

The Star of the Hour: One Hundred Years of Clarice Lispector

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Abstract and Keywords

One hundred years since her birth, Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector is fêted around the world for her passionate, enigmatic, idiosyncratic prose, which challenges conventions of genre, form and content, word, and sentence. This chapter begins by making reference to the ways Lispector's centenary was commemorated in 2020 and moves on to outline her life and career. It describes the narrative strategies that make her work simultaneously strange and compelling. The second half of the chapter presents some of her literary afterlives: homages to her literary originality, her beauty and aloofness, and the intimacy and bravery she inspires in her readers.

Keywords: Clarice Lispector, centenary, modernism, feminism, translation, biography, literary afterlives, metafiction, crônicas, journalism

Clarice the Cultural Icon

Although it will be mainly remembered for the challenges and crises caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, the year 2020 was one of celebration for readers of the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, for it marked the centenary of her birth. One hundred years since she was born in a tiny village in the Ukraine, Lispector and her work have achieved canonical status, not only in Brazil, where she lived most of her life, becoming a naturalized citizen in 1943, but around the world. Her books have been translated into dozens of languages, from Catalan to Chinese, and the most recent set of translations into English, published by major publishing houses New Directions in the United States and Penguin in the United Kingdom, has undoubtedly boosted her popularity in the Anglophone world, gaining her new and vocal supporters, including influential names such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Ali Smith, and Colm Tóibín.

Despite the challenges it posed organizers, directors, editors, and publishers, 2020 still saw the fruition of a large number of commemorative initiatives, such as the reissuing by Rocco, Lispector's Brazilian publishers, of her complete literary works, with bold, bright

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covers, designed by Victor Burton using details from Lispector's own paintings, and the publication of *Todas as cartas* (All the Letters, 2020), part of a series grouping "all" her works, including her journalism, according to genre. Her Parisian publishing house, Éditions des femmes, brought out a "Coffret Anniversaire" (Anniversary Chest), and literary magazines and academic journals celebrated the anniversary with special issues. The Instituto Moreira Salles (IMS), a cultural center that houses the bulk of Lispector's archive, launched a section of their website devoted exclusively to her, making available digitalized photos and scans of documents, manuscripts, audio recordings, and videos, including lectures on her work, with material in English as well as Portuguese (*Clarice Lispector*).¹ Academic conferences organized around the world (for example, São Paulo and Macau), brought together both scholars and enthusiasts—journalists, novelists, artists, musicians, filmmakers, friends—to discuss the author's work and to pay tribute to her achievements. Even her son, Paulo Gurgel Valente, emerged from a discreet silence to contribute an afterword (2020) to the centennial edition of the most recent English translation of probably her best-known book, *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*, 1977), participate in a Webinar organized by Princeton University, and be interviewed for Argentinian daily *Clarín* (Abdala 2020).²

The pandemic adversely affected many events, which had to be postponed, like the planned exhibition at the IMS of women artists "Constelação Clarice" (Constellation Clarice) (curated by Verónica Stigger and Eucanaã Ferraz), or the distribution to cinemas of the feature films *A Paixão segundo G.H.* (The Passion according to G.H., adapted from the homonymous book published in 1964), directed by Luiz Fernando Carvalho, and *O Livro dos Prazeres* (The Book of Pleasures, an adaptation of *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* [An Apprenticeship or the Book of Pleasures, 1969]), directed by Marcela Lordy. Other initiatives simply moved online, which at least had the advantage of making them accessible to a wider audience worldwide.

Such a wide and varied amount of cultural activities to celebrate one author, in the midst of a global pandemic, speaks to the undeniability of Lispector's place as a cultural figure of international importance as well as to the depth of her writing's impact on her passionate readers. She is a writer who inspires real hero-worship now, and whose fame has spread beyond the borders of her country, but her critical fortunes ebbed and flowed during her lifetime. Her first novel, *Perto do coração selvagem* (*Near to the Wild Heart*, 1943), was unlike anything readers had come across before, particularly in comparison to the socio-realist, regionalist novels in vogue in Brazil at the time. The story of a young woman's intellectual, psychological, emotional, linguistic, moral, and social development in a stiffly patriarchal world was greeted with such wonder and enthusiasm that at least one review or article about it came out every month in the year following its publication (Sousa 69). The writing was strange, not always strictly grammatical—the protagonist was impulsive, twisted, lacking social filters. The long streams of consciousness, shifts from first to third-person narrative, and linguistic experiments prompted comparisons with modernism; the reflections on being, bad faith, and the absurdity of life evoked existential philosophy. In 1944, Antonio Candido, renowned literary critic, hailed the novel as

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a new dawn (“raiar”) for Brazilian literature, claiming that its young author pushed Portuguese to places no one had gone before (Candido 127).

