Social Hope in Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*

ANDRÉ CORRÊA DE SÁ
University of California, Santa Barbara

Abstract: In this essay I offer a brief theory on how Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the* Star (1977) succeeds in conveying social hope by making the reader feel the edge of reaching "the most alarmingly unsuspected regions within me"—an effort that I see as predominantly aesthetic, not representational (Lispector xiii). My account is divided into two parts. The first presents the main arguments of three discerning critics who resorted to representational interpretations of *The Hour of the Star*: Earl E. Fitz, Regina Dalcastagnè, and Lúcia Sá. The second advances an alternative explanation of how this novel speaks openly about visible and invisible forms of exclusion without implying that the search for social hope entails the search for an accurate representation of reality.

Keywords: Aesthetics, exclusion, Regina Dalcastagnè, Earl E. Fitz, Lúcia Sá

I.

Since its publication in 1977, *The Hour of the Star* has been described as a watershed narrative suggesting a new phase in Clarice Lispector's work—a phase in which social matters play a central role. Wrapped in a self-referential frosting typical of existential philosophical trends in the postwar years, earlier narratives such as *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), *The Passion According to G. H.* (1964), and *Family Ties* (1960) do not speak enthusiastically on the importance of building a more democratic and egalitarian society. Or, at least, they never express vehemently how social injustice can torture the conscience of the intellectual. In contrast, by creating Macabéa, the protagonist of *The Hour of the Star*, Lispector

promotes an approach that veers from the literary mainstream toward the margins, intentionally valuing those bits and pieces of reality that are required in the forging and wielding of a pluralistic language that reveals "the seething, uncomfortable, and violent life of our cities" (144).

In a notable essay, "Point of View in Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela,*" Earl E. Fitz offered one of the first accounts of this novel. Fitz argued that this novel's innovations could aptly be described as a paradigm shift in Lispector's work. Stressing the way in which "Clarice's deft handling of point of view" is capable of involving "the reader as well as the narrator in Macabéa's empty, wasted existence," Fitz described these variations of perspective as an effort to offer the audience an account of silenced and marginalized aspects of reality (200). As this effort may be seen as a step forward in Clarice's work, Fitz understandably regretted the fact that the author's early death prevented her from expanding a narrative experiment that he saw as a roadmap for future books. Fitz's early description of Macabéa's story has become familiar—so much so that it is still told to Brazilian schoolchildren. In this regard, *The Hour of the Star* is chiefly valued for the way Clarice portrays the viewpoints of a poor Northeastern migrant in Rio de Janeiro, as witness to her experience and to offer testimony in the form of a didactic epistle.

In chapter 3 of *Literatura brasileira contemporânea: Um território contestado* (2012), Regina Dalcastagnè argues that neither Rodrigo nor Clarice quite understands the story he is telling. Dalcastagnè deploys John Carey's argument about how educated elites chose sides and often wrote books specially equipped to contend with the vulgar hordes they despised. She tells us that Rodrigo S. M. is writing a book because he wants to widen the distance that separates him from Macabéa. An important part of Dalcastagnè's reading consists precisely of a systematic analysis of the binary oppositions that congenitally contrast the two characters. Her explanation underlines the way *The Hour of the Star* uncovers the cultural environments and discursive practices during the Brazilian military dictatorship, showing how Clarice stood up against social injustice both in fact and in fiction:

> o livro foi escrito em plena ditadura militar, num momento em que se exigia do artista e do intelectual que tomassem uma posição. Diante dos crimes cometidos pelo regime e da censura a que

> estavam submetidos os meios de comunicação de massa, era de se esperar que nomes conhecidos usassem sua legitimidade para dizer um pouco do que estava se passando. (51)

This argument leads Dalcastagnè to reason that *The Hour of the Star* (1977) is a relevant novel is because it offers a touchstone discussion of the "crisis of representation" affecting the "contested territory" of Brazilian literature by showcasing the struggle of "intellectuals vs masses." I agree that this novel is as historically embedded as any other, but this way of reading does not explain how books that favor aesthetic experiments and responses (those kinds of experiments and responses that depend on certain intuitions and thrusts of pleasure) over objective accounts of reality can support a politically emancipatory activity. This reading reduces the novel's alluring lyrical pursuit for freedom to the search for prosaic imageries of class struggle in the Big City.

