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## Selfish

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Selfish

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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I dedicate this project to my role model Luisa Manzo.

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## Introduction

I am a cage, in search of a bird

–Franz Kafka

Common knowledge-seeking as a socially unifying experience takes shape in concept formation and the assemblage of symbolic structures of understanding. Symbols are created through the extrapolation of meanings first informed by perceptions of the world and then reduced into a cohesive form. Shared human understanding is rendered possible through this abbreviation of life into symbols. These symbols are useful – through them, language can have meaning, and there can be shared understanding. In this sense, the perpetual accretion of knowledge into different areas of human understanding, be it history or philosophy, can be seen as a grand effort towards structure building.

The problem arises when, at some unknown point, the mind, seeking comprehension of the world, is overtaken by symbolic structures. The mind forgets that the symbols are just stand-ins for actual existence. Symbols then become prescriptive blueprints of how existence should be. All that becomes available to such an existence is a mere correspondence to the symbols that orbit it. A circular process of self-reinforcement ignites in the being that believes that symbolic representation is exhaustive of existence, thus strengthening the proposed meaning of the symbols. The mind then frantically attempts to deform life around it to match the images proposed by the symbols. However, since they are abbreviations, approximations, and ghostly forms that roughly replicate life, they can not perfectly match up to it.

This work, *Selfish*, will argue that the imposition of a prescriptive blueprint for understanding the world comes to neutralize life and that the need itself for a blueprint of this



kind stems from a fundamental feeling of inadequacy for being in the world and results in an existence that is trying to get rid of itself.

An honest encounter with, and recognition of, something outside of the symbolic structure uncovers the necessity for structure as a coping mechanism for humans that feel their existence in the world to be inadequate. Symbolism is a lofty representation of life that worries us.

Being in a symbolic representation of existence constrains language to maintain the symbolic structures of understanding. However, if looked upon with a more open gaze, language reveals itself to withhold a plurality of meanings routinely discarded in the interest of clarity.

Language and concept-making participate in the circular project of building and reinforcing a symbolic structure that distributes meaning. The process is circular since language at once presupposes a significative structure but also reinforces that same structure through its use.

Symbolic structures of understanding proliferate by cataloging knowledge into separate areas. Clarice Lispector is in the area of 'literature', signaling to at least some degree of difference between the treatment and weight of her works, and works dubbed to be 'philosophical'. Nevertheless, her work sheds light on problems that have constantly permeated the realm of philosophy. The logic undergirding her works presents an exciting opening to a potentially different way of understanding. The guiding principles of her writing, which the following section will discuss, directly oppose the constriction to symbolic correspondence.

Lispector does not propose any presupposed singular, blanket answer. It is challenging to recapitulate her stance in a few words, which have little meaning or are too vague without their

original context. Understanding for Lispector comes from trust. Trust in existence beyond its translation into symbols. This kind of trust then goes to reaffirm our existence as is, needy for symbolic representation as the chiefly human tool for understanding, yet leaving enough room for other possibilities of signification to exist.

*Selfish* takes two of Lispector's books as starting points: *Agua Viva* and *The Passion, according to G.H.* These works are used in different ways to inform and guide the discussion as it navigates through different symptomologies of an existence wholly underpinned by the quest for knowledge as a symbolic representation of life.

*Selfish* utilizes the two books in different ways. *Agua Viva* is perhaps the crystallization of Lispector's technique. The book does not have any semblance of a narrative. There are no characters except for "I," and "you," and the only names that appear Lispector mentions in a cursory way. They become images rather than active players in the structure of the book. *Selfish* takes most of its methodological inspiration from *Agua Viva*.

*The Passion According to G.H.* (subsequently referred to as *The Passion*), inspires the narratological building of *Selfish*. *Selfish* takes a similar trajectory to the events in *The Passion*. The book is a testimony of a self that suffers the disentanglement from a previously encompassing symbolic comprehension of existence. The novel is G.H.'s retelling of the previous day's events, when she suffered an internal rapture upon encountering a cockroach, and the metaphysical consequences she subsequently experiences. . Here is a succinct summary of the events of the book.

At the outset of the novel, G.H. is terrified, flailing, as she discloses her existential dread "How could I explain that my greatest fear is precisely of: being? and yet there is no other way.

How can I explain that my greatest fear is living whatever comes? how to explain that I can't stand seeing, just because life isn't what I thought –as if I knew what! Why is seeing such disorganization?" (Lispector *Passion* 5) The experiences G.H. suffers destabilize her ways of understanding life. G.H. gazed past her symbolic comprehension of existence and saw it as a partial facsimile that had replaced existence for her. She then fears that these realizations will forever cast her outside the boundaries of symbolic representation and therefore socialized human life.

So at the beginning of the novel, G.H. tries to label, categorize, and therefore neutralize the experience of the day before. The events begin with G.H. wanting to clean up and arrange her top-floor apartment. She then enters her maid's clean room. After becoming aware that a cockroach hides behind the closet doors G.H. stops from carrying out her desire to "arrange things." The middle section of the book is the most difficult to describe. In it, Lispector details the head-spinning metaphysical delirium G.H. goes through. The prose is convulsing, and the passages feel claustrophobic in their density. However, towards the end of the book, G.H. starts to reemerge from the shuddering darkness her experience puts her in. She becomes more assertive in her exclamations. G.H. shares a newfound clarity about her past ways of existing. She had hoped to solve her existence, but soon after, she accepts her inability to do so. What follows is the crucial realization that giving up is the only possible way for her to accept her state of existence.

In the final moments of *The Passion*, the reader, alongside G.H., is returned to the beginning of the book, yet something has changed. The protagonist's initial existential dread and fear that "the whole world will have to be transformed in order for me to fit within it" (Lispector

3) is resolved with her final utterances, “the simultaneous present no longer scared me” and “The world depended on me” (Lispector 189). What changed was not the world, nor G.H.. Perhaps, she realized that nothing had to change in order for her existential dread to pass, “I was feeling baptized by the world” and what she achieved wasn’t a glorious victorious triumph, “[n]ot the maximum act, as I had thought before, not heroism and sainthood. But at last the tiniest act that I had always been missing.” (Lispector *Passion* 188). In the same stride, *Selfish* does not pretend to give the ‘whole’ picture but ‘a’ picture nonetheless.

Joyce writes in *Ulysses*: “the heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” (Joyce 573). *Selfish* is a collection of fragments, small argumentative pieces, “stars”, that elucidate and analyze the various symptoms of G.H.’s structural collapse by deciphering them with other philosophical voices. *Selfish* wants to give its reader the fruit, a totality impossible to deliver directly through writing. By juxtaposing these fragments, the intention is that a more comprehensive picture emerges peripherally. The following section will provide a more extensive explanation of such a method of composition.

As the protagonist of *The Passion* says while discussing strategies to retell, thus rationalizing the catastrophic experience at the heart of the book: “the vision of an infinite piece of meat is the vision of the mad, but if I cut that meat into pieces and parcel them out over days and over hungers — then it would no longer be perdition and madness: it would once again be humanized life” (Lispector *Passion* 6). In this sense, each fragment is a portion of this infinite piece of meat or pulp. Nevertheless, the whole nightblue fruit will hopefully become visible once the constellation of fragments fully sets in place. So may the direct assertions of this work be stars, and may they shine just enough to make the harvest most bountiful.

This introduction is trying to say all that should be said, that can be said, to begin the discussion, yet enough cannot be said, yet a lot more is said between the lines – a space to fill with *Selfish*.

For another methodology

Have I been understood?

–Friedrich Nietzsche

I understand myself

–Clarice Lispector

At first glance, Clarice Lispector can appear as a mysterious writer. Consider this exchange from one of her only filmed interviews:

Júlio Lerner: Do you consider yourself a popular writer?

Clarice Lispector: No.

J.L.: Why?

C.L.: Well, they even call me hermetic. How can I be popular and hermetic at the same time?

J.L.: And what do you think of that description – ‘hermetic’?

C.L.: I understand me. So I’m not hermetic for myself. (Interview with Lispector, 10:08)

This short reflection on her writing already signals a difficulty the reader might encounter when analyzing or understanding Lispector’s work. She is not hermetic for herself, but is she hermetic for the reader? Does it matter for our analysis?

Let us look at a passage from Lispector’s *Água Viva* to see whether the writer comes off as hermetic:

I know that you don’t like art either. I was born hard, heroic, alone, and standing. And I found my counterpoint in the landscape without picturesqueness and without beauty. Ugliness is my banner of war. I love the ugly with the love of equals. And I defy death.

I—I am my own death. And no one goes further. The barbarian within me seeks the cruel barbarian outside me. I see in light and dark I the faces of people flickering in the flames of the bonfire. I am a tree that burns with hard pleasure. A single sweetness possesses me: complicity with the world. I love my cross, which I painfully carry. It's the least I can make of my life: accept commiserably the sacrifice of the night. (Lispector *Água Viva* 32)

The initial framing of the passage preludes a stance on aesthetics. Perhaps Lispector's view of art attempts to go beyond arbitrary qualitative distinctions such as beautiful or ugly. Does she then imply that through art the human becomes immortal? Could the next few lines be understood in Heideggerean terms? Is Lispector declaring her understanding of her being as fully present in her life only regarding the awareness of its finality? Does the word barbarian imply a suggestion on the level of etymology? The Greek *bárbaros*, from the onomatopoeic 'bar bar' – how the Greeks used to describe foreigners speaking unintelligible languages that sounded all the same. Could she mean that she, unintelligible to herself, seeks the unintelligible other? Perhaps Lacan can be implicated here. And yet she is a tree... Is she arguing that the only irreducible quality of our existence is that we exist? Or is the relationship with the world more complicated than that? Does this have something to do with Jesus Christ? This list of questions seems to go on.

Lispector's prose is difficult to decipher. This difficulty is not one of material complexity. Lispector is not concerned with being unnecessarily erudite or verbose. Instead, Lispector claims that she writes very simply. The topic of clarity is addressed later in the interview:

I: Could it be that simple things, these days, are looked at in complicated ways?

CL: Possibly. But I write simply. I don't dress things up. (Interview with Lispector, 20:45)

However, the overarching question that appears in the mind of Lispector's reader is, 'What exactly is she referring to?'. The myriad of topics she seems to touch on in one brief passage only augment this question. If Lispector does not dress things up in ornamental language or with brainy references to other topics, why is she so difficult to understand? In *The Passion*, at some point, she writes: "Ah, I am being so direct that I manage to seem symbolic" (*Lispector Passion* 142). While Lispector may be writing directly, it hardly appears so to the reader. To the reader, she seems symbolic. This dissonance is perhaps more informative about the reader than it is about Lispector herself.

Subjects within symbolic structures seek to recognize the symbols behind their encounters. In reading, this actualizes in a presumption of symbolic correspondence between what is on the page and what the subject has already experienced, be it in life, other readings, etc. The reader seeks a meaning they can understand. Understanding within symbolic structures occurs through matching the referent at hand to the symbol it is supposed to represent. So the reader approaches the text with a dictionary full of tropes, images, references, allegories, etc., looming in the back of their minds. On the other hand, Lispector's writing is unconcerned with prescriptive questions on how a reader will interpret the text.

In the interview, relating to this discussion on referentiality, Lerner asks Lispector:

J.L.: In your education as a writer, who were the writers that most marked you?



C.L.: I really don't know, because I mixed everything up. I read novels for young girls and mixed it up with Dostoyevsky and ... I chose books by their titles. And not by the authors because I didn't know anything. (Interview with Lispector, 20:59)

Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality', which could help us better understand how Lispector's writing functions in the reader. Lispector becomes overwhelming the moment when, as Kristeva puts it, "in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (Kristeva *Desire* 36). If approached with the presupposition of symbolic correspondence, Lispector's writing appears as an impossibly dense tangle of references, of inextricable sediments of other people's and author's thoughts, a distillation of thousands of narratives.

On the effect that Lispector's writing has on the reader, specifically about *Água viva*, Hélène Cixous writes, "It can produce resistance and anguish in the reader because it is governed by a different order. One could say that from the point of view of a classical order, it is completely disorganized. But as poets know and keep repeating, the law holds only through its name and by its name" (Cixous *Reading* 53). Supposedly, as Cixous never clearly states it, by "classical order", she could be implicating any pre-established governing structure of understanding, in this case within literature, that presupposes a work to be discernible with the tools the structure provides – its symbols. From the point of view of a reader presupposing clear symbolic meanings, Lispector's writing comes off as chaotic and obscure. But as the poets say about 'Law', the authority of the structure is upheld only by the use and reinforcement of its constituent components. Lispector's texts produce resistance proportional to the reader's investment within one prescriptive structure of meaning.

When Lerner asks Lispector about her ‘average reader’, she offers an anecdote about the readers of *The Passion* in response:

CL: a Portuguese teacher from Pedro II came to my house, said he’d read it four times, and he didn’t know what it was all about. The next day a young girl, seventeen years old, came over and said that that book was her very favorite (Interview with Lispector, 17:20)

Someone who presumably should have been most competent in understanding literary work, as in this example, the Portuguese teacher, struggles the most when confronted with Lispector’s texts. Lispector’s writing is so interwoven within itself that a dissection, a division into clean and coherent parts is unfeasible. Whereas, someone who is not as oversaturated with the infinity of potential symbolic significance supported by an ever-expanding library of meanings, as presumably, a seventeen-year-old girl would be, seems to gain the most out of Lispector’s books. Therefore, to put Lispector’s texts on the operating table of literary analysis, appears to be an insurmountably difficult task, but an unnecessary and counterproductive one. Understanding Lispector does not require an analytical vivisection of the text. What is transmitted is not dependent on prior literary or philosophical knowledge.

In the interview, Lispector further confirms that her writing does not require extensive intellectual preparation:

CL: It either touches people, or it doesn’t.

CL: I mean, I guess the question of understanding isn’t about intelligence, it’s about feeling, about entering in contact. (Interview with Lispector, 17:49).

Touching or entering into physical contact with something pertains to the body, not the mind. Therefore, what is asked of us to understand Lispector is a different kind of approach than the

one born from the “classical order”. To gain from reading Lispector, a reader must abandon any preconception of how a work should be or how meaning within a work should be delivered. The parallel stands, contrary to the mind, the body does not presuppose. The same goes for analyzing Lispector. A different methodology must be applied. Suppose we are to appraise Lispector’s work by excavating potential symbolic meanings. In that case, one must go through with their analysis without completely uprooting her writing from the fertile grounds in which it blossoms to make her words correspond to a preconceived form or meaning.

At the same time, one cannot fully abandon the feeling of symbolic semblance generated in reading Lispector’s writing. The proposed methodology does not wholly overlook the shadows of symbolism cast by the fire of Lispector’s words. The methodology of *Selfish* appears in between these two polarities. On the one hand, needing to abandon unconscious blueprints that impose rigid paths onto the process of understanding. On the other, tapping into the possible pluralities of significance that appear while reading Lispector. This acceptance actualizes in the project’s guiding logic behind the assemblage of arguments. Various voices, ranging from philosophy to poetry, are brought in within the fragments that are to follow based on this symbolic semblance. Questions akin to ‘How can poetry be compared to philosophy’ or ‘Is it really appropriate to bring in a religious text while discussing a novel’ are born from structural resistance, an unwillingness for categorization to become muddled in order to preserve the clarity of any significative order in place. *Selfish* abandons any resistance that might sprout from prescriptive presuppositions on the ‘nature’ of the texts provided. Instead, voices are brought together by intuiting that they are saying similar things. In the comparisons that are to follow, texts carry the same weight independently of their origin, be it poetry or philosophy. This

concatenation process of thoughts allows for the balance between constriction and freedom of meaning.

At this point, one might ask, why were these texts brought in and not others? The criterion for selecting the pieces and excerpts used in these essays was what was ready (*Zuhandenheit*). This term, introduced by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, delineates an attitude towards things in the world. Ready-at-hand is the state in which an object, usually separated from the subject, is conjoined. An easy example of this would be a sewing needle and how a subject does not concern themselves with what the needle does or is while sowing. The needle in sewing exists without the subject having to consciously consider its existence; thus, the focus falls solely on the task. The texts brought in were ones that fell naturally into the hands of the project along its conception. The fragments thus treat them as tools, extensions of the body of the project that goes on to form the image that *Selfish* wants to deliver. In this sense, the distinction between analyzed and analyzer is muddled. This conflation is another dissolution of categorical boundaries necessary for the discussion.

This cursory hint at Heidegger opens the discussion to another crucial facet of the project's logic of argumentation that *Selfish* also extrapolated from Lispector. The logic informed by symbolic semblance allows for moments when terms or passages diverge into sometimes even paradoxical meanings. For example, let us return to the line "The world independed on me" (Lispector *Passion* 189). The word Lispector creates, "independed", could signify a paradoxical relationship in which two meanings that are logical contradictions coexist. "Independed" could mean that the terms of the relationship depend on one another; they are in dependence on one another. Alternatively, it could mean that the world and G.H. are independent of one another. A

fuller analysis of this phrase will appear in the second to last fragment titled *Giving Up*. The point, for now, is that at certain moments, *Selfish* must accept the apparent paradoxicality, to achieve a fuller comprehension of the passage under analysis, neither constricted by the imposition of category nor left completely ungrounded and meandering in vagueness,

The non-exclusivity of meanings does not appear in *Selfish* solely as flat-out logical contradictions. There are moments when the discussion will forgo a certain degree of clarity to place terms used within the arguments that follow into a significant penumbra. This omission allows for a suggestiveness similar to the one experienced while reading *Lispector*.

For example, the term “heaven” in the project does not exclusively signal a promised afterlife but also a certain ideal one strives towards. The discussion does not provide an exhaustive definition of this ideal. Instead, the reader receives a blueprint as an invitation to transpose their personal examples of the actualization of the concept.