After such acclaim and applause, Lispector was under pressure to write a follow-up that matched the introspective explosiveness of her debut novel. This would be a difficult task in any circumstances, but the year after *Perto do coração selvagem* was published, she left Brazil to accompany her diplomat husband on postings to Europe and the United States, and lived abroad, except for short holiday periods back home, for the next sixteen years. During this time, she did publish two novels and drafted another, but she also became a mother, endured the tedium of carrying out the duties of a diplomat’s wife, and kept up a lively correspondence with her literary and journalist friends back in Rio, as well as with her beloved sisters (Lispector, *Todas as cartas*). She was able to maintain a presence in the literary and publishing worlds by contributing short stories and *crônicas*³ to newspapers and literary magazines, but upon separation from her husband and a return to Rio in 1955, she needed to reassert herself as a serious writer. This she did with the publication in 1960 of a book of short stories, *Laços de família* (*Family Ties*), and the weighty, existentialist *A maçã no escuro* (*The Apple in the Dark*, 1961). While raising her two sons, she continued to write powerful fiction, as well as supplementing her income with less prestigious work: translations of foreign blockbusters and classics into Portuguese, story books for children, interviews with celebrities in the popular magazines *Manchete* (1968–1969) and *Fatos e Fotos: Gente* (1976–1977), and what became a much-loved Saturday column in the daily newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* (1967–1973), via which she gained a wider audience.⁴

All in all, Lispector published eight novels, five short-story collections, three children’s books, a book of interviews, and two books of *crônicas* before her death in 1977. In the seven years immediately following her death, another novel, another book of unpublished short stories, two collections of *crônicas*, and another children’s book came out. Since then, almost all these texts have been republished, the stories widely anthologized or gathered in new thematic collections, and all manner of unpublished material collected into volumes or digitalized by the IMS: correspondence, writing for women’s pages, essays, notebooks. Her work is available in many formats and editions, studied at Brazilian secondary schools and, in fragmented form, scattered over the internet and social media (Athayde and Rocha; Mota).

Lispector’s Idiosyncratic Style and Appeal

The capacity to surprise and wrongfoot readers at the levels of syntax, metaphor, content, and plot that had so impressed the readers of her first novel became characteristic of Lispector’s idiosyncratic writing, which changes from story to story and book to book, and, importantly, stands out distinctly from her contemporaries’ work. Her translators have commented on the considerable challenge of maintaining the strangeness of her expression and not falling into the trap of domesticating or correcting it. Her metaphors and similes bring together apparently disparate elements, inviting reinterpretations of re-

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ality, questioning what we take for granted. For example, in a pair of crônicas about the experience of visiting the custom-built, recently inaugurated (1960) capital city of Brasília, she wrote:

Brasília is the landscape of insomnia.... Brasília is a tennis court.... Brasília smells like toothpaste.... Brasília is pure protein.... Brasília is slim. And utterly elegant. It wears a wig and false eyelashes.... Brasília is a mass suicide.... Brasília is a pair of stainless-steel scissors.... Brasília is the sound of ice cubes in a glass of whiskey, at six in the evening, the hour of nobody.

(Lispector, *Complete Stories* 574, 576, 578, 581, 584, 589, 593)⁵

The multi-sensory comparisons listed in the crônicas, based on visits to Brasília in 1962 and 1974, evoke the impact of the modernist architecture, foregrounding corporeal reactions to the energy and elegance of the city, but amid the comedy and chaos are unsettling images of violence and death, perhaps alluding to the turbulent times of the military dictatorship (1964–1985). In a similar way, the mismatch between lovers is manifested in the imagery in this passage from *Perto do coração selvagem*:

“Otávio,” she’d suddenly say to him, “has it ever occurred to you that a dot, a single dot without dimensions, is the utmost solitude?” ... As if she had tossed a hot coal at her husband, the phrase flipped about, wriggling through his hands until he rid himself of it with another phrase, cold like gray, gray to cover the interval: it’s raining, I’m hungry, it’s a beautiful day.

(*Near to the Wild Heart* 25)⁶

This passage vividly illustrates Joana’s interest in physics and metaphysics, and Otávio’s incapacity to connect with her on an intellectual level. Her burning words turn to ash (here translated as “gray,” the word “cinza” also means “ash”) in his hands, and her bright thought is dimmed by his banal statements. It also directly contrasts a female and a male mode of expression, as if exemplifying Hélène Cixous’s feminist concept of *écriture féminine*.⁷ Indeed, Lispector’s writing consistently questions rigid categories of all sorts, including gender and the formation of the traditional family unit, which prove so hard to perform and uphold, as evidenced in the stories of *Laços de família*. Likewise, imagery of crumbling, ruins, cracks, hard surfaces, and carapaces barely containing the messy chaos within are strewn throughout *A paixão segundo G.H.*, a novel about reconstructing identity and/through language.