In "*A hora da estrela* e o mal-estar das elites," Lúcia Sá ties up the arguments advanced by Fitz and Dalcastagnè in a brief and graceful formula that describes in useful terms much of what seems to happens in the book: "Por mais que se tenha dito o contrário, o foco principal do romance *A hora da estrela* de Clarice Lispector não é a história da nordestina Macabéa, e sim a de seu criador, Rodrigo S. M. Ou melhor: não se trata propriamente da história de Rodrigo S. M., mas de sua aventura de tentar criar uma personagem, a nordestina Macabéa" (49). What Clarice is trying to say—concludes Sá—is that this kind of attempt, both as an aesthetic endeavor and a political program, is bound to fail, making Rodrigo S. M. look bad, and Clarice, who pulls the carpet from under his feet, look good.

In short, Fitz, Dalcastagnè, and Sá consider *The Hour of the Star* the redeeming effort of an intellectual no longer able to turn a blind eye to the suffering of her compatriots. They bring us to accept the idea that the "very slight and constant toothache" that crosses the narrative speaks to the effort of portraying the lifeworld of this young girl from the Northeast (Lispector 15). Fitz sees Macabéa as "a discussion of what it means for a literary artist to create a character who expresses particular attitudes and concerns, many of which may or may not coincide with those of the implied author or the real author" ("Point of View" 197). Dalcastagnè sees Rodrigo S. M. as an intellectual who writes a book to stand out from a miserable Northeasterner "who should have stayed in the backlands of Alagoas in a cotton dress without any typewriter" (Lispector 7). Lúcia Sá, in turn, sees the

clash between the two as a symbol of the left-looking elites' malaise and disillusionment with the social issues of the country.

II.

These three readings share two basic assumptions: first, that the narrator emotionally identifies himself with Macabéa, and that the strength of this identification translates into the rhetorical strength of the narrative; and second, that Macabéa somehow manages to battle her creator. These two ideas have often led critics to focus on the dramatic tension between Rodrigo S. M. and Macabéa. This explanation and the technical complications that stem from it raise a set of questions that seem pertinent if we are interested in buttressing the predicative discourse that I summed up above. These are the kind of questions that a landscape painter would ask about a particular mountain or that an actor trained in method acting would ask about a particularly demanding role; questions related to the ability to grasp forms of reality or to embody personalities very different from ours, depicting things hard to see and saying things one does not necessarily feel; questions such as "What figurative devices can I use to apprehend the forms of reality?" or "How can I use my personal experiences and memories to deeply connect with this role?"

When Rodrigo S. M. describes Macabéa, he seems to be hearing voices instead of describing a living person, which does not surprise if we consider that he wasn't exactly familiar with someone like her. Born in the backlands of Alagoas, Macabéa was raised by an aunt in Maceió, the state capital. This aunt later took her to Rio de Janeiro, paid for a typing course, and got her a job as a typist. Following her aunt's death, Macabéa found herself alone in the Big City. Compared to "a stray dog . . . guided exclusively by herself," Macabéa undoubtedly has the marginal quality Rodrigo S. M. seeks (Lispector 10). Nevertheless, while he seems proud of his effort, he also acknowledges that he cannot step out of his own vocabularies and express the young girl's "particular attitudes and concerns." He never explains, for instance, when and in what context he met Macabéa or her situation. He only explains that the initial shiver of inspiration suddenly became tangible on a day when he "glimpsed in the air the feeling of perdition on the face of a Northeastern girl" (Lispector 4). Without any embarrassment, he admits that his narrative is a matter of life and death: "I have to write about this Northeastern girl or I'll choke,"

he confesses, jumping to a complaint and a kind of retraction, perhaps not unexpected, but in any case premature: "She's accusing me," he utters, "and the way to defend myself is to write about her" (Lispector 9).

But the desire to "make clear something that's almost erased and that I can hardly see" does not naturally extend to an ability to contact and become familiar with lifeworlds different from those he knows (Lispector 11). The embodiment of one of "thousands of girls scattered throughout the tenement slums, vacancies in a room, behind the shop counters working to the point of exhaustion," we are told, requires an almost ascetic exercise, a deliberate abandonment of the lifeworld, and involves sleepless nights, a three-day beard, and "wearing old ragged clothes" (Lispector 6, 11). To play Macabéa and "make clear something that's almost erased," Rodrigo S. M. has to withdrawal from his common life and, imbued with the pathos inherent in the exercises of cruelty and humiliation to which Northeastern bodies were subjected, seeks to identify himself with Macabéa's existential enclave: "To draw the girl I have to get a grip on myself and to capture her soul I have to feed myself frugally with fruits and drink iced white wine because it's hot in this cubbyhole I've locked myself into and from which I'm inclined to see the world" (Lispector 11, 14).