The picture *Selfish* wants to capture is a different, perhaps more organic process of understanding, which, again, is not the whole picture, but a picture nonetheless.

On the project-wide scale, *Selfish* aims for the reader to see each fragment conversation with the others, linked and referencing each other. In *The Passion*, chapters are divided only by a break in the page, after which the next chapter’s title becomes the sentence that ended the previous. *The Passion*’s stylistic trait takes shape in the project thematically. This concatenation could enable a sort of constant referencing to a general network of meanings that orbit this project, triggering past connections and reinforcing them and the interwoven web. Thus the entire project aims to accrete meaning with repeated readings of it.

Similarly to the requirements for Lispector's reader, in *Selfish*, the text should not be treated as a mere analysis and a stylistic, perhaps even poetic, exercise. What the project asks of its reader is to hold off from nitpicking and applying pressure at any immediate cracks but "[w]hat I tell you should be read quickly like when you look." (Lispector *Agua Viva* 23), a message that Lispector repeats several times throughout *Agua Viva*. The suspension of philosophical, analytical disbelief, allowing the discussion to trace its desired trajectory, is the necessary breathing room that preserves the cited texts in similar conditions to their original atmosphere. "This text that I give you is not to be seen close up: it gains its secret previously invisible roundness when seen from a high flying plane" (Lispector *Agua Viva* 20).

### Tower of Babel

For in the temporal world God and I cannot talk together, have no common language.

–Søren Kierkegaard

Once again I'm thinking because I have the objective of finding — and for safety's sake I'll call finding the moment I discover a way out. Why don't I have the courage just to discover a way in?

–Clarice Lispector

There is a drive, traceable through Western thought, which appears when studying topics such as morality, truth, science, and language, that preoccupies itself with the perpetual accretion of concepts. Thoughts through centuries are stacked one on top of the other in order to achieve a unanimous understanding of the world and existence at large. So, naturally, there are voices in scorn and voices in praise of this drive.

Nietzsche presents one of the most (in)famous voices against this drive. His concerns are voiced succinctly in his essay “On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense,” in which this drive takes the (in my opinion, partial) name of truth drive. The first step towards the conception of this drive in the Nietzschean argumentation is a ‘peace treaty of sorts, conceived in order to “banish at least the very crudest *bellum omni contra omnes*.”’ (Nietzsche *On Truth* 2) Truth first appears as a compromise between individuals to be able to live together. Nietzsche points out that the concern with lies is not necessarily with the lies in themselves but with the potentially harmful repercussions these can have on the misguided one. The same selectiveness also reaches truth: “he desires the agreeable life-preserving consequences of truth, but he is indifferent to pure

knowledge, which has no consequences; he is even hostile to possibly damaging and destructive truths” (Nietzsche 2). My partial discontent with Nietzsche’s articulation of the drive finds ground in his hinting at the utilitarian obsession with truth, which he does not take much further, in the sense of answering the question: if the truth one is so obsessed with is one with utility, what is it for? Life-preserving is vague and, in my opinion, not quite the whole story, but this will be further discussed later in this chapter.

A crucial part of Nietzsche’s argument is his keen awareness that selectiveness becomes forgetfulness. “Only through forgetfulness can man ever achieve the illusion of possessing a “truth”” (Nietzsche 2). Forgetfulness becomes a foundational necessity for truth, which consecutively implies the same for the building blocks of truth; language and concepts. The forgetfulness that renders language acceptance possible is the neglect of language as a set of metaphors: “A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one” (Nietzsche 2). Language functions by translating one type of perception into another. The process concludes with the formation of a symbol representing the perceived object. Hence, language is imprecise, but to convey information, humans must accept or overlook this intrinsic imprecision to some degree.

By itself, the vagueness of language is not an issue. The problem is how one process of comprehension becomes dictatorial about how any further understanding is to take shape in the future. By letting the inherent vagueness of language slip out of attention, we facilitate this ossification process. Concept-making is another step in said process. As Nietzsche discusses with the leaf example, the characteristic imprecision of language carries through to what becomes the



reductive formation of concepts. The capacity to say ‘leaf’ and understand ‘leaf’ relies on “an arbitrary abstraction” from the individual differences of each singular leaf, and “through forgetting [...] gives rise to the idea that in nature there might be something besides the leaves which would be ‘leaf’” and later “we obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts” (Nietzsche 3). The anthropocentric category mistake par excellence: to overlay onto nature our systemic approach to comprehension. This imposition is only possible through the reduction of nature to our terms.

Similarly to how we forget the space between the different stratas of perception, similarly to how we forget that language is at its core a metaphor, similarly to how we forget that concepts function only by reducing the outside world to a common denominator, we forget that the system by which we choose to represent life is perforce separate from it. Therefore we presume that we are in complete contact with the world, whereas in actuality, we exist in an illusion made in the image of man.

Nietzsche argues that this separation from nature installs the idea of a conceptual ‘heaven’ that lies beyond the imperfection of life. Nietzsche compares this societal process to the Roman and Etruscan charting and cataloging of deities in a respective area of the sky above, “so every people has similarly divided conceptual heaven above themselves and henceforth thinks that truth demands that each conceptual god be sought only within *his own* sphere” (Nietzsche 4). Again we see a circularity through which the truth-seeking mind embarks on its self-appointed quest. Akin Nietzsche’s anecdote about a bush, we selectively forget where we hide the truth, and when we find it, we are amazed and congratulate ourselves on our great

discovery. Here, too, we selectively forget that we are the ones who charted the map for truth by constricting it to appear in our terms.

Nietzsche then brings in the first analogy to a process of construction. “Here one may admire man as a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water” (Nietzsche 4). Once more, the philosopher points out how the solidity of the foundation of this building is much more questionable than one thinks. The metaphor for water used here recalls the Heraclitian wisdom that the only constant in the world and us is changing, which is also, in turn, forgotten in order to establish a system that overarches life.

Before returning to the analogy of construction, Nietzsche states: “We have seen how it is originally *language* which works on the construction of concepts, a labor taken over in later ages by *science*” (Nietzsche 6). The drive for truth, born and capacitated through language, then metastasizes into science. To clarify, Nietzsche does not scorn science or language in themselves. The problem lies elsewhere. We become oversaturated with one kind of blueprint for truth, against which every singularity is treated as an imperfection that stands in the way of reaching clear concepts. These efforts create an outlook, which in turn creates a faulty pretense - this is what Nietzsche takes issue with. He continues: “Just as the bee simultaneously constructs cells and fills them with honey, so science works unceasingly on this great columbarium of concepts, the graveyard of perceptions. It is always building new, higher stories and shoring up”, the result of which is “the entire empirical world, which is to say, the anthropomorphic world”(Nietzsche 6). A point of focus, for now, is the funereal theme. A columbarium as a structure where funeral urns are stored recalls Emil Cioran’s words in the short extract titled *in the Graveyard of*

*Definitions*. He writes: “What surrounds us we endure better for giving it a name—and moving on. But to embrace a thing by a definition, however arbitrary is to reject that thing, to render it insipid and superfluous, to annihilate it. [...] No more sensations; nothing but memories. Under each formula lies a corpse: being and object alike die under the pretext they have occasioned” (Cioran *A Short History* 8 ). In this context, death is present as the antithesis and rejection of life, so the erection of such a structure implies the moving away from life, built from the ground up, separated from it, in an increasing attempt to reach the sky above. Cioran introduces the idea of endurance, which finds its grounding in Nietzsche as well, “[the man of science] requires shelter, for there are frightful powers which continuously break in upon him” (Nietzsche *On Truth* 6). These frightful powers make up all of life that does not fit into our pretended, reductive view of it. Life which continuously reminds us of the faultiness and imperfection of the system we deem so immaculate. Life which we continuously forget, as its sounds are muffled by the walls of our tower.

Bertrand Russell presents a different voice that favors the drive for Truth through the accretion of concepts, capitalized to signify the intention for universality. Thus Russell appears as a fitting example of a constructor of concepts. In his essay titled *Vagueness*, Russell takes a similar stance to that of Nietzsche on the imprecision of language. Russell writes, “I propose to prove that all language is vague” (Russell *Vagueness* 147). For Russell, vagueness is the birthplace of most philosophical problems. Akin to Nietzsche's argument, the characteristic gap of language also appears as the principal culprit, or as Russell formulates it: “the relation between what means and what is meant” (Russell 147). However, Russell diverges from Nietzsche in the proposed solution to solve the problem of imprecision. Russell's solution does

not reject the system in place to embrace the ‘imperfections’ or ‘vagueness’ of language, which could, in turn, open doors to new opportunities for potentially different expressions. Instead, Russell's attempt is for greater clarity. Having established that Russell works in the same paradigm but with an opposite goal, it becomes increasingly evident how insightful his reasoning can become for the context of this essay.

Russell demonstrates a similar eye for detail to Nietzsche's “On Truth and Lies”. Through various examples, starting with qualitative words like ‘red’, which fall into the blunders of sense perception, but also moving onto logical semantic tools like ‘or’ and ‘not’, where “we are able to *imagine* a precise meaning” are also unreliable, as they too “become vague through the vagueness of ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’” (Russell 151). Though, what these logical tools enable us to do is “see an ideal of precision, to which we can approximate indefinitely; but we cannot attain this ideal” (Russell 151). Rife with flaws, the linguistic system in place hints at a possible ideal of representation. Interestingly, Russell is aware that this ideal is unreachable. Nonetheless, he does not falter, perhaps out of confidence in his proposed new system. Note that this heaven's unattainability, as he will soon call it, is a necessary condition for its positing. This point will be further discussed in this and following fragments.

Russell recaps the fallacy of logic:

All traditional logic habitually presumes that precise symbols are being employed. It is therefore not applicable to this terrestrial life, but only to an imagined celestial existence. Where, however, this celestial existence would differ from ours, so far as logic is concerned, would be not in the nature of what is known but only the accuracy of our knowledge. (Russell 151)

Russell is aware of the incoherence of applying traditional logical symbolism to our terrestrial existence. Instead, we see a reaching for a beyond, implicated within logic onto something beyond, past this imperfect world we find ourselves in. It is crucial to underscore how even in the eyes of Russell, an imagined ideal existence foments the desire to discard life. The point of difference between the two existences, the imagined heaven and the reality at hand, Russell claims to be one of accuracy, not quantity. “One system of terms related in various ways is an accurate representation of another system of terms related in various other ways if there is a one-one relation of the terms of the one to the terms of the other” (151). Russell’s solution to the inaccuracy of language and knowledge, evident in the reductive process of conceptualization, is not rejecting such a process or adopting a different, new way. Instead, he is championing an ever-increasing number of concepts; aiming to build more and more floors in the columbarium until there is an urn for each of the singularities that current concepts need to discard for their formation, as evidenced by the example of “leaf”.

The immediate absurdity of Russell’s plan of action recalls another absurdity evident in the parable of Borges’ map. Russell’s “one-to-one” correlation of terms culminates into, in its idealistic extreme, an exact replica of life. In Borges’ *On Exactitude in Science*, (18-19.), a map is imagined, so large and so accurate that it would be the size of the kingdom it is supposed to denote. Such a map would be utterly useless. Russell’s project assumes this same absurdity in trying to create a system that is supposed to wholly and exactly represent reality. Russell’s words come back to us, where what would be different is not the quantity of our knowledge but its quality. Russell places vagueness up against precision and thus details what Nietzsche would describe as the muddling of knowledge. For a broader understanding of the argument of the

essay, let us point out that many other parallels can be proposed, such as clarity and opacity, certainty and confusion. Generally, a prescriptive blueprint of existence attempts to eliminate that which threatens a vision of life as a clean and complete system of knowledge.

Russell talks about these oppositions again: “We are able to conceive precision; indeed, if we could not do so, we could not conceive vagueness, which is merely the contrary of precision. This is one reason why logic takes us nearer to heaven than most other studies. [...] But those who dislike logic will, I fear, find my heaven disappointing” (Russell *Vagueness* 151). Let us underscore how the ideal is born out of its inverse, even for Russell. A movement that the discussion will soon come back to, but in an opposite climate. I propose to name the drive which guides the drive for truth, the pretense to science and logic, the drive that aims to achieve a (re)solved existence – clean and pure – the drive for heaven. The drive for heaven pushes one to reinforce and improve this columbarium of knowledge and definitions constantly. To reach beyond this tarnished, imperfect life and continuously reach for paradise. I call it a ‘(re)solved’ existence, even though at first glance, ‘solved’ might have been more appropriate because the two words diverge in definitions by the nature of their achieved ‘solutions’. Solve indicates the intention for completeness out of a logical force, a solution that is one and forever, a heaven. Resolve, on the other hand, as one would resolve an issue, does not entail the same logical completeness as solving, yet the issue, almost ignored, is no more. In the context of the discussion, using resolve instead of solve includes a degree of doubt about the promise implicit within the drive for heaven.

Pausing a little further on Russell's words, underscoring the 'disappointment' of some in the face of Russell's 'heaven', Aphorism 15, *From a distance*, in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, seems to point to the same disappointment. The aphorism reads:

This mountain makes the landscape it dominates charming and significant in every way. Having said this to ourselves a hundred times, we become so unreasonable and grateful that we suppose that whatever bestows so much charm must also be the most charming thing around — and we climb the mountain and are disappointed. Suddenly the mountain itself and the whole landscape around us, below us, have lost their magic. We had forgotten that some greatness, like some goodness, wants to be beheld only from a distance and by all means only from below, not from above; otherwise it makes no impression. (Nietzsche *Gay Science* 89-90)

One could qualify Nietzsche as being against the preconceptions of the realm of logic. The mountain, taken metaphorically in the context of this discussion, represents any structure of meaning assignment. Propelled by the drive for heaven, one binds themselves to the quest of climbing the structure and thus – becomes subject to its laws. Depending on a mountain's physical structure, the path to climbing it is altered accordingly. Is it steep or not? Are there obstructions along the way? The details of any given structure dictate how subjects traverse it.

Furthermore, at the pinnacle, when one climbs the structure and sees the quest out to its end, one is ultimately disappointed, perhaps, because the mountain did not fulfill the promise one thought it had made. A system is incapable of wholly encapsulating life in order to solve it away. Forgetting the imprecisions of the tools that make up a structure and, consecutively, forgetting the limitations of representation given by said structure sustain the process of proliferation of

structure. Reaching any sort of heaven would be disappointing. The following question looms in the background, “is perhaps the whole point of pitching a heaven above one’s life not to reach it but rather to spend one’s life trying to reach it?” Answers will be attempted in later fragments.

Returning to the central thesis, regarding thought as building blocks of a construction, we now turn to Georges Bataille, who discusses this in the prefatory segment of *Theory of Religion*, titled *Where This Book Is Situated*. He begins: “The foundation of one’s thought is the thought of another; thought is like a brick cemented into a wall” (Bataille 9). Here the tradition delineated in the thesis argument reappears, namely that one’s thought within the history of thought will always in some way be in debt, whether in adherence or contrast, to the thoughts of the others that came before. This new brick is then cemented back into the wall for future use as a new foundation for the others to come. “The work of the mason, who assembles, is the work that matters” (Bataille 9). The value of significance is intrinsic to the profession of the builder, which in this context is adjacent to the previously discussed notions of species-preservation, which within the drive for heaven translates to structure preservation and reinforcement. “In a sense the unlimited assemblage is the impossible” (Bataille 9). In the context of Bataille’s work, the word ‘impossible’ has a plurality of meanings. The first, literal meaning, is that of ‘unrealizable’ (a word which also suffers the multiplications of interpretation). Unrealizable would be the structure imagined as an unachievable ideal for terrestrial existence. Even a strong advocate for structure, exemplified with Russell, comprehends its unattainability. The other meaning for ‘impossible’ is far more characteristic to the French philosopher. ‘Impossible’ is all that is outside the bounds of human language, understanding, knowledge, and preconceptions. The ‘impossible’ becomes the guiding “concept” for Bataille’s search. Comparing the assemblage of



thought forming into a massive structure of understanding to the impossible explicates the significance of the structure itself: to be a stand-in for the impossible, for that which cannot be understood and expressed. “It takes courage and stubbornness not to go slack. Everything invites one to drop the substance for the shadow, to forsake the open and impersonal thought for the isolated opinion” (Bataille 9-10). In the climate dominated by the drive for heaven, where all thought is predicated and dedicated to its strive, what is impersonal, not reinforced by the foundations of others, open, not delimited by the walls of the structure, is forsaken, and exchanged for its opposite – isolated opinion.

Bataille continues: “Of course the isolated opinion is also the shortest means of revealing what the assemblage essentially is – the impossible. But it has this deep meaning only if it is not conscious of the fact” (Bataille 10). Forgetfulness proves helpful to understand Bataille’s words here. Similarly to how truth solidifies as an exhaustive representation of existence by forgetting the plethora of gaps within its formation, the isolated opinion, unconscious of itself, thinks it expresses the impossible, which is the totality of a (re)solved existence. “This powerlessness defines an apex of possibility, or at least, awareness of the impossibility opens consciousness to all that is possible for it to think” (Bataille 10). Bataille is making Russell’s inverse move, with vagueness born out of precision. Only at the threshold of the impossible, the inexpressible, the unthinkable, does one perceive the boundaries of thought. Therefore, only then does one grasp all that one can think. “In this gathering place, where violence is rife, at the boundary of that which escapes cohesion, he who reflects within cohesion realizes that there is no longer any room for him” (Bataille 10). This boundary is violent because everything past it threatens and disproves all the construction efforts so far. He who thinks within cohesion strives to implement

all the infinitudes of existence into a structure and, at the boundary, sees everything that escapes the structure and his methodology of comprehension. There is no room for him. Similarly to the absurdity of Borges' map, all that he who thinks within cohesion wants to express, he is incapable of expressing as it is already there.