In her pioneering study, the first monograph on Lispector in English, *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (1994), Marta Peixoto describes the author’s practice as aggressive not only in physical terms but also at a textual level, particularly directed toward patriarchal structures (xiv). Rather than representing “the literal, political violence of war and torture, or other overt forms of state brutality, which are all too prevalent in Latin America and indeed the world. There are crimes in Lispector, but they are used mainly for their symbolic value, as vehicles and correlatives of guilt and

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inner conflicts” (101–2). Despite what is often a minimal plot or storyline (a woman decides to clean a room, two teenagers see a “haunted” house, a chicken escapes), her fiction has great psychological intensity and lyrical beauty. Acts committed are not crimes in a legal or political sense, or sins in a religious sense, but they still condemn the perpetrators to soul-searching, guilt, and shame and, rarely, though occasionally, pride and joy. Characters may be faced with a dilemma or choice (Jolley), or forced to deal with strange encounters with people or things radically different from themselves and the lives they take for granted (Sá; Williams). The narrative accompanies them attempting to process their sensations and impressions, turning them into words, and trying to interact with the confusing, restricting world around them. Frequently structured around an epiphany, or moment of revelation, the texts twist in unexpected directions, ending ambiguously and always surprisingly: “Life just is for me, and I don’t understand what I’m saying,” *The Passion according to G.H.* (183);⁸ “Don’t forget that for now it’s strawberry season. Yes,” *The Hour of the Star* (77).⁹

This disruption of expectations is also what Peixoto describes as the “undermin[ing of] the authority of reason,” or the privileging of “the intuitive and the improvisatory, which she associates with the feminine” over the standard, canonical, masculine “rational construction and logical progression” (xiv). This gendered conflict is exemplified in the relationship between male narrators and female characters in her last two novels, *A hora da estrela* (1977) and *Um sopro de vida* (*A Breath of Life*, 1978), which also satirize male dominance and arrogance in the literary world. In fact, a surprisingly wide range of embodied female experience, from childhood to old age, is played out in the stories and novels, inspiring one enthusiastic reader to pronounce that “the work of Lispector, as a whole, is the *Moby-Dick* of a certain kind of femininity: the female relationship to the female body” (Daniels 2017, n.p.).

It is feelings and impressions in all their messiness that the characters are trying to process but cannot stifle. Lispector declared: “Fortunately for me, my books are not overloaded with facts but the repercussion of facts on individuals” (Borelli, 70).¹⁰ This shift of emphasis from rationality to affect is encapsulated in the statements from the first page of *A hora da estrela*: “Thinking is an act. Feeling is a fact” (*The Hour of the Star* 3).¹¹ Lispector avoids answers, definitions, and facts (so important to the self-proclaimed narrator of that novel, Rodrigo SM) but revels instead in ambiguity and potential, her intention being not “writing in order to respond, but in order to stretch the question to its furthest point, where no response could ever be anything but a compromise” (Borelli 77).¹²

Some readers are fans of Lispector’s longer fiction, others prefer her short stories or newspaper crônicas, though genre is not a category that she allowed to restrict her, famously, and casually saying, in *Água viva* (*Água Viva*, 1973), a particularly slippery text, “No use trying to pin me down: I simply slip away and won’t allow it, no label will stick” (7).¹³ A look at the descriptive subtitles she occasionally used suggests Lispector wanted to create new genres evoking physical sensations, such as “impressões leves” (brief impressions) for the collection of crônicas and fragments *Visão do esplendor* (*Vision of Splendor*, 1975) or “pulsações” (pulsations) for *Um sopro de vida* (*A Breath of*

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Life, 1978).¹⁴ Moreover, this spirit of invention and creation is patent in her constant reflections on the act of writing and other forms of artistic creation in her *crônicas*, and can be seen in her insistence on practice and technique when interviewing celebrities writer/artist characters, but it is also expressed by her characters:

Then she made up what she should say. Eyes closed, surrendered, she softly spoke words born in that instant, never before heard by anyone, still tender from their creation—fragile, new shoots. They were less than words, just loose, meaningless syllables that flowed and merged, were fertilized and reborn in a single being only to break apart immediately afterwards, breathing, breathing... (*Near to the Wild Heart* 129)¹⁵

This story will be made of words that will gather in sentences and from these a secret meaning emanates that goes beyond words and sentences. Naturally, like every writer I'm tempted to use succulent terms: I know splendid adjectives, meaty nouns, and verbs so slender that they travel sharp through the air about to go into action, since words are actions, don't you agree? ... Words are sounds transfused with unequal shadows that intersect, stalactites, lace, transfigured organ music.

(*The Hour of the Star* 6–7, 8)¹⁶

Perhaps it is the impressionistic nature of Lispector's prose, or its openness to multiple readings that has attracted devotees, because so many readers feel a very visceral connection. Upon reading her for the first time, Hélène Cixous famously felt an immediate affinity, wondering "Who are you who are so strangely me?" (169). Her texts can be enjoyed and studied from a plethora of different critical standpoints. For example, *A paixão segundo G.H.* has been read with a focus on ecofeminism and zen (Owen), "non-modernity" (Paulson), motherhood (Hedrick), mysticism (Krabbenhoft), avant-garde Brazilian sculpture (Anitagrace), or the sense of touch (Goh), or the use of "Holy Land imagery" (Hornike) and neurologists have gone so far as to diagnose G.H. with "temporal lobe epilepsy" (Deo and Charlier).

