections, we have seen the various contexts and ways in which Clarice Lispector’s oeuvre was popularized outside of Brazil. In the U.S., it was the political factor that provided funding for research conducted abroad and invested in language and literature instruction (the “Good Neighbor” policy and NDEA). In addition, the efforts of translators and

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36 Translation mine. The original quote in Portuguese: “Clarice, eu não leio você para a literatura, mas para a vida.”

37 Translation mine. The original quote in Portuguese: “Cada realidade é expressa no seu ritmo e no seu tempo. O fluxo do tempo é o fluxo da palavra” (Hahn 125).
scholars were instrumental in drawing American readers’ attention toward Lispector. In France, interestingly, the translators’ – often – poorly produced renditions played an essential factor in initiating discussions around Lispector and her work. But even more importantly, the feminist movement provided context for which Lispector’s works had originally been placed.

The interest in Lispector’s work and in Lusophone literatures in Poland has not recorded such a remarkable growth as it did in France in the 1970s and the 1980s or in the U.S. in the 1990s and the 2000s. Although there has been an increase in the popularity of the Portuguese language in Poland, which is taught in a variety of language schools around the country, Portuguese as a major is still offered at only a few universities in Poland, and most of the time it constitutes a part of the Iberian, the Romance Studies program, or as an additional foreign language for French or Spanish majors. Clearly, there is a tendency to associate the field as a mere addition to the Spanish or Latin American program.

The Department of Portuguese and Translation Studies at the Institute of Romance Languages at Jagiellonian University in Cracow offers Portuguese on the undergraduate and graduate levels (MA, PhD), while Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań has Portuguese Studies on an undergraduate level at the Institute of Romance Languages. The Department of Portuguese Studies at Maria Skłodowska-Curie University in Lublin offers education on undergraduate and graduate (MA) levels, with the possibility to pursue the Lusophone track on the undergraduate level. MA students in Portuguese are specialized in Translation Studies. The Department of Luso-Brazilian Language and Culture\(^\text{38}\) at the University of Warsaw’s Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American studies lists Portuguese as part of the undergraduate and graduate (MA, PhD) program, offering such areas of specialty as linguistics, history and culture, and

literature. The websites of the departments provide information about various conferences, talks, presentations, discussion and research clubs (“Amor-Não-Me-Deixes” at the University of Warsaw or “Lusomundo” at AMU in Poznań), music shows, and theatre pieces, organized by the faculty and the students. A few Polish universities collaborate with the Portuguese Instituto Camões da Cooperação e da Língua, inaugurated in 2005, a public institution supervised the Ministry for Foreign Affairs whose aim is to implement educational policies as well as to promote Portuguese language in non-Portuguese speaking countries.

The link between Portuguese language and translation is clearly an important factor in promoting Lusophone literature in Poland. Before the appearance of Lusophone studies in Polish institutions of higher education, Brazilian literature had been introduced to the Polish reader in the form of numerous translations. As such, Brazilian classics by Machado de Assis, José de Alencar, and Jorge Amado were translated in the late 1940s. Janina Wrzoskowa was the major translator of Brazilian literature until the 1970s, during which Janina Z. Klave’s translations appeared. In 1949, Wrzoskowa translated some of Jorge Amado’s novels, such as the 1943 Terras do Sem-Fim [Ziemia krwi i przemocy in Polish, The Violent Land in English], and, in 2015, she published her translation of Gabriela, cravo e canela [Gabriela, goździk i cynamon in Polish, Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon in English]. Her Polish rendition of Machado de Assis’s masterpiece Dom Casmurro was published in 1959; in 1962 she translated José de Alencar’s O Guarani.

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39 Due to the focus of this thesis, I have narrowed down my research to Brazilian literature in Poland.
40 In order to explain the numerous translations of Brazilian literature into Polish at that time, we would have to take into account the translations of the aforementioned writers into other languages, such as English, French or German, since these were more popular in Poland than the Portuguese language. It is possible that the appearance of the translations in those languages triggered translators to popularize the texts in Poland. In fact, Terras do Sem-Fim was translated into English in 1945 by the already mentioned Samuel Putnam, and one year later into French by Claude Plessis, before it found its way to the Polish reader in 1949.
1970s and 1980s Poland saw the publication of two anthologies of Brazilian short stories (Opowiadania brazylijskie, 1977, and Nowe opowiadania brazylijskie, 1982), selected and translated by Janina Z. Klave. Among the authors included in the anthologies were Fernando Sabino, Samuel Rawet, João Guimarães Rosa, Lima Barreto, Clarice Lispector, Moacyr Scliar, Nélida Pinon, Edla Steen, Dalton Trevisan, Rubem Fonseca, Mário Quintana, Luís Fernando Veríssimo, and Otto Lara Resende. Apart from translation, Klave – who was also a literary historian – published books contextualizing Lusophone literature and dealing with the history of Portuguese literature, Brazilian premodernism and modernism. She is also the author of Portuguese language textbooks. It is fair to affirm that her translations prompted her to become a major figure in the dissemination of Brazilian (and Portuguese) literature in Poland during the 1970s and the 1980s.

Paulo Coelho marked the 1990s and the 2000s: various translators translated nearly twenty of his novels into Polish. There have been also several Polish translations of poetry by poets such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Mário Quintana, and Paulo Leminsky published in anthologies and literary journals.

The most recent translations published in Poland include: Daniel Galera’s Broda zalana krwią [Barba ensopada de sangue in Portuguese, Blood-drenched Beard in English], and Adriana Lisboa’s Symfonia w bieli [Sinfonia em branco in Portuguese, Symphony in White in

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42 For an extensive list of Brazilian literature in Polish translation, see Appendix A of this thesis.
English], both published in 2016 and translated by Wojciech Charchalis. Charchalis is academic scholar currently working at AMU in Poznań and has also published critical works on the acclaimed Portuguese author José Saramago, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1998.43

Apart from Charchalis, other contemporary intellectuals working with Lusophone literature in Poland include Jerzy Brzozowski, Anna Kalewska, Jakub Jankowski, Renata Diaz-Schmidt, Natalia Klidzio, Gabriel Borowski, and Anna Wolny. Although there have been numerous Lusophone studies publications in Poland, I have not encountered any published article or an extensive piece of critical analysis dedicated solely to Lispector’s writing, especially not written in Polish.44 As such, I conclude that the reception of Lispector’s oeuvre in Poland has been sparse and is mostly represented by Polish authors such as Janina Z. Klave and Michal Lipszyc, who have translated some of her texts into Polish, and provided information about her life and works in the form of biographical notes or indexes.45

43 The first translations of Saramago’s work into Polish, Ewangelia według Jezusa Chrystusa [O Evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo, 1991] appeared in 1992 in Cezary Długosz’s translation. It should be noted that between 1992 and 2015 a total of thirteen Polish translations of Saramago’s works were published, eight of which had been translated by Charchalis. I believe it is a result of a combination of factors: the openness of the publishing market, readers’ demand, and Charchalis’s academic interest in Saramago.


45 I have not encountered any publication on the reception of the translations of Lusophone literature into Polish. There is a study on the reception of the translations of Ibero-American literature into Polish between 1945-2005, but it excludes the Lusophone context: Gaszyńska-Magiara, Małgorzata. Recepcja przekładów literatury iberoamerykańskiej w Polsce w latach 1945-2005 z perspektywy komunikacji międzykulturowej. [Reception of Translations from Latin American Literature in Poland in 1945-2005]: An Intercultural Communication Perspective]. Wydawnictwo UJ, 2011. Gaszyńska-Magiara describes the Polish boom of Latin-American literature, which, she claims, started along with the publication of Julio Cortázar’s Gra w klasie in 1968 [Rayuela, 1963; Hopscotch in English, 1966], translated by Zofia Chądzyńska, and ended in 1981, which is when the Martial Law in Poland was introduced (Gołuch 341).
Aleksandra Lipczak, a Polish journalist, gave an extensive biographical account of Lispector in the article titled “Clarice Lispector – the great witch of Brazilian Literature” published in 2012 in the Polish cultural magazine High Heels [Wysokie Obcasy], a supplement to the Saturday edition of the national newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza [Electoral Newspaper]. This piece provides an insight into Lispector’s life and presents her as an essential contributor to contemporary Brazilian literature. It does not, however, discuss in detail any of her works; it instead provides only general descriptions of some of her texts. The author wrote the article using Moser’s Why This World? and Laura Freixas’s 2010 biography Ladrona de rosas. Clarice Lispector: Una genialidad insoportable and focused primarily on Lispector’s intriguing and influential persona rather than a critical analysis of her literary output.

Lispector’s work found its way to the Polish reader for the first time in 1977, when Janina Z. Klave’s translation of Lispector’s short story “Feliz aniversário” [Happy Birthday] with the Polish title “Urodzinowe przyjęcie,” was included in the collection Opowiadania brazylijskie [Brazilian Short Stories]. And in 1987, Anna Hermanowicz-Pałka introduced readers to Lispector’s famous novel A hora da estrela, called Godzina gwiazdy in Polish. Two years later, the literary journal Literatura na Świecie [Literature in the World] published three short stories, all translated by Krystyna Sabik: “Tajemnicze wydarzenie w São Cristóvão” [Mystery in São Cristóvão], “Byk” [Bull], “Naśladowanie róży” [The Imitation of the Rose]. In 2007, another collection of Brazilian short stories was published, Intymność i inne sfery [Intimacy and Other Spheres], with a preface by the then Ambassador of Brazil to Poland, Marcelo Jardim. In the preface, Jardim said that Lispector’s story “Felicidade Clandestina”

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47 Translation mine.
48 The Portuguese titles are: “Mistério em São Cristóvão”, “O Búfalo,” and “A imitação da Rosa”. The English titles are Katrina Dodson’s.
49 Translation mine.
[Covert Joy], translated into Polish as “Ukryte szczęście,” “deserved special attention,” which he then explained by briefly describing Lispector’s biography and her writing. He said: “Her [Lispector’s] universal style gained international renown, and her awareness with which she crosses the paths and wilderness of the human soul (be it Slavic or Brazilian), make her one of the more important writers of the twentieth century.”

In 2011, the journal Literatura na Świecie, mentioned earlier, published several of Lispector’s short stories, namely “Kura” [A Chicken], “Najmniejsza kobieta świata” [The Smallest Woman in the World], “Obiad” [The Dinner], “Tajemnica São Cristovão” [Mystery in São Cristóvão], “Jedz, synku” [Eat Up, My Son], “Dwie historie po mojemu” [Two Stories My Way], “Miss Algarve” [Miss Algrave], “Droga krzyżowa” [Via Crucis], “Język pu” [Pig Latin], “Ciało” [The Body], “Chyba będzie padać” [But It’s Going to Rain], “Gdzie byliście w nocy” [Where Were You at Night], and “Właśnie tam idę” [That’s Where I’m Going]. Michał Lipszyc translated all of these texts. In the same volume, Agnieszka Dideńko published four excerpts from Lispector’s first novel Perto do coração selvagem [Near to the Wild Heart], with the Polish title W pobliżu dzikiego serca. The excerpts were: “Tata…”, “…Mama…”, “Spacer Joany”, “…Ciotka…” [The Father, The Mother, Joana Takes a Stroll, The Aunt].

The biographical sketches included in the volumes serve as an important point of reference for the Polish reader about the writer. More importantly, these records are the only

50 Translation mine. The original text in Polish says: “Na szczególną uwagę zasługuje opowiadanie Clarisse Lispector ‘Ukryte szczęście’… Jej uniwersalny styl zyskał światową sławę, znawstwo zaś, z jakim porusza się po drogach i bezdrożach ludzkiej duszy (czy to słowiańskiej, czy brazylijskiej) czynią z niej jedną z ważniejszych pisarek XX wieku” (Angrocka et al. 5).
51 The Portuguese titles are: “Uma galinha,” “A menor mulher do mundo,” “O jantar,” “Mistério em São Cristovão,” “Come, meu filho,” “Duas histórias a meu modo,” “Miss Algrave,” “Via crucis,” “A língua do ‘p’,” “O corpo,” “Mas vai chover,” “Onde estivestes de noite,” “É para lá que eu vou.” The Polish titles are Lipszyc’s and the English titles are Katrina Dodson’s.
52 Translations of the title of the novel and of the excerpts are Giovanni Pontiero’s. The Portuguese titles are: “O Pai,” “A Mãe,” “O Passeio de Joana,” “A Tia.”
pieces of information available to a person not familiar with the critical reception of Lispector’s oeuvre in Portuguese or English, which is far more extensive than in Polish. In the biographical note included in *Opowiadania brazylijskie*, the translator Janina Z. Klave writes that Lispector deals with “existential themes” and that “in her books, which are characterized by mature introspection, she looks for a metaphysical sense of the world,” and “describes human solitude” (Klave 1977: 301).53

A similar description is provided in the note included in the collection *Intymność i inne sfery*. There, we read that “the characteristic feature of the author’s [Lispector’s] writing is her constant searching and attempt to reach the most deeply hidden spheres of the psyche of the characters whom she created.”54 Both notes stress the introspective aspect of Lispector’s writing but fail to mention the author’s preoccupation with literary awareness, an essential characteristic of her poetics that, echoing Candido’s view, had forced the Portuguese language to adapt to her complex writing.

This aspect of understanding and appreciating Lispector’s influence in contemporary Brazilian literature was signaled by the biographical note in the literary journal *Literatura na Świecie*. In the 2011 volume dedicated to Brazilian literature, Lispector is described as a “Latin American Kafka”55 whose “innovative treatment of language and narration has permanently revolutionized Brazilian literature.” Moreover, we read that “Lispector’s literary output goes

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54 Translation mine. The original fragment in Polish: “Cechą charakterystyczną pisarstwa autorki jest ciągłe poszukiwanie, próba dotarcia do najgłębiej ukrytych obszarów w psychice kreowanych przez nią postaci” (Angrocka et al 15).

55 It is safe to assume that the author of the sketch was either familiar with Cixous’s work “By the Light of an Apple,” in which she compared Lispector to Kafka, or with the biography *Why This World?*, in which Moser actually quoted Cixous’s words. In fact, Cixous’s comparison has been used in many texts about Lispector (especially newspaper articles published online).
from modernism and existentialism toward more daring experiments.” She is also described as “extremely subjective and personal, sometimes psychological, introspective (drawing on the technique of “stream of consciousness”), sometimes cold and naturalistic.” We are also told that she “oscillates between fatalism and the darkness of the human unconscious,” on the one hand, and “realism and the grotesque,” on the other.56 This is by far the most comprehensive biographical note in Polish I have encountered, for it both captures the content of Lispector’s texts and her constant preoccupation with and her acute sensitivity to the language in which she wrote.

In order for a Polish reader to better grasp the complexity of Lispector’s writing, it is necessary to present various angles of interpretation concerning not only the content but also the form. This, in my opinion, constitutes the biggest gap in the present situation of Lispector studies in Poland. The introspective aspect triggered by the constant search of the sense of the world and of the self are essential to understanding Lispector’s poetics, but so is her constant challenge of the Portuguese language characterized by her quest for the word that would evoke the thing. After all, she would express her thoughts on the metanarrative aspect of her writing throughout her works: “Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it – and the way I do not find it. But it is from searching and not finding that what I did not know was born, and which I instantly recognize”; “(…) all my basic material is the word. So that’s why this story will

56 Translation mine. The original fragment in Polish: “Lispector nazywana jest ‘Kafką Ameryki Łacińskiej’; jej nowatorskie podejście do języka i narracji trwale zrewolucjonizowało literaturę brazylijską. Twórczość Lispector zmierza od modernizmu i egzystencjalizmu ku coraz śmieszym eksperymentom, jest skrajnie subiektywna i osobista, czasem psychologiczna, introspektywna (czerpie z techniki „strumienia świadomości”), a czasem chłodna i naturalistyczna, oscyluje między fatalizmem i mrokami ludzkiej podświadomości a realizmem i groteską.” (LnŚ, no. 1-2, 2011, pp. 410-411).
be made of words that gather in sentences and from these a secret meaning emanates that goes beyond words and sentences” (Lispector *The Passion* 186, *The Hour of the Star* 6).\(^{57}\)

The treatment of language and the word is, thus, of paramount importance in Lispector’s writing. It represents a connection between form and content, draws attention to the process of writing, the creation of a literary text, and the dynamics between the author and the work she is producing. Although mentioned in the biographical notes included in some of the existing translations of Lispector into Polish, this angle of interpretation of her works has not been adequately explored in Poland. In order to address this gap, I propose the following analysis of four short stories written by Lispector in which, I argue, this perspective is particularly visible.

**CHAPTER 2**

**“THE WORD IS MY FOURTH DIMENSION”: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF “O OVO E A GALINHA” AND “A QUINTA HISTÓRIA”**

“To write, therefore, is the way in which someone uses the word as bait: the word fishes for something that is not a word. When this non-word takes the bait, something has been written. Once what lies between the lines has been caught, the word can be discarded with a sense of relief. But here the analogy ends: the non-word, upon taking the bait, has assimilated it.”\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) The first quote was translated by Idra Novey, the second by Benjamin Moser. The original quotes: “A realidade é a matéria-prima, a linguagem é o modo como vou buscá-la – e como não acho. Mas é do buscar e não achar que nasce o que eu não conhecia, e que instantaneamente reconheço”; “(...) o meu material básico é a palavra. Assim é que esta história será feita de palavras que se agrupam em frases e destas se evola um sentido secreto que ultrapassa palavras e frases” (Lispector *A paixão* 210, *A hora* 19).

\(^{58}\) Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. The original text in Portuguese: “Então escrever é o modo de quem tem a palavra como isca: a palavra pescando o que não é palavra. Quando essa não-palavra morde a isca, alguma coisa se escreveu. Uma vez que se pescou a entrelinha, podia-se com alívio jogar a palavra fora. Mas aí cessa a analogia: a não-palavra, ao morder a isca, incorporou-a.” (Lispector *A Descoberta do mundo* “Escrever nas entrelinhas” 385). The piece was also included in the 1977 novel *Água viva*.  

38
Clarice Lispector on the Art of Short Story Writing

In 1977, the Brazilian journalist Júlio Lerner interviewed Clarice Lispector for the channel TV2 Cultura. The interview took place just a couple of months before the author’s death. Lispector had been battling cancer, and it was evident how tired she was and even reluctant to answer questions. Although clearly aware of Lispector’s uneasiness during the interview, Júlio Lerner did not give up. At one point, he made a comment about her being “hermetic,” to which Lispector vividly objected, adding that she comprehended herself. After a pause, however, she admitted that there was one short story that she had written and did not completely understand. The text she referred to was “O ovo e a galinha” [The Egg and the Chicken], published in 1964 in the collection A legião estrangeira [The Foreign Legion]. In the next question, Lerner wanted to know what text she held dearest, and Lispector’s answer, again, was “O ovo e a galinha.”

I did not entirely understand “O ovo e a galinha” (hereafter “O ovo”) at my first reading either. Not after the second or third. I knew, however, that “O ovo” is essential in its content and form. It highlights the focus on the creation process that is central to Lispector’s poetics, while the convergence of the content and the form serves to engage in a mental discourse on the origin of things and metaphysics. As I have mentioned before, Lispector’s literary awareness, which is reflected in her writing, is what I would like to promote for the Polish reader of her oeuvre. In my view, this angle of interpretation is particularly visible in the following four short stories: “O ovo,” “A quinta história,” “O relatório da coisa,” [Report on the Thing] and “Seco estudo de
cavalos” [Dry Sketch of Horses]. The first two are from the collection of short stories *A legião estrangeira*, originally published in 1964, and the second two are from the 1974 volume *Onde estivestes de noite* [Where Were You at Night]. The second and third chapters of my thesis are dedicated to a textual analysis of the above stories, aiming to prove how important the approach to the creation process is for comprehending Lispector’s writing.

Although Lispector gained her literary acclaim as the author of both novels and short stories (and, to a lesser extent, as the author of chronicles), many critics, as Fitz claims, favor the short story as the form in which Lispector’s “real brilliance as a writer” is the clearest and the most vigorous (Fitz *Clarice Lispector* 97). For Fitz, her short fiction “has an economy of expression, intensity, and a sharpness of focus that the more diffuse, more fluid novels do not possess” (97). He does not, however, specify which novels he finds more “diffuse” or “fluid” than the others. Although he may have had in mind *A paixão segundo G.H.* and *Água viva* – two books that might as well be described as philosophical treaties and reflections rather than novels

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59 “O ovo e a galinha” was first published in *Cadernos brasileiros*, in 1963. After it had been published in *A legião estrangeira* (1964) – with slight alterations in the text compared to the 1963 version – it appeared in the *Jornal do Brasil* on July 5, 12, 19, 1969 (divided in three parts), with significant changes in the content, under the title “A atualidade do ovo e a galinha” [The Present Situation of the Egg and the Chicken]. The story also appeared in the collections *Felicidade clandestina* (1971) and *A imitação da rosa* (1973), but did not contain changes in the text. In 1984, it was republished in the volume *A descoberta do mundo* (Hahn 53, 91). “A quinta história” first appeared in the women’s section “Entre mulheres” [Between Women] of the newspaper *O Comício*, on August 8, 1952. It was only a short excerpt, limited to the recipe on how to kill cockroaches, signed with one of Clarice’s pseudonyms – Teresa Quadros – and titled “Meio cómico mas eficaz...” [A comical but effective means] (Gotlib “Readers of Clarice” 190). In 1962, it appeared in the newspaper *Senhor*. After it had been published in *A legião estrangeira* (1964), it was republished in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, in 1969, and in the collection *A descoberta do mundo* (1984), with changes only to the title: “Cinco relatos um tema” [Five accounts one theme]. The story also appeared in the collections *Felicidade clandestina* (1971) and *A imitação da rosa* (1973), without changes in the text (Hahn 45). “Seco estudo de cavalos” first appeared in the 1949 novel *A cidade sitiada*, in fragments. In 1964, the section “Estudo do cavalo demoníaco” [Sketch of the Demon Horse] was included in the novel *A paixão segundo G.H.* In 1973, the story was republished in three parts in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, on August 4, 11, and 18, with the title “Estudo de cavalos” [Sketch of Horses], before it finally appeared in the 1974 *Onde estivestes de noite*, containing many alterations in the text (Hahn 99). “O relatório da coisa” was first published in the newspaper *Senhor*, in 1971, with the title “Objecto – relatório – mistério” [Object – Report – Mystery]. In 1972, it was republished as “Um anticonto – O objecto” [An Anti-short Story – The Object] in the *Jornal do Brasil*, divided into three parts. The fragments appeared on August 19, 26, and September 26. The story included in the 1974 *Onde estivestes de noite* contains major alterations compared to its previous versions (Hahn 131, 160).
in a traditional sense – I do not agree that they are less intense or blurred in the way they deal with their themes.

Another important aspect Fitz mentions is related to “epiphany,” which constitutes an integral part of Lispector’s short and long fiction. The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines epiphany as “the term used in Christian theology for a manifestation of God’s presence in the world” and later “taken over by James Joyce to denote secular revelation in the everyday world,” developed in his posthumously-published novel *Stephen Hero* (ODLT 113). This “epiphany,” which invades the quotidiant and alters characters’ lives and the way they perceive the world, is considered a common element between Lispector’s and Joyce’s writing, due to both authors’ “fascination with language and with the mystery and power of the human mind” (Fitz 97). In the four texts I have chosen for my analysis, I focus on Lispector’s literary awareness, linguistic choices, and how these reflect her own poetics.

Despite the difficulty in categorizing some of Lispector’s texts, especially the novels, Benedito Nunes claims that her short stories fit into the fundamental features of the short fiction genre, for they “concentrate on a single episode that serves as a nucleus, and which corresponds to the concrete moment of the inner experience” (*O drama* 83). He further refers to the nucleus as “conflictive tension” (“tensão conflitiva”), an event that, according to Bella Josef, occurs suddenly, establishes a rupture of the character with the world, and precedes the epiphany (Nunes 83, Josef 242). Nunes illustrates the presence of the nucleus and its effect on the character by analyzing the story “Amor,” published in the 1960 collection *Laços de família*.

The main character in “Amor” is Ana, a housewife imprisoned by her routine. One day, while off shopping, Ana sees a homeless man chewing gum and is completely consumed by this image. She becomes overpowered by nausea and finds herself wandering through the Jardim
Botânico of Rio de Janeiro. She is detached from (her) reality, indulging in this renewing experience accompanied by ambivalent feelings of love and pain, life and death. She finally returns to her routine, albeit enriched by the sensations she had just invited. The particular elements in the structure of the story are easily noticeable: the beginning of the story is marked by Ana going shopping just like every day; the middle focuses on Ana looking at the homeless man, her sensations, and her trip to the Jardim Botânico; the end shows Ana back in her house.

In her book *Teoria do conto* (1990), Nádia Batella Gotlib uses the same text, “Amor,” to illustrate the classic structure of the short stories in order to question the common belief of Lispector being solely a modernist writer, and to suggest that her modernism is reflected in a mixture of different styles present in her writing (54). Although many of Clarice’s stories do contain a beginning, a development, and a clear conclusion like “Amor,” Gotlib fails to mention that some texts constitute a challenge not only on the structural level, but also in relation to their content, and as such highlight an essential property of Lispector’s writing: their resistance to formality, gender or theme.

**Now Serving: Philosophy, Feminism, and Literary Awareness:**

**Analysis of “O ovo e a galinha”**

The first short story I shall analyze, “O ovo e a galinha,” represents a literary challenge to such an extent that it has been referred to as an “anti-short story” (Cabanilles and Lozano 30). In fact, the French philosopher Hélène Cixous goes even further in affirming the resistance of Lispector’s texts to being classified according to genre by saying that “with Clarice, we cannot speak in terms of genre,” but “of writing, of fiction,” which shares “visible affinities that are
those of the unconscious in life,” rather than “representing a reality that can be coded” (Cixous
Reading with Clarice Lispector 99). Lispector herself renounced any clear delineations of the
genre: “I don’t really know what a short story is. And yet, although hazily, I do know what an
anti-short story is. Hazily. Perhaps I understand the anti-short story better because I myself am
an anti-writer” (Borelli 71).60 Her statement-refusal is inextricably linked with her reliance on
inspiration rather than on a mere decision to start writing, dictated by an arbitrary theme or plot:
“I don’t know how to give orders to myself. I only write when ‘the thing comes’” (Borelli 71).61
The result of those sudden waves of inspiration are texts that are more or less conventional. I
contend that “O ovo” is an unconventional short story in its approach to the theme and in its
structure.

Cabanilles and Lozano consider “O ovo” an anti-story due to the multiplicity of narrative
threads (30). They explain this by referring to Ricardo Piglia’s thesis of two plots embedded in a
short story. According to Piglia, a classic short story contains a plot that is narrated in the
foreground and a second one hidden behind the explicit story, which is revealed by the narrator
in “an enigmatic and fragmentary way” (Piglia Formas breves 106).62 In terms of Lispector’s
writing, such an observation could hardly be applied even to her more conventional texts like
“Amor” because it contains more than a single implicit plot: a woman bored with her routine
yearning for a change, an oppressed and imprisoned housewife on the verge of madness, and,
finally, Ana as a symbol of all women-victims of patriarchy.

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60 The original text in Portuguese: “Não sei bem o que é um conto. No entanto, apesar de nebulosamente, sei o que é
um anticonto. Nebulosamente. Talvez eu entenda mais o anticonto porque sou antiescritora” (Borelli 71).
61 The original text in Portuguese: “Eu não sei me comandar. Escrevo só quando ‘a coisa vem’” (Borelli 71).
62 Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “Un relato visible esconde un relato secreto, narrado de un modo
eíptico y fragmentario” (Piglia 106).
In the case of “O ovo,” the number of plots is even greater. Apart from the opening scene of a woman frying eggs in the kitchen, there is a woman contemplating the egg as if in a philosophical essay pierced by sudden exaltations about the subject, a woman discussing the logical dependency between the egg and the chicken, then describing the chicken’s fate, and a woman talking about her role as an “agent.” The seemingly ordinary character of the opening scene, thus, develops into a complex narrative, which mixes various symbols and metaphors, oscillating between “the sublime and the grotesque” and “flirting” with the principles of “realist, intimate, and avant-garde” writing (Russotto Sustentación del enigma 63). As a consequence, we are presented with a short story that can be either discarded as incomprehensible due to its density of plots or appreciated due to its multiplicity of interpretations.

What is “O ovo” about, then, and what does its intricacy consist in? Margara Russotto describes in great detail the different levels of interpretation embedded in the story. She begins her analysis by drawing attention to the dialectics that characterizes the entire text, which is based on the relationships between “ignorance and knowing” and between “myopia and splendor,” all of which are represented by analogies related to “narrative process, to maternity, and to the social situation of the woman” (Russotto 64). 63 These analogies are grouped in three metaphors that “O ovo” symbolizes. The first metaphor stands for the problematic philosophical relation between substance and accident. The second metaphor refers to the chicken serving as the representation of the woman, and the third metaphor illustrates the relationship between the writer and his or her work (Russotto 66). In short, the metaphors draw from the realm of philosophy, feminism, and literary awareness. It is difficult to discuss the three perspectives...

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63 Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “El cuento plantea una dialéctica de la simulación – entre ignorar y saber, entre miopía y esplendor – procediendo mediante analogías encabalgadas que aluden simultáneamente al proceso de la narración, a la maternidad y a la situación social de la mujer (mientras la única acción consiste en freir un par de huevos)” (Russotto 64).
separately, because they overlap and interfere one another. In my view, the philosophical and literary angles of the story are closely related, and I shall start by discussing those two.

The philosophical metaphor is illustrated by the narrator’s attempt to explain what the egg is. Nunes aptly points out that the chains of meanings, that is, the possible answers to the question “what is the egg?” repeat the same name “o ovo,” but they do not provide the reader with a solid idea of the meaning or the essence of the egg. Instead, they confuse the reader (Nunes 92). Russotto affirms that the first-person narration also implies an essay or a philosophical report that never ends, and refers to it as “silogismo imperfecto” (“imperfect syllogism”) (Russotto 68). Indeed, instead of clearing out doubts and pointing to logical constants between the subjects of the essay, the egg and the chicken, the seeming deductive reasoning ends up being taken over by ambiguity, chaos, and contradictions (Russotto 68). As such, the text questions the very ability to approach the topic with reason.

In Nunes’s words, the entire story is “a language play between the word and the thing” (92). This play is illustrated by instances of deliberate nonsense: “To the egg I dedicate the Chinese nation,” philosophical parodies: “I wonder, do I know of the egg? I almost certainly do. Thus: I exist, therefore I know,” and paradox: “What I don’t know about the egg is what really matters. What I don’t know about the egg gives me the egg properly speaking” (Nunes O drama 92, Lispector The Complete Stories 277). Although I agree with the list Nunes provides, I believe that labeling it as a pseudo-philosophical rhetoric fails to accentuate the multiplicity of metaphors present in the story. Furthermore, it makes the narrator’s effort to safeguard the story against understanding it superficial. The motif here is not to ridicule philosophy by writing

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64 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “De uma a outra cadeia, fala-se de uma só coisa, de um só objeto; mas o significado se evade quanto mais cresce a teia das definições formada em torno do objeto ovo, definido de diversas maneiras” (Nunes 92).
gibberish, but to defy knowledge and logical reasoning. This attempt is also illustrated by
Lispector’s request to the audience present at her talk at the Congress of Witchcraft in Bogotá: “I
am asking you to listen to the story without reasoning, otherwise everything will fall into
understanding. If half a dozen of people truly feel the text, I will already be pleased” (Lispector
Outros escritos 121).65

The narrator in “O ovo” describes the egg using properties that are impossible to be seen
or measured, thus forcing the reader to distance him/herself from reason: “Seeing the egg is
impossible: the egg is supervisible just as there are supersonic sounds. No one can see the egg”
(…) “The egg is invisible to the naked eye.” The egg is also described as non-existent: “The egg
no longer exists. Like the light of an already-dead star, the egg properly speaking no longer
exists.” The egg is ideal: “You are perfect, egg” and white: “You are white” (…) “It lives inside
the chicken to avoid being called white. The egg really is white.” The egg is a thing floating
above the ground: “The egg is a suspended thing. It has never landed” and fragile: “An egg is a
thing that must be careful” (Lispector The Complete Stories 276-278).