In the name of cohesion and in the context of a structure built from a drive to heaven, the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel comes to mind with no surprise. It appears in Genesis 11.1-9 and reads:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The Lord came down to see the city and tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the earth. (Coogan et al. *Genesis 11* 26)

The unity of language parallels Russell's dream of a universal system of symbols for communicating between people. At this point, the people set out to make their building materials. Although it may appear as a happy coincidence that Bataille uses the word bricks to describe thoughts and concepts, it is one we gladly build on. Having gathered the necessary building materials, reaching heaven becomes possible. Notable events follow after the appearance of God. Completing the construction as only the beginning of what is to come will be elaborated later. For now, we can find grounding in the previously established concept of existence (re)solved. One feels courageous enough to set out into life only by (re)solving existence, eliminating all that threatens and escapes understanding. At this point, nothing will be impossible in the sense of Bataille's impossible. Everything will be thinkable. Everything will be expressible. Success in instating a clear and universal system of understanding will have vanquished the impossible. God then tears the univocal system apart and confuses people.

People were scattered and separated, just as they feared, and God gave them the name of Babel. Let us focus on the function of the names in this story, that of Babel, and the people's wish to 'make a name for themselves'. The footnote to the story in the bible reads: "The name 'Babel,' interpreted here as 'confusion' but originally meaning 'gate of god'" (Coogan et al. 26). The gate is closely related to the threshold, which has already appeared in the reading of Bataille. One finds religious and topical backing behind the summation of these two together. God, traditionally considered as all that is above what is human, is ungraspable by the human mind, which in the context at hand is all which escapes and rejects a human system of knowledge. Voltaire is surprised at this in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. Derrida quotes him in the essay *Des Tours De Babel*: "I do not know why it is said in *Genesis* that Babel signifies confusion, for

*Ba* signifies father in the Oriental tongues, and *Bel* signifies God; Babel signifies the city of God, the holy city” (Derrida *Des Tours* 105). Voltaire's words not only strengthen the cohesion between God and confusion but also shed more light on the reasoning behind the punishment given by the Lord. In the story sacrilege becomes the misuse of the capacities provided by a unified language and the planning of the construction. Whereas blasphemy is the goal behind the project of construction. Not just reaching the heavens, but ‘making a name for ourselves’, to imprint on the heavens the name of humanity, the name of clarity. In response to such a wish, God's punishment aims to humble human hubris by imposing with His name, that of confusion.

For previous and later use of the words "structure" and "system," the Tower of Babel is implied in the plurality of its significance. To recapitulate: the Tower of Babel is seen here as the labor of the drive for heaven, a force that pushes us to reject life, erase its imperfections, and distill it into comfortable concepts, which in turn serve as building blocks for this structure we find shelter in. Humans assembled structure in the name of an ultimately unreachable ideal, towards which we nonetheless strive. The imagined ideal is for a unified, univocal understanding of reality, existence (re)solved. The physical form as a tower parallels our desire to separate ourselves from the ground, “where violence is rife”, and reach a heaven we imagine and think we deserve. The Tower of Babel is a project to which one can attribute all symptoms born from the drive for heaven, like the ossifying, restrictive pretenses behind the search for totalizing answers in topics such as truth, morality, science, or theology.

It is crucial to note that God does not destroy the tower but dismantles that which enabled its construction. The symptoms of a satisfied drive for heaven – a clear, perfected system of language and therefore of understanding the world and one another. One of Kafka's parables on

the Tower of Babel proves helpful in hypothesizing a reason behind such divine punishment. “If it had been possible to build the tower of Babel without ascending it, the work would have been permitted” (Kafka *Paradoxes* 35) What might seem at first paradoxical, we take literally. Kafka’s insight could entail that the purpose of the tower, perhaps in the way of a divine plan, was the failure of its ascension. The punishment could be a lesson against pride, over-ambition, against an overblown ego. Such notions open the gates to understanding some crucial revelations of Lispector’s *The Passion*.

Towards the novel's end, G.H. calls these revelations: "depersonalization", "deheroization," and "giving up." The discussion will return in greater depth to these notions in the fragments that follow. The analysis of the final passages of *The Passion* at this moment here is to demonstrate the relevance and topicality of Lispector within the discussion and initiate the discussion of her work at large. On deheroization, Lispector writes: “The deheroization of myself is subterraneously undermining my building” (Lispector *Passion* 185). As will shortly be demonstrated, the term ‘building’ and ‘construction’ fluctuate within the novel. At the beginning of *The Passion*, G.H. discusses how she lives at the top of her building, yet later on in the book, the top floor of her building slips away from signifying the literal meaning, for example, “G.H. lived on the top floor of a superstructure, and, though built in the air, it was a solid building [...] And that had been happening for centuries, with the necessary or occasional changes, and it worked. It worked – at least nothing spoke and nobody spoke, nobody said no; so it worked” (Lispector 64). The building becomes a superstructure and is understood similarly to the Tower Of Babel as a massive construction perpetrated by the assemblage of whatever it dubs as ‘useful’

knowledge. The system proliferates under an expansion of silence where it discards all that is seen as ‘useless,’ all that goes against the rigidification of the structure.

However, soon, G.H. says:

But, precisely this slow accumulation of centuries automatically piling atop each other was what, without anybody noticing, was making the construction in the air very heavy: it was getting saturated with itself: getting more compact, instead of getting more fragile.

The accumulation of living in a superstructure was getting increasingly heavy to stay up in the air. (Lispector 64)

The more the system of knowledge goes on, condensing thought as material for its construction, the denser it becomes. At this point, less space is available for creating thoughts diverging from the ones already implemented into the building. So deheroization subterraneously undermines the construction as it goes to alter a foundational necessity for the building structure. Deheroization will be discussed further in later fragments, but in the context of the argumentation that has been already laid out, a characteristic function of the system is to make humanity, and the subject, feel heroic. For subjects to feel validated in their action, the system must reinforce their beliefs by narrativizing life in some way that puts the subject and humanity at large at the top, in the position of the hero of the story.

Deheroization undermines this process “Until it is finally revealed to me that life in me does not bear my name.” [...] Deheroization is the great failure of a life. Not everyone manages to fail because it is so laborious, one first must climb painfully until finally reaching high enough to be able to fall” (Lispector 185). Akin to the story of Babel, there is a realization that the human or humanity is not the protagonist of life. This realization only occurs when enough

structure, the attempt at a unified system of understanding that aims to encompass the entirety of life, is put in place “I can only reach the personality of muteness if I have first constructed an entire voice. My civilizations were necessary for me to rise to a point from which I could descend. Only then is my nature accepted, accepted in its frightened torture” (Lispector 185). Muteness here is understood differently from silence, as the latter means ‘nothing to hear’ and the former ‘cannot speak’. “Ah, but to reach muteness, what a great effort of voice” (Lispector 185). It is only by speaking that we can recognize the imprecision of language. We can only recognize the limitations of its tools, symbols, concepts, and so on by engaging with them within a structure. G.H. comes to see that the structure's purpose is to ascend it. Yet to ascend it, to transcend it, similarly to Kafka's stipulation, G.H. says that it is necessary to climb the structure first.

This paradoxical and elliptical approach to the use of structure recalls a movement made by Wittgenstein in his aphorism of the ladder. A page later, G.H. says: “The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve” (Lispector 186). Whereas in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes: "6.54: My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly" (Wittgenstein *Investigations* 88). The unsayable is understood in terms of Bataille's impossible; whether the totality that a system attempts but to encompass, or a specific thought that is excluded from a structure in order to preserve the coherence of the structure. One transcends the seemingly inescapable circularity of

the ossifying process of apprehension of the world around us only when one climbs a structure to its end. One cannot return to a less restrictive view of life by rejecting the only humanly given tools that restrict life. Instead, a possible solution out of the vicious cycle comes from embarking on a quest to (re)solve life, climbing the mountain, and personally experiencing the disappointment of the failure of a system.

Nevertheless, such a brief recapitulation can only have partial significance at the beginning of this discussion. In the same stride as G.H. proclaims in the final passages,

And it is no use to try to take a short cut and want to start already knowing that the voice says little [...] For the journey exists and the journey is not simply a matter of going. [...] In the matter of living, one can never arrive beforehand. The via crucis is not a detour, it is the only way, one cannot arrive except along it and with it. Persistence is our effort, giving up is our reward. (Lispector *Passion* 86)

One must first climb the structure in order to ascend from it. So, it is opportune to look at G.H. at the beginning of *The Passion*. There, G.H. struggles to implement her inexpressible experience into the structure of the expressible. The whole novel exists as a repetition of G.H.'s attempts to convey her experience and subsequent realization that she cannot. To deal with the fear of potentially never making it back to a systematized way of understanding existence, G.H. wonders, "To continue being human will my sacrifice be forgetting?" (Lispector 9). Forgetfulness of the imprecision of language, of the reductive nature of concepts, of the shaky grounds upon which the system of knowledge builds itself, is requested of the subject at all times to fit back into what G.H.'s experience took her out of – humanized life.



G.H.'s prelude to the catastrophic events of the prior day is her meandering around the apartment, not knowing what to do, and lightheartedly deciding that she would give herself to her hobby of 'arranging.' Unfortunately, she is not talking about urns in a Columbarium. The polarity-shifting events are set in motion once, in the playfield of her passions, the maiden's room, she uncovers that there is something apart from her. "No, I wouldn't arrange anything — not if there were roaches" (Lispector 41).

Etwas Ungeheures

I am now hearing the ancestral cry within me: I no longer seem to know who is the creature, the animal or me.

Will I have to die again in order to be born once again?

I accept.

–Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*

*inter urinas et faeces nascimur*

–St. Augustine

The first lines of Nietzsche's final essay in *Ecce Homo* read: "Ich kenne mein Loos. Es wird sich einmal an meinen Namen die Erinnerung an **etwas Ungeheures** anknüpfen" [I know my lot. It will come to be that my name is associated with the memory of **something monstrous**.] Another exclamation follows: "I am not human, I am dynamite." (Nietzsche *Ecce Homo*) As most of Nietzsche's project is concerned with criticizing and attempting to step out of preconceived human notions, it is easy to link inhumanity with the word 'ungeheures', which translates to terrible, monstrous, and tremendous.

At this point, the opening lines of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* come to mind: "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem **ungeheuren** Ungeziefer verwandelt." [When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from tumultuous dreams, he found himself in his bed transformed into a **monstrous** vermin.](Kafka *Die Verwandlung*) Kafka uses the same word, ungeheuren, to describe the insect which Gregor transforms into during the night. The last link in this chain becomes the only other physically present counterpart to the protagonist of *The Passion*, a cockroach.

Within Lispector's novel, the cockroach is the culprit of the metaphysical delirium suffered by the protagonist G.H. The revelations that the protagonist comes to throughout the novel find genesis in her encounter with the cockroach. In the context provided, the cockroach lies outside of structured human existence. At many points throughout the novel, G.H. describes the destination she senses she is headed towards because of the encounter with the cockroach as a personal death and an abandonment of her life as a human person. An analysis of the cockroach as this terrible creature in contrast to the human subject will see the cockroach as a threshold past which lies what Bataille has previously described as a "gathering place where violence is rife". This opens the doors to a discussion of animality at large, the contact with which resembles that of religious rapture. Both can provide a brief look at our condition from outside it.

Soon after becoming aware that the presence of a cockroach contaminated the spotless room, G.H. elaborates on why she finds them disturbing: "What I had always found repulsive in roaches is that they were obsolete yet still here. Knowing that they were already on the Earth, and the same as they are today, even before the first dinosaurs appeared, knowing the first man already found them proliferated and crawling alive" (Lispector *Passion* 40). Calling cockroaches obsolete implies an underlying comparison, which must be the human. Cockroaches can be out of date only in the eyes of a human. What is troubling to G.H. is that despite their obsolescence, the cockroaches still found a way to persist and did so way before the human species crowned itself as the pinnacle of existence on Earth. Most likely, the cockroaches will persist after humanity is dethroned. This disturbance comes about as it challenges an anthropocentric view of the world. This view can come from mistakenly categorizing the human way of existing as the 'best' way. The existence of cockroaches already undermines this belief. The foundation of this

anthropocentric view is an almost subconscious ‘forgetting’ that other creatures do not exist in the world the same way we do. Furthermore, other creatures do not even exist in the same world as we do. We only share perceptions of them, which are also entirely different; a human’s perception of a cockroach is necessarily different from a cockroach’s perception of a human.

Biologist Jakob von Uexküll articulates this view when analyzing the processes of a different insect, the tick. The functional cycle of the tick as a “subject and the mammal as its object” (Uexküll *A Foray* 50) is in three parts, each triggered by one of the only three stimuli the tick can perceive. These are “butyric acid”, how a tick on a tree branch, through olfactory means, understands that there is a mammal beneath it. “Collision”, the falling tick landing on the mammal perceives the physical body that arrests its descent, “The new feature activates the tick’s running about, until this feature is in turn extinguished at the first bare patch of skin by the feature ‘warmth,’ and the drilling can begin” (Uexküll 50). The crucial part of this analysis, the value it implicates for Uexküll and our argument at hand, is that in the example of the tick, “The whole rich world surrounding the tick is constricted and transformed into an impoverished structure that, most importantly of all, consists only of three features and three effect marks—the tick’s environment” (Uexküll 51). The world of the tick is drastically different from ours; the tick does not perceive the forest, the tree, or anything else surrounding it in the way we do. A handful of factors delimit the tick’s existence. If one calls the tick’s world poor, one must honestly accept that the human world is also poor. It is poor in a different way, but we also, as a sensing species, have limits to our perceptions; we do not see specific wavelengths of light, we cannot hear certain sound frequencies, and so on. One quickly forgets this lesson as one becomes engrossed in the human world, in which everything goes to reaffirm the belief that the human stands atop

the hierarchy of existence with the most total of perceptions. The animal helps us to remember that this is not the case.

It then becomes evident that all worlds are poor. Access modes bind each world and ways of perception specific to the creature that perceives it, and therefore, as all perceptions are imperfect, all worlds are poor. Nevertheless, all worlds are valid for themselves, for as Nietzsche argues in “Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral sense,” “the insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that man does, and that the question of which of these perceptions of the world is the more correct one is quite meaningless, for this would have to have been decided previously in accordance with the criterion of the *correct perception*, which means, in accordance with a criterion which is *not available*” (Nietzsche *On Truth* 5). Any comparison between ways of existing, for example, G.H. dubbing cockroaches obsolete is only possible by the erroneous admittance of human perception as one that is free from error, one it is not. This error then informs a belief that human perception can be the correct criterion for comparison, which is also false. This error is another symptom of the drive for heaven that, through forgetfulness, fuels the intention to build a unionizing structure out of existence — the Tower of Babel. In this instance, discarding animals as lesser than humanity, frees space for humanity at the pinnacle. Once again, we observe the underlying imperfections ignored to possess this presupposed imagined perfection. Therefore, the only possible comparison is within and not between species. Such an argument would see the cockroach as a perfection for itself, as they have figured out a way of being that works for themselves. Proof of this circular perfection is their permanence on Earth from time immemorial to humanity to a probable future where

humans are no more. Let us leave these assertions here: all worlds are poor and valid for themselves.

Returning to G.H., she continues giving reasons behind her distress at cockroaches: “For three hundred and fifty million years they had been replicating themselves without being transformed” (Lispector *Passion* 40). Embedded in this statement is an underlying doubt of whether evolution, in the sense of transformation, should be prized as much as it has been. Darwinian evolutionary theory argues that evolution occurs through natural selection, a ‘law’ which dictates that an individual capable of surviving in their environment will generate more offspring, and the species will propagate. Furthermore, survival in the environment depends on adaptability, which for us humans, in Nietzsche’s words, “weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves, since they are denied the chance of waging the struggle for existence with horns or the fangs of beasts of prey” (Nietzsche *On Truth* 1) through our intellect. We prize our human intellect so much as that is how we adapted and ‘conquered’ a hostile world. However, encountering a cockroach, a creature even weaker than us, that managed to propagate for longer than us without our prized possession of intellect and adaptability, is nothing but disturbing, as it goes to undermine and disprove all of these presupposed notions that hold humanity at the top of existence.

Enthralled by disgust, G.H. feels a newfound force enter her system: “I was getting drunk for the first time with a hatred clear as a fountain, drunk with the desire, justified or not, to kill” G.H. decides to kill the cockroach, becoming aware of this desire she exclaims that it is “[a]s if for the first time I was finally on the level of Nature” (46). The question of murder and physical

violence both in nature but even symbolically in, for example, literature has often been seen as a great equalizer. Violence occurs in a moment free from symbolic delimitations.

A great example is Charles Baudelaire's prose poem "Let's Beat up the Poor." After being extensively absorbed with the works of 'entrepreneurs of public happiness', the narrator, in a state of near catatonia, gets a "germ of an idea". He then leaves for a cabaret, and he finds the opportunity to test that idea along the walk. The poem then details the narrator's encounter with a beggar, someone who is of a lower social class. The narrator assails the beggar to the point of picking up a nearby branch and beating the beggar 'with the obstinate energy of a cook who wants to tenderize a steak.' After a brief pause, the vanquished springs back to life and returns the favor to the narrator, who then exclaims, "Through my energetic medicine, I had returned to him his pride and his life... [...] Sir, you are my equal! Ending with the beggar swearing that he had understood the narrator's theory" (Baudelaire *Let's*). The morbid moral of this story is that however unpleasant, violence can remind us of a foundational quality that pertains to bare life, which is not stripped away by symbolic differences, in the case of Baudelaire's poem — social class.