Lispector's works have left a considerable impact on her readers; many enthusiasts speak of falling in love with her or claim that her writing has changed their lives. Indeed, her own life story sometimes seems more like fiction. When she was just an infant, her family fled Stalin's brutal pogroms in search of a better life in South America. She grew up in the Jewish community in Recife, a city in northeastern Brazil, and the family moved to Rio when she was fifteen (in 1935). In life as in literature, Lispector did things differently from most people. She studied law and became one of Brazil's first woman journalists. She wrote from a young age, publishing her first short story in a literary magazine in 1940. On her return to Rio from Washington DC in 1959, she lived as a divorcée and single mother in a conservative, largely Catholic society. She was never able to make a living from literature in her lifetime, and she worked in a male-dominated field; nonetheless,

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her reputation as a distinguished writer grew throughout her lifetime, and she was awarded a number of prizes.

This life of exception and trailblazing has inspired a number of biographies in different languages and formats, including a cartoon book for children, *Clarice Lispector para meninas e meninos* (Clarice Lispector for Girls and Boys, Fink and Sáa), and a guide to Rio de Janeiro focusing on neighborhoods and sites significant in her life, based on tours run by the author (and biographer) Teresa Montero: *O Rio de Clarice: Passeio afetivo pela cidade* (Clarice's Rio: A Personal Tour around the City).¹⁷ She is also one of the few Brazilian authors to have warranted a literary afterlife—several of them, in fact: she has been fictionalized by writers from around the world in numerous works of poetry and prose.¹⁸ She appears as a character within the fiction, sometimes named, always recognizable to readers already acquainted with the details of her life. For the rest of this chapter, I will engage briefly with some of these incarnations of Lispector to explore the aspects of her life and works that are manifested most frequently and forcefully in other authors' texts.

“Clarice” the Character

Retired academic and prize-winning author Vilma Arêas is fiercely protective of Lispector's life and work, fearful that the real person and, more importantly, the originality of the work are lost amid the sheer volume of critical readings and growing number of biographical accounts. In the mid-1970s she and Lispector attended group therapy sessions and became friends (“Entrevista”). Her short story “Sobre os Espelhos” (On Mirrors) describes Lispector's bearing and presence with some unexpected metaphors and emphasizes the discomfiting impact of meeting and knowing her (17–20).¹⁹

Clarice is a pale nail, a thorn in the sole of your foot. I've never walked upright since I saw Clarice. She passed by and—too late!—my heart had rolled over. But I've never looked back, not once. I meet Clarice and start speaking nonsense. Because when she wants, she can be a flower, but also a rough woman with rings of sweat under her arms, chewing the fat thigh of a chicken while swigging mouthfuls of beer. It's no secret that she would eat human flesh if she had to.²⁰

And yet, for all the pain and panic she causes the narrator, “Clarice” also inspires loyalty and devotion. The relationship portrayed by Arêas evokes the intimacy between them through images and anecdotes, the older woman offering advice, always conscious of a woman's looks, the younger woman only too aware of her imperfections. Their friendship is close; so close that the narrator is overwhelmed by Clarice even as the latter is dying: “I looked in the mirror. But instead of my own, I saw her face tied down by threads on the pillow” (20).²¹ Arêas's tender, frank, iconoclastic story emphasizes the physicality of the female body and playful friendship (empathy represented through the mirroring effect), rather than describing her subject's intangible intellectual or mystical qualities, which is what many interviewers and critics have done (and still do).

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There is no doubt that personal acquaintance with Lispector gives even a fictional portrait of her, like this one, extra credibility. Other authors who did not have the privilege of meeting or knowing her have had to rely on biographical material and have been obliged to use her writing (fiction and non-fiction) as a primary source. Building on the received knowledge to fill gaps and solve mysteries has often inspired authors to produce literature that can be categorized as, for example, “historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon) or “postmodernist biofiction” (Layne). The works created might range from speculating about unknown elements or “missing” events in writers’ lives, or rewriting those lives: imagining what might have happened if they had made other choices, or had alternative opportunities, and encountered different people and places.

Literature and life interweave closely in *Clarice Lispector: o tesouro de minha cidade* (Clarice Lispector: The Treasure of my City) by Ana Miranda, a well-known author of historical fiction and bio-fiction. In order to maintain a close intertextual relationship, Miranda decided:

I would only read what Clarice had written, nothing that other people had written about her, so as to give my reading purity and avoid interferences, and that’s what I did: I read all Clarice’s books in the order in which they were written and published, as if I were reading an autobiography, hers, and mine. I read her letters. At the end, when the book was ready, I did manage to read the biography by Nádia Battella Gotlib, and used it to complement what I knew about Clarice. I looked at the photos, saw Clarice in sandals and a fur coat and thought: that was me...