The attributes the narrator lists are equally vague as the egg itself, apart from the more
concrete feature of color: the egg’s whiteness. Because of this uncleanness, it is difficult to
determine whether the egg can in fact exist without these properties. As such, it remains beyond
categorization and, more importantly, beyond our understanding. Another important element is
the distinction between the egg as being abstract (non-existent, revolutionary, transcendental)
and concrete (represented by an edible egg). Berta Waldman also notices the dichotomy of the
egg, claiming that it passes “from the concrete (as aliment) to the abstract (a being of language),

65 All translations from the book Outros escritos are my own. The original in Portuguese: “Peço que ouçam a leitura
não apenas com o raciocínio, senão tudo escapará ao entendimento. Se meia dúzia de pessoas realmente sentirem
esse texto já ficarei satisfeita” (Lispector Outros escritos 121).
from the particular to the general, from the interior to the exterior, from the visible to the invisible, from the temporal to the eternal,” playing the role of a “moveable sign that simultaneously denies and evokes meaning” (101). Another interpretation is that the narrator of “O ovo” may be referring to the problematic philosophical concepts of form and matter. In Aristotelian terms, the form unifies some matter into a single object, and the result is a compound of the two (Ainsworth). In this way, the story suggests a twoness of the egg, its simultaneous non-existence and existence.

The conclusion after reading the first three-and-a half pages of the story is that it is impossible to define the egg using a single symbol, and, therefore, to define the egg at all. Although it has a single name, the egg, as Nunes notes, remains beyond the representations that try to circumscribe it; the egg continues to be “a visible object” whose meaning is “unutterable” (92). This observation, however, runs counter to our earlier comment on the double nature of the egg, and contradicts the narrator’s claim: “The egg is an exteriorization. To have a shell is to surrender” (Lispector The Complete Stories 277). The comment corresponds, again, to Lispector’s own view of the word and its meaning(s): “To write a dictionary must be the most difficult thing to do. Because, in truth, there are no synonyms. And there is no single explanation possible” (Borelli 71). “O ovo” puts this theory in practice by demonstrating the multiplicity of symbols that refer to the egg. This is where the philosophical and the literary metaphor converge: just like the egg continues unexplained, the story-essay remains without any conclusion, and may

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66 Translation mine. The original quote in Portuguese: “Também no texto ‘O ovo e a galinha’ pode-se observar de forma radical a fluidez da forma e da significação na trajetória percorrida pelo ovo, que vai do mais concreto (alimento) ao mais abstrato (ser de linguagem), do particular ao geral, do interior ao exterior, do visível ao invisível, do temporal ao eterno, funcionando como signo móvel que desdiz um sentido no mesmo momento que o evoca” (Waldman 101).

67 The original text in Portuguese: “A coisa mais difícil de se fazer deve ser escrever um dicionário. Porque, na verdade, não há sinónimos. E não há uma explicação possível” (Borelli 71).
thus be considered a fragment, an excerpt, a chapter of a book that will never be finished. The creative process, therefore, is ongoing.

The visual aspect of the story also deserves special attention. The abundance of the word “ovo” and of the letter “o” suggests a set of thoughts and notions, which move around in a circular motion, just like the story juggles the many properties of the egg. Moreover, the letter “o” can refer to a circle or sphere which, according to Aristotle, are the symbols of perfection. Lispector even brings up this reference by saying: “You are perfect, egg” (Lispector The Complete Stories 277).

Another example of the strategy of “iconic representation of writing” is that the lower and upper-case “o’s” permeating the text correspond visually to the actual eggs (Cabanilles and Lozano 31). The round shape of the egg itself is a topic for discussion in the story. Although we do not know why the egg is round: “The egg could have been a triangle that rolled for so long in space that it became oval (…) The egg originated in Macedonia. There it was calculated”, we know that this is the only form the egg acquires: “The veracity of the egg is not verisimilar. If they find out, they might want to force it to become rectangular. The danger is not for the egg, it wouldn’t become rectangular” (Lispector The Complete Stories 279).

The use of dashes in the original Portuguese text, closely reflected in the English translation by Katrina Dodson, is another element that stands out in the visual angle. The first four pages are filled with dashes which may suggest a mental dialogue. Toward the end of the

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68 There is an important grammatical aspect about “O ovo” that I should note. The presence of “o’s” in the story is enhanced by the definite article “o” (masculine) and the past participle ending with an “o.” Whenever the past participle is preceded by the verb “to be” (ser/estar conjugated accordingly), it functions as an adjective, forms a passive voice, and is, therefore, subject to modification depending on the gender (in Portuguese there are two genders: masculine and feminine). When the past participle is preceded by the verbs “to have” (ter/haver conjugated accordingly), it does not suffer modification and, as such, maintains its “o” at the end. This happens with verbal tenses such as “o Pretérito mais-que-perfeito” (corresponds to the “Past Perfect” tense in English). This visual representation of the abundance of “o’s” is lost, however, in the translation into English.
story, however, the dashes disappear, and the text resembles an internal monologue, as if the seeming two voices of a mental conversation would unite into a single mental discourse. In addition, the dashes may suggest short intervals or moments where the reader should take a breath and a mandatory pause. Cabanilles and Lozano opt for this line of interpretation, since “the system of pauses, the respiration of the sentence, and the phonic repetitions” are all an iconic representation of the following sensation: “we cannot stop seeing eggs” (31). The reader participates in a live broadcast. The narrator sees the egg and reports on it, while the reader follows the narrator’s commentary and is made to see the egg by means of the numerous “o’s” symbolizing it. In addition, the obligatory stop makes the reader pay greater attention to the poetic devices Lispector uses: anaphora (“Love for the egg cannot be felt either. Love for the egg is supersensible”) and anadiplosis (“I shall keep the egg. – The egg has no itself”), which disappear toward the end of the story, along with the dashes. All these observations are the results of Lispector’s play with the writing process as an artistic, and not only literary, concept, by adding the iconic dimension to it. It is for the reader to decipher the meaning and the impact of these signs on the overall interpretation of the story.

As the very title of the story suggests, the presence of the egg entails the appearance of the chicken: “an egg is the soul of the chicken” (Lispector The Complete Stories 277). The dashes gradually disappear, and the pages no longer teem with “o’s.” The narrator attempts to explain in a logical way the causal relationship between the egg and its “keeper,” which is “silly, idle, and myopic” (Lispector The Complete Stories 280). The main function of the chicken is to carry the egg while not knowing that it is inside her. The chicken loves the egg, although the egg is the chicken’s sacrifice; the cross she bears throughout her life (Lispector The Complete Stories

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69 Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “El sistema pausal, la respiración de la frase, y las reiteraciones fónicas se plasman icónicamente: no podemos dejar de ver huevos” (Cabanilles and Lozano 31).
The association between the chicken and the woman is immediate: the woman, too, is reduced to carrying her child, oblivious to what is going on around her because her reality is dominated by men, and – as the opening scene suggests – she is focused on providing food for her offspring. The metaphor of chicken-woman opens up the floor for the feminist angle of interpretation of the text:

With a subtle delicacy, the narrator signals the historical limits of feminist action in relation to society, to knowledge and in relation to herself, the essentialist stereotypes attributed to her condition (pleasure, irrationality, extreme subjectivism). [She mentions] the insufficiencies in the codes of self-representation that had always betrayed her, and, finally, the responsibility and the particular demands that emanate from the condition of her being the generator of the species.\(^{70}\) (Russotto 70-71)

Lispector, however, plays with the feminist perspective by means of contradictions. For the egg-child to be born, the chicken-woman needs to forget that she carries the offspring. In short, she has to consciously reject the essentialist role of being one of the generators of the species. This observation, however, opposes the thread that functions as a scaffolding of “Ovo”: of a woman preparing food and engaged in a philosophical discourse on the origin of the substance – the egg. Her role is to make sure her children have something to eat, and that is why her syllogism is interrupted. As a consequence, the narrator’s “metaphysical dispute” should focus on the fried eggs, that is, “it should transform into feminist ethics,” which, for Lispector, is

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\(^{70}\) Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “Con sutil delicadeza, la narradora marca los límites históricos de la acción femenina frente a la sociedad, el conocimiento y frente a sí misma, los estereotipos esencialistas atribuidos a su condición (placer, irracionalidad, subjetivismo extremo), las insuficiencias en los códigos de autorepresentación que siempre la ‘han traicionado’ y, finalmente, la responsabilidad y las exigencias singulares que emanen de su condición de generadora de la especie” (Russotto 70-71).
closely linked to “love for the species,” meaning all living being and “tolerance for the other” (Russotto 71). This immediately takes us to Lispector’s other stories starring animal characters, and her effort to represent animals as individual beings not objectified by the roles they perform, like the chicken in the story with the same title. In her other texts, animals were also contemplated on and contributed to the characters’ epiphanies, such as the buffalo in “O Búfalo”, the dog in “Tentação,” the dead rat in “Perdoando Deus” [Forgiving God], the horse in “Seco estudo de cavalos,” the cockroach in “A quinta história,” and the cockroach in the novel A paixão segundo G.H. A rabbit and a chicken were also the principal characters of Lispector’s two children’s books: O mistério do coelho pensante and A vida íntima de Laura.

The narrator’s love for the other instructs her to live modestly, which means experiencing one’s own pleasures and pain and surrendering oneself to a life that is “extremely tolerable,” that “keeps busy,” “distracts,” and, finally, that “makes us laugh” (Lispector The Complete Stories 284). The result of this conscious sacrifice that the narrator calls “living” is “the continuity of life,” which is made possible thanks to “this denial-pact performed by women who pretend to be chickens, allow themselves to forget, and repeat this oblivion every day so as not to disturb the passing of time” (Russotto 73). Indeed, this persistence is embedded already in the title of the story by the conjunction “and,” challenging the common proverb related to the origin of things, in which the egg and the chicken are placed opposite each other by the conjunction “or.”

In her book “Uma poética do olhar” [Poetics of Looking], Regina Pontieri draws a line between the egg and the chicken interpreted from the point of view of meaning and language. In the first instance, Pontieri highlights the fact that although the chicken is considered solely a

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71 Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “La continuidad de la vida se debe entonces a ese pacto-renuncia que realizan las mujeres, fingiéndose gallinas, dejándose olvidar, reiterando el olvido diariamente, para no obstaculizar la marcha del tiempo” (Russotto 73).
body for the egg, she does possess a life of her own: “To be honest, the only thing the chicken really has is inner life” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 280). On the symbolic level, as the critic affirms, it means that the chicken may serve as a corporeal symbol of the incorporeal egg. From the perspective of language, however, the chicken and the egg both stand for a body suggesting “interchangeable meanings” (Pontieri 220).72

Pontieri’s observation is significant from the point of view of literary awareness as well. The relationship of equality between the egg and chicken can be understood as the dichotomy work of art-inspiration. In fact, when Lispector was invited to participate in the Congress of Witchcraft in Bogotá in 1975, she prepared two versions of a speech, after which someone would read “O ovo.” A few moments before her presentation, however, she decided not to read any introduction and asked someone to read the short story for her.

In her short, never-given talk titled “Literature and Magic,” Lispector mentions inspiration in terms of a magical element of creation: “The inspiration, in any form of art, has a magical touch because creation is absolutely inexplicable” (Lispector *Outros escritos* 121). In a characteristic mode of saying one thing and then unsaying it, Lispector links inspiration to the supernatural: “I don’t believe that the inspiration comes from the supernatural. I believe that it emerges from the deepest ‘I’ of every person, from the depths of the unaware individual, cosmic collective,” which is, still, “somewhat supernatural” (Lispector *Outros escritos* 121). Moreover, writing for her is also magical: “Writing, and I am talking about real writing, is completely magical. The words come inside of me from places so far-off that they seem to have been

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72 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “O ovo é interior e também exterior. De modo paralelo e cruzado a galinha, sendo principalmente um corpo, tem no entanto “muita vida interior... A nossa visão de sua vida interior é o que nós chamamos de galinha”. Isso significa que, se no plano do significado, a galinha poderia ser o símbolo corpóreo de um ovo incorpóreo, enquanto seres de linguagem, ovo e galinha são corpo e significante de significados cambiantes” (Pontieri 220).
thought of by strangers and not by myself” (Lispector *Outros escritos* 124). By “real writing” Lispector most probably means, again, inspiration-guided writing, and if we look at it through the prism of “O ovo,” it becomes clear that creation takes place while the author is doing something else. As Lispector reveals in the speech, inspiration would come to her in the middle of the night. She would suddenly wake up, then, and “write down a sentence full of new words,” and would go back to sleep as if nothing had happened (Lispector *Outros escritos* 124). As such, sleeping was one of the activities that distracted her and kept her busy while the work of art was being formed, nourished by sudden fits of inspiration.

What about the “new words” Lispector would take down while touched by inspiration? The attempt to describe the egg in “O ovo,” and the eventual impossibility to do so, refer to the very core of her poetics: approximating oneself to the idea, but never capturing it because that would mean depleting it. As she writes, “The general law for us to stay alive: one can say “a pretty face,” but whoever says “the face,” dies; for having exhausted the topic” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 278). Expressing oneself, as Gotlib affirms, refers to the two-fold aspect of writing: “writing that involves the attributive word guarantees survival, while writing the thing, in itself, in its essential substance is to face the emptiness and the silence” (*Clarice* 352). “Dying” also refers to “understanding,” that is, to analyzing and trying to comprehend, deconstruct, and dissect, which is what Lispector consciously rejects throughout the story.

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73 The original fragments in Portuguese: “A inspiração, para qualquer forma de arte, tem um toque mágico porque a criação é absolutamente inexplicável”; “Não creio que a inspiração venha do sobrenatural. Suponho que emerge do mais profundo ‘eu’ de cada pessoa, das profundezas do inconsciente individual, coletivo cósmico. O que não deixa de certa forma ser um pouco sobrenatural” (Lispector *Outros escritos* 121). “Escrever, e falo de escrever de verdade, é completamente mágico. As palavras vêm de lugares tão distantes dentro de mim que parecem ter sido pensadas por desconhecidos, e não por mim mesma”; “Às vezes, no meio da noite, dormindo um sonho profundo, eu acordo de repente, anoito uma frase cheia de palavras novas, depois volto a dormir como se nada tivesse acontecido” (Lispector *Outros escritos* 124).

74 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “Escrever envolvendo a palavra de atributos é garantir a sobrevivência, enquanto escrever a coisa, em si, na sua substância essencial é já enfrentar o vazio e o silêncio” (*Gotlib Clarice* 352).
And yet, I agree, it is important “to reveal – in some way – what one actually knows,” otherwise the insight may fall into oblivion (Russotto 65).\footnote{Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “Es necesario revelar de algún modo lo que – por instantes – en realidad se sabe; revelar esta otra naturaleza del saber, y lo que cuesta este fingimiento siempre amenazado de olvido” (Russotto 65).} In other words, it is necessary that the author write. They must make sure, however, that the revelation be subtle so that the idea-egg remains “fully protected by all those words. Keep talking, is one of the instructions” (Lispector The Complete Stories 286). The numerous mini-narratives embedded in “O ovo” are instances of the revelation of the knowledge as fragments presented to the reader by the author. However we understand these pieces – as referring to philosophy, feminism or literary awareness – they still make up for a larger body of meanings, while the entire idea is protected and remains to be “fished.”

\textbf{(Un)necessary Disinfestation: The Case of “A quinta história”}

One of the most striking features about another short story from the 1964 collection \textit{A legião estrangeira}, “A quinta história” (hereafter “A quinta”), is its unusual structure. Initially written as a chronicle, “A quinta” is in fact a collection of five accounts of the narrator’s plan to kill cockroaches. In addition, the text is also a metanarrative in the sense that it reveals the creation process of the story: “This story could be called ‘The Statues.’ Another possible name is ‘The Murder.’ And also ‘How to Kill Cockroaches.’ So I will tell at least three stories, all true because they don’t contradict each other” (Lispector The Complete Stories 309). Immediately after signaling the fragmentation of the story, the narrator reaffirms its unity: “Though a single story,” in order to break it again, “they would be a thousand and one, were I given a thousand and one nights” (Lispector The Complete Stories 309). Her reference to Scheherazade brings
about the issue of survival; after all, the Persian queen would tell the one thousand and one stories to save herself from being sacrificed. This section will attempt to describe Lispector’s form of survival and the implications of the unusual structure of the story on the author’s creation process.

It is important to note that 1964 witnessed not only the publication of the collection *A legião estrangeira*, in which the story “A quinta” appeared, but also the release of the novel *A paixão segundo G.H.* As Lispector later commented, the attention given to the novel entirely repressed the interest around the volume of short stories (Gotlib Clarice 344). Apart from the date, the two texts have the presence of cockroaches in common (or a single cockroach, as in the novel).

The Brazilian critic Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna considers the structure of “A quinta” “concentric and spiraling” (35). On the one hand, the story revolves around the same topic, and is therefore abundant in “intratextual connections,” that is, textual references that occur within the same text (35). On the other hand, as the critic affirms, “A quinta” contains intertextual connections because its structure “is a small-scale model of a process that is repeated throughout Lispector’s entire oeuvre” (Sant’Anna 35-36).

Evandro Nascimento points to the dual significance of the cockroach in relation to the human being: its remoteness, because “on the scale of values attributed to the living being, insects are at the end, together with bacteria and viruses” and its proximity, because cockroaches inhabit people’s homes (Nascimento 41). Although Nascimento’s observation is accurate, it

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76 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “Segundo Clarice, o livro foi inteiramente abafado pela *A paixão segundo G.H.*, que saiu na ocasião” (Gotlib Clarice 344).

77 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “‘A quinta história,’ de *A legião estrangeira*, e *A paixão segundo G.H.* trazem a ‘impossibilidade doméstica’ da barata, essa outra forma quase informe em relação ao humano, ao mesmo tempo extremamente distante (na escala de valores atribuídos ao vivo, os insetos ocupam o
lacks the fact that cockroaches are considered invaders of human dwellings and they cannot be tamed like other animals, despite belonging to the animal species. They are not useful like bees or associated with any virtues, such as ants, which are seen as hardworking. They are a source of disgust because of their association with filth, they feed on human food leftovers, and they are carriers of various diseases. Even if we run away from a cockroach or try to kill it, “its being out of sight does not make it out of mind” because “no matter what we do, its filthiness is inescapable” (Lockwood 69).

On a less disgusting note, cockroaches are “considered the oldest beings on the planet,” as “if cockroaches were always there, as long as there was life” (Nascimento 41). The cockroach, then, evokes ambivalent feelings: of respect, due to its antique continuity as a being and as an untamed species, and of repulsion, because of its invasive nature and association with dirt. Interestingly, the narrator is only triggered to perform the actual cleansing once she starts preparing the fatal mixture, since before that the cockroaches only inhabited her thoughts. By transforming the abstract into the concrete, “A quinta” takes the reader through the meanders of the motives, the implementation, and the aftermath of the crime against cockroaches.

The first story, titled “How to Kill Cockroaches,” resembles an objective summary or a report because it merely states the facts. A tale devoid of tensions and reflections sounds rather unfamiliar to Lispector: “Facts trip me up. That is why I am now going to write about not-facts, that is, about things and their gaudy mystery” (Lispector The Breath of Life: Pulsations 89). She therefore embarks on another journey and rewrites the first story. By means of the familiar

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último lugar, junto com vírus e bactérias) e próxima (a barata ‘habita,’ apesar de tudo, os lares, convivendo como a alteridade no limite do suportável)” (Nascimento 41).

78 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “As baratas, seres também plurais em tipos e formas, configuram o próprio estranho familiar (Un-heimliche, o in-familiar), sendo considerado o vivente mais antigo na face do planeta. É como se sempre tivesse havido baratas, bastando haver vida” (Nascimento 41).
technique of saying one thing and unsaying it, she proceeds: “The second story is actually the first one,” but the reader senses that it is not true, because the title, “The Murder,” is different (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 309).

Indeed, the second reiteration of “A quinta” introduces the motif and carries out the assassination of the cockroaches, something that was not present in the first version. The narrator begins the second account with justifying her right to commit the crime: “The truth is that I was only complaining about cockroaches in the abstract, since they weren’t even mine: they belonged to the ground floor and would crawl up the building’s pipes to our home. Only once I prepared the mixture did they become mine too” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 309). Nonetheless, she becomes overtaken by the feeling of resentment and outrage, and she finally voices her objection to the invasion of the cockroaches. It is also at this point that the narrator views the insects as the “other,” and she gives herself right to protect her “peaceful home” against the “invisible” and its “secret curse” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 310).

In Janine Tobeck’s view, the act of appropriating herself of the cockroaches permits the narrator to regain control over the story and render her “the true and the absolute subject” of the text (194). However, since the cockroaches now became a part of the narrator’s life, as a problem to be solved, they are represented as a threat to reason, “the incommunicable secret of an otherness that disturbs the identity of the self” and “erodes the tranquil mind” (Tobeck 194). For the sake of regaining her “rational unity,” the narrator must eliminate the source of the problem. Apart from ill feeling, the narrator is guided by a “secret fear” and becomes aware of her own “secret curse,” which ultimately leads to her distress. As Tobeck interestingly points out, by taking possession of the cockroaches and thus accepting the other as part of her own self, the narrator transforms herself into a single subject “who contains too much,” and borders on “self-
destruction” (194). This happens precisely at the moment of distributing the lethal powder on the floor “until it looked like something from nature,” because only in this way the cockroaches – which are as “clever” as the narrator – will consume the poison without sensing any danger (Lispector The Complete Stories 310).

The conflicting feelings the narrator experiences once she decides to get rid of the cockroaches reflect Lispector’s views on the unknown. In the short chronicle entitled “Not to understand,” she manifests her seeming acceptance of the unspoken:

I do not understand. That phrase is so overwhelming that it transcends any understanding. Our understanding is always limited. But not to understand can be without frontiers. I feel myself much more complete when I do not understand. (…) The desirable thing is to be intelligent and not to understand. (Lispector Discovering the World 227)

And yet, not understanding is “overwhelming,” just like Tobeck describes the narrator in “A quinta” as a subject who “contains too much,” after she had decided to solve the cockroach problem. That is why the desire to understand is brought forward: “Apart from the occasional moment of disquiet: I should like to understand a little. Not too much: but at least to understand that I do not understand” (Lispector Discovering the World “Not to Understand” 227). If the cockroaches are to symbolize the incomprehensible, the sphere covered by not understanding, then the narrator’s internal resistance is justified by Lispector’s above words. In addition, her uneasiness with eliminating the cockroaches is, at the same time, an attempt to eradicate a part of her own self.
Interestingly, the narrator only imagines how the cockroaches enter the laundry room where she had previously distributed the poison, but we never read how the insects die. We only see them dead on the floor, “hard,” and “huge” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 310). The mission has been accomplished: “in our name, day was breaking” just like “in our name” the narrator had earlier measured and weighed the ingredients “with a slightly more intense concentration” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 309-310). Although the reaffirmation of subjectivity is supposed to reassure the narrator of her decision, it fails to do so, and both the reader and the author are not satisfied with the reiteration. In the author’s and the reader’s terms, the pursuit of the “correct” way to represent “how to kill cockroaches,” “the murder” or “the statues” is not yet complete.

Nicolino Novello argues that Lispector’s “search for the language and for the true mode of writing” reflects the other side of her literary consciousness, that is, Lispector’s “severe self-criticism” represented by “an eternal discontentment” toward her own literary production (Novello 62-63). Although Lispector manifests her deep concern with the creation process of her texts, as shown in “A quinta,” I believe that Novello’s comment essentially highlights the arduous aspect of writing. I do agree with the assumption that Lispector was very much a self-conscious writer, but her search for the true literary expression, in my view, is also motivated by her resistance to stop writing, because that would mean to cease to know how to write. I write, therefore I am (a writer):

When I am not writing, I simply do not know how one writes. And if this most sincere of questions did not sound childish and sham, I would seek out some friends who are writers and ask them: how does one write? (…) No one is more surprised than me when I write. Nor have I ever got used to the idea of being
called a writer. Because unless I am actually writing, I really do not know how to write. (Lispector Discovering the World “How Does One Write?” 208)

In this way, “A quinta” can be perceived as Lispector’s own manifesto on writing, stressing the very activity and experience of producing a literary work and allowing it to be rewritten as many times as the author decides. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the artistic completeness is never achieved, because even if the creation “appears finished to others, the created object always seems to us [the creators] in a state of suspension; we can always change this line, that shade, that word. Thus, it never forces itself” (What is Literature? 49). The egg from “O ovo” is also “a suspended thing,” an object that “has never landed” and, therefore, immune to being captured or defined. The attempts to describe the egg are numerous as they are insufficient, just like the two versions of “A quinta.” That is why Lispector continues her process of verbalizing the narrator’s cockroach problem.

The third story – titled “The Statues” – begins in the same way as the previous two, but concentrates largely on the aftermath of the murder, when the narrator “awake and still sleepy” crosses the kitchen and enters the laundry room which “from the perspective of its tile floor” is “even sleepier than I” (Lispector The Complete Stories 310).

It is important to note that the narrator in “O ovo” is also sleepy while preparing breakfast for her children. And yet, while performing this quotidian activity and not entirely awake, the narrator engages herself in an ontological and metaphysical discourse on the egg and the chicken. In the same way, as I have mentioned earlier, Lispector would wake up in the middle of the night to take down a few phrases dictated by a sudden beam of inspiration. The common factor of all those events is distraction, the state of being not fully alert, aroused, and cognizant,
so as not to disturb “the great life” that is being formed inside oneself, that is, a discovery or a work of art (Lispector *The Complete Stories* “The Egg and the Chicken” 282).

The narrator’s discovery of the “dozens of statues, rigid” that “have hardened from the inside out” is compared to the outcome of the tragedy in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, to which the narrator is the witness. This analogy is not entirely accurate, as the witness in “A quinta” is at the same time the killer, while the ash-covered Pompeii was destroyed and buried by a force of nature with the eruption of the volcano Mount Vesuvius.

For Tobeck, this “god-like height” of a witness allows the narrator to imagine “the apocalypse as it took place from the perspective of her [the narrator’s] victims” (197). Here we see the cockroaches engaged in “the orgy in the dark,” and although their movements will have been made difficult by the hardening plaster, they “will have greedily intensified the night’s joys” up to the point where they “turn in stone, in innocent shock” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 311). We further read that other cockroaches are “suddenly assaulted by their own core, without even the slightest inkling that some internal mold was being petrified!” until they abruptly “crystallize, the way a word is cut off in the mouth: it’s you I…” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 311). Finally, one cockroach seems to have discovered its ill fate too late: “because I looked too deep inside myself!” instead of indulging in making use “of things with the gratuitous charm of being in vain” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 311).

According to Tobeck, the voices the narrator gives the cockroaches reflect her own, and thus they suppress “any subjectivity” the insects could have possessed (198). In addition, as the critic aptly observes, the last cockroach represents the destructive effect of subjectivism because the insect is “punished for believing that all could be understood through contemplation of the self by being fixed forever in a state of realizing too late and of not knowing, of being unable to
be the last word” (Tobeck 198). Lispector presents the reader with a two-fold metaphor of infinity. On the one hand, the cockroach looking too deep inside itself is stalled in time, as if in a painting or a photograph. Its discovery is never to be completed and, thus, it is deprived of choice or freedom to respond to the situation. On the other hand, the internal gaze is essentially an ongoing process, because we never find ourselves, just like the author never encounters the veritable form of writing: “the most suitable form for a chicken has yet to be found,” and a single story that might as well be “a thousand and one” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* “The Egg and the Chicken” 280, “The Fifth Story” 309).

The fourth version of “A quinta” does not have a title, but begins with the same words “I was complaining about cockroaches.” This time, upon seeing the “plaster monuments” on the floor, the narrator reflects on the temporality of the poison-based solution, since “this very night a slow and living population will renew itself in single file” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 311). She then asks herself whether she would “renew the lethal sugar every night” but she is not opposed to her fate, because she “trembled with wicked pleasure at the vision of that double life of a sorceress” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 311-312).

The next sentence represents, again, an identification with the cockroach: “I also trembled at the sign of plaster drying: the compulsion to live that would burst my internal mold” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 311-312). In addition, the fragment reflects the narrator’s own fear of death or – drawing from “O ovo” – it merely states the obvious, namely, that “living leads to death” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 279). She immediately finds herself in “a harsh instant” before a choice between “two paths” she thought “are bidding each other farewell and sure that either choice would be a sacrifice: me or my soul” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 312). Although the narrator makes a decision and she may now “secretly boast” in her heart “a
plaque of virtue: This house has been disinfested,” her opposing feelings regarding her choice are reflected in the oxymoron “secretly boast” (Lispector The Complete Stories 312).

Tobeck claims that, in fact, the narrator realizes “the impossibility of standing on either path” because they are inseparable, and that is why Lispector leaves the fourth reiteration of the story untitled and suspended (201). Tobeck interprets “the double life of a sorceress” accepted by the narrator as an aspect of violence in writing: “to go on telling or writing a story is to renew an interminable crime by utilizing the object violently in the service of the subject” (Tobeck 202). Indeed, Lispector “kills” the cockroaches in all the four versions of “A quinta.” For Tobeck, however, the subject equals the word while the object represents the idea, or the non-word. According to Tobeck, this relationship is shown in the chronicle “Writing Between the Lines,” which I included as an epigraph at the beginning of this chapter:

To write, therefore, is the way in which someone uses the word as bait: the word fishes for something that is not a word. When this non-word takes the bait, something has been written. Once what lies between the lines has been caught, the word can be discarded with a sense of relief. But here the analogy ends: the non-word, upon taking the bait, has assimilated it. (Lispector Discovering the World 508-509)79

In Tobeck’s opinion, the violence of the text is represented by the animal imagery: “the writer uses bait to be eaten by a fish which will assumedly, in turn, get eaten” and “while the writer may seem to have the upper hand, being in a position to discard or abandon the word,

79 The original text in Portuguese: “Então escrever é o modo de quem tem a palavra como isca: a palavra pescando o que não é palavra. Quando essa não-palavra – a entrelinha – morde a isca, alguma coisa se escreveu. Uma vez que se pescou a entrelinha, poder-se-ia com alívio jogar a palavra fora. Mas aí cessa a analogia: a não-palavra, ao morder a isca, incorporou-a” (Lispector A descoberta do mundo “E escrever as entrelinhas” 385).
Lispector then violently ends the analogy, and lets the non-word – even though caught – persist, devour, assimilate” (202-203).

Although I agree with Tobeck’s animal analogy of the excerpt, I do not view it as an act of violence done on the word, which becomes devoured by the non-word. In my view, when “what lies between the lines has been caught,” that is, when the act of writing takes place, it is a result of a compromise between the non-word and the word, rather than a disproportional tug-of-war. In fact, violence is what Lispector opposes in writing: “Since one has to write, the least one can do is to avoid suppressing the words between the lines” (Lispector Discovering the World “Since One Has to Write” 263). It is important to point out that there can be more than a single compromise between the non-word and the word, just like there are numerous representations of the egg, or five versions of one story.