Since the violent encounter G.H. finds herself in is not with another fellow man, the plane the experience brings her to is not one of humanity but that of nature or bare life. At that moment, the situation puts under question the crucial difference between the roach and G.H. "[u]p until then I'd never mastered my own powers [...] I! I, whatever that was" (Lispector *Passion* 46). " On the level of nature or bare life, 'I', the border drawn by self-consciousness to differentiate itself from the outside world, posited as contrasting 'not-I', is seen for what it is, a construction. The realization of this is shocking as we also see G.H. a few lines later wondering,

“What had I done? Maybe I already knew that I didn’t mean what had I done to the cockroach, but: what had I done to myself” (Lispector 46)? Here, as well as in much of the novel, G.H. is afraid that she lived experience with the cockroach and the realizations that come out of it will forbid her to ever step into the realm of humanity. These revelations have evidenced an underlying nature of existence, ignored by humanity, which at once disproves the ways of humanity.

To the protagonist’s astonishment, the cockroach was caught between the closet doors, still alive, yet bleeding out a white puslike substance. The thread of realizing that her way of existing has primarily been more fictitious than she had previously assumed runs through the novel's entirety. “Because I’d looked at the living roach and was discovering inside it the identity of my deepest life. In a difficult demolition, hard and narrow paths were opening within me.” (Lispector 52). This passage recalls Bataille’s description of a location beyond structure. To better understand the importance of the animal as a potential gateway to this other side, let us turn to him again for the analysis of animality he provides within the following chapter of the *Theory of Religion*. “I consider animality from a narrow viewpoint [...] From this viewpoint, animality is immediacy or immanence. The immanence of the animal with respect to its milieu exhibits itself in a precise situation [...] *the situation is given when one animal eats another*” (Bataille *Theory* 17). We will put this situation aside and revisit it later when G.H. finds herself in it. For now, the attention falls to immanence, or the state in which the animal exists within its own milieu or world, as previously discussed.

The moment G.H. looks at the cockroach, she discovers the identity of her most profound life as something past her humanity. “In picturing the universe without man, a universe in which



only the animal gaze would be open to things, the animal being neither a thing nor a man, we call up a vision in which we see *nothing*” (Bataille 21). This nothingness is not precisely the usual image of an empty void. Instead, it is a world in fullness, which, stripped from the human consciousness perceiving it, “is a movement that glides from things that have no meaning by themselves to the world full of meaning implied by man giving each thing his own” (Bataille 21). Such an image must have this dual and to us paradoxical nature of fullness, as it is not a world without a perceiving gaze, yet indiscernible, as the perceiving gaze is not the human one divides perceptions into objects and assigns meaning onto them through language. Such a duality is only possible in the sphere of the animal, which, as Bataille pointed out, is possible only by virtue of the animal being the midway point between the meaninglessness of objects by themselves and the meaningfulness attributed by subjects. Therefore, the first and only difficulty lies in describing such a world. “The correct way to speak of it can *overtly* only be poetic, in that poetry describes nothing that does not slip towards the unknowable” (Bataille 21). because poetry is a way “by which man goes from a world full of meanings to the final dislocation of meanings, of all meanings, which soon proves to be unavoidable” (Bataille 22). This capacity is held within poetry as it functions by twisting the already existing one-to-one correlations between concepts and objects. A ‘backward’ exercise with poetry will be found in the following fragment.

What this "gathering place", past structure, of animality, requests of us is to rid ourselves of meanings. At this point, even if the vision of what we see is ‘confused’, the anti-anthropocentric lesson becomes that something persists despite its meaninglessness. Returning to the vision of the animal, “the animal opens before me a depth that attracts me and is

familiar to me. In a sense, I know this depth: it is my own. It is also that which is farthest removed from me, that which deserves the name depth, which means precisely *that which is unfathomable to me*. But this too is poetry....” (Bataille 22). Bataille’s description shares with G.H. the same recognition of something that pertains to humanity as a living being yet at once is unfathomable as it belongs to an order prior to the human consciousness. Similarly, G.H.’s shocking realization is “because rising like pus was my truest matter — and with fright and loathing I was feeling that ‘I-being’ was coming from a source far prior to the human source and, with horror, much greater than the human.” (Lispector *Passion* 52) It is a mistake of consciousness that, only genuinely aware of itself, in the sense of the world outside existing only under its perception, will take the primary cause of its genesis to be self-consciousness itself. On the other hand, it is out of animality that we have risen through the faculties of our intellect. Therefore, whether the human person forgets this, the immanent plane is the primal foundation for our conception.

Bataille differentiates between the two planes of existence while discussing the situation of an animal eating another. “I am able to say that the animal world is that of immanence and immediacy, for that world, which is closed to us, is so to the extent that we cannot discern in it an ability to transcend itself” (Bataille *Theory* 23). Transcendence here stands in contrast to immanence. As discussed in the Tower of Babel, a characteristic of humanity is transcendence; this is the capacity to separate ourselves from life to attempt to grasp something ‘higher’ than it. In the situation when one animal eats another, “there is no transcendence between the eater and the eaten” (Bataille 17). There is a difference between them, as Bataille points out, but it is not a discernible one as the animal eating another “does not distinguish it clearly from itself, in the

same way we distinguish an object from ourselves. The distinction requires a positing of the object as such” (Bataille 18). But without self-consciousness, a subject, to do so, “[t]he animal that eats another is not yet given as an object” (Bataille 18). The difference between transcendence and immanence becomes the positing of the object, which implicates a subject or self-consciousness that perceives it. The process of objectification, therefore, makes it possible for the subject to create various hierarchies in signification, a top of which the human will place itself as the only creature capable of these hierarchies to solidify the belief of existence (re)solved. Then what happens when distinctions as such are nullified? To answer this question, let us return to *The Passion* at the scene where one animal eats another.

The moment at which G.H., towards the end of the novel, musters the courage to eat from the pus of the cockroach, she does not realize her actions. “I was ashamed of having gone dizzy and unconscious in order to do something that I would never again know how I had done — since before doing it, I had removed from myself all participation. I had not wanted ‘to know’” (Lispector *Passion* 174). Her consciousness does not perceive the experience itself; the only thing available is the sort of ‘black-out’ the experience provokes. This type of experience recalls the reports of religious rapture, in which people claim to have gotten in contact with God. William James wrote an enormous book titled *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, in which he gathered many of these reports. Let us take one as an example: “I have on a number of occasions felt that I had enjoyed a period of intimate communion with the divine. These meetings [...] seemed to consist merely in the temporary obliteration of the conventionalities which usually surround and cover my life. . .” (James *Varieties* 59). There are already some similarities between what G.H. is retelling and this report. Namely, the experiences share the trait

of stripping the subject of its preconceived existence, catapulting it into a space where these human notions do not touch them, and, looking back, appear fictitious.

The report continues: “What I felt on these occasions was a temporary loss of my own identity, accompanied by an illumination which revealed to me a deeper significance than I had been wont to attach to life. It is in this that I find my justification for saying that I have enjoyed communication with God” (James 59). So both experiences exhibit a temporary dissolution of the self-reflexive ‘I’, which equates to the “nothing”. The experiences carry that same duality of an indescribable ‘something’. The connection drawn here is between the concept of contact with God and the plane of animality, where both appear as experiences where all is *confused*. However, the feeling of this totality is perceived nonetheless. The difference between the two is apparent within more of James's accounts. “God is more real to me than any thought or thing or person” (James 59); such an attitude indicates the presuppositions of the drive for heaven; that which one enters in contact with is higher than life, whereas, in the case of G.H., it becomes life itself. Perhaps such a difference is only a mistake in charting; the two experiences enter in contact with the same ‘thing,’ but the Christians draw it up to the heavens because of their theological blueprint.

Whether this is a mistake in labeling or a connection to something different altogether is not of interest here. In the ones James quotes, transcendence is taken for granted, whereas in *The Passion*, G.H. laments it. “Transcendence, which is the memory of the past or the present or the future. In me was transcendence the only way I could reach the thing? Since even eating of the roach, I had acted to transcend the very act of eating it. And now all I had was the vague memory of a horror, all I had was the idea” (Lispector *Passion* 174). The actual experience becomes

unavailable to her the second it happens. In this sense, this applies to all of the human's lived experiences. As she mentions, transcendence touches past, present, and future in the form of memory; all that the human can possess is not the actual experience in itself but its transcended, diluted quality in the form of an idea.

G.H's lament reminds us of Bataille's initial remarks that "at the boundary of that which escapes cohesion, he who reflects within cohesion realizes that there is no longer any room for him." (Bataille *Theory* 10). This lack of space is what G.H. is realizing. No matter the vertigo and the intensity she puts herself through, she can never reach what she desires, as it contradicts the characterizing quality of humanity, that of transcendence. As we will see later, this experience of inhumanity will and can only bring us back to what we are, with an added, more honest understanding of our condition. To reach and perhaps exist in the plane of immanence, as Bataille describes in a poetic way of the animal existing, "a level with the world in which it moves like water in water" (Bataille 25), is unavailable to us except for short instances, in which we, or the self experiencing it, is no more. It is a plain contradiction in terms, which is suspended only at times when the experience, if taken for what it is, can be highly informative on our condition. These occurrences are rare. Ouvert expressions, as Bataille has stated, can come about or give us the feeling of such rapturous occurrences only through things like poetry, where poetry is a transcendence out of the transcendence that is language — it informs us that we cannot shed our characteristic transcendence but attempts to transcend transcendence itself, poetry, prove to be propitious nonetheless.

ieudul fără ieşire

Лишив меня морей, разбега и разлёта      [By robbing me of the seas, keeping me from  
И дав стопе упор насильственной земли,      running and flying without restraint  
Чего добились вы? Блестящего расчёта:      And forcing the sole to foot on coercive ground  
Губ шевелящихся отнять вы не могли.      What have you accomplished? A brilliant calculation:  
The moving lips you couldn't take]

—Osip Mendelstam

For Bataille, poetry is a way to peek outside the constrictive net of human meanings and turn towards immanence. Poetry is a momentary gaze at the impossible. In the scene previously discussed in the Tower Of Babel, Bataille depicts, “the isolated opinion is also the shortest means of revealing what the assemblage essentially is – the impossible. But it has this deep meaning only if it is not conscious of the fact” (Bataille *Theory* 10). This chapter is an attempt at a "forced unconsciousness" to contrast the use of “the assemblage” against the aura of the “impossible” shrouding poetry.

The methods used in this chapter are antithetical to most arguments made in this project. This chapter is to be taken as an exercise in these ‘counter’ methods to show that poetry still manages to flourish in significance even in this very roundabout way. Arbitrary distinctions between different ‘kinds’ of knowledge enable the belief in ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ quality knowledge. Any such distinctions are superseded, especially in this fragment. The argument made ‘between-the-lines’ here is not that the analytical method or “classical order” or ‘humanized existence’ etc. is a malaise that we need to eliminate. No, only at a specific step of humanization does the system become over-calcified and constrictive of existence. An

equivalence emerges if the analysis is carried out without the heavy sense of necessity for one truth, without being obfuscated by overinvesting oneself to a singular explanation.

This fragment takes the notion of thought as bricks stacked on each other quite literally. Varied voices sustain argumentative points. These points are stacked on top of one another to reach an adequate height and see ‘eye to eye’ with the poetry of Ioan Es. Pop. Perhaps, a different metaphor could be more helpful. The fragment gathers other writers in order to create an ever sharper blade, which then attempts to dissect the poetry presented here. This process of understanding turns out to be incredibly circular; in the end, we are only repeating what Es. Pop has already said. However, such a process aims to demonstrate that through symbolic semblance, one can assemble an analytical blueprint that can be informative and helpful in deciphering the poetry without being constrictive of it.

The explicit arguments made here are that Ioan Es. Pop fits into a manufactured category of poetry, which is only here for the sake of the ‘experiment’ that opens language past its literal or one-to-one meaning restriction. The comparison made with the included philosophers is to ‘validate’ poetry, put it on the same plane as theory, and elucidate or solidify what Ioan Es. Pop is already saying. So to begin building up, the foundational question is, what is a poet?

With this question, Kierkegaard opens *Either/Or*. “An unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them, they sound like beautiful music” (Kierkegaard *Either/Or* 38). Gloom aside, this description is a mechanical aberration within the poet’s process of *articulation into language*. The poet’s state of suffering translates, recalling the language of Nietzsche, as a different kind of metaphor that seems incorrect at first glance. The poet’s suffering, which in ‘common’ language should be

expressed in terms that would directly correspond to suffering, actually externalizes in "sweet music" instead. This transmutation should not disclose a defect of the poet's expression; as Kierkegaard points out later, the appreciation of poetry as sweet music inhibits the public from truly hearing what the poet is saying. The public will soon exalt: "Sing again soon"—in other words, may new sufferings torture your soul, and may your lips continue to be formed as before, because your screams would only alarm us, but the music is charming" (Kierkegaard 38) The public that would be alarmed by the scream, if it were to be understood, comes off as the 'watering down' of death Heidegger accuses 'people'. "The 'they' is constituted by the way things have been publicly interpreted, which expresses itself in the idle talk" (Heidegger *Being* 296). How the public discusses death discloses an underlying attitude toward death. "In publicness with which we are with one another in our everyday manner, death is 'known' as a mishap which is constantly occurring as a 'case of death'" (Heidegger 296). Tragic events occur at every moment all over the world. The constant discussion of which, for example, in the news, dilutes the actual event as something that 'just happens', as a truth of the world exterior to us, and therefore of no importance. "As such, it remains in the inconspicuousness characteristic of what is encountered in an everyday fashion. The 'they' talks of it in a 'fugitive' manner, either expressly or else in a way which is mostly inhibited, as if to say, 'One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us'" (Heidegger 297). The chief characteristic of deferral of actual events within humanized understanding is also present here. It would be too much to remember how every death we hear about should remind us of our own utmost personal date of expiration.



The other option, carried through "they-speak", is to completely neutralize the notion of death. "In such a way death is understood as an indefinite something, which, above all, must duly arrive from somewhere or other, but which is proximally, *not yet present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat" (Heidegger 297). Heidegger is asking to reform the understanding of death, not as a 'well known' truth of the world, that we all die someday. Let's not say, 'Oh well, unfortunately there is not much one can do about that'. Instead, the utmost personal feeling of our own finality, that, even if it is unknown to us, there exists an inevitable moment at which we will cease being, a moment we constantly head towards, only goes to foment our being present in our lives.

While it may be true that to ask people to stomach the weight of personal death at every mention of it might be too much to ask, diluting this feeling until it lies neutralized is just as excessive of an alternative. As poetry can give a gaze outside of neutralizing systems of understanding, readers should be more open for poetry to do this. The discarding of poetry as an over-sentimentalized expression of something only gets in the way of understanding what the poet is trying to convey to us. As Nietzsche writes about this: "The sphere of poetry does not lie outside the world as a fantastic impossibility spawned by a poet's brain: it desires to be just the opposite, the unvarnished expression of the truth, and must precisely for that reason discard the mendacious finery of that alleged reality of the man of culture" (Nietzsche *Birth* 61). The tendency to treat poetry as "sweet music" is the varnishing that occurs through processes such as 'they-speak' within the domain of existence dominated by the humanized structure that attempts to (re)solve life away. The attempt is again to neutralize something that would be threatening to our preconceptions of existence.

And yet, poetry to the poet is what logic is to the logician, a personal way of accessing the world, so, let us repeat that, all access modes to the world are valid. The discarding of poetry as some embellishment or over magnification of something can again only occur if one presupposes an idea of a clear, correct perception, which, against the expression of poetry, is treated like the ‘sober’ one.

Nietzsche speaks of this imagined criterion of perception in *Truth and Lie*.

But generally, it seems to me that the correct perception [...] is something contradictory and impossible; for between two absolutely different spheres, such as subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, no expression, but at most an aesthetic way of relating, by which I mean an allusive transference, a stammering translation into a quite different language. For which purpose a middle sphere and mediating force is certainly required which can freely invent and freely create poetry. (Nietzsche *On Truth* 5)

Poetry is already happening as the creative process of filtering existence into metaphors that we understand. Forgetting that the transmutation into metaphors is already at play renders possible the valuation of one kind of expression as more favorable than the other. If poetry is already at play even within the usual understanding of existence, say, “they-speak”, then what is asked to treat poetry with the same sort of ‘acceptance’. Only then can poetry showcase its capacity to dislocate ossified meanings, venture out of the preconceptions of significance, and give a new, disillusioned gaze on our condition.

The argumentation so far asks us to take poetry more openly, not to discard it as purely ornamental or unintelligible because it appears in a format that does not cohere with predominant visions of truth. So, instead, let us hear the scream between the lines.

Gary Snyder, in *Earth House Hold*, brings in an additional differentiation between two possible classes of poets: “Comes a time when the poet must choose: either to step deep in the stream of his people, history, tradition, folding and folding himself in wealth of persons and pasts; philosophy, humanity, to become richly foundationed and great and sane and ordered” (Snyder *Earth* 46). This first class of poets within the context of *Selfish* fall under the symptoms of structure. Poets fully invested in the human narrative of history, tradition, etc., can be categorized under the unconscious masons that help construct higher stories and solidify the construction. The attempt is not to discard ‘this’ kind of poetry. Instead, it is to accept the second class of poets for what could be so destabilizing that they could show a different truth. Snyder continues: “Or, to step beyond the bound onto the way out, into horrors and angels, possible madness or silly Faustian doom, possible utter transcendence, possible enlightened return, possible ignominious wormish perishing” (Snyder 46). The poet discussed in this work falls under this second classification. Their scream is a lament from a location that is outside human bounds.

One of these figures is Ioan Es. Pop, a Romanian poet who witnessed before his eyes the crumbling of a colossal structure, the Soviet Union. This poet's voice denies reduction under the umbrella of the lyrical ‘I’—instead, Es. Pop seems to have rummaged through the debris of an ideological collapse, collecting his voices, ones of his friend, his family, the dejected strangers, of the kind you hear in the queue for the mail. The voice is that of a buried alive, of someone at the dregs of existence. Es. Pop's social and historical context makes him topical within Althusser's discussion of Ideology.