(Possani, “Anexo” 134–35)²²

The novella takes the form of short fragmentary texts, told in the third person, or by a first-person narrator, with titles as enigmatic as “*Secreta certeza*” (Secret Certainty) and as specific as “*Clarice continua a andar nas ruas do Rio de Janeiro*” (Clarice Carries on Walking the Streets of Rio de Janeiro) (Miranda, *Clarice Lispector* 46, 36–37). As the latter title suggests, there is a focus on the female body travelling across the city, and even one fragment (“*Uma cartografia*” [A Cartography]) that simply lists street names mentioned in Lispector’s works (38). The protagonist, “Clarice,” has the freedom to roam and observe, but she is also a lonely, melancholy figure who rarely interacts with anyone else, apart from observing them from afar. She is not homeless; indeed, her apartment is described in great detail, but she is restless and rootless, always searching: “Clarice feels her heart racing. In the streets she searches for the peace she has not found inside herself” (92).²³ The narrative creates atmosphere and affect through adjectives, the occasional use of free indirect speech, and, rarely, direct speech. Clarice does not even need to be physically present in the action. Outside her apartment building: “There is no plaque, but there is the presence of Clarice. She comes in the sea breeze, the light, the air, the leaves blown by the wind, the moonlight. Clarice lives in ethereal things. Her plaque is made of clouds and salty waves and sand” (20).²⁴ This ghostly Clarice is a distillation of elements recurring in Lispector’s fiction, but she is curiously insubstantial, lacking the warmth and humor that biographers describe, as well as the network of friend-

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ships and family that clearly supported the “real” Lispector. Miranda’s work blurs the distinction between biography, autobiography, and fiction, with the potentially misleading effect of conflating Lispector the author (and Ana Miranda the author) with Clarice the character, and also with Lispector’s fictional characters like G.H. (from *A paixão segundo G.H.*), who gazes across the city from her penthouse, or the young Joana (from *Perto do coração selvagem*) playing with language. Miranda recognized this overlap, describing her novella as “a conversation between two writers, Clarice and I, imagined by me, using her words as a starting point.”²⁵

Another way of “knowing” Lispector without having met her is through the intense and long-term study of her life and works, as what Matt Hills calls the “scholar-fan.” Lucilene Machado and Edgar César Nolasco are academics who have published literary critical research on Lispector (Machado “Entre abanicos e castanholas”; Nolasco *Clarice Lispector, Restos de ficção*). They have also taken their relationship with the author one step further by writing their own stories and crônicas, gathered in a collection entitled *Claricianas* (2006), which is a self-declared homage to Lispector, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of her death.²⁶ Their short texts, which they term “minibiografias ficcionais” (fictional mini-biographies), constitute attempts to re-create the “fantasmático e espectral” (phantasmatic and spectral) side to her literature by jogging the (informed) reader’s memory through well-placed allusions to aspects of her life and works (7).

This sort of fiction functions on several layers, with different reverberations in the reader, depending on how well they know Lispector’s life and works. Nolasco and Machado have created an elaborate game of “spot the reference” that appeals especially to connoisseurs, though it does not exclude the uninitiated. The first-person narrator of Machado’s twenty-six fragments is a woman reflecting on how to live, love, and write. Some of her sentences *almost* quote Lispector. For example, “Nasci para três coisas: amar, amar e amar” (There are three things for which I was born: to love, to love, and to love, 25) closely resembles lines from the crônica “As três experiências” (The Three Experiences): “There are three things for which I was born and for which I am prepared to give my life” (Lispector, *Discovering the World* 134–35).²⁷

Nolasco goes further and creates a protagonist who behaves much like the version of herself Lispector portrayed in her crônicas, and similar to some of her characters. His unnamed female character stands at the window of her apartment, gazing at the sea, smoking. She visits a fortune teller, argues with her maid, and suffers from insomnia. Furthermore, Nolasco’s Clarice is an author with grand literary pretensions, who wants to write like “Shakespeare, Homer and Virgil, Dante, Kafka, Machado, Woolf, Lispector, or even Borges himself” (64).²⁸ This direct reference to Lispector and her inclusion in a list of canonical writers reminds the reader of the fictional nature of what they are reading: although the character is a “Clarice,” she is not *the* Clarice. This is reinforced by circumstantial details such as the character writing on a computer, or, more obviously, the dating of one section to November 16, 2005 (*Claricianas* 52).