Perhaps that is why Lispector decides to give the final series of “A quinta” a title that does not have anything to do with cockroaches, poisoning or death: “Leibniz and the Transcendence of Love in Polynesia”. It begins with the already familiar sentence “I was complaining about cockroaches,” but this is where it ends as well. Does the title matter, then, if the content of the story is more important, informative, dense, or meaningful? Does not the reader of “A quinta” already know what another installment of the story is going to be about? For Tobeck, the fifth version can be read “to remind us that if we have journeyed to the point of accepting the idea of writing as murder, of a story as a crime,” we should not forget that our starting point was “The Thousand and One Nights – stories told to stop murders and to foster justness through a broadening of imaginative horizon” (205).

If we agree with Tobeck’s observation, then Lispector’s fifth version can be read as a futile act of resistance, because neither is the reader able to stop anticipating the content of the
story, nor does the narrator propose a different idea of developing the text. If we stick, however, to the initial metaphor of survival evoked by Scheherazade’s stories, the final reiteration – which the title of the entire short story actually points to – may symbolize the author’s attempt to preserve the idea. The concept, albeit disguised in a defamiliarized title, stresses the continuity of the creation process represented by multiple facets. In the same way that Sant’Anna points to blank spaces in *A paixão*, considering them “connections, not ruptures,” the final silence in “A quinta” is “a way to allow the reader, just as anguished as the protagonist, to breathe” (Sant’Anna 37).

Another interpretation of the final installment of “A quinta” has to do with agency in relation to the writer and language. Lispector would often deny her agency as a creator while writing, and, instead, she would attribute creation as such to inspiration, which, in turn, would dictate the language she was supposed to use. In the chronicle entitled “O ‘verdadeiro’ romance” [The ‘True’ Novel], the author describes this dependency on the linguistic tool and highlights the importance of search and discovery in her writing:

I know perfectly well what makes a true novel. Yet when I read such novels with their web of facts and descriptions, I simply feel bored. And when I write a novel it may not be in the classic mould but it is nevertheless a true novel. Except that what guides me in my writing is always a sense of research and discovery. No, not research into syntax for its own sake, but for a syntax which will convey as faithfully as possible what I am thinking when I write. Besides, after careful consideration, it strikes me that I have never chosen my language. All I have ever done was to follow my own intuition (Lispector *Discovering the World* “The ‘True’ Novel” 400).
She points elsewhere to the difficulties of writing under inspiration:

Every time after finishing writing a book or a short story, I think – in despair and with all certainty – that I will never write anything again. I feel lost especially after I finish a more serious work. There is an emptiness that can be called – without exaggeration – hopeless. But for me, it is even worse: the germination and the gestation of a new work can take years; years in which I fade. When days later I read something I wrote, I feel certain disillusionment, dissatisfaction (Borelli 69).80

Based on the author’s poetics and ethics of writing, the final version of “A quinta” can be read as the writer’s surrender to language dictated by inspiration, as the author’s commitment to creation process that is abruptly stopped. In Nicolino Novello’s words, in “the act of writing, creating something through the written means, the language becomes a creative factor” that is even stronger than the writer, who, in turn, is merely “the result, the final product, the ‘masterpiece’ of a language creating the writer” (Novello 64).81 In this way, it is the writer who is the object, while the language she uses becomes the subject of the text. If Tobeck’s argument calls the narrator the murderer, in the proposed interpretation she would be instead an accomplice, while the language would be fully responsible for the act.

80 The original text in Portuguese: “Todas as vezes em que eu acabei de escrever um livro ou um conto, penso com desespero e com toda a certeza de que nunca mais escreverei nada. E me sinto perdida principalmente depois que acabo um trabalho mais sério. Há um esvaziamento que quase se pode chamar sem exagero de desesperador. Mas para mim é pior: a germinização e a gestação para um novo trabalho podem demorar anos, anos esses em que feneço. Lendo dias depois o que escrevi sinto certa desilusão, insatisfação” (Borelli 69).
81 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “Então, um novo aspecto se revelaria: a linguagem – ou o ato de escrever, de criar alguma coisa pela escritura, o escrever enquanto descoberta – a linguagem, portanto, passa a ser o elemento criador mais forte, mais forte que o escritor, pois este é, nada mais nada menos, o resultado, o produto final, a ‘obra-prima’ de uma linguagem criando o escritor...” (Novello 64).
“A quinta história” by Clarice Lispector proves, as we have seen, that the story can be interpreted from a multiplicity of perspectives. The principal characteristics – that of fragmentation, continuity, the relationship between the author and her work – are also present in the first story we analyzed, “O ovo e a galinha.” In both stories it is not the plot that stands out. It is not the what but rather the how, that is, how the author goes about developing their work. It raises the question of who is the legitimate agent in the creation process, who is the receiver, when the process in itself ceases and whether it ever reaches a conclusion. All these issues touch upon the realm of literary consciousness and are to be revisited in the remaining two stories to be analyzed in this thesis.
CHAPTER 3:

ON THE VERGE OF REALITY: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF “SECO ESTUDO DE CAVALOS” AND “O RELATÓRIO DA COISA”

*I notice that I’m writing as if I were between sleep and wakefulness.*

/Clarice Lispector Água viva, trans. Stefan Tobler/

**Horses as Words: Textual Analysis of “Seco estudo de cavalos”**

The short story “Seco estudo de cavalos” was published in 1974 in the volume *Onde estivestes de noite*. At that time, Lispector was already a well-established writer in her home country. In the same year, she published the collection *A via crucis do corpo*, in which she explored the topic of sexuality, violence, and gender, and the children’s book *A vida íntima de Laura*, whose principal character is a chicken named Laura.

The volume *Onde estivestes de noite* is a literary cocktail in which Lispector looks into human solitude, death, and being, juxtaposing structurally classic stories with oneiric impressions and philosophical reports. The story “Seco estudo de cavalos” (hereafter “Seco estudo”) investigates the relationship between the animal and the human being, the writing
process, and the relationship between literature and the arts. This section of the thesis will look into the story, highlighting its most essential elements and the metaphors encapsulating the writing process.

It is important to mention that writing and painting coexisted for Lispector. She created as many as sixteen paintings in her entire life, all of them in the mid-1970s. Moreover, in an attempt to include art in her own writing, she also made some characters of her books painters, such as the narrator of *Água viva* (1973) or the character Ângela in the posthumously published novel *Um sopro de vida: pulsações* (1978).

In the first novel, *Água viva* (1973), Lispector includes the following epigraph by the Belgian painter Michel Seuphor (1901-1999), in which the synthesis of writing, painting, and also music is particularly visible. According to Marcos Antônio de Oliveira and Edgar Cézar Nolasco, by practicing both painting and writing, the narrator of *Água viva* affirms the complementary relationship between the two practices, which she announces through the epigraph:

> There must be a kind of painting totally free of the dependence on the figure – or object – which, like music, illustrates nothing, tells no story, and launches no myth. Such painting would simply evoke the incommunicable kingdoms of the spirit, where dream becomes thought, where line becomes existence. (Lispector *Água viva* xv)

Lispector’s paintings have not been extensively analyzed, but, as Lúcia Helena Vianna points out, it is because they ought to be treated as supplementary representations of the author’s
thoughts in her literary oeuvre ("O figurativo inominável" 53). In this way, Lispector’s pursuit of
the “pure form,” the it, conveyed in the novel is also noticed in her pictures:

[P]urity which consists in the idea of the thing-making-itself; simmering of blood
in the entrails of what one day it will become. This movement is recognized in
Clarice’s paintings where the bordering lines of colors and forms are erased, ones
interpreting themselves in the others, many times exposing the brightest surface of
the canvas that hold them up. (Vianna 59)

Nádia Batella Gotlib claims that the art work Lispector created in the 1970s reflects the
fragments she composed at that time, which would later become a part of the novel Um sopro de
vida: pulsações (1978). Gotlib discerns in Lispector’s writing “a tendency to move further away
from the figurative” through “approximating oneself to rhythm and pure sounds, disentailed from
the commitment to a straight line of discourse and history” (Gotlib Clarice 477). In writing, on
the other hand, the displacement and detachment is represented by “colors and lines” made with
“strong brush strokes,” indicating “inner unrest and tumult” (Gotlib Clarice 477).82

Finally, the metaphor of writing as captured by painting can be seen in Lispector’s
interview with Djanira da Motta e Silva (1914-1979), a Brazilian painter, illustrator, and
engraver. Both artists reflect on the inner necessity to produce art. Lispector inquires about
Djanira’s motives to create, at the same time affirming the parallel between the two artistic paths:
“What is it that you would like to reach, Djanira? I am, too, trying to capture something that I

82 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “De fato, nota-se uma tendência para deslocar-se cada vez mais
do figurativo, na escrita, aproximando-se do ritmo e de sons puros, desvinculados de compromissos com a linha
continua do discursivo e da história; e na pintura, detendo-se em cores e linhas, com manchas fortes, em construção
que indica uma inquietação e turbulência interior” (Gotlib Clarice 477).
don’t know what it is. Do you know what it is?” (Lispector De corpo inteiro 75). This awareness of the interrelations between literature and the arts does not however mean that Lispector considered herself a painter. She was first and foremost a writer, but also an artist, which by definition encapsulates various types of artistic sensibility.

In her article “Clarice Lispector’s (Post)Modernity and the Adolescence of the Girl-Colt,” Diane E. Marting points to the reference between writing and visual arts in the short story “Seco estudo.” The critic claims that the words “seco estudo” in the story’s title translated as “dry point” are a form of “copperplate engraving,” because the two-dimensional lines produced in an engraving serve as a metaphor for writing which leaves two-dimensional marks on paper (Marting “Girl-Colt” 434). The method of engraving, as Marting furthermore asserts, is an indication of how to read the entire story. The text is composed of fifteen episodes of various length, each preceded with a title. And yet, the titles are not usually telling of the content of the sections they name, making the comprehension of the text more difficult and allowing for ruptures within the story, which account for fragmentariness as a modern and postmodern characteristic of the text (Marting “Girl-Colt” 434). The matter of structure becomes even more visible if juxtaposed with the title of the story, which suggests a single study or sketch, instead of a number of them. That is why – Marting claims – “like the lines in an engraving (which leave gaps for the viewer to fill in), the ‘spaces between’ the fifteen individual segments must be filled by the reader in order for the chronicle to be understood as representational” (“Girl-Colt” 434-435).

83 The original text in Portuguese: “O que é que você queria alcançar, Djanira? Eu também procure alcançar alguma coisa que não sei o que é. Você sabe o que é?” (Lispector De corpo inteiro 75).
84 The title was translated as “A Dry Point of Horses” by Alexis Levitin in the volume Soulstorm (1989). In the 2015 volume The Complete Stories, Katrina Dodson translated the title as “Dry Sketch of Horses.”
Marting’s observation is based on a premise that can also be related to drawing: “Due to the reduction of spaces to lines (rather than to blocks of color), in an engraving there are gaps to be filled in mentally by the viewer, if the representation of the object is to be achieved” (Marting “Girl-Colt” 434). Consequently, Katrina Dodson’s translation of “seco estudo” as “dry sketch” is a valid choice, especially because it also recreates the meaning of “estudo-sketch” as an excerpt; a fragment of a larger piece; a work in progress. In addition, the reader-response approach emphasized by Marting can be applied to those of Lispector’s texts in which the visual aspect contributes to the overall meaning. An example of this is “O ovo” and its iconic representation of the egg by the letter “o” in the original text, as well as the appearance and a later reduction of dashes within the text. Be that as it may, the visual side of “Seco estudo” is, as Marting rightly points out, an essential contribution to understanding the text.

Beside the layout of “Seco estudo,” another important point is the motif of the horse. In fact, it should be noted that animal imagery is ubiquitous in Lispector’s texts. As Olga Borelli affirms, Lispector loved animals “because they did not expect from her any logic,” and the writer would say that “only those who fear their own animal nature do not like animals” (Borelli 55). As a dog owner herself, Lispector also postulated the treatment of animals as animals, that is, in accordance with their non-human nature, instead of trying to anthropomorphize them. She would express it by means of her texts: “I don’t humanize animals because it’s an offense – you must respect their nature – I am the one who animalizes myself” (Lispector Água viva 42-43). It is safe to say that in her affirmation Lispector agrees with Donna Haraway’s criticism of “lots of dangerous and unethical projection in the Western world that makes domestic canines into furry children” (11). Even when Lispector’s faithful dog Ulysses bit her on her lip, after which she had

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85 The original text in Portuguese: “Seu afeto pelos animais era enorme: amava-os, como dizia, porque não lhe pediam nenhuma lógica” and “Somente quem teme a própria animalidade não gosta de bicho” (Borelli 55).
to have a few stiches, she did not blame the dog for its misconduct, but rather admitted to her own crossing of borders. Haraway also points to this complex human-canine relationship, not always based on love:

They are dogs; i.e., a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings. The relationship is not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play. (Haraway 12)

Lispector’s literary experiments with animals do not fall under the category of allegorical beast fables created by Aesop or by La Fontaine, nor do they become excessively surrealist animal accounts like Franz Kafka’s short story “Investigations of a Dog,” featuring a dog as the narrator, or human-insect transformations as told in *The Metamorphosis* by the same German-Jewish author. In her texts, Lispector observes animals and exposes the animal side of every human being. Her literary fascination with animal subjectivity does not marginalize animals “as genre fiction such as children’s literature or fantasy” (Boehrer 2). Instead, it opens up the floor for discussion related to the animality of humans, and to human-animal confrontations.

The two short stories I have analyzed in the present chapter also feature animals: the chicken from “O ovo” has been analyzed from the feminist and philosophical point of view, while the cockroaches in “A quinta” came to represent the unknown, evoking ambivalent feelings of repulsion and admiration in the narrator. The horse, too, is a source of many intertextual references in Lispector. It appears in the novels *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943), *A cidade sitiada* (1949), *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), and *Água viva* (1973). The horse is also present in a number of short fiction: the story “Onde estivestes de noite,” and in some chronicles: “Não soltar os cavalos,” “Como tratar o que se tem,” and “Bichos (Conclusão).” In the latter
chronicle, Lispector expresses the following wish: “Not to have been born an animal seems to be one of my secret regrets” (Discovering the World 442). This desire is reinforced in “Seco estudo”: “[I]f it had been up to me I would have wanted to be born a horse” (Lispector The Complete Stories 448).

As a symbol, the horse has come to represent ideas, states, and emotions ranging from positive to negative:

The horse is quite often a solar symbol, and in the Bible it is one of intelligence. According to its color, a horse may symbolize either destruction or victory (fiery-red and white, respectively). It is a maternal archetype, and it might also symbolize impulsiveness, impetuosity of desire, the instinctive impulses that motivate man. This association of the horse with darker human drives, such as virility and sexuality, has been resented by numerous writers [(Nietzsche)]. In addition, it is related to air and wind, acting as the mediator between heaven and earth; Centaurs are wind gods. A highly sacred animal, considered a taboo to eat its meat. It carries many characteristics of the person as well, such as fertility, fidelity, sensitivity, strength, selfishness, anger, stubbornness, stupidity and vanity. In psychology it can be the unconscious, subhuman side. A figure highly associated with many aspects of war, especially in the Greek tradition. Colors: white – omen of death but also innocence and divinity; black – famine; red – war; grey – devil. Types of horses: two – intellect, especially when harnessed together; winged – poetic relations; grazing – peace. (“Horse” Online Symbolism Dictionary” University of Michigan)
The story “Seco estudo” begins with a description of the horse, its form and its character. The first and only phrase of the initial section titled “Stripping” reads “The horse is naked” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 447). The statement is an affirmation of facts, signaling a major difference between animals and humans: “It is generally thought that the property unique to animals and what in the final analysis distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it” (Derrida 373). Moreover, “the horse is naked” throws us immediately into the human sphere, for the concept does not exist in the animal world.

For Marting, the nakedness of Lispector’s horse refers to its freedom from the equipment developed by the human being, aimed at taming and controlling it: bridle, saddle or other forms of decoration (“Girl-Colt” 437). And yet, as we read in the second section titled “False Domestication,” even if the horse does serve the human, it never performs it fully, for it represents “freedom so indomitable” that even if it “lets itself be domesticated,” it does so with “a rebellious toss of the head” to show “that its innermost nature is forever wild and limpid and free” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 447). The horse’s nonconformity to curbing its freedom, as well as the beauty of its form represented by “the soft coat that suggests the supple muscles, agile and controlled,” are sources of admiration for the narrator (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 447).

Just like in “O ovo” and in “A quinta,” here, too, we witness an identification of the human with the animal: “I have a horse inside me that rarely manifests itself” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 447). The identification with the animality in Lispector’s text is a result of an intense, prolonged, and contemplated observation of the non-human subject. Since the story in question is a “study,” it entails investigation and reflection based on an earlier, careful examination of an entity. At the same time, the animal frequently stares at the human being.
provoking conflicting feelings, an excellent example of which would be the short story “O Búfalo” published in the collection *Laços de família* (1960).

The visual confrontation with the non-human is the subject of Jutta Ittner’s essay, in which she analyzes an excerpt from “Seco estudo” through the prism of Jacques Lacan’s concept of “gaze,” understood as the “underside of consciousness” (*Lacan Seminar XI* 83). In his *Seminar XI* devoted to this idea, Lacan makes a distinction between the “eye” and the “gaze.” He refers to the former as “the metaphor of something that I would prefer to call the seer’s ‘shoot’ – something prior to his eye,” thus pertaining to the subject (Lacan 72). At the same time, Lacan claims that “we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world” and considers “being under the gaze (...) that circumscribes us” a source of our satisfaction (75). The gaze, on the other hand, is characterized by an outward movement: “In the scopic relation, the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze” (Lacan 83). This gaze is not deprived of form, for, as Lacan claims, “we can give body to the gaze,” which is what Jutta Ittner considers her starting point in the discussion of the fragment in “Seco estudo,” titled “The Eyes of the Horse.”

In the above-mentioned section, the narrator contemplates a blind horse, which is described as restless and “attuned to the slightest murmur provoked by the breeze in the grasses” (*Lispector The Complete Stories* 448). Next, the narrator is trying to determine what a horse sees: “What is it that a horse sees to the extent that not seeing its like renders it lost as if from itself?” She seems to know the answer to the question, but it only affirms the irrationality of the blind horse and it being an “error of nature”: “What happens is – when it does see – it sees outside itself whatever is inside itself. It is an animal expressed by its form. When it sees mountains, meadows, people, sky – it dominates men and nature itself” (*Lispector The Complete Stories*
448). Ittner notices here Lispector’s failure in acknowledging the other nature represented by the blind horse, which is a manifestation – in the Brazilian writer’s own terms – that “nature had erred”:

[D]espite her attempt to imagine what a horse sees, Lispector cannot help resorting to her own concept of a horse. Even the most sympathetic construction of alterity tends to see the animal as merely an imperfect state of ourselves; that is, it denies the existence of the truly other. (Ittner 107-108)

Ittner’s observation is valid and confirmed by Lispector’s own words expressed in the following section titled “He and I,” where she questions her earlier wish to have been born a horse: “Does the horse represent the beautiful and liberated animality of the human being? Does the human already contain the best of the horse?” and embraces her own human nature: “Then I renounce being a horse and in glory I’ll go over to my humanity” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 449). As Ittner rightly points out, Lispector sees the horse as a projection of the human qualities; it is deprived of its own subjectivity and reduced to an instrument. “The horse shows me what I am,” but it is the human who determines which properties come from the animal or from the human world (Lispector *The Complete Stories* “Seco estudo” 449). Tobeck’s view on Lispector’s suppressing of the animal’s subjectivity in “A quinta” can also be included in this observation.

Indeed, the entire story is a representation of the narrator’s dream, her desire to become a part of the animal world ruled by horses. If we look at the story from the perspective of the author, we might say that the story is a representation of Lispector’s subjectivity imposed over nature. As such, the entire text does not provide an insight into the animal world but into the author’s. Yet, is this not the case with any attempt to describe the animal in literature? Are they
not all projections of the writer’s effort to transport oneself to the animal world or transform oneself into an animal? What matters more is what kind of effect it has on the reader and on the narrative.

Although I side with Ittner’s comment about Lispector’s subjectivity imprinted on the representation of the blind horse, I think that Lispector tries to overcome this need in some fragments of “Seco estudo.” For example, contrary to “A quinta” or “O ovo,” in “Seco estudo” Lispector does not make the animal speak. Her efforts to communicate with the horse can be considered as a return to silence before the human had mastered articulate speech – a skill which “defines man’s singular eminence above the silence of the plant and the grunt of the beast – stronger, more cunning, longer of life than he” (Steiner Language and Silence 36). The silence permeating the story is what binds the narrator and the horse together: “I wanted to answer, baring my gums in a neigh” (Lispector The Complete Stories 451). Her desire to communicate with the horse reflects the lost connection between the human and the animal. Steiner’s following comment on the disadvantages of the human’s abandonment of silence refers back to this need:

But this breaking free, the human voice harvesting echo where there was silence before, is both miracle and outrage, sacrament and blasphemy. It is a sharp severance from the world of the animal, man’s begetter and sometime neighbor, the animal who, if we rightly grasp the myths of centaur, satyr, and sphynx, has been inwoven with the very substance of man, and whose instinctive immediacies and shapes of physical being have receded only partially from our own form. (Steiner 36-37)
The horse in Lispector’s “Seco estudo” thus represents a recovery of the lost connection between the human and the animal, for the narrator refers to it as to “something of mine,” as we read the section titled “Adolescence of the Colt-Girl” (Lispector The Complete Stories 449).

Marting, who proposes her own form of decoding the text, claims that the above section is a central piece of the story. She reads the entire text based on the structure of a chevron, in which particular sections match each other. In her “thematic reading,” the first section (“Stripping”) stating the horse’s nakedness or despoilment is related to the fifteenth section (“Sketch of the Demon Horse”), in which “the despoiled horse symbolizes the female narrator’s access to illicit power, to immorality, to the dark side of human experience” (Marting “Girl-Colt” 437). Furthermore, the second fragment devoted to the horse’s impossible domestication (“False Domestication”), its “freedom and power as a wild beast” is linked to the fourteenth fragment (“In the Mystery of the Night”), where we read about the horses’ nocturne rituals, seeing them in something – as Marting claims – “close to their own ‘society.’” This piece brings back the idea that “horses merely allow humanity the illusion of control, and that as wild creatures they transcend or escape the human” (Marting “Girl-Colt” 437).

The central section does not have any match because it is a statement of the narrator’s shared existence with a horse when she was an adolescent: “I have related perfectly to a horse before. I remember adolescent-me. Standing with the same pride as the horse and running my hand over its lustrous coat. Over its rustic aggressive mane” (Lispector The Complete Stories 449). Although the title suggests a single being “colt-girl,” Marting rightly affirms that the text itself highlights the equality between the horse and the human, as well as their duality: “I felt as if something of mine was watching us from afar – Thus: ‘The Girl and the Horse’” (Lispector The Complete Stories 449).
For Joel Rosa de Almeida, the neologism “colt-girl” represents a fusion between the feminine and the masculine, a topic explored by Lispector in the grotesque-oneiric story “Where Were You at Night.” Almeida, however, views the union as an allusion to centaurs – figures from Greek Mythology that resemble a human up to their trunk, while having the body and the legs of a horse (Almeida 146). The critic furthermore affirms that just like centaurs, so is the narrator and her horse involved in “Dionysiac practices,” described in the final sections of the story (Almeida 147).

Indeed, the erotic dimension of the horse-girl union, and the words Lispector uses to describe their relationship and their disobedience amount to religious heresy: “The first bells of a faraway church make us shudder and flee, we vanish before the cross. The night is my life with the diabolical horse, I enchantress of the horror” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 454). Although Lispector did represent animals in an erotic way in some of her texts – for example, in “O Búfalo” – she is rather interested in exposing the animality of the human being, instead of describing an intimate relationship between the animal and the human.

According to Olga de Sá, the indomitable horse, the image of life, can also stand for the word. In this way, the critic draws a parallel between the animal in Lispector’s story and colts in João Cabral de Melo Neto’s poem “Psicologia da Composição VIII” [Psychology of Composition VIII]:
To cultivate the desert like an orchard in reverse: then, nothing more distils; evaporates; where there was an apple, a hunger remains; where there was a word (colts or bulls contained) the severe form of emptiness remains.

The analogy between horses and words also appears in Lispector’s short story “O manifesto da cidade” [Manifesto of the City] included in the volume Onde estivestes de noite (1974). While describing the architecture of Recife and its memorable places, the narrator sees a horse:

But there comes a Horse. Here is a horse with four legs and hard hooves of stone, a powerful neck, and the head of Horse. Here is a horse.

If this was a word echoing off the hard ground, what do you mean? How hollow this heart is in the center of the city. I am searching, searching. (Lispector The Complete Stories 480-481)

If we consider, however, the horse as a symbol of silence, of the non-word as Lispector refers to it in “Writing between the lines,” the narrator is, at the same time, a writer who is looking for a union between the concept, the “between-the lines,” and the words she is putting down in an attempt to describe the idea. Similar to the plethora of symbols representing the egg in “O ovo,” so are we left with a number of meanings related to the horse in “Seco estudo.” Moreover, as Almeida points out, the horse’s freedom may be interpreted as the writer’s
statement favoring her own literary liberty: “From statements to questions, the texts sew together while the horse’s indomitable nature fulfills in CL [Clarice Lispector] her own freedom of artistic creation” (Almeida 146). The sections of “Seco estudo” also remain free from any structural or final boundaries, since they prevail as “fragments, traces, drafts, croquis, impressions, gestures or movements inconclusive, free” (Almeida 146). 86

Indeed, the literary freedom represented by the inconclusive is reflected in other metaphors present in “Seco estudo.” Just like the narrator in “A quinta,” who has to renew the lethal mixture every night, so does the narrator in “Seco estudo” prepare herself for responding to the night’s call to follow the horse. The narrators of both stories participate in the crime, writing, that never ends and leaves plenty of room for the reader to explore and discover what is hidden between the lines.

Anti-literature Is Still Literature: “O relatório da coisa”

Clarice Lispector’s short story “O relatório da coisa,” the fourth and last text I shall analyze in my thesis, is different from the previous three stories in a number of ways. The main distinction lies in the absence of an animal in the text: in “O ovo” we read about a logic-based relationship between the chicken and the egg; “A quinta” is a description of cockroaches and murder, while “Seco estudo” is a study of horses and the animal side of the human being. “O relatório da coisa” (hereafter “O relatório”) draws on the above mentioned stories and is centered around an allegedly non-living entity, an object: a clock. Joel Rosa de Almeida rightly highlights

86 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese (both quotes): “De afirmações a perguntas ao leitor, os textos costuram-se à proporção que a natureza indomável do cavalo concretiza em CL a própria liberdade da criação artística. Esse conjunto de textos curtos, antes de se construírem como crônicas, são fragmentos, traços, esboços, croquis, impressões, gestos ou movimentos despreocupadamente inconclusos, livres” (Almeida 146).
the connection between the stories and their motifs, the egg and the cockroach – “both beings primordially primeval and natural since they are part of the pulsing and living world” – and juxtaposes them with the clock; the Thing, something invented by the human being but equally ancient, basic, present in many people’s lives and subject to constant improvement (Almeida 166).87

Immediately at the beginning of the story, Lispector warns the reader of the potential challenges in understanding its contents: “This thing is the most difficult for a person to understand” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 471). Those difficulties are a result of human intervention in an attempt to rationalize and organize a concept that has been beyond our understanding: time. Lispector proceeds to explain the possible gaps in comprehending time by precisely highlighting the agency of the human who tries to take possession of time: “We divide time when in reality it is not divisible. It is always immutable. But we need to divide it. And to that end a monstrous thing was created: the clock” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 471). Lispector has already voiced such a resistance to approach everything with reason in “O ovo.”

The human’s division of time is inextricably linked to history, for thanks to this relationship we are able to talk about the past and pinpoint certain events. Nonetheless, Lispector chooses to talk about time, among others, using the clock whose brand is “Sveglia,” which means “wake up” in Italian. In other words: the writer uses disguised repetitions to discuss the notion of time. It is essential to add, however, that the narrator is not interested in discussing clocks in general, but narrows down her focus to a specific object: “I am not going to speak of clocks. (…) The clock of which I speak is electronic and has an alarm. The brand is Sveglia,

87 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “A experimentação da linguagem passa pela necessidade de a narradora-protagonista – depois dos contatos com a barata e com o ovo, ambas as vivências primordialmente primeiras e naturais por fazerem parte de um mundo pulsante e vivo – relacionar-se com um objeto, máquina ou ‘Coisa’ (…)” (Almeida 166).
which means ‘wake up.’ Wake up to what, my God? To time. To the hour. To the instant” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 471).

The foreignization of the clock brand accounts for its unfamiliarity to the reader and, at the same time, it maximizes the number of representations with which the narrator describes it. Moreover, it serves as an excuse for Sveglia’s mystery, since the author claims that “it comes straight from the planet Mars” and elsewhere that it comes from Europe, and therefore it needs “a little time to get acclimated,” most probably because of the time difference between the different parts of the world (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 472-473). The narrator’s mission, then, is to envelop Sveglia with as much enigma as possible, in order to attempt to deconstruct it later. The narrator’s ponderations about Sveglia’s origins bring us back to “O ovo” where we read that the egg came into being in Macedonia; “calculated, fruit of the most arduous spontaneity” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* “The Egg” 278). In fact, the two stories share a number of similarities, not only thematic but also formal.

Just like in “O ovo,” “O relatório” is an attempt to explain what a certain entity is, in this case, the clock Sveglia. However, the narrator does not insist on reminding the reader that Sveglia is essentially a clock, and, instead, uses the foreign brand name when listing what is and what is not Sveglia. In this way, “O relatório” resembles, just as “O ovo,” an essay, a scientific account belonging to the mysterious genre of “the antiliterature of the thing,” and similar to “O ovo,” it is regarded as an “anti-short story” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 471). Another link between the stories lies in their iconicity. The egg in “O ovo” is affirmed by the abundance of “o’s” in the original Portuguese text, while the oval shape of the clock is highlighted by the narrator’s reference to Sveglia as “the only eye always open like an eye floating in space” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 472). According to Almeida, both oval entities, the egg and the
clock, “are examples of forms that have fascinated the human since antiquity” (172). Apart from “O ovo” and “O relatório,” the motif of longevity is also present in the story “A quinta” in the form of the cockroach.

It is essential to list the epithets the narrator uses to explain what Sveglia is and is not. At the beginning of the story, the reader is informed about the clock’s “monstrosity” due to its function as an organizer or divider of time. We also learn that Sveglia’s owner is not the narrator, and that although it is an object, it possesses an “infernal” yet “tranquil soul,” which automatically equips it with a being. The fact that Sveglia is not a wristwatch but a “freestanding” clock alludes to its potential freedom and lack of direct contact with the human. This observation takes us back to the horse in “Seco estudo,” whose preferred state is the one not bound by harness or any other limitations imposed by humans. Sveglia is, therefore, a “free” clock standing on the table, like an eye observing the world around it.

Yet, Sveglia has an owner. It is “free” and “owned” at the same time. Moreover, the woman who owns it prefers to call it Horatio, which for Almeida is significant due to the intertextuality with William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Horatio is, as Almeida states, a reference to death, for he realizes that the sunrise signaled by the cock’s crow foresees the appearance of the ghost of King Hamlet. In other words, one wakes up to learn about someone’s death (Almeida 176). In the same way, Sveglia, as Almeida affirms, is implied by Shakespeare’s rooster and, although paradoxically, it symbolizes death, because it urges the narrator to wake up to the clock ticking, to the passing time, to the instant that will end soon, to life that will eventually lead to death (Almeida 179).88

88 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “Enquanto Horácio – personagem de *Hamlet* – drama de Shakespeare com que CL dialoga intertextualmente também em ‘O relatório,’ tal como se evidenciou no conto-título...
It is important to note that apart from Almeida’s observations related to Shakespearean characters, Horatio also symbolizes faithfulness, since as a persona in Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, he always accompanies Hamlet and is never carried away by his own analytical mind and never falls into madness. He stands by Hamlet’s side, serving as a witness: he is present during the performance alluding to Claudius’s crime and when Hamlet discovers Ophelia’s mental illness. In a similar tone, Sveglia is also company and a watcher, “the only eye always open like an eye floating in space,” non-judgmental, with its only criticism being urging the narrator to “wake up to see what must be seen” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 472-473).