In an Althusserian framing, Es. Pops would be a voice that could say, “I was in Ideology!” (Althusser *Reproduction* 191) and yet the poems' actors keep persisting within the same paradigms of the toppled structure, with eternal faith that if we keep going, things will turn out the way they did not. The description as ‘buried alive’ isn’t as haphazard as it would seem; the characters throughout Es. Pop’s work are often seen sleeping, with waking up being a threat to the upholding of their belief in the state of things: “What good would it do me to wake up and what would I be left with if I were to wake up entirely” (Pop *Ieud* 101). How come is there such hopelessness, why not attempt to open one’s eyes?

e solo di rado abbiamo aperto gli occhi e solo per vedere  
 rovesciarsi su di noi come su delle bare  
 tonnelate di sconosciuto. e proprio in quel momento li ho aperti  
 rapidamente chiusi rapidamente  
 [and only seldom did we open our eyes and only to see  
 spilling over us as onto coffins  
 tons of unknown.  
 and in that very moment I opened them  
 quickly closed them quickly]. (Pop *Un Giorno* 55)

In this case, waking up or opening one’s eyes to different, and perhaps more accurate understanding of current events is dangerous as it forces one to face life for what it is. The lives of Es Pops' voices were granted significance under a structure that is no more. Coming to terms with this, opening one’s eyes is to face one’s literal insignificance.

A Lacanian framing of the situation is of aid in understanding the state of Es. Pop's voices. One can assert that Es. Pop's voices are symbolically dead since the symbolic order which interpellated their existence has collapsed. Thus they have no more significance but are physically alive, still existing in the Real. Within this domain of 'between two deaths', these voices are haunted by a Symbolic debt they are never going to be able to fulfill, as the 'debt collector', the structure which would positively reinforce the behavior that reinstates and reproduces the conditions of relations with existence, is no more. Thus, they are stuck in a constant flailing, a perpetual insistence on reproducing these conditions for a wished existence, the only one known to them as malfunctioning automatons. These are the subalterns speaking. To listen to these voices is to hear a sibillance of a human that, just like any other human, grabbed onto an ideal of existence, a promised heaven. All that remains of this promised ideal are washed-up bones of a system on the shores walked daily. Subjects in this situation constantly face the failure of the system to which they dedicated their lives, yet, out of self-preservation, they must ignore it. Es. Pop gives an *unvarnished* view of subjects outside the structure of Ideology.

Es. Pop's *Ieud without Exit* details subjects deliriously disorientated within the belly of Ideology and structure—this theme within Es. Pop's work materializes in Ieud, the small village in North-East Romania where Es. Pop used to teach.

*1. We Have Also Been, We Have Also Been Once To The Ieud Without Exit*

and we are there even now and we will still be there tomorrow and

the day after

and the water of the same river will forever bathe us. (Pop *Ieud* 98)

The symptomatology of Althusserian Ideology is apparent here already. Subjects are within Ideology before their birth, which results in a backward awareness of their emergence into it, if at all. Jane Austen's words are of aid: "I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun" (Austen *Pride* 421). Es. Pop flips the Heraclitian saying on its head. The river that symbolizes nature's only constant change, which the Greek understood to be the nature of man, is annulled. In Es. Pop's river, there is no prospect of change. Instead, there is a feeling of things persisting eternally the same as before. Es. Pop describes the perpetual intersubjective hailing forced upon individuals that delimit their existence to a value system dictated by the overarching *system*.

In contrast, Althusser writes: "An individual believes in God, Duty, Justice, or the like. [...]adopts such-and-such a practical line of conduct, [...] participates in certain regulated practices [...] If she believes in God, she goes to church to attend mass, kneels, prays" (Althusser *Reproduction* 185). Whatever the ideal, the experiencing of the corresponding structure goes to reinforce that ideal and structure. The point is that the material existence of a subject dedicated to this or that belief system circularly fortifies this or that belief system. However, any singular part of the material existence of Ideology does not fully exhibit said Ideology. One cannot point to Ideology as one cannot point to anyone kneeling and say they must be getting ready for prayer. Maybe they are just tying their shoelaces. This plausible deniability creates further cognitive dissonance within the subject in Ideology.

Es. Pop's situation is more complicated than the one of the churchgoer. The 'mountain' that gives significance to the surrounding landscape has crumbled before allowing anyone? to climb it. The idea that gave way to the structure is no more, and the material conditions that went into reinforcing both become phantoms that perpetually haunt their subjects. This ghostliness, in

turn, launches the subjects into a head-spinning delirium. In Es. Pop's case, there is an even greater 'emptiness' than in the standard structuring of Ideology, as the material conditions of existence reinforce *nothing*. Perhaps, it is now so head-spinning for them, as the circular functioning of the system is now laid bare.

To visualize this greater emptiness, one must look for situations in which the ideal as the emblem for an ideology is unveiled in its actual emptiness. It seems fitting to imagine the door of Es Pop's poem, 7. *We Knock On Doors For Them To Open To* in a Kafkian way, akin to the parable in *the Trial* of the man standing in front of the door of Law. Es. Pop writes:

Let us out, but those on the other side don't hear us and they too knock on doors for us to open and let them out and when it opens it is ourselves we bump into but we don't even mind ourselves and we say we want out and they say we want in, don't take the door away with you, we won't have anything to unlock when we go out, there will be a gap left in the wall, we won't have a way anywhere to go out. (Pop *Ieud* 105)

Relocating the doorkeeper that stands before the gates to the Law from Kafka's *Trial* onto Es. Pop's scenario finds us donning the uniform. Since we now stand guard, there is no threat of a repressive state embodied by the external doorkeeper, so we drink the illusion of freedom and agency. Whenever one attempts to leave the ideological state, one meets oneself on the other side. This situation is at once the Kafkian moral that there is *nothing* behind that door, "the law holds only through its name and by its name" (Cixous *Reading* 53), but also behind that door, there is us, waiting on the doorstep. Before the man's death in the *Trial*, the doorman discloses that the door of Law was made for him. As the jailers in our own cells, we are worried we might take the door away, leaving us without the idea that there is a way out, without something that

pushes us into action and submerges us into the illusion of agency. Agency within a structure is an illusion we sustain ourselves.

This notion reappears, along with another revelation on the propagation of the *Ieud*/Ideology in Es. Pop's 3. *I Asked Mircea* where the protagonist's requests to wall up a window get met with empty replies and gifts to defer their attention.

[T]his teapot  
 to set on your head [...]  
 it will be your shining helmet [...]  
 and take also the stick i use to teach spain in geography class  
 it will be your glorious spear – rise up and go against yourself,  
 thrust your boots into our wooden horse's  
 belly till you draw blood. (Pop *Ieud* 100)

The knightship the protagonist suddenly receives points to the forced quixotism upon individuals within an ideology. After voicing their complaints to wall up a window because of the cold, reply is an empty “alas” from Mircea and the people, to which the narrator must also say "alas". This automatic suspension of complaints is not just the dissolution akin to "they-speak"; this is a transfiguration of reality, which in turn also neutralizes the situation, yet the process is all the more violent as the perceptions of the conditions of existence must twist all the more drastically to calm the subject.

Parts of the apartment become cities in Spain, places traversed by Don Quixote, “the granada of the bathtub”,

in the kitchen is cordoba, the mice of doubt



have found shelter there. cast away your doubts,  
we have lived with them for too long a time

to know anymore who's hunting whom (Pop 100) This 'mise-en-scene' is a coping mechanism. Other characters spurn the protagonist to dive deeper into his illusion by eradicating doubt. Doubt is the emblem of the dissonant quality of consciousness within Ideology. Consciousness in Ideology finds itself between an alienating existence and the dream-state utopia, heaven. Ideology morphs these alienating conditions of existence through other people, which have also become apparatuses for upholding and reproducing ideological conditions and relations.

The poem gives doubt some degree of agency through the ambiguity of who is hunting who: is it that doubt is naturally occurring given holes in a structure, or is it that doubt is a relentless assailant from which we must defend our tower's walls? The first symptom of realizing alienation, doubt, is treated like a pest up for extermination. One cannot overstate this point: Ideology is concerned with providing and reproducing a dreamlike existence that replaces the actual. One of the conditions of this dream is to get rid of anything that would disprove the dream you are living. Within Ideology or in the *leud*, one, to cope, is donned by others and oneself, a utopian vision constantly reproducing itself to preserve the current relations of existence. Where is the agency? Where is the way out?

In the socio-political sense, a forcible change of systems, an overturning of the old into the replacement with the new, is called revolution. Es. Pop's gaze on this appears to be on a larger time scale, past the momentary bliss of 'victories'.

E quando, nonostante tutto, si uniscono,

gli infelici fanno rivoluzioni,  
 dopo di che gli si porta via tutto  
 [and when, despite everything, they unite,  
 the unhappy make revolutions,  
 after which everything is taken away from them]. (Pop *Un Giorno* 91)

The poem questions the notion of victory itself as a total overturning, as a complete change to a solid establishment of something new and different. At another point, Es. Pop writes:

E sul campo di battaglia, il vincitore cerca tra i cadaveri il vinto.  
 vieni, lo prega, tocca a te, adesso, stare su.'  
 [And on the battlefield, the victor looks through corpses for the vanquished.  
 Come, he begs, it's your turn, now, to stand up.] (Pop 77)

This is the repeating theater of history; the victor gets drunk on his masturbatory victory, fainting or in sloth, topples over, leaving the burden of persisting to the (won), disguised as a gift of 'liberation', 'freedom'.

The 'defeated' will then have to persist in an existence dictated by the victor. Franz Fanon scorns this state of affairs in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon struggles under the weight of history, wondering if the only way forward is with this burden when down. At some point, he doubts this 'way forward': "The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man, there is but one destiny. And it is white. A long time ago the black man acknowledged the undeniable superiority of the white man, and all his endeavors aim at achieving a white existence" (Fanon 202). For Fanon, it is evident that the 'gifting' of freedom after subjugation will only establish the minority into the existence of the subjugator. It is a recognition, not an

alteration of existence. It is not a change of the relations of existence but just the integration of the minority into the same conditions, which are not only made without their existence accounted for but specifically against their existence.

This minority is sentenced to a much more severe case of the cognitive dissonance symptomatic of the Ideology discussed above. An existence which 'on paper' 'recognizes' you as equal to your oppressor, but in practice, since the system remains unchanged, i.e., 'white existence', will inform the subaltern that in the eyes of a system, they are still perceived as lesser-than, insignificant, non-human. The crucial point is the propagation of an unchanging system, which is often labeled under 'progress' despite what the person observes in their daily existence. You have not changed the structure; you were just allowed in, perhaps allocated to a different shelf, but nonetheless, you became another subject for the system to utilize. In this case, a subject will suffer even more as the system functions on your exploitation.

Es. Pop strengthens this parallel in 8. *We Haven't Had The Courage To Cry Out Even Once.*

[...]in the cold fable

we were not even mentioned.

the one who came trumpeting his victory

and knocking down corpses never knew

that we had gnawed from the foundation, gnawed in the middle,

and he only had to push a bit on top,

enough just to help it fall.

brother to the mouse and the death watch beetle, we fit again under

the sole of the newcomer (Pop *Ieud* 106)

In contrast, the ones stuck in the underbelly of society, the ones that gnaw at the foundations of systems, the ones that make revolutions possible, are not mentioned in the victor's fable. Again the victor is portrayed as a sort of pantomime for his own entertainment; again, his gesture appears much more significant and much more glorious than it is. Moreover, the ones stuck at the bottom will find a place under the soles of their new oppressor, again left without a choice but to gnaw at the foundations, again waiting for the 'newcomer' to gently push the old oppressor's corpse, all eroded from within until it topples over. Again, their efforts will be left uncited.

With much of the last chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* feels mantralike, fervently repeating separated exclamations. It does not strike that the book ends with: "My final prayer: "O my body, always make me a man who questions!" (Fanon 206). Such a plea to the body may seem out of nowhere at first glance, but soon one recalls how Fanon scatters appeals to the body throughout the chapter. At some point, Fanon writes: "At certain moments, the black man is locked in his body" (Fanon 200). With much of his discussion arguing against the historico-symbolic imprisonment of black people to a predetermined relation, the body is at moments the physical manifestation of the cage Fanon is attempting a breach from. However, it is also the location of his final prayer. Akin to the discussion in *Etwas Ungeheures*, the body is part of the human being in immediacy. Fanon begs for doubt, born in his body. Doubt can find its genesis at this location of the body as systems of signification can only partially capture the body. Thus this location gives room for doubt to fill.

Similar characterizations of the body permeate Es. Pop's poetry. At many occasions the body is seen like a cage "*Non frugarti con le unghie la carne non è una camicia è la tua carne non puoi uscire*" [Don't rummage your flesh with your nails it's not a shirt it's your flesh you can't get out] and elsewhere:

i corpi ci irritano —

ci hanno sempre impedito di essere ciò che avremmo voluto. però amico, non beviamo piu come l'anno scorso. Non aspettiamo più uno più solo di noi che venga a sedersi e a salvarci. ora non l'aspettiamo più."

[bodies irritate us —

they've always kept us from being what we wanted to be. but friend, we don't drink like last year. we don't wait anymore for one more lonely than us that would come sit and save us. now we don't wait for him anymore]. (Pop *Un giorno* 77)

Here, as well, the body is portrayed as a jail. The body is what stops the wishful-imaginary projection characteristic of Ideology. The body is a hurdle for the human that tries to exist entirely in a (re)solved manner. There is a sort of anarchic materialism implicit within our corporeal existence that *de facto* belongs to the Real and is thus not *directly* affected (it, itself) by any shifting within symbolic constellations of relations. To say this is not to discard the symbolic importance of our bodies but to underscore that this importance is *symbolic*. Be it in Fanon's context where he scorns an existence where 'Blackness' is symbolically significant only through its opposition to 'Whiteness', or in Es. Pop's context where the body, making its suffering known because of cold winters and excessive drinking, seems to pull the subjects out of their quixotic existence. The body is where this dissonance makes itself known as an incessant itching in Es.

Pop and as suffocating claustrophobia in Fanon. Either way, what is of interest is not a rejection of the body but a return to it. Does prayer bring us closer to ourselves?

Prayers to Non-Existence

All night I ask you why. All night you tell me *no*.

–Alejandra Pizarnik

And ghosts must do again what brings them pain.

–W.H. Auden

In the religious context, prayers are a practice through which one enters into rapport with one's object of worship. In between religious practices, customary elements dictate the methodology of how one should go about praying, for example, standing and kneeling or clasping one's hands and bowing one's head, and so on. In the argument to follow, prayers are taken in a broader sense, similar to how other religious elements have been taken up in the discussion of this project so far. The intent is to widen the definition of prayer to encompass any repeated ritual within daily practice that aims to reach a higher ideal than what is available in the given situation. As previously discussed, this drive for heaven strives for a (re)solved existence, any iteration of which exhibits a form of non-existence. Consecutively, these worship processes, as the argument analyzing their structure hopes to demonstrate, are prayers to non-existence. Such prayers are a coping mechanism to quench the unfulfillable desire to reach an unreachable ideal temporarily. This coping mechanism is a way to avoid pain brought upon by an existence at hand that does not match the desired preconceived one.

The trajectory of G.H. in Lispector's novel is one in which she understands her previous way of living, from the outlying standpoint of the encounter with the cockroach, as escapism, rendered possible through the attachment to different ideals of existence. Throughout the narrative, she articulates the fear of living unattached to something higher than ourselves and

sheds light on the ideals, mechanisms, and causes behind her clinging onto them. Towards the end of the book, she comes to realizations that shift, flip this manner of coping onto its head and resolve it. At moments, Søren Kierkegaard will be brought into the discussion to help articulate the causes and functions of these Prayers to Non-Existence.

At the beginning of *The Passion*, which takes place after G.H.'s structure-breaking experience, G.H. often articulates a fear of being unable to fit back into her previous way of existence. This fear translates to, "How can I explain that my greatest fear is precisely of: being? and yet there is no other way. How can I explain that my greatest fear is living whatever comes? How to explain that I can't stand seeing, just because life isn't what I thought but something else — as if I knew what! Why is seeing such disorganization?" (Lispector *Passion* 5) At this moment, we spot previously argued points. Firstly, the tremendous human fear of living life for what it is, as something that can never be fully neutralized through the conceptual understanding of it. Secondly, life seen outside of humanity's organizing functions disproves these functions. It exhibits life, in seeing for what it is, as an immanent flow of undifferentiated, unresolvable phenomena.

Soon, G.H articulates the hope that precisely those processes that provided her with a facsimile of life will again aid her in neutralizing her dread: "and maybe only thought can save me, I'm afraid of passion. Since I must save the day of tomorrow, since I must have a form because I don't feel strong enough to stay disorganized" (Lispector 7). Perhaps it may come as a striking choice of word for G.H., but, passion, will be discussed extensively in the context of Kierkegaard's *Present Age* and the events that unfold later in Lispector's novel. For now, the duality of the word passion is to be brought to attention. Commonly, passion describes a strong



and energizing emotion that fuels action toward the object of our passions. However, etymologically speaking, the roots of the word passion indicate something seemingly different. The Late Latin word *passionem* means ‘suffering’ or enduring, and the stem is Latin *pati* which also indicates ‘to endure’ or ‘experience.’ The passivity of passion, enduring something enacted from external forces, is picked up prominently in Christian Theology within the image of Christ on the cross, as a sufferer, a martyr, which passively absorbed an outside penance, hence, the Passion of Christ. For now, let us attribute this same dual meaning to passion, similar to how other recurring terms in *Selfish* are treated, for example, the drive for heaven and the Tower of Babel.