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More, slightly longer “minibiografias ficcionais” follow in Nolasco’s 2014 collection *Quem tem medo de Clarice Lispector?* (Who’s Afraid of Clarice Lispector?). Different facets of the character constructed in *Claricianas* are revealed, many based on facts about Lispector’s life (hosting a dinner party for Brazilian diplomats in Washington, smoking “Hollywood” brand cigarettes, going to a conference on witchcraft). However, Nolasco also invents transgressive new personae, named in the titles, such as “A anfitriã falida” (The Failed Hostess), “A pornográfica” (The Pornographic Woman), or “A criminosa assumida” (The Self-Declared Criminal), thereby inventing elements that *might* have been part of Lispector’s personality or behavior that she suppressed or fantasized about. Furthermore, he fictionalizes potential encounters, such as conversations with Borges and Paulo Coelho, and goes so far as to imagine his protagonist visiting the multi-media exhibition celebrating Lispector that took place at the Museu da Língua Portuguesa in São Paulo in 2007. In this way, he invites readers to consider how Lispector would have reacted to the twenty-first-century world and the commemoration of her life and work, if she were still alive.

Lispector is a writer who inspires feelings of empathy and empowerment but also awe and a kind of worship and sense of unworthiness that might prevent her readers from writing about or like her. One way to sidestep that issue has been to hide her behind a many-layered disguise. For the poet Idra Novey, the process of translating *A paixão segundo G.H.* into English was overwhelmingly intense, “scrambl[ing] the syntax” of her daily life and leaving her “stunned alive” (*The Visitor* 5). After completing the translation, she wrote a series of poems entitled *The Visitor* (2014), as a way of processing the experience. She also published a comic novel entitled *Ways to Disappear* (2016), which, like the poems, deals closely with the relationship between a translator and an author. The disguise means that readers who have no knowledge of Lispector’s life and literature can enjoy the novel on its own terms, whereas aficionados can smile at the ways the caricature distorts the original.

Novey’s author character is named Beatriz Yagoda, and her family did migrate to Brazil, but from South Africa, not Eastern Europe. Like Lispector, she is green eyed and writes avant-garde prose. However, unlike the elegant, reserved Lispector known from the biographies, or the melancholy wanderer evoked by Ana Miranda, Yagoda has a rich and varied sex life, a gambling problem, a wicked sense of humor, and a Jabuti prize,²⁹ and she smokes cigars.

Ways to Disappear is most revealing when it describes the relationship between author and translator. Emma, the translator, feels duty and commitment toward Yagoda, as well as a fascination with the writer’s daily life. Novey vividly conveys the “splendor” of translation and the translator’s privileged access to “their” writer, coming to know them in intimate ways through their use of language (132). Emma is the only one who can decode the clues hidden in the text and solve the mystery of Yagoda’s disappearance. The novel is also a satire of the publishing industry; academics’ appropriation of writers and their works, the difficulty of marketing translated fiction in the Anglophone market, the media’s use of scandal to sell books, and the dangers of being in the public eye. And yet,

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although there are echoes and likenesses in their stories, Beatriz Yagoda is definitively not Lispector.

More similar, although also disguised, is Vera Sigall, a secondary, though pivotal, character in Chilean author Carla Guelfenbein's novel *Contigo en la distancia* (*In the Distance with You*, 2015). At the end of the book, a polyphonic literary whodunnit with a murder and a lost manuscript, Guelfenbein explains that Lispector's life is "interwoven with Vera Sigall's and my own," and acknowledges having used Benjamin Moser's biography as part of her source material (407). The Jewish migrant background shared by Vera and Lispector (and the author herself) enables Guelfenbein to introduce episodes that show anti-Semitism among the Santiago elite, as well as the rootlessness felt by characters caught between different cultures. Like Novey's novel, it portrays the literary and publishing worlds, this time mid-twentieth-century, and the difficulties, particularly for women, to establish a literary career. Guelfenbein also grants Vera a healthy and active old age into the twenty-first century, grandchildren, a great inspirational love affair, and the opportunity to reap the benefits of her literary success in a democratic country: none of which Lispector, who died aged fifty-six, while Brazil was still under military dictatorship, was able to enjoy.

In one last example, Afro-Brazilian author Conceição Evaristo has created a poetic diptych from an imagined encounter between Lispector and Carolina Maria de Jesus, whose diary of *favela* life, published as *Quarto de Despejo* (*The Junk Room*), propelled her to fame upon its publication in 1960. They shared the same publisher, Francisco Alves, and there is a famous newspaper photo of them together at a book-signing event where Lispector was promoting *Laços de família* and de Jesus her diary. Evaristo's poems "Clarice no quarto de despejo" (*Clarice in the Junk Room*) and "Carolina na hora da estrela" (*Carolina in the Hour of the Star*), from the collection *Poemas da recordação e outros movimentos* (*Poems of Remembrance and Other Movements*, 2017), weave together both authors, titles, and well-known episodes from their books. In "Clarice no quarto de despejo," a dialogue is established which acknowledges the class and race differences between the two women. "Clarice" peers into the junk room and puts on fine white gloves ("luvas claríssimas") to pick through imaginary litter (97), whereas Carolina lived in the junk room (the metaphor she developed in her diary to denote the slums, where society dumps its rejects) and picked rubbish for a living.

