

The Madness of Lispector's Writing

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'She' is indefinitely other in herself. . . . Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand.

Luce Irigaray

Hysteria, madness, insanity, and depression have been historically inscribed as negative spaces inhabited primarily by women. Even the etymology of the word 'hysteria', which goes back to the Greek word 'uterus', reiterates the antiquated notion that disturbances of the womb were responsible for women's mental illnesses. Through this phallogocentric concept of madness, the 'womb' - metonymically representing women's body - becomes a site of destruction and illness, recalling the negative myth of the mother as the 'tomb of the world'.

Christine Brooke-Rose points out that while male poets of antiquity possessed 'divine' madness, women's madness was believed to come 'from the devil', as incarnation of evil through the image of 'a witch, or its modern equivalent, a hysteric'.¹ Women were supposed to serve an ideal and stereotypical image of mother, daughter, or wife, thus embodying the idealized image of 'The Angel in the House'. A diversion from these roles would give them the label of hysterical or insane. The woman who violates the law becomes, in Catherine Clément's words, the embodiment of the madwoman, 'full of badly remembered memories, guilty of unknown wrongs; she is the seductress, the heiress of all generic Eves'.² In other words, these women's transgression (their siding with the subversive Eve) is punished with the threat and label of madness.

Women's '(in)sanity', therefore, depends either upon compliance ('sanity') with, or upon subversion ('insanity') of, the rules imposed by society. In the system of binary oppositions - speech/silence, father/mother, reason/madness - through which Western thought works, women, as has been pointed out by

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- 1 Brooke-Rose, Christine, 'Illiterations', *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, Eds. Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, New Jersey, Princeton UP, 1989, 61.
 - 2 Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1975, 6.

many critics, occupy the negative pole, while men depend on women's negative position for the assertion of their own superiority. The madwoman serves patriarchy insofar as she opposes men's rationality and sanity. Shoshana Felman poses a highly relevant question concerning this stereotypical duality of concepts: how can madness 'be conceived outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason?'.³ Far from simple, the answer to such questioning deserves further consideration of the nature of madness and its correlation with gender issues.

The female protagonist in Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva* interestingly points out that '[a] loucura é vizinha da mais cruel sensatez. . . . Engulo a loucura que não é loucura -- é outra coisa' ('Madness is a close neighbor to the cruelest sensibleness. . . . I swallow the madness that is not madness -- it's something else').⁴ Madness, once more, is diagnosed as the negative pole upon which sanity, sensibleness, and soundness are based. There is, however, a strong interdependence between these two poles in that for men to be considered 'sane' and 'sensible', female transgressors have to be judged as 'insane' and 'hysterical'. The feminine voice in *Água Viva* has to accept the label of 'madness' ('I swallow the madness') bestowed upon her for her transgression of societal rules, but she is aware that her 'madness' denotes 'something else' -- the negative side of a dichotomous situation and the consequent exclusion and punishment for her subversion.

Shoshana Felman, besides acknowledging the myriad negative images and connotations attributed to the notion of women's insanity, develops her argument by approaching 'madness' as a label and as a metaphor for men's negation of feminine difference:

The woman is 'madness' to the extent that she is Other, *different* from man. But 'madness' is the 'absence of womanhood' to the extent that 'womanhood' is what precisely resembles the Masculine universal equivalent, in the polar division of sexual roles. If so, the woman is 'madness' since the woman is *difference*; but 'madness' is 'non-woman' since madness is the *lack of resemblance*. What the narcissistic economy of the Masculine universal equivalent tries to eliminate, under the label 'madness,' is nothing other than *feminine difference*. ('Women and Madness', 15)

3 Felman, Shoshana, 'Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy', *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary and Criticism*, Eds, Robyn Warhol and Diane Price, New Brunswick, Rutgers UP, 1991, 9.

4 Lispector, Clarice, *Água Viva*, Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 1980, 85. Lispector, Clarice, *The Stream of Life*, Trans. Elizabeth Lowe and Earl Fitz, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 69.