Since socialized human life presumes an adherence to an even partial univocal system of understanding, G.H. vacillates, “And may I have the great courage to resist the temptation to invent a form. [...] I’m afraid to start to ‘make’ a meaning, with the same tame madness that till yesterday was my healthy way of fitting into a system” (Lispector 7). G.H. recognizes that tame madness is required to fit into a system. A prerequisite for the human system is the delusion that it is exhaustive, complete, and rigid. She is afraid that with time she will find a way to label her experience under understandable human terms, therefore losing what the experience gave her.

The first insight on the nature of the mechanism enabling the reaching at ‘overhead’ ideals appears when G.H. talks about an eye: “My question, if there was one, was not: ‘Who am I’, but ‘Who is around me.’ My cycle was complete: what I lived in the present was already getting ready so I could later understand myself. An eye watched over my life. This eye was probably what I would probably now call truth, now morality, now human law, now God, now me. I lived mostly inside a mirror” (Lispector 20). Within such a short passage, Lispector

articulates many themes that have already been discussed or will be addressed shortly. The question G.H. asks herself recalls the facade-like quality of the nominative 'I' created by the self. A label that is not concerned with an internal definition; more, it negatively defines itself against everything outside of the 'I'. This 'non-I' is the external world that must be analyzed for the self to understand itself, hence why the gaze rarely turns onto the interior of the defining walls. Here also, we find mentioned how the present serves this complete circularity, which is human understanding of life. The present functions as the raw material onto which, later on, the subject will look to gather information and form an understanding of what has happened. Hence the simile of such an existence to that of a mirror, in which what is seen, the mirror's 'content' so to speak, is all that is external to it. The mirror's content is dictated by what is reflected in it, and the image of an empty mirror persists in being a mysterious and poetic conundrum. Further, the eye G.H. mentions is perhaps the most explicit definition of the function of ideals within the human subject found in the novel. It is not a question of analyzing and arguing about specific ideals. It is more a statement of how one throughout life attaches to different 'perfect visions' of the world, which haunt the self by constantly comparing the reality at hand to the one envisioned by the 'eye'.

A couple of pages later, G.H. talks about these utopic standards that influence daily living while referring to the furnishing of her house. "Everything here is the elegant, ironic, and witty replica of a life that never existed anywhere [...] Everything here actually refers to a life that wouldn't suit me if it were real" (Lispector 22). For example, take the refurbishing of a house, which is a process governed by taste, informed by certain criteria that adhere to an ideal of taste. Therefore the furniture, decorations, etc., could be seen as a reflection of striving towards

whatever stylistic ideal one has in mind. G.H. points out that such an ideal if realized, would not cohere with her particular existence. She then asks: “What is it imitating, then? If it were real, I wouldn’t understand it, but I like the duplicate and understand it. The copy is always pretty. [...] I always seemed to prefer the parody, it was useful to me. [...] imitating a life probably gave me assurance precisely because that life wasn’t my own: it wasn’t a responsibility of mine” (Lispector 22). These remarks call to mind the notion of mimesis, the imitation of reality in art. Mimesis could also be understood as the process by which language and concepts come about. G.H. is acutely aware that only the copy, the representation, can have utility in human terms, as the copy excludes, by its copying function, all that cannot be understood; thus, if it were made real or perfect, it would not be understood or useful.

Let us remember the paradox of Borges’ map. Only onto the copy which discards the unintelligible can an aesthetic judgment be made. A judgment like ‘pretty’ implies that what is observed is intelligible and thus capacitates evaluation within a system of values. Much of these statements and elucidations adhere to the previous discussion in the *Tower of Babel*, but what is new here is the notion of the cause for these processes. This cause being, imitating life in the form of existence within a structure gives one assurance only because it unburdens us from the crushing weight of utter freedom. Attaching to an ideal, which then persecutes our every movement, is tracing a path and having something to act in accordance or discordance with. Which thus clearly delimits our agency within the range of the selected criterion, be it God, morality, etc. In this light, such a way of being is concerned with finding something one can forfeit oneself to completely, thus being absorbed, their life becomes a form of existence (re)solved. G.H. continues: “an inexistent life possessed me entirely and kept me busy like an

invention” (Lispector 23). Thus, she felt swallowed whole by the fabrication that she held above life in order to shake the weight of her personal existence, of living life unfiltered by an ideal which would make sense of it, give value and significance to the lived thing.

Nevertheless, such a process is not as totalizing as one believes, G.H. vocalizes this right before encountering the cockroach.

I was seeing all my earlier expectations, I was seeing the awareness from which I’d also lived before, an awareness that never leaves me and that in the final analysis might be the thing that most attached to my life — perhaps that awareness was my life itself. The cockroach too: what’s the only feeling a cockroach has is the awareness of living, inextricable from its body. (Lispector 43)

At this moment, G.H. solidifies the earlier established claim that the encounter with the cockroach gives a vision of human life outside of it. From this viewpoint, G.H. postulates a “perhaps” that will only be answered later in the novel. The question at hand is whether the awareness of life that she held before the events of the novel was in some sense the same as the cockroach’s was to the cockroach; whether one creature’s perception of life is by definition perfect for itself because any perception is bound by the body of the specific creature in question. To this, G.H. adds, “In me, everything I had superimposed upon the inextricable part of myself, would probably never manage to stifle the awareness that, more than awareness of life, was the actual process of life inside me” (Lispector 43). Lispector treats the construction of the self as a superimposition atop the body. Throughout the novel, G.H. talks of this process as an accretion, which conflates the process of the self with that of the creation of human structures. Here as well, the building atop of bare life is present, in this case, the body, resulting in a divergence of

belief as to what life is, how it should go, etc. Moreover, the body, on the other side of superimposition, is the only part of the human capable of doing what the accretion promises one of doing, of being, of ‘living whatever comes.’ Throughout the encounter with the roach, G.H. sheds all these layers of accretion “I too, who was slowly reducing myself to whatever was irreducible” (Lispector 54). What follows within the novel are the metamorphic repercussions of the encounter with the cockroach, discussed in *Etwas Ungeheures*. After which, G.H. starts explicitly pronouncing her revelations.

The second to last chapter of *The Passion* calls back to one of the initial fears G.H. informs the reader of during the book's opening. “All that was missing is the coup de grâce — which is called passion” (Lispector 181). At this point, it becomes necessary to understand the function of passion as a counterforce to the ossifying symptoms of human structure. To this extent, the attention will fall to some passages by Søren Kierkegaard, primarily found in the text *The Present Age*. Proposed as a review of Thomasine Gyllembourg-Ehrensivärd's *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard diverts the discussion to analyze the social structure of the time, dubbed under the “Present Age” in comparison to what he views as a stark opposite, the “Age of Revolution”.

The first description of the present age already demonstrates a common ground with the problems G.H. is experiencing. Kierkegaard writes: “the present age is essentially a *sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudently relaxing in indolence*” (Kierkegaard *Two Ages* 252). Not only do both Kierkegaard and G.H. lament a lack of passion, but by putting the two in dialogue, and taking into account what has been discussed so far, striking similarities illuminate the overarching climate both find themselves in. The Present Age is understood as a large-scale assessment from the vantage point

of society, whereas the voice of G.H. is the testimony of the individual within this climate. As already pointed out by Kierkegaard, the present age is dominated by reflection and sensitivity, both of which are the utmostly human characteristics. Rationality is the dominion of thought, whereas sensitivity is an adjective that finds itself within the realm of the ego, which will enter the discussion in the following chapter. Another fruitful description of the present age happens soon after, “the present age is the age of anticipation” (Kierkegaard 253). Anticipation is the static waiting for something to happen, regarded as probable in a foreseen future. This will come back later.

In the present age, reflection opposes action. To elucidate this, Kierkegaard uses an image of adults in the water, encouraging the youth to jump in.

‘Come on out, just jump in quickly’ — just so does decision lie in existence [...] and if you have the makings of a man, the danger and life’s severe judgment upon your recklessness will help you become one. That a person stands or falls on his actions is becoming obsolete; instead, everybody sits around and does a brilliant job of bungling through with the aid of some reflection and also by declaring that they all know very well what has to be done. (Kierkegaard 253)

Kierkegaard will substantiate this claim more, but here lie the seeds of his intuitions that through rationality, a circular mechanism engages, by which the ‘right’ answer is achieved and understood. Yet, people will not act, as the ‘solution’ has already been grasped. This process resonates with a form of existence (re)solved, where the faculties of the mind produce a facsimile solution to life, the possession of which equates to the actual resolution of the issues. The disapproval of which is, of course, forgotten and ignored. In the cited passage and Kierkegaard's

argument, there is an implicit fear within those that get mesmerized by reflection: the fear of “living whatever comes”.

Such an age “must have the resource of a consistent and well-grounded ethical view, a sacrificial unselfishness, and a high-born nobility that renounces the moment” (Kierkegaard 254). In order to enable an individual to get lost within spirals of reflection, a system with corroborated foundations must be in place. Different iterations of such a system appear throughout history, which nonetheless will function similarly. It traps the individual by implanting an object of desire or ideal for the individual to latch onto. Kierkegaard pinpoints the object of desire, which enables the escapist processes of his current time as money. “[B]ut it is in fact token money, an abstraction”, where a young man of his time will envy another for nothing but the other’s money, “[g]ive me money, the young man will say, and I will be alright. And the young man will not do anything rash, [...] anything he has to repent of, [...] for which he has to reproach himself, but he will die in the illusion that if he had money, then he would have lived, then certainly he would have done something great” (Kierkegaard 255). The power of an ideal to strive towards and renounce one’s life for lies in its capacity to promise an alleged (re)solved existence once the individual achieves said ideal. The system promises that once the individual reaches this ideal, the doors of life will fling open, and finally, they can start living. Anticipation is located in this realm, in the passive waiting for such and such circumstances to become true.

Another critical aspect of the age of reflection which further grounds G.H. in this environment is the effect of the climate on interpersonal relationships. “life relationships, which are what they are only because of qualitatively distinguishing passion, lose their resilience; the qualitative expression of difference between opposites is no longer the law for the relation of

inwardness to each other in the relation. Inwardness is lacking, and to that extent the relation does not exist or the relation is an inert coherence” (Kierkegaard 255). Since all values are fed into the individual by the system, the individual, through reflection, perpetrates the circularity by arriving at the ‘correct’ answer, which is again only correct because of the cohesion with the structure the individual finds themselves in. Interpersonal relationships, which flare by the burning differences between passions find themselves drained as Kierkegaard would put it. G.H.’s earlier question reflects the same lack of inwardness; where the outside system dictates everything, reinforced by the people outside the individual — it is counterproductive to look inside. However, this boils down to either adherence to the system, a redundancy due to circularity, “my cycle was complete” as G.H. says, or its opposite, which would be an erasure due to the insignificance of a contrasting opinion, as again, utility is measured in comparison to how much it reinforces the structure that is already in place. In both cases, the process results in a flattening of individuality.

For this flattening to occur, Kierkegaard calls it ‘leveling’, “a phantom must be raised, [...] a monstrous abstraction, and all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage — and this phantom is *the public*. [...] the public is the actual master of leveling, for when there is approximate leveling, something is doing the leveling, but the public is a monstrous nonentity” (Kierkegaard 262). In Kierkegaard's argument, the public is an outside body which affirms criteria of judgment, it is akin to Althusserian ideology in that it is also “a corps, outnumbering all the people together, but this corps can never be called up for inspection” (Kierkegaard 262). Its representation cannot be found in one single place. Again, the individual is left against a massive force that regulates their existence without being able to point the finger at its



provenance, again, because it is an abstract nonentity. The passage in which G.H. describes her previous existence, as being under the constant observation of an eye, resonates with all of this. The public becomes just another unpinnable, vague ideal held over individuals, which oversees every internal and external motion of the self that strives towards adherence to the public in order to avoid the erasure that would follow any disobedience. Similarly to a prayer, the adherence to this higher body, which validates existence, is inconclusive. Complying with the ideal is only a momentary “deceptive consolation” because the public or any other ideal one aims to please “exists only *in abstracto*” (Kierkegaard 262). For the underlying cause of all of this, even if it is fitting in that we desire, is really to have the burden of our own personal existence removed from our shoulders. We desire something that renders our life free from the responsibility of living it. Which, again, happens from the attachment of this desire to a reasonably substantiated ideal.

On the flip side, not fitting in means being erased and not existing within a human system. G.H. despairs over this possibility at the beginning of the novel. Fortunately, Kierkegaard can lend a helping hand once more, as despair is a mainstay to the philosopher in his text *The Sickness unto Death*.

In despairing over *something*, he really despaired over *himself*, and now he wants to be rid of himself. For example, when the ambitious man whose slogan is ‘either Caesar or nothing’ does not get to be Caesar, he despairs over it. But this also means something else: precisely because he did not get to be Caesar, he now cannot bear to be himself. Consequently he does not despair because he did not get to be Caesar but despairs over himself because he did not get to be Caesar. (Kierkegaard *Sickness* 355)

If one does not match the chosen ideal due to the abstract nature of the ideal, the arrow of fault turns towards oneself. In despair over the discordance between the wished existence and the current one, the latter is rejected. When dealing with ideals, this is usually the only way this process can go. Ideals are abstract nonentities further substantiated by the system around us, which does not let any other possibility of existence permeate into the plausibility of the subject.

However, as Kierkegaard will go on to elaborate in his argument, the ideal of Caesar is quite literally unattainable, because, more than figuratively, there was and will be no one that could be Julius Caesar, as Julius Caesar has already been, and done so without the ideal of being 'Julius Caesar' to begin with. So it follows that great ideals, like heaven, are great precisely because they are truly unattainable. A great ideal must be unattainable because if it weren't, one would face the disappointment of reaching it and still have to persist in living life. If great ideals were attainable, one wouldn't be able to shake the burden of their personal existence to discard the responsibility of freedom to achieve them. The only difference between the erasure under personal despair and the unburdening which happens within a larger social body is that in the latter, others help sustain the illusion, which can become utterly crushing in our solitude.

In regards to another ideal, morality, G.H. gives a very practical take:

Morality. Would it be simplistic to think the moral problem with regard to others consists in behaving as one ought to, and the moral problem with regards to oneself in managing to feel what one ought to. [...] All of a sudden the moral question seemed to me not only overwhelming, but extremely petty. The moral problem, in order for us to adjust to it, should be less demanding and greater. Since as an ideal it is both small and unattainable.

Small, if one attains it: unattainable, because it cannot even be attained. (Lispector *Passion* 84)

Lispector here once again demonstrates what her writing is capable of. It tosses in seemingly shallow propositions in such a way that they subterraneously perform various movements at the same time. At once morality is critiqued. Then the process by which we manufacture ideals is also put into question. Again, because like an ideal, its achievement becomes disappointing as one, at its pinnacle, does not get the promised resolution. Lastly, the *reasonable* dissatisfaction that comes from reading G.H.'s 'theory', raising philosophical eyebrows, so to speak, as a reaction demonstrates an underlying tension. Such a claim is too simplistic, the issue must be more impenetrable, and this is much too superficial of an account. Perhaps we invent such things as complicated moral systems, utilitarian calculi, universalizable maxims, etc., in order to avoid the presence of life and death, in order to buy time or, perhaps, waste time, and quench any sense of guilt that could sprout from realizing the time lost in pondering. Indeed this would be quite petty.

G.H. continues to share brilliant insights on the domain of ideals. "But becoming human can be transformed into an ideal and suffocate beneath accretions... To be human ought not be an ideal for man who is inevitably human, being human must be the way that I, living thing, obeying freely the path of whatever is alive, am human" (Lispector 129). Throughout history, uncountable ideals or 'correct' paths for individuals and society were charted. Something birthed as a supposition can easily slip into an axiom. Uncountable wars waged in the name of this or that ideal, and uncountable sufferings caused in the name of this or that ideal. If a correct way to exist is given to us within a structure, it will continuously proceed to entrap and evade us.

Whatever the correct way, G.H. proposes that it must come from our nature as a living thing rather than specifically human, as the functions and processes of what is human will ultimately still be present, unshakeable. From abandoning a predetermined human path and opting for the one dictated by the few rules of bare life, one will still live as what one is, a human.

One of the final remarks appears as a pleading invocation: “And I don't want the kingdom of heaven, I don't want it, all I can stand is the promise of it!” (Lispector 154). The achievement of an ideal would, in the specific form of heaven, as already discussed, be unsustainable for the human subject. This unsustainability also extends to all the great unattainable ideals as they are much too great and potent for the human vessel. For other ideals, their achievement only brings us back to the starting point of having our escapist thirst momentarily quenched, only to be met once more with the dryness of an unspecified existence. Only in the promise made by an ideal can life be occupied with anticipation. Our current existence can be sustained only in the promise of the future that redeems the present. And thus, life can be spent in these prayers to non-existence, the definition of which has purposefully been omitted as an extensive and definitive list of what these are would be a similarly titanic and paradoxical task as that of Borges' mapmaker. The cursory definition would be any process that strives towards an ideal above us which serves us to sidestep the weight of responsibility we feel from our utmost personal freedom. The subsequent question is where does such a desire to get rid of ourselves come from, and is there a way out? It must get tiring along this path. Is there any reward for our persistence?

### Giving Up

All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.  
 –Blaise Pascal

In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is  
 getting it.  
 –Oscar Wilde

The previous chapters trace the trajectory of a self, G.H., through an experience that threatens, challenges, and finally reforms her past ways of existence. In the begging, G.H. is terrified that her experience will prohibit her from returning to her previous way of living. Later, the reader finds out the events that caused G.H. to see humanity from the outside and how, from that vantage point, being human actualized in an avoidance of life, acting on an instinctive fear of the unknown. Finally, she realizes that she has been ignoring the failure to achieve her desires and grasp life in its entirety. G.H. comes to terms with this faulty aspiration, understanding that her desire has been from the set-out, an erroneous wish born from an over-bloated ego.