Despite the social divide, Clarice listens to Carolina and, even more importantly, reads beyond her words, to see the person behind them: "Nobody reads me, Clarice, / Nobody can decode / the only lack I don't suffer from / loneliness" (97).³⁰ *A hora da estrela* is Lispector's demonstration of the difficulties of writing about poverty in a meaningful way, and, though playful and metafictional as well, it can be seen as a response to Carolina's stark representation of the facts of life in a favela and a provocation to readers to see and listen to those less fortunate than themselves. Evaristo's poems and "Macabéa, Flor de Mulungu" (*Macabéa, Mulungu Flower*, 2012), her reinterpretation of the story of the poor

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northeastern migrant girl, from *A hora da estrela*, highlight Lispector's social engagement as well as foregrounding the importance of female collaboration and complicity.

The authors I have mentioned above use a range of styles to vividly convey their own Lispectors: realist (Arêas), impressionist, or even Cubist, for the fragments and unusual angles (Nolasco, Miranda), caricature (Novey, Guelfenbein), and montage (Evaristo). Their Clarices are a blend of fact, fiction, admiration, and imagination, the result of a relationship derived from reading and a deeply felt empathy with the deceased author. One hundred years since her birth, Lispector is still very much alive through her questioning texts and also through her literary afterlives. The process of channeling or resurrecting her mirrors what literary critic and lecturer Affonso Romano de Sant'anna wrote about Lispector's own practice: "My friend was very special. She was mixed in magically and seductively with the characters she created. Literature was her flesh and blood" (72).³¹

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Notes:

- (1) Some archive material, including correspondence and personal documents, can also be found in the AMLB at the Fundação-Casa Rui Barbosa in Rio de Janeiro.
- (2) He also contributed a moving tribute to his father, the diplomat Maury Gurgel Valente, in the literary magazine *Quatro Cinco Um* (2020).
- (3) The crônica is a journalistic genre popular in Latin America similar to an op-ed article, or regular column. The *cronista*, or columnist, reflects on current events from a personal perspective, often developing an idiosyncratic style and wide readership.
- (4) Most of the interviews have been collected in *Entrevistas* (2007) and the crônicas in *Todas as crônicas* (2018).
- (5) "Brasília é a paisagem da insônia ... Brasília é uma quadra de tênis.... Brasília tem cheiro de pasta de dentes.... Brasília é proteína pura.... Brasília é magra. E toda elegante. Usa peruca, e cílios postiços....Brasília é um suicídio em massa....Brasília é uma tesoura de aço ouro.... Brasília é barulho de gelinho no copo de *whisky*, às seis horas da tarde. Hora de ninguém." Clarice Lispector, "Brasília," in *Para não esquecer* (1992), pp. 76, 78, 86.
- (6) "Otávio-dizia-lhe ela de repente-, você já pensou que um ponto, um único ponto sem dimensões, é o máximo de solidão? ..." "Como se ela tivesse jogado uma brasa ao marido, a frase pulava de um lado para outro, escapulia-lhe das mãos até que ele se livrasse dela com outra frase, fria como cinza, cinza para cobrir o intervalo: está chovendo, estou com fome, o dia está belo" (Lispector, *Perto do coração selvagem* 42–43).
- (7) Hélène Cixous's passionate pronouncements about Lispector's works, from 1979 onward, were instrumental in the Brazilian writer becoming better known in Europe, and particularly by readers interested in feminism. See, for example, *L'heure de Clarice Lispector* (1989) and *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (1990).
- (8) "A vida se me é, e eu não entendo o que digo. E então adoro. ————" (Lispector, *A paixão segundo G.H.* 183). The last line of *A paixão* has a particular challenge for the translator because it turns the intransitive verb "ser" (to be) into a transitive, reflexive verb: literally, "life is itself to me." Chris Daniels has suggested the radical solution of creating a new verb in English, translating the phrase as "life itselfs me," (2006, np).

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(9) “Não esquecer que por enquanto é tempo de morangos. Sim” (Lispector, *A hora da estrela* 106).

(10) “Meus livros felizmente para mim não são superlotados de fatos, e sim da repercussão dos fatos nos indivíduos” (Borelli, *Clarice Lispector* 70); unless otherwise attributed, all translations into English are mine.

(11) “Pensar é um fato. Sentir é um ato” (Lispector, *A hora da estrela* 25).

(12) “Escrever não para responder, mas para levar a pergunta a seu ponto mais agudo, onde toda resposta não seria mais que acomodação” (Borelli, *Clarice Lispector* 77).

(13) “Inútil querer me classificar: eu simplesmente escapulo. Gênero não me pega mais” (Lispector, *Água viva*, 13).

(14) Much of the material from *Visão do Esplendor* is yet to be translated, but the crônica “Brasília” does appear in *The Complete Stories* (2015). *A Breath of Life* has been translated by Johnny Lorenz (2012).