Difference is precisely what patriarchy denies women by conferring upon them the label of 'madness' as a negative attribute of this feminine differentiation. Under the circumstances in which insanity is envisioned under patriarchy, the outcome of feminine madness is often tragic and inevitable -- 'to die as other'. The therapeutical cure implies recognition and acceptance of the patriarchal standards that women so fiercely attempt to undermine. They are forced to dismantle the concept of feminine difference and acknowledge the logic of 'sameness' of the symbolic order -- something most women cannot do or are not willing to do. As a consequence, the punishment for women's transgression of the symbolic order and its prohibition is the epithet of insanity and/or self-imposed death ('Women and Writing', 17-18).

In her marginal role in society, the madwoman is often identified with the sorceress who attempts to destabilize the symbolic order. The madwoman and the witch partake of a marginal position in society that, ironically, allows them to participate in a carnivalesque ceremony by disrupting and inverting the established order. The madwoman, therefore, also embodies the image of the carnivalesque woman who possesses a 'grotesque' body of which she is 'unashamedly' aware and through which she expresses her hysterical behavior'.⁵ The 'grotesque body' of the madwoman and the association of hysteria with some ailment in the woman's womb are linked to what Kristeva terms the abject image of the mother -- an image that simultaneously attracts and repels.⁶

Nevertheless, behind this negative image that patriarchy has historically conferred upon the subversive woman lies a transgressive attitude that is inherent to the concept of madness and carnival. In Clément's words: 'Festival and madness. The feminine figure who crystallizes around herself the swirling glances of a threatened culture. And not far away -- revolutionary myths, the figure of liberty' (*Newly Born*, 26). The 'carnavalesque' madwoman subverts the order of society by rejecting language and assuming a close connection to her maternal and 'grotesque' body. Clément, however, cautions against the intrinsic double-bind in the concept of carnival by stressing the ambiguous quality of the role of the sorceress and the hysteric in their participation in a carnivalesque festival and their embodiment of a discourse imbued with the logic of carnival. This position is simultaneously antiestablishment in their transgression and conservative in that they culminate by being destroyed by the same system they subvert -- 'death as other' (*Newly Born*, 5). This is, however, the drama that awaits

5 Russo, Mary, 'Female Grotesque: Carnival and Theory', *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, Ed. Teresa de Lauretis, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 220-22.

6 Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection*, Trans. Leon Roudiez, New York, Columbia UP, 1984, 207-10.

the woman who dares to transgress or destabilize the symbolic order.

Furthermore, the madwoman shares with the woman writer a marginal place in society, the space of the other, the outsider, the exile -- a 'non-locus'. The hysteric, like the woman writer, tends to remain in close proximity to the mother and the maternal body by resisting language as a representative of the symbolic order. Interestingly, insanity and madness derive from the subject's refusal to be detached from the imaginary association with the mother and to accept the Law of the Father and enter the realm of language. As Diane Hunter puts it: 'Before we enter the grammatical order of language we exist in a dyadic, semiotic world of pure sound and body rhythms, oceanically at one with our nurturer'.⁷ This is the idyllic position to which the hysteric wants to return in order to recreate the link and communication that exist between mother and infant during the imaginary phase.

Like the woman writer, the depressed, the psychotic, and the melancholic, therefore, tend to regard language as an alien, foreign entity, and to remain outside it, attached to the semiotic -- silent and estranged from language. Because women preserve a stronger connection with the mother and are historically excluded from society and the means of production, they are bound to experience this alienation more often than men.⁸ As Cixous points out:

Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech, they are aphonic, and at times have lost more than speech: they are pushed to the point of choking, nothing gets through. They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body. In the end, the woman pushed to hysteria is the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance.⁹

Insanity grants the female subject a close attachment to the body of the mother and places her outside language, within a silence that becomes, through its association with the maternal semiotic, productive and meaningful. Diane Hunter, among other critics, envisions an intimate bond between madness and

7 Hunter, Diane, 'Hysteria, Psychoanalysis and Feminism: The Case of Anna O', *The (M)Other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, Eds. Shirley Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Springnether, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1985, 98.

8 Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Trans. Leon Roudiez, New York, Columbia UP, 1988, 71.