The very fact that *The Hour of the Star* is a kind of self-administered therapy targeted at relieving a guilty conscience makes it particularly evident that the priority of the discourse is not in the quality of mimesis. In a technical sense, Rodrigo S. M. has no way of getting Macabéa to speak his language and her soul is never captured by the narrator's language. In a technical sense, Macabéa's story is not even the primary theme developed in *The Hour of the Star*. Macabéa consists of a counterfactual effect of the existence of Rodrigo S. M., which only reacts to the nonrational stimuli caused by her presence. As a "feeling of perdition" does not do justice to an array of wishes, likings, and beliefs, it's hardly surprising that writing about her becomes mostly writing about him. As I elaborate below, the outcome of this epiphany is a confession that builds up as a *counternarrative*. Rodrigo S. M. gives us his opinion about Macabéa, assures us that he says what he thinks. If we are to describe the way Clarice uses Rodrigo S. M. to bring Macabéa to life and addresses social matters, the kind of questions asked above—questions that stem from notions about getting reality right—seem to me puzzling and misleading. I prefer to take a different approach.

In the remainder of this essay, I examine the rich meaning conveyed by the epiphanies in this novel and the role they play.[1] By "epiphany," I mean, following Sophie Grace Chappell, "an (1) overwhelming (2) existentially significant manifestation of (3) value, (4) often sudden and surprising" (95). I argue that *The Hour of the Star* uses a rhetorical device enveloped in epiphanies to provide new self-images to a quartet composed by two pairs performing in tandem: Rodrigo and Macabéa, and Clarice and the reader.

Roughly speaking, from my point of view, epiphanies are the tool that turn Rodrigo S. M.'s confession into a form of social hope. To clarify the nature of this interaction, I return to Earl Fitz's useful argument about the oscillation of points of view, reframing it with variations that allow us to reap the aesthetic impulse of this book, showing, *pace* Kant, its compatibility with responsible moral standards. Rather than emotionally engaging with Macabéa *via* Rodrigo S. M., Clarice uses Macabéa to offer Rodrigo S. M. a cognitive model for his own perceptions. Which is to say that Macabéa's well-wrought story counters dominant social narratives because—this is key—she gives Rodrigo a different self-image, instead of showing us the limit of scope of a top-down representation.

III.

Contrary to what Dalcastagnè believes, I see no point in the idea that Macabéa's evocation helps Rodrigo S. M. assert himself as an intellectual. As much as Rodrigo S. M. seems to use his authority to control Macabéa's voice, she always flippantly manages to escape his sketches. Additionally, Rodrigo S. M. does not think of himself nor is he recognized by others as someone speaking the truth when he examines her existence. He is clearly aware of being at odds with everyone else: "I have no social class, marginalized as I am. The upper class considers me a weird

[1] One disclaimer is in order: many of my ideas do not stand alone in contemporary scholarship. In addition to Marta Peixoto and Earl Fitz, who have offered nuanced readings on the relationship between aesthetics and politics in Clarice Lispector, two other scholars have provided insightful approaches that help us see how Lispector's work questions the representational regime of literature. In *Anti-Literature: The Politics and Limits of Representation in Modern Brazil and Argentina*, Adam Joseph Shellhorse starts his reading of *The Hour of the Star* rightfully warning that "moreover, such a plot summary often falls within the trappings of a representational logic that interprets the impoverished protagonist, Macabéa, as a hapless victim. Lispector will maintain a far more ambitious project" (19). In *Writing by Ear: Clarice Lispector and the Aural Novel*, Marília Librandi also claims that Lispector puts in place forms of nonverbal communication that operate through modes of perception, rather than meaning.

monster, the middle class worries I might unsettle them, the lower class never comes to me" (Lispector 10).