Sveglia’s clock mechanism is described as “simple,” it is not as complex as a person, but still “it is more people than people,” but not as much as wristwatches are – shock resistant and waterproof (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 472). Sveglia is, again, a being, although not considered human because, as mentioned earlier, it is “extraterrestrial.” More importantly, the narrator gives us faint signals of her doubt. On the one hand, she seems adamant that Sveglia comes from the planet Mars, and on the other, she questions it: “if that where it is from then that’s where it will one day return.” She then suggests Sveglia’s “divinity,” since “it is from God,” and both human and divine minds collaborated in its creation.

The personification of Sveglia is interrupted when, again, the narrator refers to it as an object, however, not just any object, but the capitalized Object and the Thing, representing a link between the human and the material world. Sveglia’s features as a thing are constantly challenged by the narrator’s efforts to equip it with human-like capacities. The purpose of this tug-of-war between Life and Thing, in my view, is to obscure the clarification of Sveglia, and to
resist the human need to rationalize and understand it. This conflicting relationship is also reflected in the juxtaposition of dream and reality: the limit between the two states is blurred, for “reality resembles a dream” (Lispector The Complete Stories 472).

In fact, the motif of sleepiness, and of finding oneself between dream and reality; of being a binder or a link connecting the two worlds humans are ever condemned to, is common in Lispector’s texts. We have already discussed it in the previous stories: in “O ovo,” where the narrator is drowsy when preparing breakfast for her children, but still engages in a syllogism about the origins of the egg and its logical relationship with the chicken. The narrator in “A quinta” is also “awake and still sleepy” when crossing the kitchen to reach the laundry room where she discovers the effects of the lethal mixture she prepared earlier. The story “Seco estudo” stands out from the previous two because it represents the obfuscated limit between dream and reality, where the narrator leads a double life: she imagines herself waking up “beside the enormous weary horse head” not knowing what “crime” she and her “fantastical mate” had committed. But here, too, we deal with sleep and its accompanying state, that is, the dream, or, as Peter Schwenger puts it: the dream as a “sort of waking on the other bank of the Lethean river that is sleep (At the Borders of Sleep x). Falling asleep, on the other hand, is related to a gradual loss of awareness: “Though we may be aware of sleep’s preliminary signs (a lethargy of the limbs, a loosening of our associative processes), the moment when we slip over the border into sleep is also the one in which we lose awareness – at least awareness in its usual versions” (Schwenger 2).

Sleepiness, day-dreaming allow the narrator and the character to be in both worlds at the same time, at the threshold that can be considered both the end and the beginning. The end and the beginning of what? Actually, as Schwenger observes, the direction is unclear, a point best
summarized by Anne Carson’s title of the essay “Every Exit Is an Entrance” (xi). If we follow Almeida’s thread, however, and assume that Sveglia represents death as a part of life, the motif in question represents the very instant, a point on the line of continuity, a fraction of a process, a fragment of a larger piece.

The instant is immersed in the present, “a firefly that sparks and goes out, sparks and goes out” (Lispector Água viva 8). In this very instant, the narrator is reduced to an object, as if she, too, was Sveglia: a being caught up between the two worlds, the animate and the inanimate one:

What am I in this instant? I am a typewriter making the dry keys echo in the dark and humid early hours. For a long time I haven’t been people. They wanted me to be an object. I’m an object. An object dirty with blood. That creates other objects and the typewriter creates all of us. It demands. The mechanism demands and demands my life. But I don’t obey totally: if I must be an object let it be an object that screams. (Lispector Água viva 78-79).

This instant – Sveglia – is, again, a definition of being. We are brought back to the physical characteristics of the clock and learn that it is “thin,” and therefore potentially sensitive and susceptible to being broken or hurt. Immediately after reading this statement, we are reminded of its agency, for Sveglia “makes things happen.” It is furthermore “indifferent,” for it neither wishes harm nor good for the narrator, but it also has its “weaknesses,” pointing again to its human-like attributes. This is instantly contradicted by the narrator’s mention of Sveglia’s stopped mechanism, revealed to her in secret by the clock’s owner, which throws us back into the inanimate aspect of its world.
The clock’s origins remain unknown, for the narrator – as mentioned earlier – claims that it comes from the planet Mars or from Europe. Yet again, its divinity is brought back, for Sveglia might be a “mediator” between God and the people: “it seems its electronic-God communicated with our electronic-God brain: the sound is low, not the least bit shrill” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 473). Sveglia is furthermore referred to as “a white horse roaming free and saddleless,” which is another intertextuality between the story and the white horse in “Seco estudo” (473). Next, Sveglia is a desired “father” of the narrator’s child, when she is heard screaming in her sleep “I want to have a baby with Sveglia” (475). Elsewhere it is the mysterious object represented as a cure to the narrator’s flu: “Antibiotics are Sveglia” (475).

The object also has a “decisive voice,” because – as the narrator explains the use of the genre of a report to write about Sveglia – the clock “does not allow short stories or novels no matter what. It only permits transmission. It hardly allows me to call this a report” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 475). Sveglia is “anonymous,” a property that approximates it to God, because after all “God has no name: he preserves perfect anonymity: there is no language that utters his true name” (475). The analogy between Sveglia and God continues and when the narrator calls Sveglia “dumb,” the same refers to God because “he does not understand, does not think, he just is” (476). God makes mistakes, but the only error he does not commit lies in not dying. Sveglia is then “immortal.”

Sveglia is furthermore related to the rooster, while the egg is “pure Sveglia,” but only “when whole, complete, white, its shell dry, completely oval” (476). To eat the nucleus of the egg, that is, its “raw yolk” is Sveglia, too. Furthermore, “a football match” is Sveglia, but not its most famous players in the history of Brazilian soccer, Pelé, because, as the narrator suggests, “he didn’t respect anonymity” (476). “Fights” and “to lose one’s temper” is Sveglia, but not to
feel anything, just like the narrator’s maid Severina who was neither happy nor sad, is also Sveglia (476).

Other objects, activities, and states that are Sveglia are: water, writing (but not style), having breasts (but “the male organ is too much”), non-kindness (but not kindness), giving oneself, not having secrets but still keeping the enigma, the person who understands the narrator’s “undisclosed and precise” report, the Sun (but not the Moon), the narrator’s face and (probably) the reader’s face, whiskey, Coca-Cola (but not Pepsi-Cola), being faithful, being a postman, being happy, typewriter, the deep blue sky, waiting (perhaps), a musical quarter (“is immensely more so than a symphony”), the narrator’s perfume – “rustic and a bit harsh, with hidden sweetness,” and, finally, dying is also Sveglia (477).

As we can see, and as Almeida aptly observes, the narrator disposes of Sveglia’s principal function as a clock or an alarm clock and proceeds to personify it throughout the narrative, which stresses the grotesque aspect of the text: “Sveglia transforms itself into an allegorical and monstrous figure coming from the anterior or the posterior world, deus ex machina or post machina, ancient and futuristic at the same time” (Almeida 168). Indeed, Sveglia is represented in a way suggesting divine intervention, and, as I said before, the narrator makes frequent parallels between the object and God.

The story, however, does not engage in a dialogue solely with God, but rather constitutes an example of religious syncretism. Almeida points to the three mini-narratives mentioned earlier as drawing from the practices of Candomblé, a religion officially originating from

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89 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “A partir dessas perquirições sobre o universo alegórico na obra de CL, percebe-se que, em ‘O relatório,’ Sveglia não é caracterizado somente através das funções típicas do despertador, objeto que aos poucos, de modo grotesco, vai-se personificando na narrativa, transformando-se numa espécie de figura alegórico-monstruosa que surge de um mundo anterior ou posterior, deus ex machina ou post machina, antigo e futurista ao mesmo tempo” (Almeida 168).
Salvador, Bahia, but actually brought by West-African slaves, who had been shipped into the Brazilian North-Eastern coast by Portuguese colonizers. Candomblé is related to “macumba,” that is, to practices that often include sacrificing animals, and it worships a number of gods collectively called “orixás.” The religion is widely practiced among Brazilians, especially the North-Easterners, and in other South American countries such as Argentina and Uruguay. Over the years, it has become closer to the Catholic religion, and some people engage in Candomblé while also following Catholic practices. In addition, the orixá Iemanjá – the mother of all orixás – has had its counterpart in the Catholic Virgin Mary.

The first story-within-the story features a man, an owner of Sveglia, who was walking with his ten-year-old son at night. The son warned his father by saying “watch out, Father, there’s voodoo (in the original Portuguese “macumba”) out there,” but it was too late, and the man stepped on the burning candle putting it out. Although he did not feel anything before going to bed, he woke up at night with a swollen and black foot. The mysterious injury was carefully examined by as many as nine doctors, who diagnosed it as gangrene and recommended amputation. After the man had fallen asleep, he had a dream in which he was being chased by a beautiful white horse.

Immediately we are brought back to the story “Seco estudo,” where a white horse also appears and represents mixed feelings of admiration and terror. In the case of “O relatório,” however, the animal symbolizes healing: when the white horse in the man’s dream stomped on his foot, the man woke up screaming only to discover that his foot did not show any signs of swelling or blackness. The nine doctors called were unable to explain the man’s mysterious recovery, which, in Almeida’s view, represents a criticism of the scientific mind (Almeida 179).
The narrator places Sveglia and the white horse at the opposite ends, as if they were enemies: “They didn’t know about the enigma of the Sveglia against which only a white horse can fight” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 474). However, Sveglia does not stand here for death, nor for life, but rather for a mysterious experience – close to being on the verge of losing one’s physical capacities, capturing life and death at the same time. Sveglia left its mark on the man’s foot, which never fully recovered and was weakened: “It was the sign of the horse harnessed with silver, of the snuffed candle, of Sveglia” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 474).

The second mini-narrative exemplifying Sveglia’s interference is closely linked to the first one. This time, however, the main character is the man’s wife who, one day at dinner and while being “in perfect health,” feels sudden pain in her intestines. She decides to lie down, and her husband follows to check on her. He sees her pale, “drained of blood,” and without any pulse. Her sweat-covered forehead suggests that she is alive, and the doctor’s diagnosis is catalepsy. The husband, however, decides to take the matter in his own hands, uncovers his wife’s stomach, and makes “simple movements over her – the same he himself made when Sveglia had stopped – movements he couldn’t explain” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 474-475). His wife wakes up, perfectly healthy. Just like the previous one, this story reveals the reality of many Brazilian families, and their reliance on spirituality whose agency is inexplicable, mysterious – and therefore linked to Sveglia.

The third mini-narrative also presents a family, but this time we are informed about the setting: a place called Coelho Neto, in the State of Guanabara, which is currently the Rio Janeiro State. The main character is a woman with a wound on her leg that will not heal. She and her husband-postman are poor, work hard to make their living, and have many children. One day, in order to make his wife feel better, the postman shows her different people who suffer more than
the woman: a neighbor who cannot have children, and another neighbor who had children but whose husband hits her. The wife feels happier, and being happy is Sveglia, after all.

Although seemingly innocent in its representation, the story carries a hidden message as noted by Almeida: the chronicle discloses a bitter irony through showing how uncritically people accept certain situations and build their happiness by seeing other’s misery, and it also places the text in the social context (Almeida 182).\(^{90}\) Sveglia is here represented as a goal – “to be happy” – comparable to the Machiavellian “the end” that “justifies the means.”

The three stories-within-a story constitute an interesting writing strategy: they disturb the structure of the report whose objective is to provide a list of what Sveglia is and is not. In addition, each of the mini-narratives is a report in itself, a fragment of reality, because they provide an account of the events without any biographical, metanarrative inserts or the writer’s personal opinion on the matter. In other words, the mini-stories resemble a report more than the entire text does.

In order to take a closer look at the metanarrative aspects of the story, it is essential to note Lispector’s thinking process while describing Sveglia. At some occasions, she begins with the noun Sveglia followed by an attribute, like in the sentence “Sveglia is dumb.” At other times, she inverts the order, and first uses the noun and then characterizes it as “Sveglia.” In this way, writing, having breasts, whiskey, being happy are all Sveglia, but until we comprehend what Sveglia actually stands for, the explanations remain open. Although the writer filled several pages with words, she did not actually say anything that would make the reader grasp the nature

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\(^{90}\) Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “(...) a história respira uma crônica em ácida ironia a estampar o conformismo através da miséria alheia, discurso bem típico tanto nas paupérrimas quanto nas riquíssimas famílias brasileiras, discrepâncias cada vez mais acentuadas nos tempos atuais, mas muito anterior ao início da década de 70, época na qual o texto de CL foi provavelmente concebido” (Almeida 182).
of Sveglia. We are left with a dual conclusion: Sveglia is nothing and everything at the same time; “it escapes any classification whatsoever” and just the like narrator in Água viva, it also does not fall under any gender-marked category (Nascimento 39). In addition, Lispector is surrendering to the implausibility of describing the Object: “What she [Lispector] questions is the subjective possibility of language and, therefore, the possibility of ‘me’ expressing ‘the thing’” (Sá A escritura 120).

Russotto shares this view by affirming that Lispector’s stories are actually “testimonies of the impossibility” to transmit a narrative (Sustentación del enigma 45). These narratives, frequently inconclusive and best exemplified by “O ovo,” “A quinta,” “Seco estudo,” and “O relatório” address a number of questions related to the writing process, which Russotto specifies as follows: “Why and for whom do you tell the story? (…) What is capable of being narrated? (…) What do these inconclusive narratives preserve?” (45).

Another important aspect of the story in question is the fragmentariness and lack of order in the presentation of events. The narrator is talking about time, simultaneously ignoring any sequence in her account. As a result, the world Lispector gives us is broken into pieces: “While showing the scarcity of fictional objectivity as a sequence of events, the narrative of “O relatório” also reflects its singular fragmentariness, constituting on a diegetic level an appalling,
implacable, and shattered reality” (Almeida 172). Lispector uses the genre of the report to add credibility and scientific basis to her arguments, but it can hardly be considered a written account of certain events, because the author appears to undercut it frequently. The formality of the report is especially questioned by the narrator’s mention of her personal state, her reactions toward Sveglia, and metanarrative inserts.

These strategies run counter to the characteristics of Roland Barthes’ “zero degree” or “colorless writing” (Writing Degree Zero 78). In his book, Barthes criticizes French bourgeoisie writing, represented by realists such as Flaubert, and favors the experiments of such authors as the symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, whom he calls “the Hamlet of writing” (75). The French poet’s “murder of language,” as Barthes continues, aims at setting the word free, and affirms its solitude wrapped in silence. Barthes describes Mallarmé’s language as “Orpheus who can save what he loves only by renouncing it, and who, just the same, cannot resist glancing round a little; it is Literature brought to the gates of the Promised Land: a world without Literature, but one to which writers would nevertheless have to bear witness” (76). Barthes favors this “disengaging literary language” and puts forward his theory of “writing at the zero degree” that is “amodal,” uses “the indicative mood,” and can be best described as “journalist’s writing” (77). He excludes, however, the possibility of journalism developing “optative or imperative (that is, emotive) forms” (77). According to Barthes, such a technique of writing was initiated by Albert Camus in his Outsider, where the

transparent form of speech (…) achieves a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style; writing is then reduced to a sort of negative mood in which

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93 Translation mine. The original text in Portuguese: “Não tão nitidamente quanto “Seco estudo”, a narrativa de “O Relatório”, a apresentar escassez de objetividade ficcional como sequência de acontecimentos, aqui também reflete sua singular fragmentação, tendo-se, no nível diegético, uma temida e implacável realidade despedaçada” (Almeida 172).
the social or mythical characters of language are abolished in favor of a neutral and inert state of form; thus thought remains wholly responsible, without being overlaid by a secondary commitment of form to a History not its own. (Barthes 77).

The neutral writing proposed by Barthes can be found in Lispector’s first installment of “A quinta” or in the three mini-narratives included in “O relatório.” Yet, she is clearly not satisfied with this sort of literature, and resorts to the type of writing with which she feels most comfortable: the description of the narrative act characterized by “situating the origins of the story, its sources, and the specific position of the narrative voice” (Russotto 41).94

Barthes also see the downside of “colorless writing,” and refers those to the writer’s originality:

[M]echanical habits are developed in the very place where freedom existed, a network of set forms hem in more and more the pristine freshness of discourse, a mode of writing appears afresh in lieu of an indefinite language. The writer, taking his place as a ‘classic,’ becomes the slavish imitator of his original creation, society demotes his writing to a mere manner, and returns him a prisoner to his own formal myths. (Barthes 78)

Writing is then also resistance: resistance to the abuse of embellished literary language on the one hand, and resistance to language dominated by neutrality on the other. In fact, Barthes’s rather pessimistic conclusion is that it is impossible to remain a colorless writer, but it is

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94 Translation mine. The original quote in Spanish: “(…) la situación de origen del relato, sus fuentes y la posición particular de la voz narrativa” (Russotto 41).
nevertheless an essential stage for an author to experience in order to perceive the limitations of language.

In “O relatório,” we can identify the following examples of Lispector’s opposition to writing a report: “I am melancholy because I am happy,” “I am in perfect physical and mental health,” “I am sleepy,” “Now I am nearly dying of exhaustion,” “I got sick of Consul cigarettes which are menthol and sweet,” “It so happens that I am very tired” (476-478). It almost seems as if the narrator forced herself to inform us about her mood, as if this message was an integral part of the report – part and parcel to the process of deconstructing Sveglia. At other times, the narrator switches from the third-person narration into a second-person form of address, thus violating the report structure and equipping it with dialogue: “See you never, Sveglia,” “You already killed a part of me,” “Sveglia, when will you finally leave me in peace?” (478-479).

Finally, the fragments related to metanarrative are observed at the beginning and toward the end of the story: “I’ll say up front what I have to say and without literature,” “This is a report,” “It seems to me that I will write about the electronic thing without ever seeing it,” “Now I am going to tell a story,” “I was hoping to reach page 9 on the typewriter,” “I want to send this report to Senhor magazine and I want them to pay me very well,” “I think I’ll conclude this report that is essential for explaining the energetic phenomena of matter” (471, 478). As we can see, the what is ever paired with the how. In fact, I contend that the how predominates in “O relatório.” The reader is left with an incomplete account of the subject matter of the report, having only a detailed description of the mood and the psychological state of the reporter at his or her disposal.

The metanarrative excerpts are nevertheless essential because they represent the narrator’s attitude toward Sveglia and the impact of the object on the future of her writing career.
Now I would like to be able to write a story: a short story or a novel or a transmission. What will be my future step in literature? I suspect I won’t write anymore. But it’s true that at other times I have suspected this yet still I wrote. What, however, must I write, my God? Was I contaminated by the mathematics of Sveglia and will I only be able to write reports? (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 479).

Although the narrator-writer feels resentment toward Sveglia, the inexhaustibility of this Object-Thing on the verge of the animate world guarantees the narrator’s survival as a writer. Indeed, Sveglia is a proof that the narrator is not able to write formal accounts containing a linear sequence of events. In this way, Sveglia does not represent death, but life characterized by the writer’s continuous creation. The writer’s survival lies in her deliberately outlined impossibility to describe the subject matter of the report. The potential to explain what Sveglia is and backed up by a plethora of images does not guarantee the possibility of exhausting the topic precisely because the writer refuses to do so: “What I’m writing you is ‘this.’ It won’t stop: it goes on” (Lispector *Água viva* 88).

Sveglia, then, represents Lispector’s unattainable journey to encounter a word that will not deplete the concept or the non-word. Although the writer gives us a number of potential meanings of Sveglia, it still symbolizes continuity, because these ideas are mere instances, and are therefore not final or complete. Lispector also blurs the lines between day and night, sleep and awakening, dream and reality, thus allowing for the emergence of a limbo between the two worlds. This intermediate space represented by Sveglia is significant, because it is where writing precisely takes place: “And I work while I sleep: because that is when I move inside the mystery” (*Água viva* 59). Sveglia is, then, the impossible. Sveglia is Clarice Lispector’s writing.
All four stories analyzed in the second and third chapters highlight Lispector’s profound interest in the how of the writing process, demonstrating her willingness to experiment with literary frames: mixing different types of narrative, registers, verbal structures, literary devices, playing with iconicity of the text. All stories border on sleep and wakefulness, dream and reality, navigating the reader towards the mediate space where the creation process occurs. They all stress the essential aspect of Lispector’s poetics which is related to the unfinished, the fragmentary, the instant. They also expose paradoxes regarding Lispector’s writing such as the impossibility of writing because the perfect analogy between the word and the non-word can never be achieved. And yet, writing guarantees survival of the author, so she has to “keep talking,” as we read in “O ovo.” Therefore, the writer is unable to “speak as little as possible” and must use words. In order not to exhaust the idea she is writing about, the author must remain distracted while creating. But how can there be room for distraction if we are dealing with a structured process and a carefully crafted piece of writing? These are only a few ideas Lispector touches upon in the analyzed four stories, and certainly the discussion remains unfinished.
CHAPTER 4

CLARICE LISPECTOR: THE TRANSLATOR, THE TRANSLATED, AND THE TO-BE-TRANSLATED

“Transcribe: From the Latin prefix trans + scribere.

1. To write something anew and fully, as with score of music for a new instrument. 2. To convert a written work in such a way that it alters the expectations of others and/or oneself, often requiring the abandonment of such expectations entirely.

See also: transform, transgress, translate.”

/Idra Novey Ways to Disappear/

Clarice Lispector on Being Translated and on Translation

In an interview with the Brazilian writer Jorge Amado (1912 – 2001), whose works have been translated into nearly fifty languages, Clarice Lispector asked her famous guest: “Do you usually read the translations of your books?” Immediately, she appended her own opinion to the question: “Because, for example, I never read them [the translations of my books], in order to spare myself the anger” (Lispector De corpo inteiro 13). Amado’s answer “I prefer translations in a language I don’t read. In others you discover mistakes and feel upset” turned out to reflect
Lispector’s own opinion on the matter: “Exactly: I was pleased with two of my translated books” (Lispector *De corpo inteiro* 13).

The translations Lispector mentioned were into German, a language she neither spoke nor read, and that is why “a coisa ficou aliviadoramente” (“it was alleviatory”) and no potentially unpleasant reading experience ever took place (Lispector *Outros escritos* 117). “Ignorance is bliss,” one can say. However, when her fourth novel, *A maçã no escuro* (1961), was published in 1967 in an English translation (*The Apple in the Dark*, translated by Gregory Rabassa), she decided to familiarize herself with the “foreign” version of her book, and see how her literary offspring written in her beloved and “painful” language manifested itself in a different tongue. In the end, Lispector applauded Rabassa’s efforts, but her reading experience was negatively affected by two factors: first, her reluctance to reread her own works, and second, her surprise at the translator’s conclusion that she was an even more difficult writer to translate than João Guimarães Rosa. According to Rabassa, the syntax she used throughout her works was to blame for the challenge.

Indeed, Rabassa comments on Lispector’s writing with a focus on syntax in the introduction to his translation of the novel, and echoes Antonio Candido’s words about Lispector and her efforts to stretch the Portuguese language to the limits it had not seen before. Nonetheless, the translator does not solely focus on Lispector’s grammar, but lists it as one of the elements, along with Nélida Piñon’s rich vocabulary and Guimarães Rosa’s bold recreation of myths, that comprise “the stylistic basis of all good contemporary Brazilian literature”:

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95 The original text in Portuguese: “– Você costuma ler as traduções que fazem de seus livros? Porque eu, por exemplo, jamais leio, para me poupar a raiva. – Prefiro as traduções em língua que não posso ler. Nas outras você descobre erros e se chateia. É assim ou não com você – Exatamente assim: fiquei contente com dois de meus livros traduzidos” (Lispector *De corpo inteiro* 13).
It is precisely in their styles of presentation that the three writers diverge:
Guimarães Rosa using the primitive resources of the language for 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 without
falling into archaisms or other such absurdities; 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” xii)

It seems, then, that Lispector’s observation was somewhat hasty. Yet it is difficult to
deny that her writing is a challenge for translators, and in this chapter I will elaborate on this
issue, as well as on the presence of translation in Lispector’s professional work.

Although Lispector was not entirely on the same page with Rabassa regarding The Apple
in the Dark and her writing, she and her translator had a few things in common: they were both
translators, and both did not like to read the books before translating them. For Lispector, the
reason was related to the translator being first and foremost a reader, and to her curiosity about
what happens next in the book. Reading the entire book prior to translating it in a different
language would otherwise turn translation into an obligation.96 Rabassa’s explanation was
similar, because he wanted to “maintain suspense” and “keep an open mind” (Hoh).

Lispector, in fact, was well familiar with the challenges translation might pose. Teresa
Montero affirms that Clarice’s career as a translator developed after she had come back to Brazil
for good, that is, in June 1959 (Outros escritos 113). After attending English classes while still in
Brazil, and having spent six months in Torquay, UK, and seven years in Washington DC,
Lispector had a good command of the English language. She also spoke French and some

96 The original text in Portuguese: “É frase por frase, porque você é levada pela curiosidade para saber o que vem
depois, e o tempo passa. Enquanto que, se você leu, sabe tudo, é um dever” (Lispector Outros escritos 114).
Spanish. Motivated by her friend Tati de Moraes – a translator, journalist and Brazilian film critic – and by her own financial struggles as a divorced woman and mother of two, Lispector decided to “venture into some translations” (“arriscar algumas traduções”) (Outros escritos 113).

Lispector stuck with this “risky” profession until the end, and, as Montero states, in the 1970s, she would translate as many as three books per year (Outros escritos 113). She was also busy adapting classic works for juvenile audiences: Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray [O retrato de Dorian Gray], Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories, and Jules Verne’s The Mysterious Island [A ilha misteriosa]. As for other classic authors, Lispector translated a collection of short stories Three Blind Mice [Três ratinhos cegos] and a detective fiction classic Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case [Cai o pano: o último caso de Poirot] by Agatha Christie. Together with Tati de Moraes, Lispector translated the following plays: Federico García Lorca’s La casa de Bernarda Alba [A casa de Bernarda Alba], Lilian Hellman’s The Little Foxes [As pequenas raposas], and Henrik Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler (Outros escritos 113). The last work won her and Moraes “the best translation of the year” award in 1966, granted by the Association of Theatre Critics of São Paulo (APCT – Associação Paulista de Críticos de Teatro).

Her translation experience resulted in a chronicle titled “Traduzir procurando não trair” [To Translate but Not to Betray], which was published in the magazine Joia in March 1968. It was the only piece she ever wrote devoted to translation. The chronicle talks about Lispector’s and Moraes’s process of translating Hellman’s and Chekhov’s plays, and also includes Lispector’s opinion on Rabassa’s translation of A maçã no escuro.

Lispector’s observations on translation demonstrate that she was interested in the process, and that she was familiar with the problems of translation implied by the well-known Italian adage “Traduttore, traditore” (“translator, traitor”). She was also concerned with the notion of
fidelity toward the author, and emphasized the importance of the auditory aspect of the translated words:

First, when translating, you may run the risk of never stopping: the more you revise, the more you need to meddle with and redo the dialogues. Not to mention the necessity to stay faithful to the author’s text, while, at the same time, there is the Portuguese language, which does not translate certain typical American expressions smoothly. This requires a more liberal adaptation. And what about the wearisome reading aloud of the play, so that we can feel how the dialogues sound? Those have to be colloquial: according to the circumstances, at times more or less ceremonial, and sometimes more or less relaxed. 97 (Outros escritos 115)

The sound of words is essential in a translation because, as Lispector claims, every character has their own, peculiar intonation, and this must be reflected in the rewritten work by means of a domestic counterpart of the tone and register. Since she had been surrounded by plenty of American characters while working on the translation, she started pronouncing Portuguese words in a singing manner, “exactly like an American speaking Portuguese.” Although her friend and co-translator Tati de Moraes complained about her aspirations to demonstrate her “inner actress,” Lispector did not disagree with her friend, and came to a conclusion that established a close link between an actor and a writer: “I think that every writer is an actor by nature. First, he represents in an in-depth manner his own role. A writer is a person who gets very tired, and who finishes with a little bit of nausea of himself, since he is forced to

97 The original text in Portuguese: “Primeiro, traduzir pode correr o risco de não parar nunca: quanto mais você revê, mais se tem que mexer e remexer nos diálogos. Sem falar na necessária fidelidade ao texto do autor, enquanto ao mesmo tempo há a língua portuguesa que não traduz facilmente certas expressões americanas típicas, o que exige uma adaptação mais livre. E a exaustiva leitura de peça em voz alta para podermos sentir como soam os diálogos? Estes têm que ser coloquiais: de acordo com as circunstâncias, ora mais ou menos cerimoniosos, ora mais ou menos relaxados” (Lispector Outros escritos 115).
stay in an intimate contact with his own self for a prolonged amount of time” (Outros escritos 116).  

Lispector’s preoccupation with the auditory aspect of the play proves, as André Luís Gomes rightly points out, her familiarity with theatrical techniques that are useful in writing a good play (43). Indeed, watching a play is a significant experience, distinct from reading a book in the silence of one’s room, precisely because of the attention given to factors such as sound, voice, tone, and the need to emphasize their variability. The only difference between an actor and a writer is that the former is expected to perform distinct roles throughout their career, while the latter always re-enters the same door of “one’s own self” and the deep contents of one’s psyche, in order to represent reality through a subjective lens. This is where, if we follow Lispector’s lead, the writer’s “nausea” comes from.

The analogies involving writers, translators, and actors are not uncommon. Lispector’s observation is not an isolated one. Willard Trask (1900-1980), a major figure in the field of translation in the U.S., also suggested the analogy between the translator and the actor. Initially he had been asked whether “the impulse” to engage in translation should be considered equivalent to the stimulus “of someone who wants to write a novel” (Honig 13). Trask objected, and compared translating a novel to “a technical stunt,” since a translator is not aiming “to express oneself” like the writer is (Honig 13). The translator and the actor, however, both “take something of somebody else’s and put it over as if it were their own. (...) So in addition to the

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98 The original text in Portuguese: “Como se não bastasse, cada personagem tem uma “entonação” própria e para isso precisamos das palavras e do tom apropriados. Por falar em entonação, aconteceu-me uma coisa desagradável, enquanto durou a tradução. De tanto lidar com personagens americanos, “peguei” uma entonação inteiramente americana nas inflexões da voz. Passei a cantar as palavras, exatamente como um americano que fala português. Queixei-me a Tati, pois já estava enjoada de me ouvir, e ela respondeu com a maior ironia: “Quem manda você ser uma atriz inata”. Mas acho que todo escritor é um ator inato. Em primeiro lugar ele representa profundamente o papel de si mesmo. Escritor é uma pessoa que se cansa muito, e que termina com um pouco de náusea de si, já que o contato íntimo consigo próprio é por força prolongado demais” (Outros escritos 115-116).
technical stunt, there is a psychological workout, which translation involves: something like being on stage” (Honig 13-14).

It is possible to become fatigued by identifying oneself with one of the characters of the work being translated. Such was the case with Lispector’s translation of Anton Chekhov’s well-known play *The Seagull* (1895), which in Portuguese was translated into *A gaivota*.