9 Cixous, Hélène, 'Castration and Decapitation', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7. 1, 1981, 49.

feminism in that they both strive to destabilize patriarchal conventions: 'Hysteria can be considered as a self-repudiating form of feminine discourse in which the body signifies what social conditions make it impossible to state linguistically' ('Hysteria', 114). Operating outside language and words, the madwoman resorts to her body and her meaningful silence as forms of expression. By doing so, the madwoman, in her awareness of the potential of her female body and her rejection of language, attacks the very system of representation that has been responsible for her (in)sanity.

The female protagonist in Lispector's *Água Viva* is able to break traditional systems of representation through her repudiation of the symbolic and her alliance with the semiotic. She also manages to establish an intense connection between the free and fluid discourse through which she chooses to express herself and her madness, and its potential for liberation: 'depois da liberdade do estado de graça também acontece a liberdade da imaginação. Agora mesmo estou livre. E acima da liberdade, acima de certo vazio crio ondas musicais calmíssimas e repetidas. A loucura do invento livre' (92) ('after the freedom of a state of grace there also comes the freedom of imagination. At this very moment I'm free. And beyond freedom, beyond a certain emptiness, I create musical waves, very calm and repetitious. The madness of free invention' (75)).

Hysteria and madness can, therefore, as the surrealists believed, be situated as a place of expression and production of meaning outside the rigid logic of the symbolic. These states allow a writing through the body and a poetic practice beyond restrictions and impositions. In this sense, madness can be conceived as feminine discourses of illness. Unable to find a place in society, women encounter in their marginal role as madwomen the means of expressing their thoughts and of attaining freedom through the unrepressed semiotic.

Julia Kristeva believes that poetic language operates through the same process as madness, hysteria, and depression by effectuating the 'semiotization of the symbolic,' which is in itself a revolutionary act.¹⁰ Along the same lines, Patrícia Yeager adopts the liberating and affirmative metaphor of the 'honey-mad' woman, the woman writer who is 'mad for the honey of speech'.¹¹ She borrows the metaphor from Lévi-Strauss's analysis of a South American tale of the honey-mad women who are punished for their oral excesses. A poet, Mary Oliver, however, rewrites the metaphor of the honey-mad woman as a 'hungry visionary, free, savvy, invulnerable to social closure' (*Honey*, 27). For Yeager, to 'go

10 Kristeva, Julia, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Trans. Margaret Waller, New York, Columbia UP, 1984, 68-70.

11 Yeager, Patrícia, *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing*, New York, Columbia UP, 1988, 4.

honey mad is the equivalent of going language mad,' and the honey-mad woman writer is a 'symbol of verbal plenitude, of woman's capacity to rewrite her culture' (*Honey*, 28-29).

No matter how emancipating, poetic, and suggestive this metaphor might seem, there are problems in this highly liberating image that should be addressed. Phyllis Chesler, for example, cautions against the danger of romanticizing madness as a form of political protest and social transgression. For her, madness is the very means through which society deprives women of the capacity to protest and to voice their needs.¹² Kristeva also points out that in madness, insanity and depression, the subject effectuates a complete break with the symbolic, that is, an exclusion from the signifying process that can bring the destruction of the subject. She maintains that poetic language is the means through which the transgressive force of the semiotic can be manifest in the symbolic without the subject being in danger of being completely excluded (through mental illnesses) from language and society (*Revolution*, 80-84). Therefore, the question to be addressed, as the metaphor of madness is viewed in Lispector's works, should be: can Kristeva's concept of poetic language liberate 'madwomen' (and women writers) from the dangerous double-bind of being inscribed in the very system they want to disrupt?

The metaphor of madness is a prevalent issue in Lispector's works. Through the voices of her female characters, Lispector addresses the notion that madness has been traditionally employed to reinforce women's marginal and inferior position in society. As she seems to be conscious of the possible danger that 'insanity' may present for women and the woman writer, her female characters often voice her concern about the double-bind of writing about madness and being simultaneously inside and outside the order they so strongly try to undermine. Aware of the difficulty of trying to represent that which is inherently unrepresentable, Lispector explores the metaphor of madness in terms of women's exclusion from language and their attempt to find a discourse of their own. I believe that her work implicitly addresses, in different ways, the issue raised by Felman -- how to talk about madness without being subjugated to reason, without being completely inscribed in the symbolic -- and Kristeva's notion that poetic language can rescue the subject from the double-bind of (in)sanity.