Regarding matters of social justice, the sort of empathic energy we get from his elaboration seems to me more important than the representative experiment presumably attempted by Lispector. In this sense, more than analyzing the ways that allow us to recognize the epistemological prejudice of the discourse and the underlying social structure through which this discourse constitutes itself and is constituted, it is important to point out that Rodrigo S. M. uses Macabéa's mocking fable to challenge his own schemas and preconceptions, and compel readers to change their own schemas and preconceptions: "Anyway, it's true that I too have no pity for my main character, the Northeastern girl: it's a story I want to be cold. But I have the right to be sadly cold, and you don't" (Lispector 5).

It's true—we have no right to be "sadly cold." My alternative account of this novel's unique narrative merits focuses on describing how the epiphanic moments entail a visionary notion of the future, in the form of social hope. Instead of using *The Hour of the Star* to map an objective Brazilian reality, thinking in these terms makes it possible to encourage readers to see themselves differently. In the rest of this paper I suggest that the height of the mobilization of new self-narratives primarily takes place in the last two scenes: the consultation with the fortune teller, Madame Carlota, and Macabéa's death as a result of being run over shortly thereafter. These scenes are generally skimmed over by critics, who quickly evoke Macabéa's death in a tragic tone. But as they allow me to advance an alternative theory on how *The Hour of the Star* works, I examine both in detail.

Let us begin by examining the disruptive role of the fortune teller in the economy of the narrative. The most significant passage is the moment when the fortune teller, after describing in a somber tone the state of affairs in Macabéa's life, calls up a vision of a grand new future, a series of explosions, full of hope:

> —Macabéa! I've got great news! Listen carefully, my flower, because what I'm about to tell you is very important. It's something very serious and very happy: your life is going to change completely! And even more: it will change the minute you step out of this house! You'll feel completely different. You can be sure, my little flower, that even your boyfriend will come back and ask you to marry him, he takes it all back! And your boss will

> tell you that he's thought about it and isn't going to fire you! (Lispector 67)

Holding the future in her hands, Macabéa shudders with awe. Persuaded that she has won the right to own a destiny and to debut a set of exciting new words that express that destiny, Macabéa frees herself from the shame of a backward and immiserated Northeast, from the shadow of illiteracy and social exclusion, from the circle of violence and oppression to which she has been subjected. She can finally lead her life with her own lights.

Ravishingly, we are then taken to the most skillful rhetorical twist of the entire book: the annihilation of Macabéa. In this scene, Rodrigo S. M.'s cruelty reaches new heights—as does Clarice's lyrical pitch. As soon as she leaves the fortune teller's house, Macabéa is hit by a huge luxury car (driven by Rodrigo S. M. himself?), which leaves her lying on the street in agony: "Macabéa as she fell still had time to see, before the car fled, that Madame Carlota's prophecies were already coming true" (Lispector 70). Carried away by the prophecies, she immediately experiences a feeling of *ekstasis*, voicing it, "clearly and distinctly," through a grammatically unfinished and semantically ambiguous phrase that was one of the fourteen titles proposed by Clarice for the novel: "As for the future" (Lispector 75). Driven by a flowing glance, the mental image that arises from this open utterance has the nature of a vault into which Macabéa, who had always slogged along earthbound, may leap in a sudden moment of revelation. This wow moment leads our attention to a mixture of joy, anger, passion, and suffering that forces us to say something.

Something happens with the young girl, with Rodrigo S. M., and eventually with us. Macabéa finally stops answering back to the norms that prevented her existence. Everything else around her becomes invisible and we are too brought to epiphany, getting to grasp the sheer materiality of the young girl lying on the pavement waiting for her movie-star hour to come: "Macabéa, on the ground, seemed to become more and more a Macabéa, as if reaching herself" (Lispector 72). Even if this lyric flare is a by-product of Rodrigo S. M.'s tortured conscience, the fact that Macabéa has resorted to a word—"future"—for which she had never had a proper use makes us notice that some form of life exists under the dismantled corpse of the young girl. A life that finally was granted the right to have a name.

And what sort of name has Rodrigo provided his creature? Unlike Dalcastagnè, I don't think it's terribly important that we know who Macabéa is or where she came from. Rodrigo S. M. barely knows her himself. "Macabéa" may in fact be just a shorthand for something he cannot quite see. It can be something very personal and private, something no one would clearly identify with—and still open a large window onto history and society. The way in which this rhetorical device operates eschews any notion of verisimilitude, substituting a shiver down the spine for the visual strength of a picture. What I am trying to make clear, therefore, is that the experience of epiphany changes the way Macabéa and Rodrigo see themselves, thus making her presence more tangible to us, and *The Hour of the Star* more relevant from a moral standpoint.