Unfortunately, the translation by Lispector and Moraes got lost due to, as the writer put it, “external motives,” but the translation process as seen from Lispector’s perspective was included in her chronicle “Traduzir procurando não trair.”

Lispector contends that when Moraes suggested that they translate one of Chekhov’s classics, she herself was not in her best mental health. Moraes started asking a few friends of Lispector’s whether translating a text where the protagonist resembled the writer so much would be appropriate, bearing in mind her depression. The character in question was Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplyev, an aspiring writer seeking new forms of expression, suffering from anxiety, and dealing with the pain of unrequited love toward Nina Mikhailovna Zarechnaya.

In the end, both Lispector and Moraes decided to continue with the translation because it would be beneficial for Lispector to simply keep on working, and to see her own self in the play “like in a mirror” (*Outros escritos* 116). The third benefit Lispector mentions borders on irony: “that it would be good for me to deal with a character whose tragic sense of life leads him to despair” (*Outros escritos* 116).99 Nevertheless, the translation was finished with “a tremendous effort” on Lispector’s part because, as she affirms in the chronicle, it seemed as though she was

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99 The original text in Portuguese: “Mas – quando nos caiu em mãos uma peça de Tchecov? Veio numa fase em que eu estava meio deprimida. Depois soube que Tati andou consultando amigos meus para saber se me convinha lidar com o personagem principal, já que este se parecia demais comigo. A conclusão era que eu trabalhasse de qualquer maneira porque me faria bem agir, e porque seria bom eu ver, como num espelho, a minha própria fisionomia. Que me faria bem lidar com um personagem cujo senso trágico da vida termina levando-o ao desespero. Traduzimos Tchecov, eu com um esforço tremendo, pois me parecia estar me descrevendo” (*Outros escritos* 116).
describing herself. In this way, Treplyev was a means through which Lispector would spend a
great amount of time “in an intimate contact with her own self,” just as a writer does. Bella Josef
describes her literary contribution as a writer through the same prism: “Clarice Lispector made a
journey inside herself to surprise the human condition in its crucial instance and to reveal in all
its dimensions the solitude of being” (“La recuperación de la palabra poética” 257).100

Apart from working as a translator, Lispector was sometimes forced to perform the role
of an editor of the translations of her own texts. This was the case with the translation of her
debut novel Perto do coração selvagem (1943) into French, eventually published in 1954 in
Paris. Lispector was living in Washington D.C. at that time, her last foreign residence as a
diplomat’s wife. She had received what was the final version of the French translation and found
it rife with errors. Lispector therefore decided to write a letter to the publisher denouncing the
mistakes, and stating that the translation was “scandalously poor.” She described the errors in
great detail, also in French, and the entire revision took her around ten days to complete.

In a letter to her sisters, dated May 10, 1954, Clarice vented her anger and gave examples
of the flaws, most of them mistranslations, which demonstrated the translator’s poor knowledge
of the Portuguese language, and – as Lispector herself concluded – an overreliance on Spanish.
The instances of poor word choice include the phrase “Fiquei tonta, disse ela,” which in English
means “I felt dizzy, she said” but in French it became “I felt stupid, she said.” Another
mistranslation is related to the colloquial word “porcaria” meaning “dirt,” “mess” or “rubbish” in
English, which was translated, to Lispector’s discontent, into “excrement” in French, regardless
of the context of the phrase (Minhas queridas 254). Apart from mistranslations, the text also
contained what Clarice ironically called “funny” (“engraçados”), examples of the French

100 Translation mine. The original text in Spanish: “Clarice Lispector realizó un viaje dentro de sí misma para
sorprender la condición humana en un instante crucial y revelar la soledad del ser en todas sus dimensiones” (Josef
“La recuperación de la palabra poética” 257).
translator’s *licentia poetica*. For instance, the original’s “criada,” that is, “maid” in English, became “black maid” in French, although the book did not specify the maid’s skin color (*Minhas queridas* 254-255).

Lispector’s dissatisfaction with the translation was so intense that she wanted to forget about the whole experience and wished that the novel had never been translated. Unfortunately, since the book was ready to be published, she doubted that her letter would contribute at all to improving the quality of the translation. This disturbing event may have been one reason why Lispector respected fidelity to the author’s text when she herself became a translator.

Due to the complexity of Lispector’s oeuvre, I believe that a number of translators of her works would actually appreciate her opinion on the many translations into English, French or Spanish which have appeared since her death. Even though Lispector did not speak any Polish, I would have loved, as a beginning translator, to be able to consult with her about my translations.

In her novel *Ways to Disappear* (2016), Idra Novey (the author of the most recent translation of Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.* into English) tells a story of an American translator who was fortunate enough to collaborate with a famous Brazilian writer. The protagonist, Emma, is a translator and a PhD student from the University of Pittsburgh, while Beatriz Yagoda is a well-known author who disappears one day. Upon hearing the news, Emma immediately flies to Brazil in order to help find the writer, together with Beatriz’s children Raquel and Marcus, and to discover the reasons for her disappearance.

A reader familiar with Lispector’s biography and her text will encounter in Novey’s book an abundance of analogies. First, the fictitious Beatriz is Jewish, has green eyes, is surrounded by an aura of mystery, and prefers solitude to a life full of social interactions – all of which can be said of Lispector. Yagoda dies a sudden death, which may be applicable to Lispector as well, for
although the cause of her death was cancer, it was discovered only two months before she died, and in an already advanced stage. Lispector also suffered a fire accident when she fell asleep with a cigarette in her apartment in Leme, Rio de Janeiro. Both writers were buried on the same Jewish cemetery in Caju, a neighborhood of Rio. Furthermore, Beatriz Yagoda’s works are considered intricate, just like Lispector’s have been. One of her unfinished texts is a recollection of events that led to a murder in the alley, written in five installments. This alludes to Lispector’s story “A quinta história,” analyzed in the previous chapter of this thesis, which also constitutes one story retold in five different ways.101

The translator in *Ways to Disappear* often serves as a literary critic who interprets Yagoda’s texts for the reader, in order to provide us with the origins of her fascination with the writer. In addition, by talking about her work as a translator, its beauties and its risks, Emma turns the novel into a reflection on the process of translation itself. Often the observations take place along with a dynamic action, just like when Emma tries to hide Marcus’s clothes and backpack before her fiancé enters her room, and ponders about “domestication,” a practice frequently encountered in translation:

A translator could justify moving around the objects in a sentence if it made it easier for her audience to grasp what was going on. She could even change an object into something more familiar to the reader to avoid baffling him with

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101 The motif of multiple versions of a crime, as in the cases of “A quinta história” and *Ways to Disappear*, had already been used earlier, by the Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (1982-1927), considered “one of the country’s foremost stylist” and “a born short story writer” (Akutagawa xxii). In a short story written in 1921 titled “In a Bamboo Grove” (also translated as “In a Grove”), Akutagawa presents seven versions of a murder committed on a man and – supposedly – on his wife, too. The eyewitnesses of the incident include a travelling priest, a policeman, the alleged murderer, but also the wife and her dead husband’s spirit. Every subsequent story provides more details about the crime, but it also supplies elements that contradict each other in other versions. The reader is left with multiple pieces to arrange in a coherent story, or rather with a bunch of subjective accounts each aspiring to be the objective truth. The last version does not, however, provide the answer to what really happened, and so the text, just like “A quinta história,” remains open. The story was turned into a film a few times, the first time in 1950 by Akira Kurosawa, who used another famous story by Akutagawa, “Rashōmon,” to inspire the setting of the scenes and the film title.
something he wouldn’t understand. It often occurred with food – with a fruit, for example, that the reader wasn’t likely to recognize and therefore whose sweetness he could not imagine. The problem with domesticating things this way, however, was the possible displacement of truth. Emma had made a practice of keeping this dilemma out of mind, of trusting that she was experienced enough now to intuitively know what could be moved and what couldn’t – when the location of an object was, in fact, its meaning. (Novey Ways to Disappear 169-170)

Apart from serving as a comment on translation disguised in a detective novel, Novey’s Ways to Disappear also expresses the unattainable dream of having her questions answered, or of obtaining a seal of approval from one of the most intriguing and demanding contemporary Brazilian writers. I am certain that many translators working with a piece written by a deceased author are subject to the same quandary: the impression of having a limitless spectrum of choices, but also the necessity of faithfully replicating the text, of preserving the author’s message, and of simulating his or her style. The underlying feeling, however, is solitude, marked by a lack of response from the writer: “You can ask a question but you don’t get an answer. The author just stares at you and says nothing to you and you wonder if the best thing to do would be to get up and run out of the room, especially if the work you’re translating is as mystifying as The Passion According to G.H.” (Novey “Translator’s Note” 191). This observation becomes clear once we familiarize ourselves with Novey’s specific comments on her translation of Lispector’s famous novel.

Let the Translators Speak: The Challenges of Translating Clarice Lispector
Many translators struggle with particular pieces of translation, but not all of them voice their concerns in interviews, essays or journal articles. Moreover, it should be noted that not all translators decide to include a preface, an afterword, or a note in their translations. Those who do, however, often provide an insight into the translated writer’s poetics, like Gregory Rabassa or Giovanni Pontiero in the introductions to their renditions of Lispector’s works. Such a technique may be useful for readers who appreciate more context about the writer and a heads-on message pinpointing the essential elements they should be looking for in the text. It also provides us with more information about the translators: they insist on presenting their academic side, proving that their interests go beyond a mere wish to introduce a particular text by a given author. In other words: they provide the reader with reasons for which the writer should find his or her way to the reader by means of translation. Such a perspective from the translator’s part is missing in translations of Lispector into Polish. Apart from general information on her poetics, translator’s prefaces, introductions, or notes containing detailed analyses of her writing in a Polish translation are yet to be written.

There are translators who share the doubts they experienced while translating the book, and often present specific examples of their struggles. This type of translator’s contribution to the edition is particularly useful for readers familiar with both the source and the target language of the translation. I believe that this is precisely the type of audience such translators have in mind when they write a similar note. Readers who want to read the translation because they do not speak the source language may consider such a piece a report on the work done, and perhaps even a statement exposing the translator’s weaknesses. Still, such a note is useful because it brings the translator closer to the reader in that it denies the existence of a perfect translator and of an objectively flawless translation. It also presents a challenge, since whoever comes up with
a better match for the original word or phrase is welcome to voice it in a new translation. In addition, this strategy accounts for the translation as an unfinished work of art: although the piece has been published, the specific questions are yet to be answered.

In her translator’s note to the English version of *A paixão segundo G.H.*, Idra Novey opts for such a strategy and lists the questions she would have asked Lispector: “I would have liked to ask her about her curiously alternating use of “o Deus” (“the God”) and “Deus” (“God”) – how strange she intended that article to sound to the reader” (Novey “Translator’s Note” 191). Another doubt is related to the Portuguese word “preso,” which means “imprisoned,” but its meaning varies depending on the context, and that is why on some occasions she decided to use the word “pinned” to describe “the sensation of being pinned under a rock,” although in Portuguese still the same word “preso” was used (Novey “Translator’s Note” 191). In any case, Novey’s justification still remains open, and she agrees that it would have been best to consult the author: “I wish I could have asked her: was I right to go with “pinned” here, or should I have used “imprisoned” instead, as the lyrical use of repetition is so essential to what makes this novel such a hypnotizing book?” (Novey “Translator’s Note” 192).

In another instance, Novey exposes her struggle with the Portuguese phrase describing an abundance of roaches: they “parecem uma prece,” which in a literal sense means “seem like a prayer.” The literal rendition, however, fails to recreate “the sonic pleasure of the phrase in Portuguese,” and that is why Novey decided to translate it as “they appear a prayer,” in order to, although only partially, draw attention to the importance of the auditory aspect of the phrase. The feeling of incompleteness, still, remained, and the translator had to do what underlies every translation experience, that is, make a choice: “As I couldn’t ask Clarice when to prioritize the
music and when the meaning of this book, I had to trust what I’d come to hear in my head
rereading *G.H.* many times over the past decade” (“Translator’s Note” 192).

It is important to note that Novey’s strategy runs counter to both Rabassa’s and
Lispector’s reluctance to read the entire text prior to translating it. In my translation practice, I
side with Novey and reread the source text many times, especially if I am not satisfied with what
I have produced. What is more, I do not believe it is possible for the translator to pay attention to
the content/message and the particularities of the sounds in the text at the same time – hence the
necessity to revisit the piece a few or even several times in order to detect any “sonic pleasure.”
Those translators who produce translations at their first reading must be very confident of their
talents and skills.

Novey’s struggles only assured her that translating *The Passion* means “gradually,
painstakingly experiencing every word,” which sounds very much like Lispector’s own
experience as a writer: approximating oneself to the word, browsing through its different
meanings, at the same time respecting its boundaries and the fact that the true meaning can never
be reached. It should be noted that Lispector’s approach to writing is not based on inventing new
words. But the result of her way of thinking in combination with the language she uses does
bring about an innovative literary mixture.

Ronald W. Sousa, the translator of an earlier version of *The Passion According to G.H.*, published in 1988, rightly points out in the introduction to the translation Lispector’s disbelief in
language as a tool for communication and representation of reality “unless it is pushed to its
limits and thereby made to reveal what, in its structuring as a container, it seeks to hide” (Sousa
viii). He refers to Lispector’s style applied in *A paixão* as consisting of “a series of nontraditional
language uses,” which include: “inconsistencies in punctuation practice; juxtaposition of
colloquial phrases, and phrases that are completely non-Portuguese; creation of fictitious
allusions; reuse of apparently important terms with slightly changed signification, seemingly to
avoid creation of consistent terminology” (Sousa viii). Although his potential goal is to describe
the intricacies of the author’s unique style, his explanation at times sounds like an accusation.
Sousa admits, though, that Lispector’s choices were deliberate, in her use of “wholesale, but not
therefore meaningless, violations of traditional grammar and syntax, and of the concepts of
association and exclusion that underlie them; and employment of complex verbal-conceptual
ambiguities” (Sousa viii).

Although I do not entirely approve of Sousa’s accusative tone, I do understand his
concern for making the translated text – in this case an especially challenging one – accessible
for the readers: “As a translator preparing this singular text for a reading public unable to go to
the original, I have felt acutely the ways in which traditional expectations have been violated, for
such violation has robbed me of useful ways of structuring my presentation” (Sousa ix). Sousa’s
approach to the novel was therefore based on recreating “the intellectual positions set forth in the
book,” and then on reproducing “such features as style variation and artful use – or violation – or
language norms” (Sousa ix). Such a strategy, however, had its price to pay because, as the
translator confesses, in order to pursue his plan, he has “often made the translated text more
conventional than the original,” resorted to paraphrasing on a frequent basis where “no single
term was available in English,” and employed “philosophical terminology where the original
uses more ambiguous, and therefore more powerful, formulations” (Sousa ix).

His approach is based on “domesticating” the text, that is, on making it as clear and as
culturally accessible to the reader as possible and, as such, does not focus on recreating the
equivocality embedded in the original story. That is the choice he made and justified. What, then,
is the outcome of Sousa’s technique? The translator describes the gap between the original and the translation as follows: “The result 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 that original” (Sousa ix).

We can defend Sousa by quoting Robert Frost’s definition of poetry, and accept the fact that translation always results in a loss of the original: “I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation” (Brown et al 200). And yet, even this valid argument does not support Sousa’s decision to transform Lispector’s text to suit readers’ needs. First, he was not writing an adaptation of the book for younger readers, for example. Second, the ambiguity and idiosyncrasy is Lispector; it is her hallmark and her domain.

Although I can relate to the translation challenges outlined by Sousa, I am not convinced by his final point: “I invite the reader to imagine a Portuguese text that transmits a much greater sense of potential language chaos than does the translation” (Sousa ix). His request is not legitimate because readers unfamiliar with Portuguese will not be able to engage in such a task, and it will most probably not make a difference whether they “imagine” the text in Portuguese or in any other language that they neither read nor speak. Perhaps inviting readers to think about a text in their native language they find intellectually challenging and therefore difficult to rewrite in a different language, would result in a more effective analogy.

Tace Hedrick also criticizes the overreliance on conventionality or accessibility for the reader. In her essay “Mãe é para isso: Gender, Writing, and English Language Translation in Clarice Lispector,” she mentions Giovanni Pontiero’s omission of the word “o nada” (“nothingness”) in his rewriting of The Hour of the Star, published in 1992.¹⁰² The original

¹⁰² The concept of translation as “rewriting” was put forward by the Belgian translation theorist André Lefevere (1945-1996). By rewriting a literary text, Lefevere means making the text suitable for a specific audience: adapting
fragment reads as follows: “Eu medito sem palavras e sobre o nada. O que me atrapalha a vida é escrever” (Lispector *A hora da estrela* 7, my emphasis). Pontiero proposed the following translation: “I meditate without words or themes. What troubles my existence is writing” (*The Hour of the Star* trans. Pontiero 8, my emphasis). Interestingly, the most recent rendition of the novel does not leave “o nada” out, although the proposed version is still questionable: “I meditate wordlessly and upon the nothing. What trips up my life is writing” (*The Hour of the Star* trans. Moser xiv, my emphasis).

According to Hedrick, “o nada” is a recurrent motif in Lispector’s writing repeated “as silence, nakedness, the neutral, or tastelessness, as in the alinguistic but gravid “tastelessness” of the cockroach in *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964)” (58). In addition, “nothingness,” which is how she translates Lispector’s “o nada,” constitutes what lies “in between the lines,” and is therefore related to the process of writing, which, for Lispector, was “a bait for this nothingness” and “for the silence of the material world” a silence she searches for most in her depictions of the female body” (Hedrick 58). Since Hedrick is particularly interested in a gender-oriented perspective, for her “nothingness” also refers to “silence she [Lispector] searches for most in her depictions of the female body” (Hedrick 58).

In this way, Pontiero’s seeming conventional approach toward the text is actually a mistranslation and a failure to highlight Lispector’s wish to “speak as little as possible.” Alexis the poetics and the language of the text for a foreign audience to understand, hence the relationship between rewriting and translation. Another important factor in rewriting is the ideological component, because by adapting the text, the communicated ideology may also alter: “All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature are exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live” (Lefevere *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 1992: vii). I shall use Lefevere’s concept of rewriting as a synonym for “translation.”
Levitin, translator of *Soulstorm* (1989), draws attention to Lispector’s space in-between-the-lines in his afterword: “Lispector feels that a human truth that cannot be stated can be conveyed by non-words, between the lines. While the written line presents daily life struggles in vain for truth through reason, the real discovery, love, rises like a great old bass through the empty spaces” (Levitin “Afterword” 173).

To “meditate about nothingness” is much more powerful and ambiguous than to “meditate without themes” or even “to meditate about the nothing.” By removing the “bait” from readers, the translator deprives them of perceiving the key to Lispector’s poetics. Elena Losada Soler, translator of Lispector’s works into Spanish, affirms that it is not the word that matters for the writer and in her texts, but what it brings about: “Lo que importa no es la palabra, sino lo que puede convocar” (Losada Soler 13). I believe that for Lispector the word is as important as what it evokes; it is her principal tool of communication with the reader and without it she is not able to transmit neither clarity nor ambiguity. Without the *word* there is no approximation to the *non-word*.

I have mentioned the cases of Ronald W. Sousa and Giovanni Pontiero not to expose their erroneous decisions but to prove that some translation choices require further scrutiny. When I translate Lispector, I often ask myself whether a given word or phrase will be understood by the Polish reader – perhaps too often. A friend of mine, a fellow translator, once told me: “Don’t be afraid to preserve this strangeness of hers.” He has a point.

I choose to elaborate on this “strangeness” of Clarice Lispector by quoting Losada Soler’s perceptive and visual description of translating Lispector: “To translate Clarice Lispector is to specifically deal with something that manifests both tough resistance and fragility. Clarice’s
word is made of crystal – it is fragile and hard” (Losada Soler 12).\textsuperscript{103} Regardless of how careful the translator is, she will never be able to reconstruct the crystal-like world in the other language. This impossibility leaves her dissatisfied: “To translate her is to walk through a mirror – one of the many we come across in her works; those mirrors that construct and destroy women’s identities – and come back the other side with nothing but a sad reflection” (Losada Soler 12).\textsuperscript{104} The feeling of incompleteness and sadness is preceded by a prolonged struggle in the name of Lispector’s word:

Lispector’s “strange” texts always place the word on the verge of the abyss of ineffability. Ungrammatical at times and full of syntactical and conceptual anacolutha, they become involved in the translator’s own language. They impose on the translator a constant struggle to remain faithful without crossing the threshold and making the text incomprehensible in the target language.\textsuperscript{105} (Losada Soler 12-13).

Translating Lispector involves a love-and-hate relationship between the translator and the text. The translator’s love for the text is matched with discontent toward the translated piece, marked by the ever-present feeling of incompleteness, imperfection, and possible betrayal of the author. Losada Soler’s preoccupation is a manifestation of a two-dimensional fidelity:

\textsuperscript{103} Translation mine. The original quote in Spanish: “Traducir a Clarice Lispector, en especial, es tratar con algo que ofrece una dura resistencia, pero que a la vez es tan frágil que puede quebrarse. La palabra de Clarice es de cristal, frágil y dura” (Losada Soler 12).

\textsuperscript{104} Translation mine. The original quote in Spanish: “Traducirla es atravesar un espejo – uno de los muchos que encontramos en sus obras, esos espejos que construyen y destruyen las identidades de las mujeres – y volver del otro lado con algo que solo será un triste reflejo” (Losada Soler 12).

\textsuperscript{105} Translation mine. The original quote in Spanish: “Los textos ‘extraños’ de Lispector, que sitúan a la palabra siempre al borde del abismo de la inefabilidad, a veces agramaticales, llenos de anacolutos sintácticos y conceptuales, se entranan en el propio lenguaje del traductor y le imponen una lucha constante para mantener el máximo posible de fidelidad sin cruzar el umbral que haría incomprensible el texto en la lengua del destino” (Losada Soler 12-13).
faithfulness to the author’s words, and, at the same time, an attempt to recreate her poetics in the
target language, involving potential alterations on the level of the translated text.

Yet the necessity to continue with the quest persists in many translators. The awareness
of never being able to reach perfection is liberating, and the striving does not cease. What is
more, some translators admit not to have entirely comprehended a text they were translating. The
translator should be the one performing the closest of close readings and, as such, is expected to
have understood the text in its detail. Yet, it is difficult to assess, based on the translation, to
what extent the translator truly understood the text. Moreover, whether the translator
comprehended the text or not is not necessarily telling of his or her superior or inferior abilities
to translate it.

Katrina Dodson, the author of the 2015 translation of most of Lispector’s short stories,
affirms that she did not understand all parts of the story “O ovo e a galinha.” In an interview for
the literary journal *Asymptote*, Dodson draws attention to Lispector’s own reluctance to being
comprehended: “I don’t think she [Clarice Lispector] wants to be completely understood, and she
wouldn’t have understood herself” (Bradshaw). In fact, in the same story, the writer confirms her
observation, and Dodson quotes it to support her own claim: “Since it is impossible to
understand, I know that if I understand it this is because I am making an error. Understanding is
the proof of making an error” (Lispector *The Complete Stories* 277).

I do not read Dodson’s words as a permission to translate carelessly, but rather as a
statement allowing the translator to embrace the text as it is, with its secrets and what is in-
between-the-lines, without feeling overwhelmed by its enigma. Practice is certainly the best way
to learn how to deal with similar struggles, but familiarizing oneself with theory on translation
may also help overcome a number of translation problems.
Theoretical Approaches to Translating Clarice Lispector

Translation has been defined by many theorists who are motivated to develop theories about the field, the translator’s tasks, their strategies, and the characteristics of a “good” translation. The abundance of conflicting theoretical frameworks only confirms that a manual titled “what is a perfect translation” does not exist. Many scholars have ventured, however, into a definition of a “good” translation, which means a translation they would like to read or produce. As such, some theories contradict each other, while others can be grouped according to the features they have in common.

Practicing and professional translators are not expected to know or be fluent in translation theory. Clarice Lispector did not have a scholarly background in translation theory, but still she translated and reflected on the challenges she encountered in her work. Nevertheless, I believe that familiarizing oneself with different theoretical approaches helps not only identify common translation problems, but also presents translators with various theories they can refer to, offering coping strategies.

If we ask the question “How should one translate a text?”, the potential answers will be “as literally as possible” or “with some degree of freedom” toward the target piece, or a combination of both. In any case, fidelity to the author’s work is one major dimension of the problem, and Lispector knew that, too. Many theorists in the field of Translation Studies have been busy describing those two approaches to translation, providing different terminology explaining the concepts.

In his essay “On the Different Methods of Translating” (1815), Friedrich Schleiermacher distinguishes between two paths a translator can choose. Both possibilities take into account the
author and the reader, but, as the scholar says, they are not to be mixed under any circumstances: “Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him” (Schleiermacher 49).

The first approach presupposes the translator’s effort to stress the foreignness of the piece, so that the reader has a similar reading experience to the translator’s – the only exception being the translator’s knowledge of the author’s language, which must serve as a means of communication between the author and the reader. The second part of the theory opts for a target text that would be most accessible for the reader and most relevant to their culture and language.

Schleiermacher himself would take the first path, and the reason for his choice, according to Susan Bernofsky, an American scholar and translator of German-language literature, stems from the fact that “most translations into German during most of the 18th century tended to be what we would now call domesticating paraphrases, texts that communicated plot line and story but paid little attention to the stylistic characteristics of the original text and tended to erase all sense of cultural difference” (Bernofsky). Schleiermacher, therefore, advocated translation as a means of enriching the vocabulary, or language in general, and literature of the culture into which a particular foreign text is inserted. Later, in the twentieth century, the French philosopher Antoine Berman would express similar views on the impact of translation on the target culture in his essay titled “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign.”

Schleiermacher’s theory, although idealistic, did not favor “literal” translation at all costs. This strategy was endorsed by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), who expressed his views in the introduction to his translation of Alexander Pushkin’s nineteenth-century novel in verse Eugene Onegin.
After explaining the innovative structure of Pushkin’s stanzas, Nabokov, who spent over ten years working on the translation, presents a short description of the key elements of Russian poetry in juxtaposition to their English counterparts. The purpose of the list is to introduce the reader to the infinite intricacies of the Russian language, which are: a greater number of rhymes, both masculine and feminine, in Russian than in English; the presence of solely single-stressed words in Russian as opposed to English words containing both primary and secondary stress; and a greater number of polysyllabic words in Russian than in English (Nabokov “Onegin in English” 118). Nabokov then proceeds to lay out the complexities of some of Pushkin’s stanzas in order to make future translators aware of those subtleties (123).

Nabokov’s detailed presentation of the problem has one objective, namely, to prove that it is impossible to recreate Eugene Onegin’s rhyme in English translation. And yet, it is possible to translate it “with reasonable accuracy” by making certain alterations in the form, using iambic dimeter or iambic pentameter” (Nabokov 127). More important than the conclusions are Nabokov’s arguments endorsing “literalism,” that is, “absolute accuracy.” Yet what if this total accuracy results in an awkward or stylistically incorrect sentence? Nabokov explains his motives using the following phrase by Pushkin, and puts the blame on the author of the original, that is, on Pushkin himself: “If such accuracy sometimes results in the strange allegoric scene suggested by the phrase ‘the letter has killed the spirit,’ only one reason can be imagined: there must have been something wrong either with the original letter or with the original spirit, and this is not really a translator’s concern” (125).

Nabokov is bold in his accusations. He also appears confident in the efficacy of his solution to the matter of potential “awkwardness” of a translation: footnotes. A footnote or two? Hardly: “I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the
top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity” (127).

Apart from “the absolutely literal sense, with no emasculation and no padding,” Nabokov’s strategy has an additional meaning, that is, the attention given to the translator. If we use Lawrence Venuti’s words, we can say that the Russian-born writer’s theory challenges the “translator’s invisibility.” Although I do not entirely agree with Nabokov’s attitude, I do value his efforts to stress the importance of the translator, who is often perceived merely as a technician.

Nabokov’s dedication to the text itself, albeit radical, is an essential element in his striving for “absolute literacy”: “The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text” (125). Despite his controversial approach toward translation, Nabokov’s theory is important when talking about fidelity to the source text. Let us not forget that the very concept of fidelity was also on Lispector’s mind when she herself worked as a translator.

Eugene Nida (1914-2011), like Schleiermacher, saw translation as a two-way path. The findings of the American linguist were essential for the formation of the modern discipline of Translation Studies. Interested in Bible translation, Nida makes a distinction between “formal” and “dynamic” equivalence in translation. The first type of equivalence “focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content” (Nida “Principles of Correspondence” 156). Nida explains that “in such a translation one is concerned with such correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to concept. Viewed from this formal orientation, one is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the
different elements in the source language” (156). In addition, Nida argues, translations oriented toward formal equivalence may be supplemented with whatever footnotes or commentaries may be necessary to explain a potential word or phrase for which no direct equivalent in the target language is known. This sounds very much like Nabokov and his “copious footnotes.”

“Dynamic equivalence,” on the other hand, presupposes a translation that “aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message” (Nida 156). The focus is not on getting the message across in a way that does not distort the original piece, but on “the relationship between receptor and message,” which is dynamic, and “should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message” (Nida 156). Nida seems to lean toward this type of approach, and agrees with Leonard Forster’s definition of a good translation as “one which fulfills the same purpose in the new language as the original did in the language in which it was written” (Forster 6). If we think of an example drawn from this thesis, we can say that reading Lispector in English, then, should cause an effect on the English-speaking readers that would correspond to the impact her original texts made on the implied Portuguese-speaking readership.

Another interesting point about Nida’s famous essay is his adherence to form when translating poetry. The American scholar affirms that translating not only the content of the poem, but also its “rhythm, meter, assonance, etc. is essential to communicating the spirit of the message to the audience” (Nida 158). His view clearly stands in contradiction to Nabokov’s disbelief in a successful translation of Onegin in verse.
Nida’s approach towards “natural” translations based on “dynamic equivalence” is questioned by the contemporary American translator and theoretician Lawrence Venuti. In his book *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995), the scholar presents a survey of approaches toward translation, and focuses on the contemporary strategy in the Anglophone world interested in the fluency of translation: “[u]nder the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work ‘invisible,’ producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems ‘natural,’ i.e., not translated” (Venuti 5). The theoretician also criticizes the feedback contemporary translations get from reviewers, where common phrases include “the translation is smooth” or “the text reads smoothly”; “an apt translation,” “fluent,” “transparent,” and “a pleasant read” (Venuti 2-3). These are the characteristics of “domestication” in translation, by means of which the source text is naturalized, its author brought closer to the receptor – using Schleiermacher’s terms – and the reader left in peace.

Venuti sees in domestication a threat to the foreign cultures the source text describes because it “masks the manifold conditions of the translated text, its exclusionary impact on foreign cultural values, but also on those at home, eliminating translation strategies that resist transparent discourse, closing off any thinking about cultural and social alternatives that do not favor English social elites” (Venuti 43). Moreover, Venuti argues, domestication erases translators from the picture. It contributes to their “cultural marginality and economic exploitation, their status as seldom recognized” and calls them “poorly paid writers” who are nonetheless “indispensable because of the global domination of Anglo-American culture, of English” (Venuti 17).
An alternative to domestication is “foreignization,” in which the foreignness or the unnaturalness of the source text is highlighted, and where “subjectivity is constituted by cultural and social determinations that are diverse and even conflicting, that mediate any language use, and, that vary with every cultural formation and every historical moment” (Venuti 24). Foreignization is thus a complex strategy aimed at reproducing the source text in the most faithful way possible. It does not endorse “absolute literalism” or total fidelity in translation, but rather takes into account the dynamics between the two worlds in play: of the source and the target text.