Lispector, however, like most women writers, faces the enormous challenge that, according to Felman, awaits the woman writer: 'to 're-invent' language, to *re-learn how to speak*: to speak not only against, but outside the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which

12 Chesler, Phyllis, *Women and Madness*, New York, Avon Books, 1973, 22.

would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning' ('Women and Writing', 18-19). In a way, Lispector attempts to 're-invent' language through a 'discourse of madness,' one that, like the language of the hysteric and the psychotic, violates the symbolic prohibition and rescues the semiotic from its repressed position through a highly poetic language. As G. H., the female protagonist in *A Paixão segundo G. H.*, points out:

receio começar a compor para poder ser entendida pelo alguém imaginário, receio começar a 'fazer' um sentido, com a mesma mansa loucura que até ontem era o meu modo sadio de caber num sistema. Terei que ter a coragem de usar um coração desprotegido e de ir falando para o nada e para o ninguém? assim como uma criança pensa para o nada.

(I'm afraid to start writing to be understood by that imaginary someone, I'm afraid I'll start 'making' a sense, with the same meek madness that up to yesterday was my 'healthy' way of fitting into a system. Will I have the courage to use an undefended heart and go on speaking to nothing and no one? as when a child thinks about nothingness.)¹³

G. H.'s madness represents a form of transgression in a system that rejects any subversive questioning of its structure. However, madness is simultaneously her 'healthy' ('sadio') way of coping with oppression and preserving her own 'sanity' and her strength to persist in her transgression and to avoid being engulfed by this same system. It is a means of deceiving the law, the paternal gaze that attempts to control her life -- 'Um olho vigiava a minha vida' (24) ('An eye looked over my life' (20)) -- and the rules and regulations to which she is repeatedly submitted.

G. H., like the cockroach with whom she identifies and whom she will ultimately 'eat' as a process of self-awareness in her painstaking quest, remains on the side of Eve in her transgression of the law, thus, accepting 'sin' and questioning the dichotomy between monster and angel to which women have been restricted:

a barata e eu não estávamos diante de uma lei a que devíamos obediência: nós éramos a própria lei ignorada a que obedecíamos. O pecado renovadamente original é este: tenho que cumprir a minha lei que

13 Lispector, Clarice, *A Paixão segundo G. H.* Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 1986, 11. Lispector, Clarice, *The Passion according to G.H.* Trans. Ronald W. Sousa, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, 7.

ignoro, e se eu não cumprir a minha ignorância, estarei pecando originalmente contra a vida. No jardim do Paraíso, quem era o monstro e quem não era? (*A Paixão*, 93)

(the cockroach and I were not in the presence of a law to which we owed obedience: we were the ignored law itself which we obeyed. The renewed originality of the sin is this: I have to carry out my own unknown law, and if I don't carry out my unknowing, I shall be sinning originally against life. In the Garden of Eden, who was the monster and who was not? (*The Passion*, 88))

Like Eve, G. H. eats the 'forbidden fruit' because her transgression of the law is a temptation that she cannot resist because it gives her intense pleasure: 'A tentação do prazer. A tentação é comer direto na fonte. A tentação é comer direto na lei' (*A Paixão*, 123) ('The temptation of pleasure. The temptation is to partake directly of the source. The temptation is to partake directly of the law' (*The Passion*, 120)). G. H. wants the pleasure of 'hell' rather than the imposition of the law upon the idyllic paradise. She, however, feels entrapped and looks for a way out, desperately trying to escape the oppression of the law.

The biblical reference from the title ('the Gospel according to . . .') suggests that G. H. is in search of a mystical experience, a revelation. Instead of speaking the Gospel, however, she wants to speak the 'passion,' and this is what she seeks: '- - - - - estou procurando, estou procurando. Estou tentando entender' (*A Paixão*, 7) ('I keep looking, looking. Trying to understand' (*The Passion*, 3)). The dashes that represent the object of her search simultaneously reveal an absence and an inherent presence of this object. The word '*paixão*', one of the central metaphors in this novel, fits nicely into these blanks. Like its biblical referent of the passion deriving from Jesus's suffering as he goes through the stations of the cross ('Via Dolorosa'/'*via-crucis*'), the 'passion' for which she searches denotes an excruciating physical and emotional pain. It also reflects the pleasure and pain conveyed by a maternal *jouissance*. G. H.'s search for 'passion' will eventually lead her to the realm of madness which is also the transgressive locus of a maternal *jouissance*. Madness for G. H. is a seductive and promising form of 'passion': 'Eu estava sendo seduzida. E ia para essa loucura promissora' (*A Paixão*, 56) ('I was being seduced. I went toward that enticing madness' (*The Passion*, 52)). It is a revelation, a productive site that she does not fear, but rather desires, and from which she derives pleasure through her subversive attitude.

