

# Book Review

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

*Writing by Ear*, despite its subtitle, is not merely a book about the presence of aurality in Clarice Lispector's fiction. Marília Librandi's book closely listens to Lispector's fiction to find the resonances and reverberations of a mode of writing that informs a large part of Brazilian literature of the modern period. There is a "listening in writing," the author argues, and she offers three interrelated concepts—"writing by ear," "aural novel," and "echopoetics"—to help the reader follow her auditory journey through Lispector's life and writing. Librandi equips readers to become attentive listeners to Lispector's "aural novels," as she weaves relevant information about the writer's multilingual experience with a careful and thorough study of *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), *Água Viva* (1973), and *The Hour of the Star* (1977). These novels are read as manifestations of a "writing by ear," a phrase used by Lispector herself to describe her approach to writing. Moreover, they are in turn situated within an "echopoetics," a poetics of resonances that accounts for the aesthetic, ethical, and ecological reverberations of the imaginary. Librandi's *Writing by Ear*, however, is not merely a case study. Lispector's writing becomes in this book a theoretical source to think of fiction as an aural practice, a critical exercise that leads to a reformulation of authorship as active reception more than deliberate production.

As a Brazilian scholar and academic displaced to work and live in the U.S., Marília Librandi is particularly attuned both to the resonances and nuances of her own language, as it is spoken here by students and scholars of Luso-Brazilian literature and culture, and to the unfamiliar sounds of other, less familiar languages. As in the case of Lispector's experience with multiple languages, Librandi's personal experience is behind her own writing, in particular, her substantial research on the intersections and overlappings between listening and writing. Her impressive publications in these areas, alongside her work as co-founder of the digital collaborative site *Sense and Sound* and as co-organizer of

the Research Group *Estudos da Escuta*, are all informed by a comparative approach focused on the relationships between literature, philosophy, and anthropology. *Writing by Ear* comes as a fitting closure to this trajectory.

Resorting to a kaleidoscopic structure, Marília Librandi outlines her argument in five chapters that reverberate and resonate with one another as if to echo the rhetoric of the aural novels being analyzed. Chapters Two and Three—“Writing by Ear” and “The Aural Novel”—focus on the broader context of Brazilian literature to place Lispector’s writing by ear within a genealogy that goes back to Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis. “Writing by Ear” invokes Augusto de Campos’s notion of “pulsation” to read the auditory and acoustic properties of Lispector’s writing, while using this listening history of Brazilian literature to point to an ethics of listening in Latin American writing located at the border between lettered and non-lettered practices. As an apt continuation, “The Aural Novel” takes up and deepens the analysis of the works of Machado de Assis, Guimarães Rosa, and Oswald de Andrade, alongside Lispector’s *A hora da estrela*, aided by conceptualizations around the term “aural novel” advanced by Mia Couto and Toni Morrison. Starting from an examination of the image of the “ear listening, large, pink and dead” appearing in the first paragraph of Lispector’s first novel, *Perto do coração selvagem*, Chapter Four, appropriately titled “Hearing the Wild Heart,” follows a series of unexpected but highly persuasive connections between Lispector’s motifs and Vincent Van Gogh’s act of cutting his ear as a foundational gesture for the history of modern art. The image of the ear haunts the remaining chapters linked to maternal absence, to the sacrifice of the voice in silent writing, and, most importantly, to an expanded sense of listening out to the world. Right from the start, “Hearing the Wild Heart” intersects the legacy of the mother with that of the father, associated with the typewriter and with the symbolic system evoked by textuality. This is an image parsed out in depth throughout Chapter Five, “Loud Object,” where German media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s ideas help Librandi explore the union between the ear and the typewriter. In this chapter, both a close reading/hearing of *Água Viva*, originally titled *Objeto gritante*, and Lispector’s unique relationships with her typewriters, point to the writer’s constant concern with the materialities of communication. *A paixão segundo G.H.*, Lispector’s signature novel, is the object of study of the sixth chapter, “The Echopoetics of G.H.,” where the term “echopoetics” is fleshed out to argue that both the writing and the reading of

Lispector inhabit the space-time of echo, a listening that speaks, or a speech only possible through listening.

Librandi's ear, her talent for hearing behind, beneath, in between, beyond the printed text of some of Lispector's greatest fiction does not merely provide a fresh and innovative reading of one of the most iconic Brazilian writers to date. *Writing by Ear* nurtures a verbivocovisual orientation that includes music and the visual arts in its analysis, and, in so doing, it helps usher a third way beyond the dichotomy between speech and writing, a new distribution and mobilization of the senses that has the potential to yield productive discussions about Latin American literature in general. This is a potential that Marília Librandi hints at but seems constrained by the scope of her study to delve into, and the reader is left yearning for more on this front. At the same time, it is impossible to emphasize enough the value of a book that presents a modern theory of writing authored by a woman. In fact, the entirety of the fifth chapter is devoted to a compelling account of the emergence of the woman as author in the modern world. *Writing by Ear* is an indispensable read not just for students and scholars of Latin American and Luso-Brazilian Literature and Culture, but also to everybody interested in Women's and Gender Studies

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