That is why the narrator required a particular signature, as vigorous as it was tender and lyrical. Eloquent and stylistically elegant, the name Macabéa may be an allusion to the Maccabees. The Maccabees (a term believed to be derived from *maqqaba*, "hammer" in Aramaic) were a group of Jewish rebels who broke free from the Seleucid Empire and founded the Hasmonean dynasty, ruling Judea from 164 to 37 BC. "Life," explains Rodrigo S. M., should be perceived as "a punch in the stomach" (Lispector 74). As well as with "future," the choosing of "Macabéa" was not a mere whim. Rodrigo S. M.'s particular merit lies in shaping a catchword to denote a metaphysically neglected form of life. Instantiating this life form into the name Macabéa provides the distinction that allows us to notice the young girl whom he wasn't able to portray with clarity and rigor. Shielding a mythical figure under an aura of rebellion, Clarice urges us to harbor the idea that all lives are worth living. In this sense, Macabéa presents itself as a discomfort that has the nature of a hammer swung at the reader's conscience. Unsurprisingly, the collision that annihilates Macabéa also annihilates her creator. This bond between them makes Rodrigo S. M. realize that the world can change direction. He gets to become a different sort of person, hopefully more pluralist and democratic, capable to sense "The greatness of every one" (Lispector 76).

IV.

As I argued above, what Rodrigo S. M. calls a narrative about a poor Northeastern young girl is not such a narrative. We miss the point if we rely too much on the hopes of giving voice to what we do not know. But we also miss the point if we

think that we should rely on these hopes. Fictional writing is not limited to the merits or disadvantages of accurate representations of reality or to stretching the boundaries of the literary field into intentional political action. Reenacting the history of social relations in a concrete case, *The Hour of the Star* arguably consists of a rebuke of certain aspects of Brazilian society in the terms of a counternarrative in which readers are forced to confront themselves with ideas and attitudes toward certain groups of people.

The best explanation of how this rebuke happens is showcased early in the book, in the last paragraphs of the dedication, signed by Clarice herself. In an oracular tone, Clarice remarks that the inability to recognize what we do not know does not prevent us from understanding better certain things about the world, nor from transforming our vocabulary of moral deliberation in the light of gestures of sympathy and compassion:

> And—And don't forget that the structure of the atom cannot be seen but it is nonetheless known. I know about lots of things I've never seen. And so do you. You can't show proof of the truest thing of all, all you can do is believe. Weep and believe.
>
> This story takes place during a state of emergency and a public calamity. It's an unfinished book because it's still waiting for an answer. An answer I hope someone in the world can give me. You? It's a story in Technicolor to add a little luxury which, by God, I need too. Amen for all of us. (Lispector xiv)

Coming straight from the author, these comments make me think that the matters of representation in this novel might not be as weighty as suggested. Clarice conjures Rodrigo S. M., who evokes Macabéa and intertwines everyone in a narrative that starts with an introspective opening, gently lifts in heart-wrenching sequences, and finally unfolds in a tempestuous grand finale, toward the clean state reached by Macabéa, *the Star*: "today is the first day of my life: I was born" (Lispector 71). Macabéa, from this angle, can aptly be labeled as a kind of verbal icon with which Rodrigo S. M. rearticulates his own identity: "The action of this story will end up with my transfiguration into somebody else" (Lispector 12).

What happens to Rodrigo S. M. may well happen to us, regardless of the differences in our particular ideas and contexts. That's why I read Macabéa's death

scene not as an allegory of the social environment that keeps people like Macabéa marginalized, but as a description of how "Macabéas" can suddenly appear in our eyes and take us away from ourselves. Both are ingrained in "reality"—hence the clarity of the allusions pointed out by Dalcastagnè—but there is a sharp difference between studying a work of fiction to gather information about a country's social life in a given time period and reading a novel in search of an aesthetic bliss capable of changing the way we see ourselves and others.

I suspect this emotional upheaval is the bulk of what *The Hour of the Star* hands down to posterity. Throughout his writing Rodrigo S. M. gives us the twinkling star that he says we shouldn't wait for and, from little scraps, one note after another, he manages to develop Macabéa's melody like nobody's business. From this standpoint, Macabéa is not a conundrum Rodrigo S. M. is trying to hash over, nor a wasted life he must topple to preserve his status.