G. H.'s madness of language, that is, her means of devising a transgressive practice, denotes a concern about being caught in a double-bind that is shared with Lispector's other female protagonists. By undergoing a search for a discourse of her own in a system from which she is estranged, G. H. ultimately

experiences an epiphany through a metamorphosis as she 'eats' the 'white mass' of the cockroach. She is reborn by eating its white mass, which, for her, is like drinking from the milk of the mother and re-establishing a close bond with the lost and repressed maternal element. She then understands that, although it is very hard to find what she is looking for, the search continues. In the same way that each chapter begins with the last sentence of the previous one, the ending takes the reader back to the beginning, creating a sense of circularity, repetition, and continuity in the novel -- G. H.'s search is a never-ending process.

G. H. eventually realizes the futile attempt to grasp the meaning of words and to understand a language that is not hers. The words she has to employ are 'lies' because they are false and foreign to her. The empty spaces, both in the beginning and in the end of the narrative, represent the absence and, concomitantly, the inherent presence of a word or language. The blank spaces underline the inability of words to contain within themselves the traditional concept of fixed meanings in a language that is privileged in Western thought. At the same time, the dashes stand for G. H.'s struggle to create a discourse of her own, even if it is one that is inscribed in 'madness,' but that will allow her to escape the patriarchal structure of a language to which she is marginal and the double-bind she seems doomed to face.

By emphasizing both the presence and the absence of a discourse through which G. H. can express herself, Lispector stresses the instability of this 'phallic' and symbolic language that is foreign to women and that cannot articulate G. H.'s feminine voice. The presence of the dashes draws attention to the possibility for G. H. to attain a language of her own, while the absence of the letters stresses the difficulty in attempting to do so; thus, G. H.'s constant reference to this 'impossible narrative'. For G. H., there is an inevitable distance between the absence and the presence of words, which reflects the (im)possibility of a feminine writing: 'o abismo entre a palavra e o que ela tentava' (*A Paixão*, 63) ('an abyss between the word and what it sought to do' (*The Passion*, 59)).

However, by refusing to be confined to a system and discourse that oppress her and that she wants to subvert, G. H. has just one choice: to remain somewhat 'outside' it through the 'madness' of her writing. The impossibility of her feminine writing, however, becomes a possibility as she acknowledges the potential of her discourse to shatter the bases of the symbolic. A complete exclusion from the symbolic would lead to her death, which she avoids by transferring her 'outlawry' and madness to her fragmented and chaotic discourse. Lispector's epigraph in *A Paixão segundo G. H.* taken from Bernard Berenson -- 'A complete life may be one ending in so full identification with the non-self that there is no self to die' -- underlines G. H.'s struggle with death -- 'to die as other', a struggle which she ultimately overcomes. G. H. refuses to be confined to labels and roles and, thus, escapes death -- the punishment for the transgressive

madwoman who, losing her strength, succumbs to the prohibition of the law. Rather than being punished with death, G. H. realizes that she resides beyond death -- 'a vida se me é' (*A Paixão*, 175) ('life is itself for me' (*The Passion*, 173)).

Um Sopro de Vida, Lispector's last novel, also explores the madness of writing of a female protagonist who dares to transgress the impositions of a patriarchal society personified by a male character who claims to be her 'Author' and creator, the 'father' who gives her a 'name,' Ângela Pralini: 'E assim que recebi o sopro de vida que fez de mim um homem, sopro em você que se torna uma alma' ('And as soon as I received the breath of life that made me a man, I blow upon you who become a soul').¹⁴ This Author professes a God-like author(ity) over his creation by preserving the traditional binary opposition that in Western thought grants man the position of active subject, and relegates woman to the role of passive object. He creates Ângela to fulfill the role of the looking glass that will reproduce his glorified and superior male image -- 'inventei Ângela como meu reflexo' ('I invented Ângela as my reflection') (*Um Sopro*, 29).