(15) “Então ela inventou o que deveria dizer. Os olhos fechados, entregue, disse baixinho palavras nascidas naquele instante, nunca antes ouvidas por alguém, ainda tenras da criação – brotos novos e frágeis. Eram menos que palavras, apenas sílabas soltas, sem sentido, mornas, que fluíam e se entrecruzavam, fecundavam-se, renasciam num só ser para desmembrarem-se em seguida, respirando, respirando...” (Lispector, *Perto do coração selvagem* 155).

(16) “Esta história será feita de palavras que se agrupam em frases e destas se evola um sentido secreto que ultrapassa palavras e frases. É claro que, como todo escritor, tenho a tentação de usar termos suculentos: conheço adjetivos esplendorosos, carnudos substantivos e verbos tão esguios que atravessam agudos o ar em vias de ação, já que palavra é ação, concordais? ...As palavras são sons transfundidos de sombras que se entrecruzam desiguais, estalactites, renda, música transfigurada de órgão” (Lispector, *A hora da estrela* 29, 31).

(17) In Brazil, there are far fewer biographies of women than men, and literary biographies are also a niche genre, so Lispector continues to be a trailblazer even after her death.

(18) Many actresses have also played Lispector on stage and on film, including Aracy Balabanian, Rita Elmor, and Beth Goulart. *De Corpo Inteiro* (2009), directed by Lispector’s great-niece Nicole Algranti, is an adaptation of Lispector’s interviews with celebrities for popular magazines. In the film, eight different actresses (including the three mentioned above) portray the writer.

(19) The title of the collection, which won the Jabuti prize for short stories in 1992, is a clear reference to the section about a third leg or tripod in Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.*

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(20) “Clarice é uma unha clara, espinho na planta do pé. Nunca mais andei direito desde que vi Clarice. Ela passou e—tarde demais!—meu coração rolou. Mas não olhei para trás nem uma vez.... / Encontro Clarice e digo coisas sem nexos. / Porque ela pode ser uma flor quando quer, mas também uma mulher bruta com rodela de suor debaixo do braço, mastigando a coxa gorda de uma galinha aos golinhos de chope. / Não é nenhum segredo que comeria carne humana se necessário” (Arêas, “Sobre os espelhos” 17–18).

(21) “Olhei [no espelho]. Mas em vez do meu vi seu rosto amarrado de fios sobre o travesseiro” (Arêas, “Sobre os espelhos” 20). This moment might remind readers of the interchangeable reflections of the protagonist Macabéa and the narrator Rodrigo S.M. in *A hora da estrela*.

(22) “Eu só ia ler o que a Clarice tinha escrito, nada do que outras pessoas escreveram sobre ela, para fazer uma leitura com pureza e sem interferências, e foi assim, li os livros todos da Clarice na ordem como foram escritos e publicados, como se lesse uma autobiografia, dela, e minha. Li as cartas. No final, com o livro pronto, ainda li a biografia escrita pela Nádia Battella Gotlib, e complementei meu conhecimento sobre a Clarice, vi fotos, e percebi, a Clarice de sandália e casaco de pele, isso era eu...” (Possani, “Anexo” 134–35).

(23) “Clarice sente o coração batendo descompassado. Ela procura, nas ruas, a paz não encontrada dentro de si” (92).

(24) “Não há nenhuma placa, mas há a presença de Clarice. Vem pela maresia, pela luz, pelo ar, pelas folhas à brisa, pelo raio de luar. Clarice vive nas coisas etéreas. Sua placa é feita de nuvens e ondas salgadas e areia” (Miranda, *Clarice Lispector* 20). Since Miranda’s novella was published, a commemorative plaque has been attached to the apartment building at no. 88 Rua Gustavo Sampaio, where Lispector resided from 1966 to 1977.

(25) “Uma conversa entre duas escritoras, eu e a Clarice imaginada por mim a partir de suas palavras” (Possani, “Anexo” 135).

(26) As in English the Portuguese suffix “-ana” can be added to Christian names to create a mass noun or adjective: hence Clariciana or Lispectoriana. Here the authors indicate the plurality of their literary tributes by adding an “s.”

(27) “Há três coisas para as quais eu nasci e para as quais eu dou a minha vida” (Clarice Lispector, *A descoberta do mundo* 99–100).

(28) “Shakespeare, Homero e Virgílio, Dante, Kafka, Machado, Virgínia, Clarice, ou até mesmo Borges” (64).

(29) The Jabuti is Brazil’s most prestigious literary prize.

(30) “Ninguém me lê, Clarice, / Ninguém decifra em mim / a única escassez da qual não padeço, / a solidão” (Evaristo, *Poemas da recordação*, 97).

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(31) “Minha amiga era muito especial. Se misturava mágica e sedutoramente às figuras que criava. A literatura era sua carne e osso” (Sant’anna, “Sete anos sem Clarice” 172).

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