In her essay “The ‘death’ of the author and the limits of the translator’s visibility,” Rosemary Arrojo endorses Venuti’s criticism of the notion of invisibility. She affirms that the translator’s “visibility” is an inevitable fact in translation, despite its frequent connotation as “precariousness and the absence of what is unconditionally legitimate” (Arrojo 21). She furthermore pairs the translator’s visibility with the concept of the “death” of the author, which in turn paves the way for the “birth” of the reader (Arrojo 22). As the Brazilian-born translator and critic puts forward, both the author and the reader

are equally condemned to translation, that is, to that incompleteness which subjects authors, translators, interpreters, and readers alike to the interference represented by someone else’s interpretation, to the infinite possibilities of *différance* which are potentially set in motion when a reader approaches a text, be it an original or a translation. (Arrojo 30)

Instead of the strive for “naturalness” and “smoothness” driven by the translator’s fluency in the target language, readers – this includes reviewers and editors – should accept the fact that any transformation in translation is natural, too. Only by recognizing “the translator’s name as
proper and rightful” will the translator’s visibility be freed from “the stigma of impropriety or abuse” (Arrojo 31). Although Arrojo does not openly approve of Venuti’s foreignization, her views do lean toward the tendency to highlight the foreignness of a given text. That is why her and Venuti’s proposals seem to be in line with Antoine Berman’s (1942-1991) theory of the two types of “trial.”^106

For Berman, translation is the “trial of the foreign” and the “trial for the foreign”. In the first case, translation “establishes a relationship between the Self-Same and the Foreign by aiming to open up the foreign work to us in its utter foreignness” (Berman “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” 276). In the second case, “translation is a trial for the Foreign as well, since the foreign work is uprooted from its own language-ground” (Berman 276). In this type of trial, Berman notices a dichotomy of “the most singular power of the translating act,” which consists in revealing “the foreign work’s most original kernel, its most deeply buried, most self-same, but equally the most ‘distant’ from itself” (276). In short, Berman opposes the “naturalization” of the foreignness in the source text, i.e., its domestication, striving for the preservation of what refuses to be tamed by the target language: the capitalized “Foreign.”

Berman goes on to state that some translators decide to make the “distant” in the translated text become closer, clearer, more fluent, and, ultimately, more elegant. As we have said before, translation is a matter of choice, and as such does not prohibit translators from choosing various sides and employing various translation strategies. In his criticism of the method later coined as domestication, Berman provides a list of techniques used by translators,

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and refers to them as “deforming tendencies.” He mentions as many as twelve, among which there are “clarification,” “expansion,” and “the destruction of expressions and idioms” (Berman 280, 284).

“Clarification” occurs when the target text is made clearer, more explicit, and easier to grasp than the original. Berman refers to it as “explicitation,” and claims that it is a common practice among translators. “Clarification,” however, can distort the original in the sense that it “aims to render ‘clear’ what does not wish to be clear in the original” (Berman 281). Translators, then, need to be careful in their choice, and not be tempted by explaining when implying is sufficient. Ronald W. Sousa may have applied this strategy when rendering his translation of Lispector’s *A paixão* more “conventional,” as he admitted, and less ambiguous than the original.

“Expansion” is a strategy frequently accompanying “clarification,” and a common occurrence in translation, since translated texts, as Berman claims, are usually longer than the originals (282). Berman furthermore discusses “quantitative” expansion, that is, augmenting “the gross mass of text” (282). This can be best exemplified by the difference between Portuguese and English: the former is a pro-drop (pronoun dropping) language while the latter requires the presence of a pronoun preceding the verb. However, since some Portuguese verbal tenses are the same in the first and third person singular – for example, regular verbs in the Imperfect tense – they can cause confusion in the reader as to whether the verb refers to the pronoun “I,” “she” or “he.” In such cases, the potential deliberate ambiguity intended by the author can be dismantled in the English translation due to the necessity of stressing the pronoun. When expansion becomes “overtranslation,” as Berman puts forward, it causes the source text “to change from a shapeless plenitude to a shapeless void or hollow” in translation (282).
Celso Fernando Rocha and Diva Cardoso de Camargo identify such approaches in the English translation of Lispector’s collection of short stories *A legião estrangeira* (1964) translated by Giovanni Pontiero. Apart from expansion in the number of words, partially explained in the previous paragraph as “quantitative” augmentation, the authors find examples of “explicitation,” and a tendency to render the target text “less ambiguous” and possibly to ensure “a narrative sequence” that would be “more fluid for the reader” (Rocha and Camargo 120).107 The scholars regard the approach as a domestication – quoting Venuti’s concept – and attribute “the omission of linguistic and cultural differences” to the translator’s decision to make the translation “more transparent and more accessible to English-speaking people” (Rocha and Camargo 120). Although they do not dismiss the translation as poor and they do consider it a result of the translator’s choice, they draw attention to the possible loss of Lispector’s intended ambiguity. Moreover, some uses of explicitation are necessary in order to render a given phrase readable and prevent it from becoming ungrammatical when the original fragment is not. In any case, translators must be careful in their inclination towards explicitness and clarity of the message so as not to lose the ambiguity that is an integral part of the source text.

The goal of the third tendency is also to transform the source text in a way that it is closer to the target culture. Berman’s use of the word “destruction” suggests that the foreignness of an idiom in the source text is nullified, and even refers to such a tendency as “ethnocentrism” and

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107 According to Rocha and Camargo’s investigation, the original volume of *A legião estrangeira* (the critics used the 1991 edition) contains 29,485 words in total, while Pontiero’s translation of *The Foreign Legion* is composed of 33,937 words, which illustrates “quantitative” expansion described by Berman (Rocha and Camargo 114). As for the examples of “explicitation” found in Pontiero’s translation, Rocha and Camargo mention a few examples, such as the following piece from the story “Os desastres de Sofia” [The Misfortunes of Sofia]: “Você é uma menina muito engraçada, você é uma doidinha, dissera ele. *Era como um amor*” (Rocha and Camargo 115, emphasis mine). Pontiero’s version reads “You are a very funny child, you are a foolish little girl, he had said. It was almost like *being in love*” (Rocha and Camargo 115, emphasis mine). The critics argue that Sofia’s “being in love” is absent in the original: “Não o amava como a mulher que eu seria um dia, amava-o como uma criança” (“I did not love him like the woman I would be one day; I loved him like a child,” in Pontiero’s translation) (Rocha and Camargo 116). Katrina Dodson rewrote it as “It was like a love” (*The Complete Stories* 251).
an “attack on the discourse of the foreign work” (287). He criticizes the common technique of substituting an idiomatic expression with its “equivalent” in the target language, in order to make it comprehensible to the reader. According to Berman, such a replacement is not translation and makes it impossible for the reader to delve into the foreign culture, thereby foreclosing the possibility of expanding and enhancing “the world of our proverbs” (Berman 287). Although I understand the reasons for Berman’s claim, I do not think that this technique should be applied to every idiom and at all costs. A translation teeming with foreignized expressions could overwhelm the reader and make the translated text too obscure.

Berman’s theory, his trial of and for the “Foreign,” as well as the description of the “deforming tendencies,” stem from his emphasis on “literal translation” (288). However, for Berman, “literal” means inclined towards foreignizing the translated text:

Here “literal” means: attached to the letter (of works). Labor on the letter in translation is more originary than restitution of meaning. It is through this labor that translation, on the one hand, restores the particular signifying process of

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108 Marisa Lajolo’s discussion of the 1963 English translation of Carolina Maria de Jesus’s *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* (1962) by David St. Clair (*Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*) is an interesting addition to Berman’s tendencies. Carolina was a Black woman who lived in one of the favelas (“slums”) in São Paulo. She was poorly educated but had a passion for reading and writing, not to mention that being able to read with her socio-economic situation was unusual in itself. In her diary, she would describe her daily struggles, using a combination of the language she knew, which often contained grammatical errors and uncommon, sometimes archaic vocabulary she would learn from books or from reading the dictionary. According to Lajolo, an essential part of Carolina’s identity is based on the language she uses, that is, poor grammar and unusual vocabulary (Lajolo 430). The problem with the English translation is that it does not highlight this contradictory aspect of Carolina’s vernacular and, instead, corrects the grammar, thus simplifying the text. Lajolo provides some examples: in the original, Carolina writes “Abluí as crianças, aleitei-as e abluí-me e aleitei-me,” which is translated as “I washed the children, put them to bed, then washed myself and went to bed” (Lajolo 433). The first issue is that both verbs “abluir (-se)” and “aleitar” are uncommon in Portuguese, while “to wash (oneself)” and “go to bed” are definitely not infrequent in English. Second, “aleitar” in Portuguese is mostly used in the sense of “to nurse,” which is absent in “go to bed” (Lajolo 433). Another example Lajolo gives manifests Carolina’s effort to elevate her prose, while the English translation renders it vulgar: “E um dia, a dona Maria ao chegar em casa, encontrou o Policarpo e a prima, no copula” (correct word – “cópula”; in English “copulation”) became “One day when Dona Maria returned to the shack she found Policarpo and the cousin screwing” (Lajolo 435). Lajolo’s criticism constitutes a valid point when talking about translators’ efforts to clarify and simplify the text to the point of impoverishing the complexity of the character and rendering the translation flat.
works (which is more than their meaning) and, on the other hand, transforms the translating language. (Berman 288-289)

Although I do not entirely agree with all of Berman’s “deforming tendencies,” I consider his views highly relevant in the discussion of fidelity in translation. Berman affirms that the role of translation is essential due to its impact on the translating language, which relates him to Schleiermacher’s approach discussed earlier. I find this affirmation particularly convincing because it stresses the importance of the translator and the responsibility embedded in the profession: “[t]ranslation stimulated the fashioning and refashioning of the great western languages only because it labored on the letter and profoundly modified the translating language” (Berman 289). If translators had been otherwise busy only with getting the message across, “translation could never have played this formative role” (Berman 289).

How can we categorize the “translating language,” then, which Berman finds so powerful? Is it closer to the source language or to the linguistic system of the target culture? Berman’s theory presupposes the existence of something in-between the two worlds, a tool only translators can access, since they find themselves in two places at the same time. This observation allows us to link Berman’s theory to Walter Benjamin’s findings on translation, who draws attention to the relationship between the two languages used in translation.

According to Benjamin, the translator should strive for harmony between the two systems: “[The intention of the translator] is derivative, ultimate, ideational. For the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work” (“The Task of the Translator” 80). A happy medium may be desired, but it is not always possible to achieve. Although Benjamin’s view seems idealistic, his emphasis on the dynamics of both languages, not based on
dominance of one over the other, should serve as a reminder for translators that they do operate between two languages, two cultural contexts, and two systems.

For Benjamin, the contact of the two worlds paves the way for another form of expression, peculiar to the translator – the so-called “pure language.” Translation – in the theoretician’s terms, a good translation – “does not cover the original, does not back its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully” (Benjamin 81). The “pure language” is thus the “translating language,” the “third” language, so to say, in which the source-target dichotomy is balanced. Though I am only a beginning translator, I view the balance more as a struggle and a dilemma, especially when translating Clarice Lispector.

In view of the selected translation theories presented in this chapter, I conclude that Lispector’s concern with fidelity is part of a much larger discussion on different approaches to translation, their premises, and potential advantages and disadvantages of each strategy. After all, Walter Benjamin, among others, doubted whether fidelity was at all possible: “Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the original” (80). Translation is not only about recreating a “literal” or a “natural” text, nor does it presuppose the use of foreignization or domestication. Rather, translation is a combination of both approaches. Although I value Schleiermacher and Berman’s arguments about the importance of the translated language on the target culture, I do believe that translation needs to be domesticated as well in order to be better accessible to the reader.

Finally, none of the theoreticians presupposes the existence of a perfect translation. They do attempt to describe what a “good translation” consists in, but it is hardly ever “a very good,” “a great” or “the only possible” translation. Such a common approach invites a multiplicity of
“good” translations that can still be very different from one another, yet valuable. On the other hand, “good” translations imply the presence of “bad” translations. Although these can be detected rather easily, especially if they contain many instances of mistranslations, I do not think that they ought to be discarded; rather, they should be investigated and used as examples of what to avoid as a translator.

In the next chapter, I will present the challenges I have encountered while working on my (hopefully) “good” translations. I will also address the questions I have posed in my own critical and translation journey into Clarice Lispector’s literary world.

CHAPTER 5
THE ADVENTURE HAS JUST STARTED:
TRANSLATING CLARICE LISPECTOR INTO POLISH

Clarice Lispector in Polish: What Already Exists

If Clarice Lispector were still alive, would she approve of the existing Polish translations of her works? If we go back to her interview with Jorge Amado and her “opinion” on the German translations of her texts, we might think that yes, she would approve of the translations because she did not know any Polish. I doubt, however, that such a comment would leave the translator fulfilled. Moreover, it is the readers, and, from a more professional and literary point of view, the critics and reviewers, who evaluate the translation, not the author of the original.

Those who review the translated text can be roughly divided into two groups: the monolingual and the bilingual readers. The first group is likely to “test” the translation for its fluency, smoothness, and richness of language. The second group might engage in a comparison of the source and the translated texts, in search of linguistic or stylistic glitches, or in order to
praise the choices made by the translators. Often professional reviewers impersonate both groups, allowing for a deeper and more complete analysis of a given translation.

Although I am not a professional translation analyst, I would like to comment on some of the existing Polish translations of Lispector’s works. They present different approaches to the source text, resulting in target texts in which it is possible to detect the techniques used by the translators.

*Godzina gwiazdy* (1987), which is Anna Hermanowicz-Pałka’s translation of the 1977 novel *A hora da estrela*, is one of the most significant contributions to Lispector studies in the Polish language. It was the second translation of Lispector’s texts to be published in Poland, preceded only by Janina Zofia Klave’s reiteration of the short story “Przyjęcie urodzinowe” [Feliz aniversário], published in Poland in 1977 as a part of an anthology of Brazilian short stories.

Interestingly, the first and only – so far – publication of Lispector’s novel in Polish was actually the last book she had seen in print. In addition, this short intriguing piece can be considered Lispector’s response to the Brazilian public, who accused her of having too little interest in every-day matters of her beloved country, which was struggling with a military dictatorship that imposed on the Brazilian population, among other hardships, severe censorship. It is certainly one of the most popular novels Lispector wrote, and probably that is why it was translated and published in Polish. Another possible reason is that the naturalistic depiction of the main character’s social and economic struggle seemed to fit in the socialist and communist environment that surrounded Poland.

I consider Hermanowicz-Pałka’s translation of Lispector’s novel a successful one, with

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only a few instances of misrepresentation and translation liberties I did not find convincing. The text mostly flows in an uninterrupted manner, and the translator pays careful attention to delineate the novel’s characteristic narration technique, in which the narrator is constantly marking his presence and commenting on his relationship toward his writing, the text itself, and the protagonist, Macabéa.

The novel’s unusual narration might be another reason for having it translated into Polish – to present an innovative approach to writing, in which the omniscient narrator shares his subjectivity while forcing the reader to accompany and develop a personal attitude toward him and assess his narrative decisions. In the end, as Colm Tóibín claims, “it is hard to decide who to feel more sorry for, Macabéa or the narrator, the innocent victim of life, or the highly self-conscious victim of his own failure. The one who knows to little, or the one who knows too much” ("A Passion for the Void" *The Hour of the Star* [2011] x). In view of this observation, I contend that the Polish translator dedicated a lot of effort to recreate the novel’s dynamic character, illustrated by the tensions in narration.

Moreover, Hermanowicz-Pałka is certainly familiar with the peculiarities of Brazil’s Northeast, and probably that is why she decides to maintain the Portuguese word “nordestina” for describing the origins of the main character Macabéa, as well as the reference to Brazil’s poorest region as the original Portuguese word “nordeste.” She explains the meaning of both terms in a footnote.

There are more examples of the translator’s apparent decision to make the Polish text “foreign,” however, and these are not followed by a clarification. Such is the case of the regionalism “Eu sou carioca da gema,” which has a two-fold meaning: first, the word “carioca” refers to a person who was born and raised in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and not in the Rio de
Janeiro state, while the expression “da gema” (literally “to one’s yolk”) represents behavior typical of a *carioca* (“Rio Maravilha”). Hermanowicz-Pałka rewrote the phrase literally: “*Jestem cariocą z samego żółtka,*” which does not carry the same message in Polish as it does in Portuguese (*Godzina gwiazdy* 68). Furthermore, she did not provide any explanation of the word “carioca” nor of the phrase “da gema.”

I found her choice off-balance in comparison with her decision to apply “nordestina” described above, although I am aware of many translators’ reluctance to use footnotes excessively or at all, for fear of breaking the flow of their text. Probably that is why Benjamin Moser, the author of the most recent English version of *A hora da estrela*, decided to recreate the phrase in question as “I was born and bred in Rio,” thus leaning towards explicitness (*The Hour of the Star* [2011] 50).

Another translator of Lispector’s works, Giovanni Pontiero, was not fond of footnotes either, rewriting the famous Portuguese word “saudade” as “nostalgia” or “I remember with affection” in his translation of the chronicle “As pontes de Londres” [*The Bridges of London*] (Owen 137-138). One can say that his decisions have only affirmed the impossibility of translating “saudade” into English using a single term that would encompass its multiplicity of meanings.

This, however, does not seem to be the case of Hermanowicz-Pałka, since she did resort to using footnotes to justify her decision, as we have seen earlier. On the other hand, elsewhere in the text the translator did also opt for Polish adaptations of Portuguese idioms as a possible attempt to domesticate the text, which I consider a valid choice:

(Port) “Mais vale um cachorro vivo...” > (Pol) “Lepszy wróbel w garści...”
In order to improve the translation, I would either explain the meaning of the phrase “Sou carioca da gema” in a footnote, since they have already been used by the translator, or domesticate it, as in “Jestem cariocą pełną gebą.”

On two occasions Hermanowicz-Pałka omitted an intertextuality embedded in the novel, namely, the reference to Lispector’s book published posthumously, Um sopro de vida: pulsações (1978). Even though Lispector uses the phrase “um sopro de vida” twice in her text, Hermanowicz-Pałka renders it as simply “życie” (“life”) or as “siła życia” (“the force of life” or “life force”). Since the Polish version of A hora da estrela was published in 1987, that is, nine years after the appearance of Um sopro de vida: pulsações in Brazil, it is difficult to believe that the translator was simply not aware of Lispector’s posthumous publication. Although this detail might bear little significance to a reader not familiar with Lispector’s bibliography, I believe that by using the novel’s title twice in A hora, Lispector did insist on making the intertextuality visible, and this decision should have been reflected in the Polish translation as, for example, “tchnienie życia.”

In a similar way Lispector’s subjectivity is deeply rooted in her works. As such, in the fragment where the narrator wishes that Macabéa had finally manifested her dissatisfaction with her deplorable situation marked by profound solitude, the Polish translator decided not to make the message entirely about “I”: “Jestem sama na świecie i nikomu nie wierzę, wszyscy kłamią, czasem nawet w godzinę miłości, nie wierzę, żeby jedna istota rozumiała drugą, prawdę poznać.

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110 The full version in Portuguese of the first saying is “Mais vale um cachorro/cão vivo, do que um leão morto.” The first expression can be translated into English as “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” while the meaning of the second phrase is “Patience always pays off.”
się tylko w samotności” (Godzina gwiazdy 79, emphasis mine). Instead, the last piece of the long sentence can be translated as “one gets to know the truth only when alone,” which departs from the protagonist’s personal view of the world and adds a universal tone to the narrative not present in the original.

The translator’s ill-defined decisions described above are accompanied by her poor word choices, such as the unclear “kombinacja,” possibly referring to a pyjama or underwear, in “spała w bawełnianej kombinacji” (“dormia de combinação de brim”); the awkward “czyszczę (się)” instead of myję (się)” in “proszę, nie patrz jak się czyszczę” (“você não olhe enquanto eu estiver me limpando”) or the rather explicit “dziwka” (literally “whore”) where the original mentions a more implicit “mulher de soldado.” Fortunately, these are infrequent and are compensated by a number of brilliantly formed phrases such as “Nigdy tam nie chodzę, bezwstydnie przyznając się do strachu, jaki budzą we mnie te bure i wstęgę ochłapy życia” (“Lá é que não piso pois tenho terror sem nenhum vergonha do pardo pedaço de vida imunda”), or “Ani twarzy, ani ciała do kina” (“Nem tem rosto nem corpo para ser artista de cinema”), which capture Lispector’s striving for compact yet dense messages.

Overall, the language Hermanowicz-Pałka uses represents a conscious decision to recreate Lispector’s writing, characterized by choosing unrefined words and combining them in sentences that often sound bizzare, albeit to the point: “Na pewno któregoś dnia zasłuży na niebo dla ulomnych, gdzie wstęp mają tylko życowi połamańcy. Ale co mi tam niebo, skoro tyle

111 The original text in Portuguese: “Eu sou sozinha no mundo e não acredito em ninguém, todos mentem, às vezes até na hora do amor, eu não acho que um ser fale com o outro, a verdade só me vem quando estou sozinha” (A Hora da estrela 83, emphasis mine). The English translation by Benjamin Moser: “I am alone in the world and I don’t believe in anyone, everyone lies, sometimes even when making love, I don’t think one being speaks to another, the truth only comes to me when I’m alone” (The Hour of the Star [2011], emphasis mine 59).
cierpienia jest na ziemi” (Godzina gwiazdy 39).113

The language used by Michał Lipszyc, the author of the the most recent translations of Lispector into Polish published in the journal Literatura na Świecie [Literature in the World] bears little similarity to Hermanowicz-Pałka’s linguistic repertoire. One of the reasons is the difference between the narratives: Lipszyc translated Lispector’s short stories, while Hermanowicz-Pałka translated a novel. Another reason is that apart from working with translation, Lipszyc is also a poet and an author of children’s books, which adds another layer to the creativity of his writing. Interestingly, his book Wyprawa w Mordęgi (2012) [A Journey to Mordęgi] tells a story of three fictitious animals in search of the origin of words.114

Lipszyc’s translations of Lispector’s stories manifest a richness of vocabulary, and also highlight his willingness to experiment with language. For example, in “Onde estivestes de noite,” there is a word in Portuguese “t’isconjuro,” which is a modified transcription of the phrase “te esconjuro,” meaning “to exorcise, to curse” but also “to conjure, to summon” in English.115 Since there is no word in the Polish language that would combine both meanings, the translator decided to fuse two words “zaklinam” (“I cast a spell/I’m cursing”) and “wabię” (“I

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113 The original in Portuguese: “Na certa mereceria um dia o céu dos oblíquos onde só entra quem é torto. Aliás não é entrar no céu, é oblíquo na terra mesmo” (A hora da estrela 43). Benjamin Moser’s translation does not entirely reflect the crudeness of the message: “Surely someday she’d deserve the heaven of the crooked where you only get in if you’re warped. Anyway it’s not about getting into heaven, she’s crooked right here on earth’ (The Hour of the Star 26-27). Giovanni Pontiero opted for three, not two, succinct sentences in his translation: “Surely one day she would gain a place in the paradise reserved for misfits. Besides, in her case it simply isn’t a question of gaining Paradise. She is a misfit even in this world” (The Hour of the Star 34).

114 At present, Lipszyc – along with Wojciech Charchalis, the translator of Saramago’s works – is the most prominent translator of Portuguese-language literature into Polish. In 2008, the journal Literatura na Świecie awarded him the “new voice” prize for his translation of Fernando Pessoa’s O livro do desassossego [The Book of Disquietude]. Apart from Pessoa, Lipszyc has translated the Angolan writer Ondjaki’s Avó Dezanove e O Segredo do Soviético (2008) [Granma Nineteen and the Soviet’s Secret, 2014 in English], Mia Couto’s Terra Sonâmbula (1992) [Sleepwalking Land, 2006 in English], Drauzio Varella’s Estação Carandiru (1999) [Carandiru Station], and Carcerieiros (2012) [Jailers]. In addition, Lipszyc has given interviews and lectures on Luso-African Literature in Poland. It is worth mentioning that his translation of Couto’s novel received positive feedback precisely for adhering to the Mozambican author’s dedication to creating neologisms and challenging the already existing words and phrases in the Portuguese language.

115 In the English translation by Alexis Levitin, the phrase “t’isconjuro” reads “I cast you forth, Mother Sorceress” (Soulstorm “Where Were You at Night” 129). Katrina Dodson translated the phrase as “I conjure thee, High Priestess” (The Complete Stories “Where Were You at Night” 469).
call/I’m calling”) to produce a neologism “zakliwabię.” In this way, Lipszyc conveyed the written modification in the target text, although based on different premises: not on the oral transcription, but on the absence of a direct equivalent of the word “esconjurar” in Polish.

Overall, the mysterious and grotesque atmosphere of “Onde estivestes de noite” matches Lipszyc’s verbal sensitivity, unleashing the writerly aspect of his profession. This should not come as a surprise because, as Susan Bassnett argues, “it is absurd to see translation as anything other than a creative literary activity, for translators are all the time engaging with texts first as readers and then as rewriters, as recreators of that text in another language” (“Writing and Translating” 174). What is more, even if a translator is also a writer by profession – as Lispector, Dryden, Nabokov, and Miłosz were – writing should not be and generally is not considered as an obstacle to translating. Actually, as the American novelist and literary critic Paul Goodman affirms, the translator must have his or her unique style. However, once the translator starts working on the text, she should aim “to retreat to a simpler tenor of one’s own style and creatively adjust this to one’s author” (Andrews 920). To translate, then, means to curb one’s writerly freedom and not allow for “one’s own style” to flourish fully. This does not mean that the translator’s creativity is in any means inferior to the writer’s. In fact, due to the “constraint of having to work within the parameters of that source text,” translation “requires an extraordinary set of literary skills” precisely because of the translator’s liability to the author, to the source text, and the audience (Bassnett 174).

In view of these observations, I argue that some of Lipszyc’s translations of Lispector’s stories, in fact, do not sufficiently emphasize the “re” in “rewriting,” meaning “translation.” They tend to foreground his own style rather than focus on presenting Lispector’s unique poetics, which vary according to the text. That is why Lipszyc’s verbosity does not appear to correspond
to Lispector’s brevity in certain texts, resulting in an imbalance between grandiose expressions and a more colloquial language, such as “pozostała tam niczym ruchomy ornament architektoniczny” (“lá ficou em adorno deslocado”) or “pomny dwoistej powinności” (“lembrando-se da dupla necessidade”), both from his translation of “Uma galinha” [A Chicken]; or “niczym egzemplifikacja prawa” (“obedecendo talvez à necessidade”) from “A menor mulher do mundo” [The Smallest Woman in the World].

Even though I do find Lipszyc’s contribution to translating and popularizing Lispector impressive, I claim that his translations do not accentuate the stylistic richness of Lispector’s texts. In part this might have been dictated by the choice of texts Lipszyc decided to translate, which do not cover all of Lispector’s short story volumes and seem to favor certain collections. In total, his translations in Literatura na Świecie include four stories from the collection Laços de família (1960), two from Felicidade clandestina (1971), two from Onde estivestes de noite (1974), and as many as five from A via crucis do corpo (1974). I believe that adding stories such as “O ovo e a galinha” or “A quinta história,” which are clearly distinct in form and content from the ones published, would present the reader with additional perspectives on the content and the form of Lispector’s works of short fiction.

Every translation has its drawbacks, one might say, and there can be as many versions of certain words or sentences as there are translators: “Just as in a narration it is always possible to tell the story in a different way, likewise in translation it is always possible to translate otherwise, without ever hoping to bridge the gap between equivalence and perfect adhesion” (Ricoeur On Translation xiv). In addition, a translation review focused solely on “nitpicking” aimed at proving the translator’s insufficient skills does not amount to constructive criticism. Nevertheless, when translators make poor decisions that indicate an error and not an oversight,
they should be made aware of the areas that are in need of improvement. In the case of Lipszyc, I would like briefly to discuss the translation choices he made in two stories: “Miss Algrave” and “O jantar” [The Dinner].

The first problem is related to the title of the story. In the original Portuguese, it is “Miss Algrave,” but Lipszyc rewrote it as “Miss Algarve.” I believe that it was a mere misreading strongly influenced and possibly enforced by his familiarity with the word “Algarve,” referring to the southernmost region of Portugal. I admit that paying attention when reading the title is essential, because for a person who has heard of the Portuguese region, the alteration of the letters “a” and “r” comes almost naturally, imposing one’s brain to read it as “Algarve” and not “Algrave.” “Typos are common and harmless,” one might say, but in this case, a typo can have grave consequences on the way we interpret the text. What is more, any typing error on Lispector’s part is excluded, because the spelling “Algrave” is used throughout the entire story.

In their essay titled “The Implications of the Body in Lispector’s Narrative,” Miiller Fascina and dos Santos Coqueiro affirm that the main character’s name, Miss Algrave, provides insight into her sexuality. In order to explain their point, let us briefly summarize the story in question. The main character, Ruth, is a single woman, a virgin, who lives and works in London. She is described as beautiful and morally rigorous, since she finds the statue of Eros on the Piccadilly Circus “indecent,” is deeply offended when she sees women on the streets who work as prostitutes, and she keeps her bra and underwear on while bathing in order not to see her naked body. Ruth seems content in her solitude but, in fact, her body longs for physical contact. She unleashes her repressed sexuality when she is visited by Ixtlan, a god-like figure, who supposedly comes from Saturn. The unusual encounter culminates in intercourse that leaves Ruth anxiously waiting for another meeting. The morning after, she feels happy, fulfilled, and calm.
She is sexually active, and decides to become a prostitute, which she treats as a preparation for her “feast” with Ixtlan.

Miiller Fascina and dos Santos Coqueiro put forward an interesting thesis about the meaning of Ruth’s last name. According to the critics, “Algrave” is a “linguistic play” on the words “all” and “grave,” which points to Ruth’s hidden desires and “inhibited speech” (156). What is more, the main character’s true repressed self is reaffirmed by means of a “dry, cold, and objective syntax” marked by “short sentences” (Miiller Fascina and dos Santos Coqueiro 156). Indeed, the beginning of the story reads almost like a report on how Ruth looks and what she is like, with an emphasis on her intolerance of any immodest behavior.

When translating the title of the story and Ruth’s last name as “Algarve,” corresponding to the geographical region, and not “Algrave,” which would hint at the neologism “all” plus “grave,” we deprive the reader of this additional level of interpretation proposed by Miiller Fascina and dos Santos Coqueiro. One may argue that their hypothesis is limited, for it presupposes Lispector’s exposure to English, of which not every reader might be aware. Moreover, the theory dismisses the meaning of the prefix “al” in other languages: in Arabic, “al” denotes a definite article and can be found in numerous Portuguese words due to the presence of the Moors on the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages and their consequent impact on the Portuguese language. Finally, the title “Algrave” might as well be a linguistic play on Lispector’s part, who deliberately wishes to confuse the reader familiar with the geographical meaning of the term “Algarve,” which does not transmit any undertones regarding the protagonist. Be that as it may, I do not see a valid reason for neglecting the spelling of the title, but if the translator sees one, he or she should be able to explain his or her choice to the reader in view of either justifying the decision or providing an additional angle of interpretation.
The Polish version of the short story “O jantar” [The Dinner] raises an important issue about meddling with the gender of the characters. The shift in gender in the Polish translation of “O jantar” pertains to the narrator. Before I describe the alteration, I would like to emphasize that the majority of narrators in Lispector’s texts are female, especially in novels, such as A paixão segundo G.H. (1964), Água viva (1973) or Um sopro de vida: pulsações (1978). In other cases, namely, in her short stories, Lispector uses the omniscient or, on rare occasions, the first-person narrator identified as female, as in “Os desastres de Sofía” [The Disasters of Sofia], “É para lá que eu vou” [That’s Where I’m Going] or “O morto no mar da Urca” [The Dead Man in the Sea at Urca]. Apart from “O jantar,” another significant use of the male narrator can be found in Lispector’s last novel, A hora da estrela (1977), where Rodrigo S.M. narrates the story of Macabéa in the first person. These are the only two instances of male narrators in Lispector’s texts.