Despite his consistent claim to authority over Ângela, the Author soon acknowledges that her fate is to surpass him, to acquire a life and, most importantly, a voice of her own: 'No começo só havia a idéia. Depois o verbo veio ao encontro da idéia. E depois o verbo já não era meu: me transcendia, era de todo o mundo, era de Ângela' ('In the beginning there was only the idea. Afterwards the word met the idea. And later the word was not mine: it transcended me, it belonged to everybody, it belonged to Ângela') (*Um Sopro*, 33). In an overt biblical allusion, the Author becomes the embodiment of a God who has control over 'words' and language. Ângela, however, gradually takes possession of the word in that she undermines the Author's omnipotence and authority by struggling to devise a discourse of her own.

Ângela's discourse, as the Author constantly comments, is different from his -- hers is a 'compulsive writing', a writing that expresses 'um doido faltar de sentido' ('a crazy lack of meaning') (*Um Sopro*, 74). Like G. H., she writes with her body and derives intense pleasure from it -- 'Ficaria tonta de prazer', 'Ângela não escreve. Ela geme' ('She would be dizzy with pleasure, Ângela does not write. She moans') (*Um Sopro*, 116). The difference between the two is also reflected in their occupations. Although both are writers, Ângela is described as a painter, while the Author has specialized in physics. Ângela paints as she writes: fragmented objects, chaotic images, whereas he strives to attain geometrical control and precision. Ângela struggles to find a discourse of her own, while the Author tries to 'force' her to write simply and objectively.

14 Lispector, Clarice, *Um Sopro de Vida: (Pulsões)*, Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Alves, 1990,31, my own translations.

Ângela, the 'crazy gazelle', goes beyond writing ('além-escritura'), that is, beyond the Author's objective, rigid, and phallic discourse that is the embodiment of the symbolic order. She realizes that the kind of writing that she wants to produce -- a writing from the body, the maternal body that will give her pleasure, a writing from the semiotic -- will lead her to madness as a punishment because she will be defying the law: 'Estou felizmente mais doida. . . . Será que a polícia me pega? . . . Escrever pode tornar uma pessoa louca. Ela tem que levar uma vida pacata, bem acomodada, bem burguesa. Senão a loucura vem. É perigoso' ('I am happily crazier. . . . Will the police get me? . . . Writing can make a person mad. She has to lead a peaceful, well accommodated, very bourgeois life. If not, madness comes. It's dangerous') (*Um Sopro*, 58).

Considered a 'madwoman' because she refuses to lead the life that society imposes on her, Ângela dares to reject the 'No' of the father and chooses the 'YES' of Eve, of Molly Bloom, of the mother -- 'Ângela escolheu 'sim'; ('Ângela chose 'yes') (*Um Sopro*, 72). At first she is afraid of the label of 'madness' that the Author attributes to her, but as she gets more strength throughout the narrative, she manages to find expression for a discourse of her own, thus becoming gradually 'fearless': 'Refugio-me na loucura. . . . Quero ver coisas novas e isso eu só conseguirei se não tiver mais medo da loucura' ('I take refuge in madness . . . I want to see new things and I will only be able to do this if I am not afraid of madness anymore') (*Um Sopro*, 141). According to Barthes, 'madness has nothing to do with fear'.¹⁵ Ângela ultimately understands that, in order to be 'mad,' one has to be fearless, without fear of transgression.