The overblown ego enables a category mistake of desire where the self, emerging from a totality of non-self, wishes for a return to make it whole again. And thus, the self goes about the world, scouring for objects of desire that promise a reconciliation with a long-lost totality.

However, because of this category mistake, no object of desire within the existence of the self will completely satiate said desire. So it follows that desire continuously defers itself, producing pain and despair in the self. This circular process acts on the foundational belief for a complete reconciliation and a total quenching of desire, a 'way out,' so to speak. In this closed system, the persistent failure to achieve an idealized exit from the current conditions of existence, ignored or not, will continue to push the self further into the circularity of its desires.

The final realization, the one that breaks these metaphysical walls of the self, for G.H., comes in the form of ‘giving up’. Giving up on the titanic self-appointed task to (re)solve life, giving up on becoming ‘someone’, finally enabling her to be her-self, and free.

This fragment, akin to the final chapters of *The Passion*., summarizes the past condition, now evident in sight of G.H.’s giving up. By first detailing the genesis of this foundational category mistake of desire as sprouting from a ‘primary narcissism’, the fragment will return to G.H.’s recapitulating closing statements. Lacan’s terminology is not casual, *Giving Up* uses his mapping of desire in the self as a cipher key against which G.H.’s later revelations will demonstrate their significance.

Lacan argues that the ego is an imaginary construct created within the subject to cover up the feeling of lack that comes about from separating the subject from the wholeness of the undifferentiated world. This lack “is experienced as a sense of incompleteness or dissatisfaction that motivates the subject to seek out objects or others that can provide a sense of unity or wholeness. The subject's perception of themselves and the world is shaped by their attempts to fill this lack or gap.” (Lacan *Seminar II* 5) This “sense” of unity exists as a forgotten past with only a vague memory left. It cannot be much more than that because the subject cannot ‘experience’ said unity because that entails no differentiation between self and non-self; better yet, unity is non-self.

This sense of unity gives rise to what Lacan calls a “primary narcissism”, which he describes as a condition “in which the subject experiences themselves as a unified and self-sufficient entity, prior to the development of language and the symbolic order”(Lacan *Écrits* 70). The subject's desire is articulated erroneously out of this primary narcissism. The subject’s

desire, built on a fleeting sense of completeness, can never be satisfied as the subject constantly looks for a stand-in for their lost intimacy in the wrong order. “Desire is a metonymy, a substitution of signifiers that endlessly defer the subject's satisfaction. The subject mistakes the object of desire as a substitute for the lost object of the mother, but in fact desire is always directed towards the signifier and its endless chain of associations” (Lacan *Seminar XI* 185). In the same way that *Selfish* treats ideals in the discussion up to this point, the object of the mother is a metonymy, a different namesake for the same thing. In a purely Lacanian climate, the object of the mother would be the stand-in for the initial articulation of an ‘other’ against which the I can posit itself. Lacan differentiates between singular others and the Other. The latter comes about from articulating the self into language and thus represents the world of symbolic value. On the other hand, relationships of otherness are on the imaginary plane. If one were to trace the infinite chain of desire meticulously, one would ultimately arrive at the feeling of lack, or incompleteness, compared to the totality and fullness of the world outside the subject in the Real, that which exists outside of identification through the assignation of symbolic value.

Nevertheless, the subject attempts to quench the desire for unity through Imaginary relationships, which are cataloged in an infinite chain of symbolic signification that attempts to match up to the craved unity. So the object of the mother appears as a heteronym for that which desire craves, representing the totality inaccessible for the self. In this sense, the category mistake of desire is the subject’s attempt to quench a desire sprouting from a different plane from that in which the subject looks for a solution. From the onset, the subject is bound to fail in their attempts to quench this desire completely. So the next best thing would be a (re)solution.

These points will resonate with the concluding section of *The Passion*. To begin with, G.H. is keenly aware of the sense of unity and what it conceals. “(Nostalgia is not for the God we are missing, it is the nostalgia for ourselves who are not enough; we miss our impossible grandeur – my unreachable present is my paradise lost)” (Lispector *Passion* 157). Nostalgia is the sentimentalized longing for a past that the self feels separated from. With the Lacanian context in mind, this nostalgia becomes the longing for a time before the separation of the self from the Real. G.H.’s articulation is coherent with past discussions: it is not the achievement of the ideal we crave, nor the ideal itself. On the contrary, the self desires an existence without the feeling of insufficiency brought about by the category mistake of desire. This distant memory, where the self was complete, fuels the idea of a complete existence, a totality that is much too big for our human scale. This kind of nostalgia informs our desires that articulate objects of desires that stand in for the enormity of the Real, that propel our action in the hope for a reconciliation, which is categorically impossible and continuously evasive. Desire again appears as the desire for something that would cancel out the self. We want to get rid of ‘our selves’. The ego becomes misinformed about its own proportions at the scene of its primary narcissism. The ego, therefore, attempts to grasp the totality of the Real outside of it through its impossible grandeur. Our problem with existentialism is our dissatisfaction with what it informs us of, that there is no resolution between the divorce of man and the universe, that there can never be, within man, a totalizing solution that rids life of all that rejects our attempts to grasp and neutralize it.

In Lacan’s detailing, the circularity of desire perpetrates under an economy of lack. One needs out of personal insufficiency. Though many possible answers exist to this problem, the



first intuitive one is to eradicate desire. If one manages to eradicate desire, one will also eliminate the pain brought about by the unquenchable desire. G.H. is against a solution that gets out of the circular system of desire by rejecting it, “and solitude is not needing. Not needing leaves a man very alone, all alone. [...] Ah, my love, do not be afraid of neediness: it is our greater destiny. [...] love is as inherent as wanting itself, and we are guaranteed by a necessity that shall renew itself continuously. Love already is, it is always” (Lispector 179). Attempting to eradicate desire from the equation of the self in the world results in an existence further separated from life. Such a case would lead to greater solitude as desire propels us into action that externalizes the self to reach the object of desire. Love, God, or whatever namesake one chooses to appoint these things we crave contact with, which evade the self at its every attempt of reconciliation, as G.H. points out, already are and always will be. No matter our attempts in self-indulgent forgetfulness of our feeling of incompleteness, the existence of the Real persists despite whether the self is open or closed to it.

What G.H. discards or gives up on is finding a totalizing solution for the feeling of lack. “Ah, bidding farewell to all that means such great disappointment. But it is in disappointment that the promise is fulfilled, through disappointment through pain the promise is fulfilled” (Lispector 168). Disappointment or dissatisfaction comes from realizing that one’s prior efforts were all for nothing. This disappointment brings us back to Nietzsche’s aphorism, *From a distance*, and reinforces the concluding statements in the *Tower of Babel*. Disappointment is born from the persistent, arduous efforts to climb the mountain, structure, or system. Whatever it is that renders our surroundings significant, it makes the promise that the ‘solution’ or ‘truth’ lies at its pinnacle. So we climb on, only to find nothing at the top. However, G.H. says that the

disappointment fulfills the promise. We understand that the promise for any heaven is a promise that says, ‘Come, here is the place! Atop this pinnacle, you will finally be rid of the burden of being your self.’ It is an unfulfillable promise, yet upon such realization, it is fulfilled. Perhaps one could assert that the promise to get rid of the weight of one’s self fulfills in the time the self has spent fully absorbed in climbing. The constant strive towards an ideal makes life tolerable for the self fully immersed in its search. In this striving, the only thing of concern becomes the achievement of said ideal, and thus all the rest gains validity as something along the way to reaching the ideal.

Apparent paradoxicality is emblematic of G.H.’s thinking in the book’s concluding pages. Her proposed way of thinking goes against linear logic and yet makes sense. G.H. proposes an utterly honest acceptance of our condition as incomplete. It is not an attempt to eliminate desire but instead to accept it and its cycles at large, to accept that while we are our selves, we will never feel forever complete. G.H. names the last piece to this puzzle: “All that is missing is the coup de grâce —which is called passion” (Lispector 179). Passion, as the final step to the acceptance of the cycle of desire, takes up the duality of meanings mentioned before, and in the following pages, G.H. leans more onto the secondary definition of passion as a passive endurance of externally suffered circumstances. However, such a definition of passion is also going to become elliptical.

To further work with face-value contradictions within G.H.’s thoughts, she lets us in on her desires in this newfound state of resolution when she says:

I am avid for the world, I have strong and defined desires, tonight I’ll go dance and eat, I won’t wear the blue dress, but the black-and-white one. But at the same time I need

nothing. I don't even need for a tree to exist. I now know of a way that relinquishes everything – including love, nature, objects. A way that does without me. Though, as for my desires, my passions, my contact with a tree — they are still for me like a mouth eating. (Lispector 183)

The paradoxicality of G.H.'s state is a notion found everywhere in the discussion and the texts that *Selfish* has engaged with. In the context of G.H.'s desire, what the paradoxical attitude entails, is a state where desires exist in a clear and defined way, no longer muddled through its category mistake. However, these desires do not appear with the heavy essential, tragic importance they usually do. No more is there a sense of an 'all or nothing'. Instead, G.H. has found an in-between the either/or, in which desires can exist for themselves and are not held with the same gravitas legislated by primary narcissism, where what is at stake becomes the validation of the existence of the self at large.

The relationship G.H. finds herself in with the world at the novel's end accepts the blows of disappointment dealt by life to the ego, but yet does not reject life and is still intimate with what is. Her newfound way of accessing the world manages to neither reject herself because of inadequacy nor the world in scorn as it failed to satisfy our overwhelming desires. "Like a mouth eating" implies that this relationship carries an implicit naturalness and the sort of lightness characteristic of a feature doing what it is supposed to do, just like a mouth eating. Let us turn to the final pages of *The Passion* that crystallize this way of existing.

The first of the triumvirate of notions that appear at the end of *The Passion* is "depersonalization". On this, G.H. says: "Depersonalization as the dismissal of useless individuality — losing everything one can lose and, even so, being. [...] Depersonalization as the

great objectification of oneself. The greatest exteriorization one can reach.” (Lispector 184)

Depersonalization means the cessation of being a ‘person’. To be a person means to be something more than the bare status of a living human being, and as such, is an activity that exhibits itself in the Symbolic. In the climate of the Symbolic achievement of desire, individuality serves an almost utilitarian purpose of bringing one closer to what one wants to be. *Etwas Ungeheures* demonstrates how the cessation of symbolic existence can only be temporary. However, even if brief, it can provide a look at said manner of being from the outside, and thus it is the greatest exteriorization one can reach.

Let us follow the passages leading to the second of the three notions, “deheroization”. In them, G.H. summarizes past discussions of the various topics that were the concerns of previous fragments. “One must first climb painfully until finally reaching high enough to be able to fall—I can only reach the personality of muteness if I have first constructed an entire voice. My civilizations were necessary for me to rise to a point from which I could descend” (Lispector 185). As discussed in the *Tower of Babel*, the structure is necessary to reach the ground from which one feels separated by that same structure. The same paradoxicality of Kafka’s aphorism on the Tower of Babel and Wittgenstein’s ladder is present here. This paradoxicality, perhaps one could say poetic, proves to be a way past the circularity enforced by desire, as paradoxes and poetry contradict and disarticulate any rectilinear pre-established path and open the doors to new, different meanings.

G.H. continues: “It is exactly through the failure of the voice that one comes to hear for the first time one’s own muteness and that of others and that of things, and accepts it as the possible language” (Lispector 185). Knowledge of language is necessary to understand then the

imprecision of language, a grasp on man's culture is necessary to understand the limitations of such an understanding of the world, intimate engagement with ideals is vital to understand then how little they can actually provide. "Only then is my nature is accepted, accepted with its frightened torture, where pain is not something that happens to us, but what we are. And our condition is accepted as the only one possible, since it is what exists, and not another. And since living it is our passion. The human condition is the passion of Christ" (Lispector 185). Only by embracing the paradoxicality of such a movement – to go down, you have to go up first – do we come closer to the paradoxicality of our own nature, which, for G.H., is emblemized by pain. In one swift line, G.H. reconfigures the structure of pain. It is no longer something that occurs from external causes, as it would seem, but, rather, it is the cause for the awareness of our existence.

In the general economy of lack, the object of desire perpetually evades the desiring subject and thus causes pain in said subject. The knee-jerk reaction accuses the external world of the genesis of pain. However, pain is precisely born within the subject through the clashing of the category mistake of desire and the ego; pain is born out of our unrealistic expectations of life, which is the condition of being human. Without the expectations and idealizations that promise a life without suffering, a life without the responsibility of living life, all of which ultimately separate us further from life, our nature as sufferers is genuinely accepted. Only then is our nature accepted as the only one and not traded for a cleaner, hypothetical, ideal one.

We must briefly pause on the clause that pain is what we are. This assertion recontextualizes pain as not something external to us but something inextricable from our existence and affirming of it. This proposition finds support among other voices. For example, in

Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, aphorism 13, “pain always raises the question about its origin while pleasure is inclined to stop with itself without looking back” (Nietzsche *Gay Science* 86). Or even in the dimension of literature, Pessoa expresses something similar: “There’s no happiness without knowledge. But the knowledge of happiness brings unhappiness, because to know that you’re happy is to realize that you’re experiencing a happy moment and will soon have to leave it behind. To know is to kill, in happiness as in everything else. Not to know, on the other hand, is not to exist” (Pessoa *Disquiet* 511). Once more, we find ourselves in a place rife with contradictions. We find that categorizing something within knowledge structures neutralizes the phenomena. For happiness to exist, one must not be directly questioning it. Thus happiness facilitates forgetfulness, whereas pain, as its opposite, incites questions from the subject becoming aware of it and itself. In humanity's eyes, not knowing, or being unintelligible, equates to non-existence, as the discerning eye cannot allocate indiscernibility within a significative structure. At the same time, as Pessoa points out, knowledge that brings us pain informs us of happiness.

Nozick’s thought experiment of the ‘experience machine’ comes to mind. An analysis of the thought experiment will substantiate the proposition of pain as an experience that brings us back to our personal existence, which we aim to forget and shake the weight of.

The analytic philosopher, Robert Nozick, devised the thought experiment in the 1970s to object to hedonism as a theory of life that prioritizes pleasure over pain. His thought experiment usually shows that a fuller experience of life would not avoid pain. His thought experiment asks us to imagine a machine capable of reproducing any experience one desires. These experiences without pain and their pleasures feel identical to how they feel in life. With such a machine, one

could live in any scenario which would quench even the most extreme forms of desire. Within the simulated experience of the machine, the one plugged in is not conscious of the fiction, as the replica of life is indiscernible from reality. The philosopher then asks, if that were the case, would one plug themselves into this machine for their whole life? As mentioned before, and very intuitively, the usual answer is no. This rejection sprouts from a wish to experience the ‘fullest’ life possible, as pain is part of life. A life without pain would not be whole.

This wish is probably only voiced when one is not in contact with a pain in which one’s only concern is to get rid of the pain and, therefore, of oneself. A life without pain is a life without any affirmation of our existence. In happiness, one forgets oneself, but in pain, one is rendered highly aware of one’s own insufficiency, lack, and utmost existence. Just as in the scene given by Kierkegaard, with the person striving to be Julius Caesar, the person who is in pain for not being able to be Julius Caesar, in despair, and most likely in pain, they reject themselves. Such a tradeoff of identities is only possible when at least the one that the person in question embodies is laid bare, utterly naked in its insufficiency; in pain, their limitations come to afloat, and despair takes over in the comparison to that glistening ideal they wish to be. On the other hand, a sort of quixotic individual wholly absorbed in an idyllic daydream is the polar opposite of the previous situation with Julius Caesar. They forget their individuality in the happiness of living in their sustained illusion.

Accepting pain as our only condition can only be achieved by giving up on attempting to resolve our condition. Nevertheless, as *The Tower of Babel* mentioned, giving up cannot happen beforehand. One must traverse, through lived experience, the entire trajectory, which G.H. swiftly sums up before the novel's concluding chapter. “I have to the extent I designate — and

this is the splendor of having a language” (Lispector *Passion* 186). The understanding of the world around us as a grasping of it in the form of concepts happens through language, which at first dazzles us. “But I have much more to the extent I cannot designate. Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it — and the way I do not find it.” (Lispector 186). Despite the initial mesmerism of the conceptual world, there is an intrinsic inaccuracy of language that fails to grasp the actual profundity of life. The rawness of reality embodies this profundity, which rejects the polished classification of language.

Only through language can a human articulate their desires, and only through language can one discover that one cannot grasp their desires through language. “But it is from searching and not finding that what I did not know was born, which I instantly recognize. Language is my human effort. My destiny is to search and my destiny is to return empty-handed. But – I return with the unsayable” (Lispector 186). At every turn, our existence predicated on language, predicated on insufficiency and imprecision, makes us aware of precisely that. Our object of desire, our wished reconciliation, will forever elude us, yet we find out exactly what we crave as one contours a shape tracing its negative space. “The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve” (Lispector 186). Recalling the scene of Bataille's mason, only by standing at the precipice of the impossible, viewed from the vantage point of the pinnacle of structure, does the mason realize that there is no place there for them.

Only then, when the construction has failed to achieve its promised existence, can one achieve that which the structure failed to achieve. “And it is no use to try to take a shortcut and want to start, already knowing that the voice says little, starting straightaway with being



depersonal” (Lispector 186). G.H. is advising not to take what she is telling us as informative in the way one comes to understand a concept. Her message is quite different from usual philosophical assertions. It can only be understood as lived experience, where the distance between life and concepts or language collapses. One must first be burned by the fire to find out that fire burns. “In the matter of living, one can never arrive beforehand. The *via crucis* is not a detour, it is the only way one cannot arrive except along it and with it” (Lispector 186). The returning comparison to the crucifixion of Christ, the image of passion, of static suffering, is necessary for both the identity of Christ and the human one.