Perhaps that is why Lipszyc assumed that the story “O jantar” is narrated by a female, and decided to reproduce it likewise in Polish. Although the reader realizes it only toward the middle of the text – thanks to the past participle functioning as an adjective and marked by the masculine ending -o: “Inclino-me sobre a carne, perdido” – it should not serve as an excuse to misrepresent the narrator’s gender in any translation (Laços de família “O jantar” 78). Yet, Lipszyc consistently uses the female verbal structures marked by the ending -am: “odrówniłam,” “podjęłam,” “jadłam,” “patrzyłam,” “spojrzałam,” “zauważyłam,” “spodziewałam,” “jadłam” and feminine gender-marked adjectives “zagubiona,” “skupiona”. It is fair to say that due to the nature of the language, the gender-marking terms occur much more frequently in the Polish

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116 Lipszyc’s translation: “Zagubiona, pochylam się nad mięsem” (LnŚ 26).
As a result, Lipszyc’s “Obiad” is much more “feminine” than Lispector’s “O jantar” is “masculine.”

The same misrepresentation of gender has consequences on the entire collection in which “O jantar” had been included. According to Cláudia Pazos Alonso, the short story occupies a central position in the volume *Laços de família* (1960), making the feminine perspective peripheral (“Defamiliarization and Déjà vu in *Laços de família*” 81). The same critic is not surprised by Lispector’s choice of the narrator, and claims that it is “a fact that seemingly highlights men’s unrestricted access to a subject position” (Pazos Alonso 81).

The story is set in a restaurant, where an older man is sitting at a table and eating his meal. The same man is being observed by another male, who describes the “actor” as “one of those old gentlemen who are still at the center of the world and of power” (Pazos Alonso 74). Pazos Alonso alerts us to the word “still,” which presupposes a change to happen and, bearing in mind the setting and the outcome of the scene, can be interpreted as “a last supper.” (“Defamiliarization” 81). Indeed, the witnessed man soon experiences a sort of emotional breakdown, although he represses his tears and cries “por dentro,” that is, “inside” (“O jantar” 80). The reasons for his distress remain unknown, which leaves the narrator fascinated by the spectacle and appalled at the same time: “Estou tomado pelo êxtase arfante da náusea” (“O jantar” 79). The sensation of nausea, I should briefly note, occurs in a number of characters created by Lispector, such as Ana from the short story “Amor,” and the narrator and protagonist of *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), and connects her writing to Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist

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117 Both Polish and Portuguese languages observe the rule of agreement: some verbal forms agree in gender with the gender of the speaker; adjectives agree in gender with the gender of the noun that they modify.

118 The complex structure of *A hora da estrela* (1977) goes even further than that. Rodrigo S.M. – the narrator – constantly marks his presence and highlights his role as the “creator” by expressing his thoughts and attitude toward the main character Macabéa. We should not forget, however, that he is also merely an instrument in the author’s – Lispector’s – hands.

119 Lipszyc’s translation: “Opanowuje mnie rozchybotana ekstaza mdłości” (LnŚ 27).
Apart from feeling nauseous, the witness in “O jantar” finds it odd that the older man still wants to eat in his apparently poor emotional condition: “Apesar de tudo, não perdeste a fome, hein!, instigava-o eu com ironia, cólera e exaustão” (80). Finally, when the old man leaves the restaurant, the narrator rejects his food, which Pazos Alonso reads as a refusal “to commune with the transfiguring body and blood of the warped ideology, defining himself instead through his adoption of a dissident position by not eating” (82). Moreover, the critic interprets the narrator’s rejection of food on a symbolic level, namely, “as a refusal to adopt a predatory role,” by pointing to the other meaning of the Portuguese verb “comer” – “to possess sexually” (Pazos Alonso 82).

In this way, as Pazos Alonso rightly contends, “O jantar” can be considered a central text of the volume Laços de família, “both structurally and on a symbolic level, because of the daring challenge that it presents to prevailing images of masculinity” (82). The androcentric implications of her interpretation are, in my view, related to the wording chosen by Pazos Alonso. I do not believe that she aimed at proving that “O jantar” is the most significant piece in the volume, but rather that it serves as a turning point, a confrontation not only from the point of view of the content of the story – a discourse on age and masculinity – but also the form – using a different narrative voice compared to previous works. A reader familiar with Lispector’s writing and her narration will likely realize relatively quickly that “O jantar” does stand out from the majority of her texts characterized by the presence of an omniscient narrator and female characters. It becomes clear that if the narrator’s gender is changed, such an observation cannot be made, nor can we invite another level of interpretation of the structural and symbolic

120 Lipszyc’s translation: “Bo, mimo wszystko, apetytu nie straciłeś, co? – drażnię go, pełna ironii, gniewu i bezsilności” (LnŚ 28).
implications of the text proposed by Pazos Alonso. That is why her analysis is also significant due to its broad perspective, since it approaches the volume of short stories as a whole, in addition to investigating the particular stories included therein.

I would like to reaffirm that the objective of this chapter was not to point out the errors of the translators, whose work I respect. I described the problems in order to sensitize potential translators to the consequences of inattentive reading, and to show how important their close reading is to the potential abundance and variety of textual interpretation.

**My Experience with Translating Clarice Lispector**

My desire to engage in translating Clarice Lispector was not motivated by the problems I encountered in the existing Polish translations of her works. Although inconsistencies and a poor quality of a translation might as well serve as a reason to produce a better version, I do not think that it is the sole incentive driving any translator. Those professionals who have the privilege of choosing the text they wish to translate base their decision on their personal preference and interest in the work. Sometimes a text is granted a translation only after its author has been recognized and awarded a form of literary recognition. In my case, I have chosen to translate Lispector because I am fascinated by her writing, and, therefore, I would like to share my reading experience with readers unfamiliar with Portuguese. Since Luso-Brazilian literature has been growing rather slowly in Poland, I believe that drawing attention to such an influential author as Clarice Lispector may be conducive to the development of Luso-Brazilian studies in the Polish context.

Nonetheless, my goal in this thesis is to promote the underrepresented angle of Lispector’s writing, that is, the one related to her preoccupation with the creation process and her
attitude toward the word. I admit that translating an author with such an elaborate literary awareness is particularly challenging.

My struggle can be best described as the desire to rewrite Lispector’s writing so that it creates the same effect – of deliberate strangeness characterized by unusual word configurations and ruptures of sentences – in Polish as it does in Portuguese. I do not opt for either of the extremes: neither literalness and its “copious footnotes reaching out like skyscrapers” proposed by Nabokov nor translation focused on “prose-meaning and interpretation” or “translation as communication” criticized by Venuti (“Translator’s Invisibility 6). My stance is marked by a combination of the two strategies described in the previous chapter: “domestication” and “foreignization.” As I have already mentioned, I contend that translation practice is based on a compromise between both techniques, although often the relationship can be best described as a dilemma or tension. The translator’s “double consciousness” outlined by Philip E. Lewis captures my expectations very well, and I can relate to Elena Losada Soler’s own experience as a practicing translator of Lispector.

In my own translation experience, I aim to pay tribute to Lispector’s intricacy in terms of both language and content, and, at the same time, I want Polish readers to find the translation both accessible and crisp, that is, characterized by a certain resistance to smoothness and transparency. After all, Lispector, although considered by some “hermetic” – to her own discontent expressed in the interview with Júlio Lerner – wanted “to communicate in depth” not only with herself, but also with the reader (Discovering the World 151). It is unlikely, actually, that any writer would be oblivious to the potential recipients of his or her work. In any case, I attempt to convey Lispector’s deep respect for the word as well as her eagerness to conjure the non-word, which can be illustrated by her unusual metaphors or the use of contradictions.
Based on my close reading of the four short stories: “O ovo e a galinha,” “A quinta história,” “Seco estudo de cavalos,” and “O relatório da coisa,” I can conclude that the texts do not teem with sophisticated words or neologisms. Indeed, Lispector’s defiance of language does not include creating new words, and has already been noticed by many scholars of Lispector studies. The configuration of these words, the syntax – here I agree with Gregory Rabassa – contribute to the complexity of the reading experience. I consider the result of numerous oxymora and contradictory phrases a “freshness” of perception, a defamiliarizing device, intended to re-think and re-evaluate our knowledge of the world. It is also my goal to preserve this strangeness of Lispector’s literary gaze. These contradictions include, for example “a mais penosa espontaneidade,” “a aura dos meus dedos vê o ovo,” and “Adeus para nunca sempre” (“O ovo” 47, “O relatório” 63).121

Another technique used by Lispector in most of the stories I analyzed is “telling and un-telling,” that is, stating a fact only to defy it in the next sentence, for example: “Olho o ovo com um só olhar. Imediatamente percebo que não se pode estar vendo um ovo”; “Entender é a prova do erro”; “A quarta narrativa inaugura uma nova era no lar. Começa como se sabe: queixei-me de baratas”; or “Não ter nenhum segredo – e no entanto manter o enigma – é Sveglia” (“O ovo” 46-47, “A quinta” 76, “O relatório” 62).122 Those instances need to be recreated in the translated text, since they constitute an important characteristic of her writing, both on the structural and on the symbolic level.

The narrative structure of “O ovo” and “O relatório” is similar: both texts border on a

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121 My translations: “najźmudniejsza spontaniczność,” “to aura moich palców widzi jajo,” “żegnaj na nigdy zawsze.”
philosophical essay and a scientific report. The sentences tend to be short and objective. Each
text mixes in the narrator’s personal statements and biographical fragments: “você é perfeito,
ovo”; “mergulhada no sonho preparo o café da manhã”; “eu creio no Sveglia”; “Sveglia, quando
afinal é que você me deixa em paz?”; “eu enjoei do cigarro Consul que é mentolado e doce” (“O
ovo” 46, 52, “O relatório” 60, 63).123 Both stories also make use of repetitions, a device I have
already described in the previous chapter of my thesis. In “O ovo” it is the word “ovo,” while in
“O relatório” it is the clock brand “Sveglia.”

One of the most difficult aspects of translating “O relatório” was the gender of Sveglia.
Since the Polish language requires declining nouns for case, I decided to decline “Sveglia”
instead of leaving the foreign word uninflected, which is how the Polish language sometimes
deals with such names. Another solution would be to repeat “the clock whose brand is Sveglia”
in Polish, which would add too many words to the translation and would obscure the intimate
relationship between the narrator and the object. As a result, “Sveglia” became feminine in
Polish – because of the ending -a – and was appropriately declined.124 I do not think that my
choice made the story confusing; on the contrary, I believe that it reinforced the human-like
qualities of the already anthropomorphized Thing.

In the second chapter of my thesis I have elaborated on Cabanilles and Lozano’s theory
stating the close relationship between the word “ovo” and the image of the actual egg it creates,
combined with the iconic representation of the letter “o” mirroring the shape of the object. The
same critics affirm that those “visual effects cannot be translated into another language” (31). In
this way, and, sadly, the reader is deprived of the possibility of reading the word “egg” and

123 My translations: “Jajo, jesteś idealne”; “zanurzona we śnie, przygotowuję śniadanie”; “Wierzę w Sveglię”;
“Sveglia, kiedy ty mnie w końcu zostawisz w spokoju?”; “Niedobrze mi od papierosa marki Consul, miętowego i
słodkiego.”
124 There are a few male first names in Polish ending in -a which follow the declension of feminine nouns: Jarema,
Bonawentura, Kosma, Barnaba.
simultaneously seeing the egg. At the same time, as the critics add, the reader is unable to partake in this peculiar experience when the narrator contemplates the egg (Cabanilles and Lozano 31).

Indeed, the English translation of “ovo” does not represent a rounded form of the egg. In Polish, the word “jajo” (“egg”) contains one oval syllable, only partly conveying the iconicity of the text. To paraphrase Robert Frost: yes, this manifestation of poetry will most likely get lost in translation, at least to some languages in which the equivalent of “ovo” does not bring out the iconic side of the word. In a similar way the “treasures,” as Giovanni Pontiero calls Lispector’s best literary effects, are “inevitably lost when she creates a game of counterpoint between peninsular Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese in ‘Os devaneios de uma rapariga,’ the opening story of *Laços de família*, or juggles with the two quite different meanings of *esperança* (hope and grasshopper) in one of her chronicles” (Pontiero “Luso-Brazilian Voices” 51).

How to compensate for this gap in the visual aspect of the translation? First, the translator should carefully reproduce all the egg-words in the text and not be tempted to replace them with a pronoun or to omit them. This will at least fill the translation with the words standing for “ovo,” just as in the original. Second, the translator may choose to elaborate on this unusual yet pertinent feature of the text in a translator’s note.

“O ovo e a galinha” plays with different registers to a much greater extent than the other three stories: apart from the prevailing philosophical tone, in a few places the story reads like a memoir where the narrator talks about her children and her daily routine. At times, “O ovo” is a biography with an ironic touch, when the narrator describes the responsibilities of her being an “agent.” The fragment demonstrating the last tone I have described flows without interruptions in Portuguese, as if the narrator was talking to a familiar interlocutor, and the entire explanation is
crammed into a single lengthy sentence, contrasting it with the formal character of a report or essay:

O falso emprego que me deram para disfarçar a minha verdadeira função, pois aproveito o falso emprego e dele faço o meu verdadeiro; inclusive o dinheiro que me dão como diária para facilitar minha vida de modo a que o ovo se faça, pois esse dinheiro eu tenho usado para outros fins, desvio de verba, ultimamente comprei ações da Brahma e estou rica. 125 (“O ovo” 53)

In my translation, I decided to keep the orality of the fragment and did not split it into more sentences, in order to highlight Lispector’s deliberate obscurity in her use of registers.

Another strategy often used by Lispector – repetition – is not limited to single words, but also to entire phrases, and the story “A quinta história” best illustrates the use of this literary device. The beginning lines of the same story are repeated: “queixei-me de baratas” or “eu me queixara de baratas,” but the development of each text takes on a different course (“A quinta” 74-76). 126 In addition, the repetitions used in each installment of “A quinta” are crucial to conveying the structure of the story, which is firmer and more coherent than in the other three text.

It is essential that the Polish translator understand which instances of repeated words or phrases point to Lispector’s style, and which can be replaced in order to ensure a more fluent text. This dilemma is one of the most common struggles I have had in my experience translating the stories. It illustrates, again, the translator’s “double-consciousness” as observed by Philip E.

125 Katrina Dodson’s translation is confusing, because she translated the word “pois” as “since.” Although this is correct, “pois” has also another meaning, close to the English “well” used to introduce a remark or fill a pause in a conversation: “The fake job they have given me to disguise my true purpose, since I make the most of this fake job and turn it into my real one; this includes the money they give me as a daily allowance to ease my life so that the egg may form, since I have used this money for other purposes, diverting the funds, I recently bought stock in Brahma beer and am rich” (“The Egg and the Chicken” 284, emphasis mine).

126 My translation: “skarżyłem się na karaluchy.”
Lewis. It also involves a careful weighing of every word and phrase, and a decision how to translate them, what to highlight, and what can suffer minor modifications to ensure a more accessible and a smoother expression. In my translation, I try to understand the meaning of a given phrase, interpret it, and then figure out the version in Polish that would best capture the simplicity of the means and the implicit intricacy of the message.

And yet, I found that it was often the individual words that tripped me up in my translation of “Seco estudo de cavalos.” Although the language in the story is not abundant in oxymora, and the sentences do not contradict each other as in “O ovo” or in “O relatório,” I found the sentence combinations very difficult to translate. The text is also less objective and less concrete than the other stories, which makes it more fluid and stresses its fragmentariness. In its blurriness between dream and reality, “Seco estudo” resembles “O relatório,” but its goal is not to explain (or confuse, for that matter), but to describe sensations, memories, fragments of life, in a way that the reader is made wander through a dream-like world pierced by grotesque images. In order to capture such a dense content, I had to read a given phrase or a sentence countless times before I could proceed with translating it. I would then identify the main subject, gather all the adjectives, understand the meaning of the piece, and come up with a Polish translation that would bring out the visual and the lyric aspects of the text.

In my translation of “Seco estudo,” I found the following fragments the most challenging because I wanted to recreate the beautiful and poetic vocabulary in a way that would not result in overly long and obscure sentences: “Na fazenda o cavalo branco – rei da natureza – lançava para o alto da acuidade do ar o seu longo relincho de esplendor”; “Podia-se ver o morno bafo úmido – o bafo radioso e tranquilo que saía das narinas trêmulas extremamente vivas e frementes dos cavalos e cavalas em certas madrugadas frias”; “Na inveja do desejo meu rosto adquiria a
One of the most mysterious scenes are the two last paragraphs, where the narrator makes a plea to have “o ginete” robbed of her. Later, the narrator begs to have “o cavalo perigoso” taken away, and, finally, she asks to be robbed of herself (“rouba-me”). Interestingly, the translators Levitin and Dodson interpret “o ginete” differently. For Levitin it is “the horseman,” while for Dodson, it is “the stallion.” Indeed, the dictionary accepts both versions, but lists “a fine, well-bred horse” as the first definition, and “rider, cavalryman, a good horseman” as regionalisms (“Ginete” Michaelis On-Line). I do not believe that Lispector wanted to introduce a third character at the end of her story. Furthermore, in the text we read that the narrator had to kill the King in order to steal the horse, which is why “ginete” most probably refers to the animal. That is why I also decided to translate the word accordingly in Polish, that is, as “ogier.” I would nevertheless like to emphasize that this particular fragment was one of the most perplexing and demanding in the story.

On such occasions, I would ask the following question, although I knew that the answer could only be provided by myself: “What were you trying to say, Clarice?” The silence did not, however, stop me from proceeding in my translation journey. In fact, I do believe that I must continue translating in order accomplish my goal: to re-introduce Lispector in Poland. Giovanni

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127 My translations of the fragments: “W zagrodzie biały koń – król natury – ciskał wysoko w przenikliwość powietrza swoje długotrwałe rżenie świetności”; “Niekiedy, o poranku, można było dostrzec letnią, wilgotną parę – świętoistną i spokojną, wydobywającą się z drżących, szalejących i wibrujących nozdrzy ogierów i klaczy”; “Z zazdrości do tego pragnienia moja twarz zyskiwała niespokojną godność końskiej głowy”; “Gdybym tylko opuściła pokój, moja postać zaraz powiększyłaby się i uszlachetniła, a po wyjściu na ulicę puściłabym się w galop uderzając wraźliwymi kończynami, z kopytami ślizgającymi się na ostatnich stopniach schodów mojego domu”; “Na przodzie oświetla nas klarnet, nas, bezwstydnych wspólników enigmy.”
Pontiero’s motivation sounds similar to mine, despite his talking about the entire field of studies: “Convinced that the sheer effort of translating Luso-Brazilian texts would provide me with a deeper understanding and help to make me a more perceptive critic, I struggled on” (“Luso-Brazilian Voices” 50).

**Translating Clarice Lispector into Polish – What Is Next?**

A mere translation of a given author’s texts is at times not enough to popularize his or her oeuvre abroad and draw readers’ and critics’ attention to the “new” writer. A solid body of literary criticism and textual analysis is necessary in order to place the author on the literary map outside of their country, and to establish his or her position in relation to the context in which he or she is discussed. In the case of Clarice Lispector, such a combination of translation and critical studies has taken place in the United States, among other countries.

Among the English language translators of Lispector’s works who have demonstrated such an approach to translation are: Giovanni Pontiero, Ronald W. Sousa, and Gregory Rabassa. The first of these is a fervent advocate of pursuing translation throughout his scholarly career: “academics who translate are in a privileged position” because “they have access to well-stocked libraries, to specialist advice, and are able to consult colleagues experienced in arts and sciences” (“The Task of the Literary Translator” 59). Of course, scholars should not feel obliged to translate only because they are fluent or familiar with one or more foreign languages. If they do however engage in translation, their work can prove beneficial in popularizing a given author and their texts because it can be backed up by solid criticism and literary history. Pontiero elaborates on these advantages from the point of view of a Luso-Brazilian scholar:

I remain convinced that the academic-cum-translator has a particularly crucial role
to play because good translations demand much more than a sound knowledge of languages. They require continuous research into the history and evolution of Portugal and Brazil and a genuine understanding of the traditions and customs which have shaped these cultures. (Pontiero 54)

In Poland, it was Janina Zofia Klave (1921 – 2008) who performed the role of the “academic-cum-translator” in her promotion of Luso-Brazilian studies. In 1977, she initiated and later chaired the Luso-Brazilian Program (1981 – 1984) at the Institute of Iberian Studies at the University of Warsaw, while she published translations of Brazilian authors and critical essays on Brazilian literature (“Janina Klawe” Wikipedia). Her contribution to Luso-Brazilian studies in Poland is immense, but she did not focus on Clarice Lispector in her academic research.

Still, I would like to emphasize that Lispector is a part of the curriculum at various academic institutions in Poland where Lusophone literature is taught. For example, on the college level at the Institute of Romance Philology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Lispector is included in a course titled “History of Portuguese and Brazilian Literature III (20th century),” and discussed in the context of existentialism in literature. Students are obliged to read selected stories from one of her best known collections, *Laços de família* (1960), while her last novel *A hora da estrela* (1977) is listed as “supplementary reading” (Borowski and Wolny).

While students are given a chance to familiarize themselves with the author, and most probably engage in discussions, this has not resulted in a surge of Lispector studies in Poland. That is why, in my opinion, a more substantial and comprehensive critical study of her works in the Polish context is advised.

Although a Polish scholar specializing in Lispector would undoubtedly work towards highlighting her significance for Brazilian and international literature, I do not believe that
literary criticism and research is the sole responsibility of an academic. I argue that translators, who are already privileged in their command of the Portuguese language, should also try to go beyond the mere translation of Lispector’s works. Certainly, a combination of both – the scholar and the translator – would most probably contribute to developing Lispector studies in Poland and simultaneously equip bookstores with more translations. However, even if the translator happens not to be an academic, he or she should still feel encouraged to delve into research and assume full responsibility for injecting the author into Polish culture.

I contend, therefore, that the next publication of Lispector’s works should include both the translation and a sound presentation of the text. The translator ought to make an additional effort, apart from translating the text, to provide the reader with some context about the author and the collection, written in the form of a translator’s introduction or a translator’s note.” A more detailed presentation of Lispector’s contribution to Brazilian, South American, and world literature would provide the reader with a better grasp of the complexity of her poetics. Furthermore, I would include in such a piece a survey of how the volume has been received worldwide, followed by a short literary analysis of some of the stories to stimulate the reader’s curiosity. In my introduction, I would focus on outlining the perspective related to literary and linguistic awareness I have described in my thesis. I strongly believe that it would provide an additional explanation of Lispector’s recognition, and would propose another angle of interpretation, different from the one already familiar to the Polish reader.
When I pronounce the word *Future*,  
the first syllable already belongs to the past,

When I pronounce the word *Silence*,  
I destroy it.

When I pronounce the word *Nothing*,  
I make something no nonbeing can hold.


When I decided to translate Clarice Lispector (and later when I started writing my  
Master’s thesis), I had to ask myself this straightforward question: Why her – Clarice? I had to  
even justify my answers on paper, since one of the assignments in my Translation Workshop  
class was to write a letter to the editor explaining why this particular work by that author  
*deserved* a published translation. Obviously, the letter could not consist in presenting my  
subjective views on Clarice: “Because I love reading Lispector and the way she makes me see  
the world in slow-motion; I want to be surprised by her freshness of gaze even if it causes me to  

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feel ill-at-ease; I appreciate the variety of her oeuvre and I constantly reread her stories; and I want to share all of my reading experience with the Polish reader.” Although the reader’s intimate reception of a given author is valid, it was not enough to make my argument convincing.

The question – Why Clarice? – persisted, but it was essential to back up the answer “Because she is an important author” with sound examples. That is why I started my thesis with a presentation of Lispector’s significance in Brazil and abroad, in order to confirm her significance to Brazilian and international literature.

As we have seen, the main contribution to Lispector studies in Poland was made by translators and is limited to translations and short biographical entries included therein. This is not enough, because to read that “Clarice Lispector was an important Brazilian author” on the back cover of the translation differs from accessing a more detailed analysis of her works written in the form of a critical essay as in a “Translator’s Introduction” or “Note.” I have also shown that the description of her poetics in Poland focuses on the introspective and existential aspect, while only touching on her interest in the how of her writing. Whether expressed in interviews, through chronicles or in proper novels and short stories, “the problem of artistic creation” has indeed “always fascinated” Lispector and this integral part of her artistic world should be presented to the Polish reader.

My research has shown that this sparse attention is closely linked to the lack of critical study in Poland, which would explore the complexity of her poetics in a more comprehensive way; another reason is the shortage of translations of Lispector’s text in which this particular angle of interpretation could be approximated to the reader by the author – via the translated text. This state of matters prompted me to combine two paths in my thesis: include a textual analysis
of the stories that, in my view, highlight Lispector’s literary awareness and offer my own translations of those texts into Polish.

First, I discussed the carefully crafted philosophical “essay” “O ovo e a galinha,” an apparent syllogism that contradicts itself in order to protect the egg, the essence of writing, that is, the word. My textual analysis aimed to show that Lispector’s attempt to explain a thing, an object, a phenomenon, reflected by numerous repetitions of the word representing them, does not have to result in actually pronouncing this word, the kernel, the core. I argued that Lispector uses the same technique in “O relatório da coisa,” where the reader never actually learns what Sveglia stands for; it combines the animate and inanimate properties: it is a being but also a Thing; nothing and everything at the same time. As a result, the story is never completed because the subject remains open, just like Lispector’s writing.

With my analysis, I attempted to show that her writing also opposes any frames and structures: the apparent philosophical essay “O ovo” trips on personal accounts, while “O relatório” constantly challenges the report it was supposed to be, delaying the arrival at the what of the story and implementing mini-narratives and metanarrative. “Seco estudo de cavalos” also gives the impression of an incomplete account, a fit of imagination, a mosaic made of poetic images formed precisely where dream and reality meet. It is a “study,” a “sketch” – not a short narrative with a clear beginning, development, and conclusion. I argued that the same can be said of “A quinta história,” where the narrator never arrives at the idea and instead contradicts her own words and uses repetitions, creating a false pattern she then destroys.

The objective of the criticism I offered in the second and third chapters was to prove that all four stories share the same set of characteristics related to the writing process: they do not let the non-word “bite” the word, that is, they preserve the very idea they aim at representing,
causing the artistic creation to be ongoing. They are acts of a meticulously structured artistic technique marked by resistance, by means of which Lispector manifests her bold literary decisions and proves that it is, in fact, *impossible* to tell the stories. The numerous attempts she makes to tell them, however, guarantee her survival as a writer – and that is why she deliberately chooses to be “the mistress of ‘the incomplete’”: “What I’m writing you is ‘this.’ It won’t stop: it goes on” (Lispector *Água viva* 88).

Another goal of the textual analysis was to contextualize my next step in the thesis – the translation of all four of the short stories – and to serve as an introduction to her writerly craft. I was also motivated by the fact that none of the texts I analyzed has been translated into Polish yet. I was excited to engage in this groundbreaking undertaking and terrified at the same time, because I knew that I would have to face many challenges.

I also realized that, in many ways, Lispector’s preoccupation with writing and her literary awareness can be transferred onto translation practice. The plethora of decisions a translator makes all deal with the *how* to rewrite the text, while the *what* is implied in the very choice of the work to be translated, made by the translator or by the editor, prior to the actual translation. Moreover, considering Lispector’s fascination with fragmentariness, we can say that every translated piece is an instant, a fragment, a projection of the translator’s subjectivity formulated on the basis of the author’s creation.

In my experience translating the four short stories in question, I was equally concerned with getting the message across written in “good” Polish and preserving the form of the works. I elaborated on the foreignization/domestication dilemma I have been facing in the fourth chapter of my thesis, where I looked at different theories from the realm of Translation Studies. The presentation of the theoretical framework was essential because it allowed me to formulate better
my own stand as a translator. It also enabled me to contextualize my translation project in
relation to other translators and their concerns inscribed in their own journeys into translating
Lispector’s literary world.

In the fifth chapter, I presented the challenges I have encountered on my own path to
becoming a translator of Lispector’s works: the countless repetitions of single words “ovo,”
“Sveglia,” but also of entire phrases like “queixei-me de baratas”; the dashes in “O ovo”; short
and objective versus long and flowing sentences; scientific language giving way to poetry
captured within the lines; different registers bordering on a philosophical composition: a to-the-
point report, a journal, a snapshot, a story within a story, seemingly acting against literature but
still considered literature… I wanted to recreate all these elements to account not only for
Lispector’s literary experiments but also to expose this integral part of her writing self for the
Polish reader. Lispector’s attachment to how artistic creation takes place, paired with her sharp
linguistic awareness, constantly kept me on my toes while I tried to transmit her school of
literary thought for the Polish reader and to capture a fragment of her artistic continuum.

Another lesson Lispector has taught me is the respect for the principal tool in every
translator’s workshop, namely, the word or, in Antoine Berman’s terms, attachment to the
“letter” of the work and “labor on the letter in translation” (288-289). The word is not just a unit
of writing with a number of meanings every author has in their repertoire, ready to juggle with
on paper – the translator then simply looks for the corresponding definition of the word in the
language into which he or she is translating, and the translation smoothly continues. Rather, the
word is a precious resource that captures ideas, symbols, images: all that “lies between the lines.”

In order, however, to expose Polish readers to this fascinating lesson, they need to have
access not only to translations, but also to a solid theoretical and critical background of
Lispector’s poetics. This gap can be filled not only by Luso-Brazilian scholars interested in her oeuvre, but also by translators who should go beyond a mere task of translating a text and work towards promoting Lispector studies in Poland. I strongly believe that my project proves that this effort is worthwhile.

APPENDIX A

LUSOPHONE LITERATURE IN POLISH TRANSLATION

I. Brazilian literature (anthologies and collections):


The short stories were selected from the following collections: Relíquias de Casa Velha, Histórias românticas, Histórias sem data, Papéis avulsos, Várias histórias.


Authors included in the volume: Julieta de Godoy Ladeira, Vivina de Assis Viana, Edla van Steen, Barbosa Lessa, Mario Quintana, Rubem Fonseca, Carlos Eduard o Novaes, Hernani
Donato, Luís Fernando Veríssimo, Autran Dourado, Osman Lins, José Luís Mora Fuentes, Elias
José, Lazaro Barreto, Origenes Lessa, Herberto Sales, Judith Grossmann, Luís Fernando
Veríssimo, Maria de Lourdes Teixeira, Myriam Campello, Otto Lara Resende.

c) Klave, Janina Zofia, editor. Opowiadania brazylijskie [Brazilian Short Stories].