In the last section of *Um Sopro de Vida*, emblematically entitled 'The book of Ângela' since it actually becomes her 'own' narrative, Ângela manages to write her book called 'History of Things', a fragmented, plotless narrative formed of impressions, dreams, and incursions into her unconscious. She writes, as the Author stresses, like a woman weaving ('Mulher rendeira' (*Um Sopro*, 108)); her writing comes from her body, the body of a woman and mother. Ângela is both mother and daughter ('sou filha e sou mãe' (*Um Sopro*, 101)) and her writing is like a child, the product of her *jouissance* that entails both intense pleasure and pain. She writes with her female and maternal body and she becomes (re)born with her book that is, simultaneously, her child and the mother from which she is born. Her writing and herself are united in one body, one being: 'Estou precisando urgentemente de nascer. Está doendo muito. . . . Quero gritar para o mundo: Nasci!!!' . . . Eu me abri e você de mim nasceu' ('I am in need of being born urgently. It's hurting a lot. . . . I want to shout to the world: I was born!!! . . . I opened myself and you were born from me') (*Um Sopro*, 107-13). For

15 Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, Trans. Richard Miller, New York, Farrar, 1975, 141.

Ângela, motherhood and madness are equivalent for both derive from a transgressive practice: 'Mãe é doida. É tão doida que dela nasceram filhos' ('Mother is crazy. She is so crazy that children were born from her') (*Um Sopro*, 114). And Ângela, as mother, daughter, and madwoman embodies the quintessential transgressive woman writer.

In the last section, the Author finally realizes that Ângela is commanding him and that their writings intermingle and intersect. He feels the danger of losing himself in this powerful force that she has become and expresses his desire to invent another woman, one that will be different from Ângela: organized, precise, pure, and law abiding -- maybe she will be a 'lawyer', instead of leading the chaotic life of a painter, as Ângela does. However, it is already too late; Ângela 'é mais forte do que eu: eu sou produto de um pensamento, ela não é produto: é ela toda. Ela rompeu meu sistema' ('she is stronger than me; I am the product of a thought, she is not product: she is whole. She broke my system') (*Um Sopro*, 140). Ângela breaks his system -- the symbolic order -- and somehow restores the repressed maternal semiotic into her own voice. In the end Ângela and the Author together do battle with death, and, as she disappears, he feels compelled to do the same as he has become completely dependent upon her. However, he hints that she does not die, but rather is reborn through the maternal image of the earth.

Like *A Paixão segundo G. H.*, *Um Sopro de Vida* is a cyclical narrative -- a 'cobra que engole o próprio rabo' ('snake that swallows its own tail') (*Um Sopro*, 26). The Author cannot finish his book because he has grown too dependent on the 'other,' the 'object' that he creates and that ends up dominating the narrative, only eventually to disappear. Although the Author has the last words, his patriarchal voice is not his own anymore; Ângela, the feminine voice, through her 'book', takes possession of the narrative and expresses her fluid, fragmented, and 'mad' writing.

Lispector strives to present madness as a productive locus from which her female protagonists can escape the double-bind and fight the impositions of an oppressive society. These female characters refuse to be victimized by the system or give in to their punishment through death. Like Yeager's 'honey-mad women', they reverse the negative attributes of madness conferred on women over the years and envision madness as a merely working metaphor, a sign of their transgressive strategy. Madness is viewed as part of the semiotic realm which transgresses the 'sanity,' the objectivity and rigidity of the symbolic order. Her female characters make use of their highly poetic discourse as a compensation for the inevitable destruction that comes with madness and mental illness. This poetic writing rescues them, as Kristeva would claim, from being lost in the double-bind of a transgressive, but restrictive insanity.

Lispector herself explores the 'madness of writing' or the 'writing of madness' through a densely poetic discourse as a powerful tool of subversion. As Cixous puts it, Lispector's 'whole process consists in working like a madwoman'.¹⁶ Ângela's writing (and that of the other female characters from *A Paixão* and *Água Viva*) becomes an act of madness in the sense that it is an inherently transgressive practice that partakes of the logic of carnival. It is fragmented, anarchical, chaotic, subversive, delirious, poetic, and above all, pleasurable -- unable to be confined to the stricture of the symbolic. Ângela wants the 'impossible': to be able to transgress the symbolic without destroying herself, to voice her desires without being subjected to the laws of patriarchy, to avoid being caught in the double-bind and the logic of carnival that would obliterate her subversive strategies. She seems to be able to accomplish all these through her poetic and transgressive discourse. The subtitle of *Um Sopro de Vida* -- 'pulsões' -- suggests the semiotic quality of Ângela's (and Lispector's) narrative, as does Lispector's epigraph: 'Quero escrever movimento puro' ('I want to write pure movement') (*Um Sopro*, 16). No matter how intricate and impossible such a task might appear, Lispector strives to devise such a discourse through the incessant movement and poetic rhythm of her subversive and revolutionary writing.