To my view, *The Hour of the Star* is prone to cause deep transformations in readers by speaking, to quote Richard Rorty, to "the need to create new ways of being human, and a new heaven and a new earth for these new humans to inhabit" (88). Rather than mirroring certain aspects of the social reality, writing *The Hour of the Star* amounts to a form of knowledge that, like a Beethoven's quartet, is more about clustering spectators around epiphanies capable of changing self-images than about illuminating autobiographical pathos and endorsing collective agitations—even if novels and string quartets can do so in a powerful fashion. We can quickly recall again the "Dedication by the Author" showing the capital importance of music in the conception of this novel: "I dedicate to the tempest of Beethoven. To the vibrations of the neutral colors of Bach. To Chopin who makes me swoon. To Stravinsky who frightened me and with whom I soared in fire" (Lispector xiii).

Rodrigo's task is done the moment he unleashes the fury of the world's dance and whirls Macabéa on to the abyss. "Take care of her"—he begs us—"because all I can do is show her so you can recognize her on the street, walking lightly because of her quivering thinness" (Lispector 11). Even if we are shown nothing but a tragic paper-thin girl walking down the street, this appeal shouldn't be treated as a frail or a less empowering form of social hope. When we come across passages like these, it certainly becomes clear that we don't know much more than before about what it's like to be Macabéa. But we also feel something pulling her and us

away, a sort of peak-experience sensation unsettling the way we see the very core of who we are.

By granting Macabéa the pitch content she needed to see herself as a dancing star, Clarice shows us a glimpse of how human beings would be more decent if we were more familiar with people very different from us. This peak-experience makes sense, and Macabéa's melody sticks in our minds, precisely in the sense that a string quartet makes sense and its melodic lines stick in our minds. As such, *The Hour of the Star*, echoing the "Dedication" homage to classical composers, is in fact closer to a string quartet than to the norms and conventions of a "realistic novel"—closer, say, to a place where joy, anger, passion, and suffering are the norm, than to a place where the norm is having an "accurate representation" in tow.

To bring this argument home, I shall end in a positive tone by offering the conclusion that the impact of Clarice's hammer did not take long to be effectively felt beyond the literary precinct. The film adaptation directed by Susana Amaral (*A hora da estrela*, 1985) is a good example of the educational twist triggered by this impact. Amaral no longer needed the voice of Rodrigo S. M. to plot the narrative and bring Macabéa to life. I agree that we are better off without him. The narrator's dismissal is actually a corollary and a materialization of the argument that I am making. Played by the remarkable Marcélia Cartaxo, the Macabéa of the film considerably exceeds the ontological limits drawn by Lispector and embodies much better the lively young girl that Dalcastagnè warmly rescues from Rodrigo S. M.'s cynicism and contempt: "a Macabéa que surge diante de nós é uma jovem que trabalha em um escritório como datilógrafa, que tem um namorado, que ouve rádio, lê jornais e revistas, vai ao cinema, ao médico, à lanchonete, à cartomante, anda, enfim, livre pelas ruas do Rio de Janeiro" (158).

Rodrigo S. M. warned us upfront that his narrative was a reminder that it is time to sympathize with the pain of the companions we share this world with. A sense of despair may overwhelm us when we read that the Prince of Darkness won and Macabéa, "a music box slightly out of tune," ended up dying (Lispector 77). Yet, behind the haze of parody and sarcasm, we intimately feel that Macabéa still shines on. At the close of the narrative, again, we realize that we don't know much more than before about Macabéa, but we are urged to embrace with affection a human being who was "despised by everyone" (Lispector 8). Rodrigo S. M.'s utterance thus comes to seem a change from within, a logical and persuasive

turning point: "My god, I just remembered that we die. But—but me too?!" (Lispector 77).

This is the kind of epiphany that has the tilt toward a counternarrative. For Rodrigo S. M.'s particular experience to extend into a general idea, it will be necessary to turn the page and branch out his story in mimetic developments, diligent works of self-cleansing, and sociopolitical attitudes. In any case, reading *The Hour of the Star* and watching Susana Amaral's film reminded me of one of Foucault's most inspiring lessons: the more an existence lurks under the crust of oppression, the more natural the language capable of facing status quo will seem.

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