- Afonso Arinos “Pedro Barqueiro” (from Pelo sertão. Academia Brasileira de Letras, 1898).
- Monteiro Lobato “Skruszony wesołek” (“O engraçado arrependido,” from Urupês. 17ª
- Carlos Drummond de Andrade “Wariatka” (“A doida”, from Contos de aprendiz. José
Olympio, 1951).
- Samuel Rawet “Opowieść o miłości z przedmieścia” (“Conto de um amor suburbano,”
from Contos de Imigrante. José Olympio, 1956).
- Fernando Sabino “Lustro generała” (“O Espelho do general,” from O homem nu. 4ª ed.
- Wander Piroli “Ludzie pracy w Brazylii” (“Trabalhadores do Brasil”), “Jeden z Sorbony”
(“Um da Sorbonne”) both from A mãe e o filho da mãe. 2ed. Interlivros, 1974.
- João Guimarães Rosa “Bracia Dagobé” (“Os irmãos Dagobé”), ”Przeznaczenie”
(“Fatalidade”) – both from Primeiras estórias. 6a ed. José Olympio, 1972.
- Clarice Lispector ”Urodzinowe przyjęcie” (“Feliz aniversário” from Laços de família.
Francisco Alves, 1960).
- João Antônio “Doskonalenie sztuki kopania kapsli” (“Afinaçaõ da arte de chutar


Antônio Torres “Wszystko w porządku, generale” (“Tudo sob controle, meu general”).


• Paulo Rangel “Okazja” (“Oportunidade”)\(^{128}\)


• Roberto Drummond “Izabela, pewnej środy” (“Isabel numa quinta-feira,” in *Os melhores contos brasileiros*. Globo, 1975).

• Regina Célia Colônia “Pieśń na cześć totemu” (“Canção para o Totem,” in *Canção para o Totem*. Civilização Brasileira, 1975).


Authors included in the volume: Clarice Lispector, Edla van Steen, Fernando Sabino, Ivan Ângelo, João Silveira Trevisan, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Luiz Vilela, Rubem Fonseca, Samuel Rawet, Victor Giudice.


\(^{128}\) Translation mine.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade – various poems (translated by Henryk Siewierski).


Poets included in the volume: Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Mário Quintana.

Selection and translation: Agnieszka Szewczyk, Dawid Skibiński, Denis Fortuna, Gabriel Borowski, Henryk Siewierski, Jacek Brzozowski, Joanna Mołek, Justyna Lisowska, Katarzyna Jakóbczyk, Katarzyna Surdej, Magdalena Karpiuk, Małgorzata Drajewicz, Paulina Mansz, Tomasz Ćwiąkała, Urszula Dobrzyn, Violetta Gawor, Zuzanna Boryna.

**II. Individual Brazilian authors**


---. *Ziemia złotych płodów* [São Jorge dos Ilhéus]. Translated by Janina Wrzoskowa, Czytelnik, 1950.
---. *Starzy marynarze: dwie historie z wybrzeża bahijskiego* [Velhos marinheiros]. Translated by Janina Wrzoskowa, Eugeniusz Gruda, Książka i Wiedza, 1972.

---. *Pasterze nocy* [Os Pastores da noite]. Translated by Janina Wrzoskowa, Książka i Wiedza, 1975.

---. *Gabriela, goździki i cynamon* [Gabriela, cravo e canela]. Translated by Janina Wrzoskowa, Filia, 2015.


---. *Być jak płynąca rzeka* [Ser como o rio que flui..., 2006]. Translated by Zofia Stanisławska-Kocińska, Świat Książki, 2013.


III. Portuguese literature


---. *Luzjady* [Os Lusiadas]. Translated by Zofia Trzeszczkowska (pseud. Adam M-ski), 1890.
---. Luzytanie [Os Lusiadas]. Translated by Ireneusz Kania, 1995.\textsuperscript{129}


Castro, José Maria Ferreira de. Emigranci [Emigrantes]. Translated by Aleksandra Olędzka, PIW (1\textsuperscript{st} ed. 1950, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. 1952).


Gomes, Joaquim Soeiro Pereira. Chłopcy z cegielni [Esteiros]. Translated by Helena Czajka, Czytelnik, 1951.

---. Tryby [Engrenagem]. Translated by Helena Czajka, Czytelnik, 1956.

\textsuperscript{129} I did not find the publisher’s name of the second and third editions.


---. *Historia oblężenia Lizbony* [História do cerco Lisboa]. Translated by Wojciech Charchalis, Rebis, 2002.

---. *Kain* [Kaim]. Translated by Wojciech Charchalis, Rebis, 2013.


---. *Mały pamiętnik* [As pequenas memórias]. Translated by Elżbieta Milewska, Świat Książki, 2013.


---. *Podwojenie* [O homem duplicado]. Translated by Wojciech Charchalis, Rebis, 2005.

---. *Rok śmierci Ricarda Reisa* [O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis]. Translated by Wojciech Charchalis, Rebis, 2010.

---. *Wszystkie imiona* [Todos os nomes]. Translated by Elżbieta Milewska, Rebis, 2015.


IV. **Luso-African literature**


Ondjaki (Ndalu de Almeida). *Babcia 19 i sowiecki secret* [Avó Dezanove e o segredo do soviético]. Translated by Michał Lipszyc, Wydawnictwo Karakter, 2013.
APPENDIX B

MY TRANSLATIONS

Clarice Lispector “Jajo i kura” [O ovo e a galinha]
Translated by Agnieszka Gabor

Rano w kuchni widzę na stole jajo. Spoglądam na jajo tylko raz. Natychmiast zdaję sobie sprawę, że nie można widzieć jaja w danym momencie. „Widzieć jajo” nigdy nie utrzymuje się w teraźniejszości: jak tylko zobaczę jajo, zaraz staje się ono jajem, które istnieje od trzech tysięcleci. – W tym samym momencie, gdy widzi się jajo, staje się ono wspomnieniem jaja. – Tylko ten widzi jajo, kto już je zobaczył. – Widzieć jajo to musztarda po obiedzie: jajo zobaczone, jajo stracone. – Widzieć jajo to obietnica zobaczenia jaja w końcu pewnego dnia. – Spojrzenie krótkie i niepodzielne; jeśli rzeczywiście istnieje jakaś myśl; nie ma jej; jest jajo. – Spojrzenie jest koniecznym narzędziem, które po użyciu wyrzucę na śmietnik. Zostawię sobie jajo. – Jajo nie posiada własnego siebie. Samemu, w pojedynkę, nie istnieje.

ramieniu. – Co więcej, nie można poczuć miłości do jaja. Miłość do jaja jest ponadzmysłowa.
Nie zdajemy sobie sprawy z tego, że kochamy jajo. – Dawno temu, w starożytności, byłam
opiekunką jaja i stępałam lekko, by nie zakłócać jego ciszy. Gdy umarłam, ostrożnie wyciągnięto
ze mnie jajo. Wciąż żyło. – Tylko ten, kto widział świat, zobaczy jajo. Tak jak świat, jajo jest
oczywiste.

Jajo już nie istnieje. Tak jak blask martwej gwiazdy, jajo właściwie mówiąc już nie
istnieje. – Jajo, jesteś idealne. Jesteś białe. – Tobie dedykuję początek. Tobie dedykuję to, co po
raz pierwszy.

Jaju dedykuję naród chiński.

Jajo jest zawieszone. Nigdy nie osiadło. Jeśli osiądzie, to nie ono osiada, tylko to coś pod
jajem. – Patrzę na jajo w kuchni z powierzchowną uwagą tak, aby go nie zbić. Z największą
ostrożnością staram się go nie zrozumieć. Ponieważ zrozumienie jaja jest niemożliwe, wiem, że
jeśli je zrozumieć, znaczy to, że błądzę. Zrozumienie jest dowodem błędzenia. Widzieć jajo nie
polega na jego zrozumieniu. – W ogóle nie myśleć o jaju to sposób, aby je zobaczyć. – Czy
wiem o jaju? Prawie na pewno tak. A zatem: jestem, więc wiem. – Liczy się tylko to, czego nie
wiem o jaju. To, czego nie wiem o jaju, przychodzi do mnie w postaci owego jaja. – Księżyc
zamieszkuje jaja.

Sprawia, że stół jest równią pochylą. Jajo wystawia na pokaz. – Kto się zagłębia w jaju, kto
widzi więcej niż jego powierzchnię, chce czegoś innego: jest głodny.


Z biegiem czasu jajo stało się jajem kurzym. Nie jest nim. Ale jako jajo adoptowane, korzysta z tego przezwiska. – Powinno się mówić „jajo kurze”. Jeśli powie się jedynie „to jajo”, temat się wyczerpuje i świat staje się nagi. – Niebezpieczeństwo związane z jajem polega na

(Pewność daje nam to, że jajo nie może się przeobrazić w prostokąt; ta niemożność stanowi osile jaja; jego majestatyczność bierze się z ogromu niemożności, która z kolei emanuje, jakby była niechęcią.) Lecz kto walczyłby, aby uczynić jajo prostokątnym, przegrałby własne życie. Zatem to jajo nas naraża. Naszą przewagę stanowi fakt, że jajo jest niewidzialne. A jeśli chodzi o adeptów – cóż, oni ukrywają jajo.

Co do ciała kury, to jest ono największym dowodem na nieistnienie jaja. Wystarczy spojrzeć na kurę, aby stało się oczywiste, że jajo nie ma prawa istnieć.


Jej nawet nie powołano. Kura jest wybierana na poczekaniu. Kura żyje jakby była we śnie. Nie
ma poczucia rzeczywistości. Cały strach kury wywodzi się z tego, że jej sen na jawie jest
nieustannie przerywany. Kura jest snem głębokim. Kura cierpi na nieznaną dolegliwość. Tą
nieznaną dolegliwością jest właśnie jajo. Ona nie potrafi tego sobie wytłumaczyć: „wiem, że
błąd tkwi we mnie samej”, nazywa swoje życie pomyłką, „już nie wiem, co czuję”, i tak dalej.
„I tak dalej, i tak dalej, i tak dalej” – gdaka kura cały boży dzień. Kura posiada bogate
życie wewnętrzne. Prawdę mówiąc, życie wewnętrzne to jedyne, co kura posiada. W naszym
wyobrażeniu życie wewnętrzne kury jest tym, co nazywamy „kurą”. Życie wewnętrzne kury
polega na zachowywaniu się tak, jakby rozumiała. Jakakolwiek groźba i kura już wrzeszczy w
niebogłosy jak szalona. Wszystko po to, aby jajo znajdujące się w jej wnętrzu nie pękło. Jajo,
które pęka wewnątrz kury jest jak krew.

Kura spogląda na horyzont. Jakby z linii horyzontu szło w jej kierunku jajo. Za
wyjątkiem pełnienia roli środka transportu dla jaja, kura jest głupia, beczynna i
krótkowzroczna. Jak kura może zrozumieć samą siebie, jeśli stanowi zaprzeczenie jaja? Jajo jest
wciąż tym samym jajem pochodzącym z Macedonii. Kura jest zawsze tragedią najbardziej
współczesną. Zawsze – i niepotrzebnie – uaktualnianą, wciąż ulega przeprojektowaniu. Nie
znaleziono jeszcze formy, która byłaby najbardziej odpowiednia dla kury. Podczas gdy mój
sąsiad odbiera telefon, rozkojarzonym ołówkiem rysuje kolejny projekt kury. Bo dla kury inaczej
się nie da: nie służyć sobie samej leży w jej naturze. Ze względu jednak na to, że jej
przeznaczenie jest ważniejsze od niej samej i ponieważ jej przeznaczeniem jest jajo – jej życie
prywatne nas nie obchodzi.
Wewnątrz siebie kura nie rozpoznaje jaja, ale poza sobą również go nie rozpoznaje. Kiedy kura widzi jajo, myśli, że ma do czynienia z czymś niemożliwym. I z bijącym sercem, z tak mocno bijącym sercem nie rozpoznaje jaja.


To kura nie chciała poświęcić swojego życia. Ta, która wybrała bycie „szczęśliwą”. Ta, która nie zdawała sobie sprawy, że jeśli spędziliaby całe życie projektując jajo wewnątrz siebie – jak w bogato zdobionym rękopisie – stałaby się potrzebna. Ta, która nie wiedziała, jak zatracić siebie samą. Ta, która myślała, że jej kurze pióra służą do osłaniania własnej drogocennej skóry. Ta, która nie rozumiała, że pióra mają na celu wyłącznie ułatwić przenoszenie jaja, gdyż intensywne cierpienie mogłoby je uszkodzić. Ta, która pomyślała, że przyjemność jest darem, nie zdając sobie sprawy, że owa przyjemność służy do całkowitego odwrócenia jej uwagi od powstawania jaja. Ta, która nie wiedziała, że „ja” to jedno ze słów, które kreśli się w tym samym momencie, gdy odbiera się telefon – taka próba znalezienia odpowiedniejszej formy. Ta, która pomyślała, że „ja” oznacza mieć swoje własne ego. Kury stanowiące zagrożenie dla jaja to te, które są „ja” bez przerwy. W nich to „ja” jest tak niezmiennie, że nie mogą już nawet wymówić słowa „jajo”. Ale kto wie, być może tego właśnie jajo potrzebowało. Bo gdyby kury nie były tak rozkojarzone, gdyby skupiły swoją uwagę na życiu, które się w nich tworzy, uszkodziłyby jajo.

Zaczęłam mówić o kurze – i już o niej od jakiegoś czasu nie mówi. Ale wciąż mówię o jaju.

szacunku; jest ona właśnie darem dla złych agentów, dla tych, którzy przeszkodziliby wszystkiemu, gdyby nie uzyskali pozwolenia na zgadywanie w ciemno.


Znane są przypadki agentów, którzy popełniają samobójstwo: uznają, że instrukcje, które otrzymali, są wysoce niewystarczające i odczuwają brak wsparcia. Jeden agent publicznie ujawnił, że jest agentem, bo nie był w stanie poradzić sobie z brakiem zrozumienia i z tym, że inni go nie szanowali: został śmiertelnie potrącony, gdy wychodził z restauracji. Był też inny przypadek agenta, którego nawet nie trzeba było eliminować: pochłonął go z wolna jego własny opór, który pojawił się w momencie, gdy ów agent odkrył, że te dwie czy trzy otrzymane instrukcje nie zawierały żadnego wyjaśnienia. Kolejny agent, który również został wyeliminowany, myślał, że „prawdę trzeba mówić śmialö” i zaczął jej najpierw szukać. Mówi się o nim, że zginął w imię prawdy, ale tak naprawdę to swoją niewinnością utrudnił dotarcie do prawdy; jego pozorna odwaga była głupotą, a jego pragnienie lojalności było naiwnością, gdyż nie rozumiał, że bycie lojalnym nie jest niczym szlachetnym; bycie lojalnym oznacza bycie nielojalnym wobec całej reszty. Wszystkie te skrajne przypadki śmiertelne nie wynikają z okrucieństwa. Wynikają z tego, że jest sporo pracy – nazwijmy ją kosmiczną – do robienia i indywidualne przypadki nie mogą być, niestety,brane pod uwagę. Dla tych, którzy ulegają i stają
się jednostką, są instytucje, działalność charytatywna, zrozumienie, które nie rozróżnia pomiędzy motywami, słowem – nasze ludzkie życie.

Jaja ścinają się na patelni, a ja, zanurzona we śnie, przygotowuję śniadanie. Pozbawiona jakiegokolwiek poczucia rzeczywistości wołam dzieci, które kielkują z łóżek, przysuwają krzesła i jedzą, i tak świta trud dnia codziennego, wśród krzyków, śmiechu, jedzenia; białko i żółtko, radość na przemian z kłótnią, dzień, który jest naszą solą i my jesteśmy solą dnia; życie jest niesłychanie znośne, życie zajmuje i rozprasza, życie rozśmiesza.

I sprawia, że uśmiechem się w mojej tajemnicy. Moja tajemnica, która polega na byciu jedynie środkiem, a nie celem, dała mi najbardziej lobuzerską ze swobód: nie jestem głupia i korzystam, jak mogę. Do tego stopnia, że nawet wyrządzam innym krzywdę tak, że naprawdę. Ta niby-praca, którą dano mi po to, abym mogła zamaskować moją prawdziwą rolę; no więc korzystam z tej niby-pracy i czynię ją moją prawdziwą pracą; nawet pieniędze, które dostaję jako dniówkę i które mają za zadanie uczynić moje życie łatwiejszym, aby jajo mogło się wytworzyć; cóż, pieniądze te przeznaczam na inne cele, naciągam budżet; ostatnio zakupiłam udziały browaru Brahma i teraz jestem bogata. Wszystko to wciąż nazywam niezbędną skromnością życia. Również czas, który mi dano i który dają nam po to, aby podczas tego zaszczytnego odpoczynku jajo mogło się wytworzyć; tak więc spędzam czas ten na zakazane przyjemności i zakazany ból, całkowicie zapominając o jaju. Oto i moja prostota.

przecież nikt nie wie, jak czuje się w środku ten, którego praca polega na udawaniu zdrady i który w końcu zaczyna wierzyć w swoją zdradę. Którego praca polega na codziennym zapominaniu. Od którego oczekuje się jawnej hańby. Już nawet w moim lustrze nie odbija się twarz, która byłaby moją. Albo jestem agentem, albo to faktycznie jest zdrada.

Mimo to śpię snem sprawiedliwych, bo wiem, że moje daremne życie nie zakłóca biegu wielkiego czasu. Wprost przeciwnie: wygląda na to, że wymaga się ode mnie, abym była nadzwyczaj daremna, nawet wymaga się ode mnie, abym spała jak ten sprawiedliwy. Oni chcą, abym była zajęta i rozkojarzona, i nie obchodzi ich, jak to zrobię. Z moją niewłaściwą uwagą i poważną głupotą mogłabym przecież przeszkodzić temu, co się za pomocą mnie tworzy. Chodzi o to, że ja sama, ja w rzeczy samej, byłam i jestem od przeszkadzania. To, co może ujawnić, że jestem agentem, to myśl, że moje przeznaczenie mnie przewyższa: przynajmniej to musieli mi pozwolić odgadnąć; byłą jedną z tych, którzy ledwo wykonaliby robotę, gdyby nie odgadnęli choć trochę; sprawili, abym zapomniała to, co pozwolili mi odgadnąć, ale, niezauważalnie, pozostała we mnie myśl, że moje przeznaczenie mnie przeszcza i że jestem dla nich narzędziem pracy. Tak czy owak, jedynie, co mi pozostało, to być narzędziem, bo wykonanie pracy nie mogło tak naprawdę należeć do mnie. Już raz próbowałaś żyć na własny rachunek i nie udało się; do tej porę trzęsie mi się ręka. Gdybym upierała się ciut dłużej, straciłabym zdrowie na dobre. Od tamtej porę, to znaczy od owego pechowego doświadczenia, staram się rozumować w następujący sposób: że dano mi już tak wiele, że dano mi wszystko, co mogłam otrzymać; i że pozostali agenci, o wiele lepsi ode mnie, również pracowali w imię tego, czego nie byli świadomi, nie mając do dyspozycji – podobnie jak ja – prawie żadnych wskazówek. Wiele mi już dano; na przykład to: raz czy dwa, z sercem bijącym od tego przywileju, ja przynajmniej
wim, że nie rozpoznaję! Z sercem bijącym z emocji, ja przynajmniej nie pojmuję! Z sercem bijącym z pewności, ja przynajmniej nie wiem.

Ale co z jajem? Oto jedna z ich sztuzek: podczas, gdy mówiliam o jaju, zapomniałam o jaju. „Mów, mów”, pouczali mnie. I dzięki wszystkim tym słowom jajo jest całkowicie chronione. Mów dużo, to jedna ze wskazówek, jestem taka zmęczona.


Clárcie Lispector “Piąta opowieść” [A quinta história]
Translated by Agnieszka Gabor

Ta opowieść mogłaby się nazywać „Posągi”. Innym możliwym tytułem jest „Zamach”. A także „Jak zabić karaluchy”. Opowiem zatem co najmniej trzy historie, prawdziwe – gdyż żadna z nich nie przeczy drugiej. Mimo że tylko jedna, byłołyby ich tysiąc i jedna, jeśli dano by mi tysiąc i jedną noc.

Pierwsza, „Jak zabić karaluchy”, zaczyna się tak: skarżyłam się na karaluchy. Pewna pani usłyszała moje narzekanie. Dała mi przepis, jak je zabić. Trzeba zmieszać w równych


Trzecia z historii opowiada o „Posągach”. Rozpoczyna się stwierdzeniem, że skarżyłam się na karaluchy. Następnie pojawia się ta sama pani. Opowieść snuje się aż do momentu, gdy,

Czwarta opowieść inauguruje nową erę w naszym domu. Rozpoczyna się wiadomo jak: skarżyłam się na karaluchy. Snuje się do momentu, w którym widzę gipsowe pomniki. Tak, martwe. Ale spoglądam na rury, przez które dzisiejszej nocy odrodzi się, gęsiego, populacja wolna i żywa. Czy będę zatem musiała każdej nocy przygotowywać śmiertelnoścny cukier? Tak jak ktoś, kto nie potrafi już spać bez żądzy rytuału. I czy każdego poranka będę się kierować do

Piąta opowieść nosi tytuł „Leibnitz i transcendencja miłości w Polinezji”. Zaczyna się tak: skarżyłam się na karaluchy.

Clarice Lispector “Suchy szkic o koniach” [Seco estudo de cavalos]
Translated by Agnieszka Gabor

OBNAŻENIE

Koń jest nagi.

UDAWANE OSWAJANIE

Czym jest koń? Uosabia wolność tak nieposkromioną, że uwięzienie go dla potrzeb służenia człowiekowi jest bezużyteczne: pozwala się oswoić, ale prosty ruch, rewolucyjnie kołysanie głową – potrząsanie grzywą jak rozpuszczonymi włosami – pokazuje, że jego intymna natura pozostaje dzika, czysta i wolna.
POSTAĆ / FORMA

Postać konia reprezentuje to, co najlepsze w istocie ludzkiej. Mam wewnątrz siebie konia, który rzadko się ujawnia. Ale gdy widzę innego konia, wówczas mój się uwidacznia. Jego postać mówi.

SŁODYCZ

Co sprawia, że koń jest jak błyszcząca satyna? To słodycz tego, który przyjął życie i jego tęczę. Słodycz ta przejawia się gładką sierścią, przywodzącą na myśl trzymane pod kontrolą sprężyste i giętkie mięśnie.

OCZY KONIA


WRAŻLIWOŚĆ

Każdy koń jest dziki i nieufny, gdy dotykają go niepewne dłonie.
ON I JA


DORASTANIE DZIEWCZYNKI-ŻREBIĘCIA


POPIS

W zagrodzie biały koń – król natury – ciskał wysoko w przenikliwość powietrza swoje długotrwałe rzenie świetności.

KOŃ NIEBEZPIECZNY
W pewnej wsi – która pewnego dnia miała przekształcić się w mała metropolię – wciąż rządziły konie jako ważni obywatele. Ze względu na stale rosnącą potrzebę przemieszczania się, stado koni wtargnęło do wioseczki, a w dzikich jeszcze dzieciach narodziło się sekretne pragnienie galopowania. Młody, gniady koń śmiertelnie kopnął chłopca, który chciał go dosiąść. A miejsce, w którym mały zuchwalec zginął, było oglądane przez ludzi z wyrzutem, którego tak naprawdę nie wiedzieli do kogo skierować. Kobiety, z koszami zakupów w rękach, zatrzymywały się i gapiły. Pewna gazeta zbadała w końcu ten przypadek i ludzie czytali z niejaką dumą wzmiankę opatrzoną tytułem Końska Zbrodnia. Była to Zbrodnia na jednym z wiejskich synów. Wieś już wówczas mieszała swój odór stajni ze świadomością siły drzemiącej w koniach.

NA ULICY SPIERZCHNIĘTEJ OD SŁOŃCA


O ZIMNYM PORANKU

Niekiedy, o poranku, można było dostrzec letnią, wilgotną parę – światlistą i spokojną, wydobywającą się z drżących, szalenie ożywionych i wibrujących nozdrzy ogierów i klaczy.

W TAJEMNICY NOCY

Jednak nocą, konie zwolnione z obowiązków i prowadzone na pastwisko będą galopowały w ciemności, wykwintne i wolne. Żrebięta, szkapy, gniadosze, wysmukłe klacze, twarde kopyta – aż tu nagle jakaś zimna i cienka głowa konia! – kopyta stukają, piana na pyskach, które unoszą się ku górze w gniewnym pomruku. I czasem głęboki wydech ochładzał trzęsące się trawy.

się w lunatyczny kłus. Gdybym tylko opuściła pokój, moja postać powiększyłaby się i uszlachetniła, a po wyjściu na ulicę puściłabym się w galop uderzając wrażliwymi kończynami, z kopytami ślizgającymi się na ostatnich stopniach schodów mojego domu. Stojąc na opuszczonej chodnikiu spojrzałabym: w jedną stronę i w drugą. I widziałabym rzeczy tak, jak koń je widzi. Takie było moje pragnienie. Będąc w domu, starałam wsłuchać się w górzyste pastwisko, na którym w ciemnościach galopowały bezimienne konie, przywrócone do stanu gotowości do polowania i wojny.


STUDIUM KONIA DEMONICZNEGO


nigdy więcej. Klus jednak wciąż we mnie trwa. Rozmawiam, sprzątam dom, uśmiecham się, lecz wiem, że klus wciąż we mnie jest. Brakuje mi go tak, jak komuś umierającemu.

Nie, nie mogę przestać tam chodzić.


I pokazuję się w ciemności ciemnemu koniowi, który na mnie czeka, królewskiemu, pokazuję się niema i otoczona blaskiem. Posłuszna Bestii.

Gonią nas pięćdziesiąt trzy flety. Na przodzie oświetla nas klarnet, nas, bezwstydnych wspólników enigmy. I nic więcej nie jest mi dane wiedzieć.

O świcie ujrzę nas wyczerpanych, niepodal strumyka, nie mając pojęcia, jakie przestępstwo popełniliśmy, zanim nastał niewinny świt.

Na moich ustach i końskich kopytach znak wielkiej krwi. Co takiego złożyliśmy w ofierze?

O świcie stanę obok niemego już ogiera, z resztkami fletów spływających z moich włosów. Na dźwięk pierwszych dzwonów kościelnych z daleka przeszywa nas dreszcz i ogarnia nas strach, rozpływniemy się w powietrzu pod krzyżem.
Noc jest moim życiem z diabelskim koniem, ja – czarodziejką grozy. Noc jest moim życiem, zmierzcha się, noc grzesznie radosna jest smutnym życiem, które jest moją orgią – ach, odbierz mi, odbierz mi ogiera, bo z każdą kolejną kradzieżą aż do świtu ukradłam już dla samej siebie i dla mojego baśniowego partnera, i miałam wizję grozy tej demonicznej, niszczycielskiej uciechy o świcie.

Uwolnij mnie, odbierz mi ogiera póki czas, dopóki jeszcze nie zmierzcha, dopóki trwa bezmroczny dzień, o ile jeszcze jest czas, bo kradnąc ogiera, musiałam zabić Króla, a zabijając go, odebrałam mu jego własną śmierć. A orgiastyczna radość z naszego morderstwa pochłania mnie i czuję przerażającą przyjemność. Odbierz czym prędzej Królowi niebezpiecznego konia, odbierz mnie, zanim nastanie noc i mnie wezwie do siebie.

Clarice Lispector “Raport o rzeczy” [O relatório da coisa]
Translated by Agnieszka Gabor


Dzielimy czas podczas gdy w rzeczywistości jest on niepodzielny. Jest zawsze i niezmienny. Ale my potrzebujemy go podzielić. I z tej potrzeby zrodziła się ta potworna rzecz: zegar.

Nie będę mówiła o zegarach. Będzie o konkretnym zegarku. Gram w otwarte karty: mówię od razu to, co mam do powiedzenia, bez literatury. Ten raport jest antyliteraturą o rzeczy.


znieść twojego czuwania. Ty nie przestajesz być. Ty nie śniesz. Nie można powiedzieć, że „działasz”: ty nie jesteś działaniem, ty po prostu jesteś.


Dowiedziałam się o jednym mężczyźnie, który posiadał Sveglię i któremu przydarzyła się Sveglia. Szedł nocą ze swoim dziesięcioletnim synem i ów syn rzekł: uważaj, tato, ktoś tam odprawia makumbę. Ojciec się cofnął – i jak nie nadepnął z impetem na zapaloną świecę, gasząc ją. Wydaje się jakby nic się nie zdarzyło, co też jest bardzo Sveglia. Mężczyzna poszedł spać.

I miał przerażający sen. Biały koń chciał go staranować, a on uciekał jak szalony.

wykonał nad nim kilka prostych ruchów – takich, które wykonywał, gdy Sveglia zatrzymywała się i których on sam nie potrafił wytłumaczyć.

Kobieta otworzyła oczy. Była całkowicie zdrowa. I wciąż żyje, niech Bóg ją chroni.


Jestem całkowicie zdrowa na ciele i umysle. Choć pewnej nocy, gdy spałam snem głębokim, usłyszano, jak mówiłam głośno: chcę mieć dziecko ze Sveglią!


Przeżyłam pięć lat bez zachorowania na grypę: to jest Sveglia. A kiedy zachorowałam, trwało to trzy dni. Potem został mi suchy kaszel. Ale lekarz przepisał mi antybiotyk i wyzdrowiałam. Anytbiotyk to Sveglia.


Mam wrażenie, że napiszę o czymś elektronicznym, mimo że go nigdy nie widziałam. Wygląda na to, że tak musi być. To nieuchronne.


Szwecja to Sveglia.

Ale teraz idę spać, mimo że nie powinnam śnić.


Być wiernym jest. Akt miłości ma w sobie rozpacz, która jest.
A teraz opowiem wam historię. Najpierw jednak chciałamby zaznaczyć, że osoba, która mi ją opowiedziała, choć jest bardzo dobra, jest Sveglią.


Historia brzmi następująco:


Niedobrze mi od papierosa marki Consul, miętowego i słodkiego. A papierosy Carlton są suche, twardze, ostre i nie spoufalają się z palaczem. Ponieważ każda rzecz jest lub nie jest, nie
przeszkadza mi robienie darmowej reklamy Carltonów. Jeśli chodzi o Coca-colę – tej nie odpuszcę.

Chcę wysłać ten raport do gazety „Senhor” i chcę, żeby dobrze mi za niego zapłacili.

Skoro jesteś, może osądź moją kucharkę, która dobrze gotuje i śpiewa przez cały dzień, tak.

Chyba skończę ten raport, tak istotny dla wytłumaczenia żywotnych zjawisk materii. Ale nie wiem, co robić. Ach, wobec tego ubiorę się.

Do nigdy, Sveglia. Niebo intensywnie niebieskie jest. Morskie fale białe od piany są bardziej niż morze. (Już się pożegnałam ze Sveglią, ale wciąż będę o nim opowiadać, to nałóg, bardzo cierpliwi). Zapach morza łączy to, co męskie i żeńskie i rodzi się w powietrzu dziecko, które jest.

Właścicielka zegarka powiedziała mi dziś, że tak naprawdę, to on jest jej właścicielem. Powiedziała mi, że on ma takie malutkie czarne otwory, z których wydobywa się dźwięk miękki jak brak słów, satynowy. Wewnątrz ma złocistą tarczę. Tarcza zewnętrzna jest srebrna, niemal bezbarwna – jak samolot w przestrzeni, lecący w powietrzu metal. Czekanie jest czy nie jest? Nie znam odpowiedzi, gdyż cierpię na pośpiech i nie potrafię ocenić tego punktu bez zaangażowania się emocjonalnie. Nie lubię czekać.

Jeden kwartet muzyczny jest o niebo bardziej niż orkiestra symfoniczna. Flet jest. Klawesyn ma coś straszniego w sobie: wydobywające się dźwięki są przebrzmiałe i kruche. Tak jak dusza z innego świata.

A teraz zakończę ten raport z tajemnicy. Tak się składa, że jestem bardzo zmęczona. Zanim wyjdę, wykapię się i wyperfumuję się perfumami, które są moim sekretem. Powiem o nich tylko jedno: są agrestowe i nieco ostre, z ukrytą słodyczą. One są.


A teraz – żegnaj.
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