So, does Lispector succeed in writing from the place of the other? A writing from this space, I have argued, would intrinsically be informed by a double-bind. Hers, however, is a discourse that is aware of its operation 'against the grain', that is, a discourse that faces the dilemma of speaking from a place from which she is excluded and concomitantly about, from, and through her marginal locus in society. Her writings ironically express her awareness of the impossibility of creating a discourse that is completely excluded from the symbolic, that is, from society and language. In an attempt to escape this double-bind, she devises a means of expressing her otherness without being subjected to the rules and impositions of the system by destabilizing and problematizing the symbolic from within, through the transgression of its very form of representation: language.

Lispector's poetic discourse of transgression brings the repressed semiotic into the realm of the symbolic by disrupting it and questioning its rigidity and pragmatism. Hers is an intense poetic writing that becomes, as Kristeva claims, a revolutionary tool in fighting repression and the mastery of narratives that privilege the symbolic. As Cixous points out, 'it is in poetic writing that something of the mystery and continuity of life can appear, through grammatical

16 Cixous, Hélène, *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetayeva*, Ed. and trans. Verena Andermatt Conley, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 100.

subversion, through a certain liberty taken inside language, with regard to the law of gender'.¹⁷ This poetic discourse represents an attempt by women writers, to adopt Felman's words, to re-invent language, to re-write and re-direct the focus and dominance of a phallic discourse. Such a poetic writing should be, to use a term coined by Cixous, *transgrammatical*, that is, transgressive of grammatical rules and language restrictions (*Readings*, 3).

Lispector's writing delves into the realm of the repressed semiotic notably through the maternal body, the marginal locus *par excellence*, that, in turn, fights the traditional meanings of silence and madness to which women and their bodies have been confined by granting them a positive connotation. Without a means of expressing their repressed feelings and desires through such a poetic writing, these women would eventually succumb to a negative silence, a destructive madness, and death (to 'die as other'), as Kristeva would claim.

Although there seems to be no explicit reference in Lispector's works to a politics of location in geographical terms, it can be argued that her focus on the revolutionary content of her protagonists' struggle reflects the need to find a 'place' for them to speak in an male-dominated society. In the Brazilian case, such a search expresses the concern about giving voice to a female subaltern who, according to Gayatri Spivak, is even more in the shadow than the male subaltern, and, therefore, cannot be heard or read.¹⁸ In this context, Lispector's metaphor of madness enables her female subaltern protagonists to devise a revolutionary strategy for them to be able to speak and be heard. Far from excluding the social aspect in her works, as several critics have argued, Lispector's novels implicitly address the plight of the Brazilian female subaltern and the need for a third world female subject to break the stranglehold of silence and imposed madness.

By attempting to break with pre-established binary dichotomies through which patriarchal and repressive societies are constituted, Lispector questions such ideological hierarchies and attempts to give voice to the female subaltern. However, some critics would argue that an emphasis on the expression of the semiotic in writing as a revolutionary strategy and the consequent destabilization of the repressive symbolic is just another way of reversing the opposition, simply giving rise to another structure of power domination. Perhaps there is a need, as Lechte affirms, to create a new term that will encompass women's subversive

17 Cixous, Hélène, 'Extreme Fidelity', *Writing Differences: Reading from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, Ed, Susan Sellers, New York, St. Martin, 1988, 14.

18 Spivak, Gayatri, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Eds. Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, New York, Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1994, 83-104.

poetic writing in a dialogical contact with the symbolic to escape the double-bind -- 'the semibolic order'?¹⁹ Yet, how far have women writers come and where are they going if they still have to depend upon levels of stratification and identification? After a first stage of transgression, questionings, and rewritings, of fighting the double-bind, what will their next move be? Such questions have been continuously asked but their answers are beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, questionings should (and will) continue as will the attempts to break the double-bind and let women and, above all, the female subaltern speak.

19 Lechte, John, *Julia Kristeva*, New York, Routledge, 1990, 120.