The crucifixion of Christ is inseparable from the existence of Christ. In the same sense, in structuring who we are, we cannot avoid the cross of suffering we bear as humans. Suffering is not a detour. It is not an unnecessary that we should strive to eliminate. It is the weight of our own existence. Arriving at life beforehand, without having experienced the weight of our cross, would mean to sidestep life, to manufacture another existence that pleases our skewed expectations. “Persistence is our effort, giving up is our reward” (Lispector 186). Persistence within the circularity of unfulfillable desire as the only real human action available to us; G.H. is not telling us to discard our nature, but to accept it for what it is, as it is the only one that is, not another. “Giving up is a revelation. I give up, and will have been the human person — it is only in the worst of my condition that that condition is taken up as my destiny” (Lispector 187). The situation G.H. portrays is similar to the scene Nietzsche describes in the *Gay Science*, aphorism 341, *the greatest weight*, from which the philosopher’s idea of the eternal return and appeal to *amor fati* comes forth.

A demon appears in one's 'loneliest lonely' in the aphorism. The creature's proposition is then this: "“This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, [...] everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence”” (Nietzsche *Gay Science* 273). The philosopher then asks us what our answer would be, would one be in despair at such prospects, or would one ecstatically exclaim to the demon, "“You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine”” (Nietzsche 274). Is one to affirm one's life, even at the worst, the loneliest lonely, where one feels nothing else but the weight of one's own existence, where one gives up control of trying to change things through titanic gestures forcibly? Granted, the loneliest lonely, and the worst appear to be different, but the former seems to mean a time in which one is neither mesmerized by the happiness of life nor overwhelmed by the terror of it. As a brief counterargument, the context of G.H. and this discussion is beyond human qualitative assignations of values. The 'worst' appears at the novel's end as neutrality, indeed the worst for humanity, that craves definition. Passive neutrality is a situation that lays bare our nature as sufferers. In both cases, giving up and acceptance of the eternal return find common ground in the notion of *amor fati*, 'the love of one's fate', the acceptance of one's life as one's own. Forgoing any attempt to shake the weight of the responsibility of such and "living whatever is".

G.H. describes accepting something extremely similar in the last passages of the book after having the realization of "giving up".

I was approaching the most powerful thing that had ever happened to me. More powerful than hope, more powerful than love? I was approaching something I think was — trust.

Myself? the world? the God? the roach? I don't know. Perhaps trusting is not a matter of what or whom. Perhaps I now knew that I myself would never be equal to life, but my life was equal to life. I would never reach my root, but my root existed. Timidly I let myself be pierced by a sweetness that humbled me without restraining me. (Lispector *Passion* 188)

Trust is different from hope as trust is grounded in the present, in the situation at hand. In contrast, as a prayer to non-existence, hope reaches beyond the imminent situation to find a future that redeems it. Hope goes past life. In the consequent passages, we see G.H. addressing something imminent to herself. Her 'I' would never be equal to life. The construction that the self assembles to exist in the world can never be the same size as the totality behind the subject's object of desire. However, her life was equal to life. Her existence as a bare being that lives from the same 'that' from which the roach lives, from life, is invariably equal to life, as it is life itself. Her "root", the essential kernel to her existence, whatever that may be, would always elude her, as it is unreachable to the human and other living beings. Nevertheless, it existed, which gave solidity to G.H.'s previously tumultuous approach to life.

Giving up humbles as it brings us back to an appropriate scale of our existence, but in a non-punitive way, in which the subject experiences a greater degree of freedom. "One only reaches [giving up] having experienced the power of building, and, despite the taste of power, preferring to give up. Giving up must be a choice" (Lispector 186). The moment of "giving up" can only be genuinely achieved after having experienced the furthest depths of human capacities, assembling an imposition onto life. Persisting in attempts to find footing, by clearing the ground of any detail that threatens a solid foundation, gives the person a sense of control and an illusion

of power. Only then can the fulguration that, until now, what one has done has been a self-indulgent game of cat and mouse one plays alone to avoid facing the disappointment of a life devoid of total control or ultimate meaning. In that brief flash that allows one to give up, all of the previous gestures appear with the same tenderness as when one looks at a child flailing, throwing a fit for not getting what they want. In accepting such a point of view of our human condition, “I give up, and onto my human poverty opens the only joy granted me human joy” (Lispector 187). The humility in giving up is finding a joy that pertains to your specific existence, bound to the scale of a human and not one that encompasses existence universally.

The humility G.H. feels makes her reappraise her action of eating the paste of the cockroach: “I had put a roach’s matter into my mouth, and finally performed the tiniest act. Not the maximum act, as I had thought before, not heroism and sainthood. But at last the tiniest act I had always been missing. I had always been incapable of the tiniest act. And with the tiniest act I had deheroized myself” (Lispector 184). The fullest address of the second notion throughout *The Passion*, “deheroization”, appears here. To stop seeing oneself as a hero implies to stop seeing existence as a preestablished narrative, which has a possible resolution that the hero, the self, achieves through some grand gesture. All actions propelled to quench the ego’s desire aim to grasp a totality much larger than the self, so in this sense, these actions have the magnitude of a ‘maximum’. The Lacanian model further sustains this quantification, as an object of desire is a metonymy, a stand-in for signifiers that, in their sum, equate to the “image of the mother” or the point at which the lack was not. However, recognizing one’s nature for what it is, becomes the smallest gesture, as its outreach is near to none; not to grasp the entirety of existence, not to resolve some tragic plot, but to reconcile with the smallness and intimacy of one’s own life.

On the final page, G.H. finally manages to articulate what this newfound relationship with herself and the world born from giving up:

The world independed on me — that was the trust I had reached: the world independed on me, and I am not understanding whatever it is I'm saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say. Since how could I speak without the word lying for me? how could I speak expect timidly like this: life just is for me. Life just is for me, and I don't understand what I'm saying. And so I adore it — — — — —. (Lispector189)

The final passage of the book begins with Lispector creating a word. “Independed” is a direct translation of the Portuguese ‘independia.’ Although the word does not appear in Portuguese or English dictionaries, its meaning is incredibly intuitive. Independed, stemming from the verb depend, is created by adding the prefix ‘-in’. The initial intuition of this formation's meaning appears with the respective noun dependence, where the noun form of “independed” would be independence — not dependence. Such a view of the situation is not necessarily rejected but must be enlarged, as, here too, Lispector vacillates the structure of the language to indicate multiple meanings at once. Only in this way can the whole relationship be comprehended. The prefix ‘-in’, depending on the context, also signifies ‘inside’ or ‘into’. From this, it follows that ‘the world independed on me’ could also mean ‘the world depended (in dependence) on me’. These two seemingly opposite definitions find room in the paradoxical atmosphere of Lispector’s writing. As G.H. had mentioned before, she did not require the tree to exist, but it was natural to her, crucial, essential even, to her existence like a mouth eating.

In this manner that unites dualies, G.H.’s newfound condition thrives. It rejects direct encapsulation by rectilinear logic as she screams, “and I am not understanding whatever it is I’m

saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say. Since how could I speak without the word lying for me?” (Lispector 189). And takes this as a promise to herself, never again to rip things apart for the sake of clarity and understanding. Although she struggles to find the words, which always seem to be beating around the bush for this newfound understanding, G.H. is finally ready to let things be. To recognize herself as nothing more than she is and be nothing less than she is. “Through not being, I was. To the ends of whatever I was not, I was. Whatever I am not, I am. All shall be within me, if I shall not be; for ‘I’ is just one of the instantaneous spasms of the world” (188). By accepting the constant dislocation of meaning and breaking the linearity of logic, she finds herself closer to what she is as a living being, uninterrupted by the faculties of structure. She finds herself having surmounted the fear she informs us of at the begging of the novel of ‘living whatever comes’, as she says, “the simultaneous present no longer scared me” (Lispector 189).

A way back in / No new worlds

Nearby is the country they call life

-Rainer Maria Rilke

It's not for us that the cow's milk flows, yet we drink it.

-Clarice Lispector

The notion of Giving Up and its corollary effects appear closer to the beginning of *Selfish* and are thoroughly discussed only towards the end. This framing produces the same effect as, for example, the in-between space of an entire novel, which begins and ends with the same word. The significance of this word, at the last turning of the page, will have a much greater significance than it had in the beginning. In the same sense, one could say something similar about the names of characters in any narrative. As the story goes on, the characters interact with each other, and the plot develops. So, their names become a web of meanings that perpetually comes to light as their journey unfolds.

This chapter stands at the end of the project to harvest this feeling of abundance now that the fragments have tied the knot on the discussion within *The Passion*. This fragment demonstrates the potential utility of the various notions the others have described until now when applied to different topics as metaphysical tools. The one that will be discussed here as an example will be the notion of nature within the scope of ecology.

In 2004, B.P. popularized the term Carbon Footprint through a publicity stunt. We later understood this was a linguistic move that redirects responsibility onto the individual, despite 70% of global emissions being caused by corporations. This shift sets the ground for debates about ecological consciousness centered around individual practices. A banal counterargument

for any doctrine that proposes certain personal behavior for a better climate is that the singular person is utterly insignificant in the face of global practices. Both sides are correct, and both sides are wrong. The philosopher Timothy Morton encapsulates this phenomenon that seems to be a contradiction in terms in his book *Dark Ecology*, with the example of starting a car:

turning the ignition of your car. And it creeps up on you. You are a member of a massively distributed thing. This thing is called *species*. [...]Every time I start my car or steam engine I don't mean to harm Earth [...]Furthermore, I'm not harming Earth! My key turning is statistically meaningless. (Morton *Dark Ecology* 8)

While it is true that one turn of a key has not caused the global disaster we find ourselves in, yet “go up a level and something very strange happens. When I scale up these actions to include billions of key turnings and billions of coal shovelings, harm to Earth is precisely what is happening. I am responsible as a member of this species for the Anthropocene” (Morton 8). It is not just the individual contributing to the devastation. The ‘logic’ that takes hold of both of these moments, the singular person starting the engine, and the Anthropocene, is similar to the paradoxicality discussed in the project so far.

The intent of this essay is not to propose a solution, as one is not imminently available within a system so bound to itself. The aim is to provide a new vantage point to observe the situation in a more transparent landscape. This way of seeing and understanding at once grasps the entirety of the world while being contained within the individual. G.H.'s final realization, “The world depended on me” (Lispector *The Passion* 189), can aid in clarifying our situation. The world does not depend on a single individual for its salvation. If just one of us dropped off



of the face of the Earth, the global tendency toward warmer climates would go unaltered. The same global tendency would change if humanity disappeared from our planet.

Is the answer some golden mean? No. Any attempt within our current system to ‘point the finger’ at the main culprit will only lead us further from any actual change. ‘It is the corporations that have to do something!’ ‘It’s us that have to do something!’ ‘Both have to change for there to be change!’ These proposals, independent of their potential outcome, are missing the problem. Such arguments operate within a dynamic that seeks to appoint one side with the totality of the blame while pitching the other conscience as a clean marble slate. The corporations, similarly to how Kierkegaard has described the public, are too vague, and massive of a non-entity. However, their nature as such does not mean that the immense weight of fault should fall onto the little we have under immediate control, our actions, and vice-versa.

Discussions of ecology rallying under any utopic banner akin to ‘Let’s Save the World!’ have been doomed from the start. An unconscious mistake that strays discussions further away from solutions and finds its genesis in the language used within them. Saving the ‘World’ implies that the ‘World’ is something separate from us. In contrast, something ecological would recognize “that we are in the world, not on it” (Morton *Ecological Thought* 19). ‘Let’s Save the World!’ type of discussions are predicated on a language of selflessness, viewing ‘Nature’ as an idealized body we tarnished. It is pretty lofty of us to assume to be in dialogue with ‘Nature’. Do we forget that we are in it? We make ourselves martyrs to a cause that we pretend is separate from ours. However, again, we constructed a glossy dream-like ideal to chase, forgetting that it is ourselves that need that chase. For all we know, very literally, ‘Nature’ is suffering a 12000-year hiccup, that we call human history, in its well-being. The well-being of the climate boils down to

an ambiguous range of factors, the common denominator of which is the preservation and proliferation of human life.

However banal this may sound, no one says, 'I will save the world'. We, bloated on narratives, see the story's hero as an embarrassing cliché. The hero is a ridiculous figure whose naivety, in that one presumes their self-importance in their involvement, is repugnant to the cynical eye. However, such disdain informs us only of a disliking towards feeling utmost responsibility for our actions as a hero would. The hero has to live or die by his quest. This is too much commitment for us.

Instead, we opt for our preference. We appoint a new hero that embodies our most coveted values. To be unburdened, in virtue, from the responsibility of being, we aspire to the glory of the saint. On the topic of the saint, Lispector writes: "The saint's greatest benefit is to himself, which does not matter [...] The great goodness of the saint — is that to him everything is the same. The saint sears himself until he reaches the love of the neutral. He needs that for himself" (Lispector *Passion* 177). The saint appears as the most human character. We find a mirror in their selflessness and, on the mirror, an image that so resembles how we want to be. What other figure could embody so wholly our craving for nonexistence? Through their virtuous gestures, the saint annihilates themselves and raises the self beyond this life. Perhaps, between the saint and the leper, the saint requires salvation the most. In dissolving into life, the saint transcends it. The leper is dying. The saint absorbs the leper in their neutral love. The leper was never the focus of the moral.

Any discussion of ecology will be foiled from the onset if it presumes that the Earth and we are not deeply connected. We must not sacrifice ourselves for the Earth. We must not

sacrifice the Earth for ourselves. It is time to give up on the dream of achieving a redeeming perfection that would validate our present state of profanity. Especially, if said redeeming perfection is manufactured within ourselves and not onto what we pleaded to aid. What Lispector calls “deheroization” in this context would be desanctification. However, this is not enough, ‘Nature’ should not be considered ideal.

Viewing ‘Nature’ idealistically’ as a pristine originality or a paradise lost allows for our separation from it, our perpetual reaching towards it, and its perpetual avoidance of our grasp. Such a view of ‘Nature’ allows for the separation of the world into spaces of defilement and conservation between human-industrial spaces and ‘natural spaces’ such as national parks. Fetishism for the latter is what drives the proliferation of the former. The nostalgic/romantic fetishism of ‘Nature’ separated from humanity, and the very category of ‘ecology’ form the conditions of the disaster we threw ourselves into. ‘Nature’ can stand before humanity as an object to be preserved or exploited, but in both cases, the same underlying assumption is at play: alienation. Why would a city be less natural than an anthill? By fetishizing ‘naturalness’, ecology only further reinforces humanity’s alienation and separation from the world. What we call a climate emergency or an ecological collapse sprouts from a crisis of presence. We live as if we were absent from the world. Our separation from the world is our failure to exist in the world; as such, our action upon the world realizes itself as inexistent. Our inability to live produces a global expansion of death. The task is not to further separate humanity from nature but to destroy these metaphysical distinctions. What is asked of us is a reconfiguration of presence, a way back into the world.

The banner 'Let's Save the World!' should be 'Let's Save Ourselves!'. At least it would ring with enough honesty, as if we understood what was at stake here.

### Conclusion

What I'm writing you is a "this". It won't stop: it goes on.

Look at me and love me. No: you look at yourself and love yourself. That's right

What I'm writing you goes on and I am bewitched.

-Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*

This activity is echo to the howls of the protagonist of Lispector's *The Passion*, G.H. Her testimonies, as she traverses the tumultuous seas of her metaphysical redefinition, are assimilated in *Selfish* and put in conversation with sustaining voices. The result aims to be a demonstration of a potentially different way of understanding, that does not impose as the ultimate or completely exhaustive one. Such a manner of comprehension goes against the currents of imposition by symbolic structures of understanding. The following abstracts attempt to synthesize the atmosphere of each fragment.

*Tower of Babel* is a progressive building upon itself, to then reach a pinnacle, from which we take the hand and descend. G.H. calls out to this hand throughout the novel, but since we work from the opposite starting point, the hand we take towards the end of the chapter is G.H.'s. In this sense, Tower of Babel is a beginning and an end, the begging of the end, the end of the begging. one must say that this essay could be taken as at once the beginning, but at the same time the end; beginning of the end, the ending of the beginning.

The insignia to *Etwas Ungeheures*, if there was one could have been, 'all hope abandon you who enter... where?'. "I got scared because I don't know what that entrance opens onto. And I'd never let myself be carried off, unless I knew where to" (Lispector *Passion* 4).

Is *ieudul fără ieşire* just a bastard child? It is exactly what not to do. An exhibition of hypocrisy? Is the acceptance of it Oedipal in nature? “My error, however, must be the path of a truth” (Lispector 186).

*Prayers to Non-Existence* Paul Valery wrote consciousness “seems like a mirror of water which shows the viewer now the sky, now the depths; and often the water is jostled and stirred, and makes a multitude of mirrors and transparencies, an inextricable image” (Valery *Idea* 134) In all of these cases, Narcissus sees himself.

*Giving up* is a reemergence, seeing the place of vacation at dawn, after our arrival at dark. A reading companion to this fragment could be Giacomo Leopardi’s *The Infinite*. Or consider these lines from Alejandra Pizarnik:

All night I flee from someone. I lead the chase, I lead the fugue. My brain cries. I sing a song of mourning. Black birds over black shrouds. Demented wind. I leave the tense and strained hand, I don’t want to know anything but this perpetual wailing, this clatter in the night, this delay, this infamy, this pursuit, this inexistence.

All night I see that abandonment is me, that the sole sobbing voice is me.

(Pizarnik *Gallopings* 25)

*A way back in / No new worlds* is a “free brick”, “the price of this semblance of freedom” trying to see “the waste ground and the heaps of detritus to which a sensitive vanity consings [us] with [our] brick” (Bataille *Theory* 9)

Perhaps, the only question that remains unanswered is, who is *Selfish*?

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