"O divino para mim é real": Divinity, Maternity and Jouissance in *A Paixão Segundo G.H.*

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Abstract: In an analysis of the linguistic, feminine and spatial features of Clarice Lispector's *A paixão segundo G.H.*, this article proposes an alternative reading of the text as an aesthetic treatise on the gendered female body and female sexuality. Contemplating the textual occurrences of Freudian and Lacanian jouissance, I trace the protagonist's physical trajectory in the spatial dimension of her apartment. Through an analysis of the etymological ties between Christ's πασχειν to G.H.'s *paixão*, textual similarities to Joyce and religious linguistic wordplay, I demonstrate the particularly biological and feminized specificities of G.H.'s passion. Drawing from the theoretical work of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, I suggest that G.H. both supports and refutes the Freudian paradigm of female sexuality. Through a discursive and structural analysis, this article will also make a case for a reading of the novel as the textual representation of female autoeroticism and poetic climax.

Keywords: Clarice Lispector, *A paixão segundo G.H.*, femininity, jouissance, Lacan, Irigaray.

In *Água viva*, one of her most seminal texts, Clarice Lispector writes, "Sou limitada apenas pela minha identidade" (26). The question(ing)s of identity and perception are the most dominant of the many rhetorical and philosophical queries coursing through the author's work, particularly in her more popular texts. From the brief but intense moments of self-realization in *Laços de família* to Macabéa's tragicomic self-(un)awareness in *A hora da estrela*, Lispector's writing frequently contemplates the essentialism of identity as acts of self-knowledge and the genesis of awareness become intense labors

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of reflection and solitude. A reader can frequently become lost in the meditative labyrinths of lyrical and experimental prose, so much so that mastering its intricate—or is it simplistic—structure becomes itself an act of self-challenge. This could be just another one of the evasive author's rhetorical games. Lispector's short stories and novels are built around a philosophic preoccupation with poetic and linguistic expressions of feminine constructs and experiences, each demonstrating more intricate complexities than the last. Building upon this notion this article will focus mostly upon *A paixão segundo G.H.*, the text most representative of the author's meditations on feminine essentialism. Through an analysis of narrative structure and the text's poetic, ontological reflections, I will consider the novel's exploration of various, accented feminine components in an attempt to demonstrate how the text becomes decidedly marked with feminine characteristics and semiotics. In the article's second half, I will engage with the text's dominant religious tropes, particularly its challenging subversion of classic Lacanian identity formation, and gesture towards a possible interpretation of the narrative-as-transgression. This will engage *G.H.*'s discussion of the maternal body, notions of narrative and sexuality fluidity as well as jouissance as poetic ecstasy. Finally, I will establish the textual associations with sexuality (including auto-eroticism and orgasm), maternity and the divine mysticism of the feminine experience.

I. G.H., c'est moi!

One of Lispector's most provocative and discussed texts, *A paixão segundo G.H.* continues to elicit such strong responses and interpretations that any given analysis of the text will incorporate elements of another's discussion, uncannily reflecting the fluidity and repetition of the novel's narrative structure. When analyzing the feminine essence within *G.H.*, it's essential to begin with perhaps the most fundamental of questions driving our interpretation, that of identity. Much like *Água viva*'s unnamed narrator, G.H. is a particularly ambiguous protagonist, a discursive enigma of sorts. We can only begin to define and describe her through a meticulous analysis of the novel's interior monologue, bearing in mind its extensive use of the *não-dito* as narrative rhetoric. This stylistic ambiguity also leaves a considerable number of questions

with no definitive answers. The reader knows that G.H. is an amateur sculptress, a smoker and belongs to the upper middle-class. She is single, still within her childbearing years, travels on occasion and enjoys throwing and attending social functions. Recently separated from an unnamed and possibly married lover, she lives alone in an apartment in Rio de Janeiro, probably the Leme neighborhood. It is later revealed that G.H. has recently aborted the fruit of this relationship. Before reaching the long climax of her auto-revelation, G.H. contemplates her current sense of self and the significance of her profession:

> A G.H. vivera muito, quero dizer, vivera muitos fatos… . Cumpri cedo os deveres de meus sentidos, tive cedo e rapidamente dores e alegrias—para ficar depressa livre do meu destino humano menor … Ajo como o que se chama de pessoa realizada. Ter feito escultura durante um tempo indeterminado e intermitente também me dava um passado e um presente que fazia com que os outros me situassem: a mim se referem como a alguém que faz esculturas que não seriam más se tivesse havido menos amadorismo. (24-25)

At first, G.H. doesn't seem to differ greatly from the mould of Lispector's protagonists. For Lúcia Pires, she is a "*sketch*, um esboço de mulher" (155). A well-to-do resident of the Zona Sul, given to bouts of profound introspection and existential inquiry, we could easily conceive her as a literary neighbor or relative of the characters found in *Laços de família* or *A Legião estrangeira*. Because of Lispector's long-time residency in the Leme neighborhood, and the biographical similarities shared with G.H.[1], one could certainly perceive substitute G.H. as the author's literary doppelgänger. Even the author's most prominent devotee, Hélène Cixous, has frequently substituted author for protagonist in her multiple lectures and publications on Lispector's oeuvre. In a lecture on the hermetic short story "O ovo e a galinha," Cixous proposes that the text's literary motif, like that of *G.H.*, is one of passion. Reflecting upon G.H. at great length, Cixous writes:

> The difference between the passion according to G.H. and the passion according to the chicken is that the former progressed orthogonally, step by

> step, chapter by chapter. The trajectory went from self to cockroach... The book has time to develop between the moment when Clarice opens the door to the room where she had first seen the cockroach and the final moment when something is happening between her and the insect… . In [G.H.] one enters, one sees Clarice advance, open the door. (*Reading* 109-10)

Given that Lispector frequently incorporated elements of her own biographical experiences in both her creative and journalistic ventures, Cixous' author/ narrator exchange is certainly intentional. In an analysis of the various rhetorical elements found in *A descoberta do mundo*, a collection of various *crônicas* and narrative fragments, Anna Klobucka concludes that the resulting texts represent neither autobiography nor intimate diary entries, rather they epitomize what could be more aptly described as Lispector's self-portrait, noting that since 1964 this practice became commonplace in much of the author's work.[2] Not insignificantly, Klobucka's assertion upon 1964 coincides with the publication of *G.H.* and we can find other bio-fictional references in texts originating from the same period, such as the eponymous *Felicidade clandestina*. Set in Recife, where Lispector's family lived before relocating to Rio, the short story narrates one plump, malevolent girl's continued psychological torture of a barely-veiled literary incarnation of a thin, pre-pubescent Clarice in the continuous promise and failure to lend a Monteiro Lobato book. Cixous ascertains that the biographical Clarice Lispector is in fact the target of this passive-aggressive treatment[3]. But it was Clarice Lispector, as author and real-life figure, who had previously addressed Lobato's important literary presence in her youth.[4]

Although Cixous has continuously inserted Lispector as author/ person into the role of several literary personages, one cannot assume that all of the author's characters and their particular situations reflect specific biographical incidents within her life. A need to project authorial biography wherever it will fit within a text has become a now orthodox practice in the reader-response approaches to contemporary fiction—regardless of its appropriateness. In Lispector's very singular case, it compromises the delicate nature of a conscious rhetorical act that oscillates between the concealment and fragmentation of personal identity. As Klobucka demonstrates, this intentional technique operates on

a multifunctional level as "the discursive mode of guileless self-revelation functions as a kind of mask that at the same time disguises and allows [*the reader*] to glimpse the message repeated over and over by Lispector's self-portrait" (36).

Given the text's near exhausting theoretical, philosophical and spiritual rhetoric, we must contemplate these autobiographical masks at work in *G.H.*, though only briefly. While Lispector and G.H. share many somewhat general characteristics—both are single artistic women, upper-middle class, living in the Zona Sul (Leme)[5]—we should not read G.H. as the author's literary surrogate. Rather, in the midst of an internal struggle and an existential crisis, the protagonist represents her author as much as any other being. Assigned the far more important symbolic task of representing the human race[6], G.H. is the Everyman or woman. The choice of a central female protagonist in a narrative relying so heavily upon the symbolism and allusions of the generally patriarchal Abrahamic religions does merit discussion. What may seem an arbitrary, creative decision is instead, a meticulous and multifaceted choice, emblematic of Lispector's rhetorical style. In the opening lines of 1977's *A hora da estrela*, we find an intertextual exercise in parody, semiotics and the revision of creation myths. With a narrative finesse that posits the dialectic between biblical severity and parody, the narrator-cum-protagonist Rodrigo S.M. writes:

> Tudo no mundo começou com um sim. Uma molécula disse sim a outra molécula e nasceu a vida. Mas antes de pré-história havia a pré-história da pré-história e havia o nunca e havia o sim. Sempre houve. Não sei o quê, mas sei que o universo jamais começou. (11)

As Nelson Vieira has demonstrated, despite playing with notions of authorship, genre, gender and irony, "the novella exudes a persistent biblical tone…[the] lines parody creation, setting the stage for the tiny protagonist—a mere particle in the universe" (154). While I would counter that Macabéa is more than a mere particle and on the contrary, a domineering and castrating force that essentially rapes Rodrigo S.M., I believe that these opening sentences feature a cautious and intentional allusion to Joyce's epic *Ulysses*. Beginning with the title of Lispector's first novel, *Perto do coração selvagem*, in 1943, frequent parallels can be drawn

between the two authors' respective works and several of Lispector's texts feature intertextual references to or rewritings of some of Joyce's most famous scenarios, be they intentional or coincidental.[7] In a letter to Frank Budgen, Joyce famously declared that in his epic, Molly Bloom's frequent interjections of *yes* and its final, enthusiastic utterance in the *Penelope* soliloquy demonstrated this "female word…[indicating] acquiescence and the end of all resistance" (*Selected Letters* 278). *A hora da estrela*'s revision of the creation myth in the Judeo-Christian tradition presupposes the Penelope episode's sensual feminization of the word, thus subtly undermining the traditional—e.g. patriarchal and phallogocentric—accounts of Creationism, and instead, bases all ontological existence upon the condition of female acquiescence and affirmation. That Rodrigo S.M., the macho mask that Lispector employs in a game of narrative transvestitism, supposedly writes these lines further demonstrates the author's insistence upon a distinctly feminine component at the basis of evolution/ creation.

While the experience of the feminine sublime or Cixousian lack, impossible to represent within the Lacanian Symbolic Order, is generally attributed to Macabéa, I believe we can find its early manifestations in G.H. As Earl Fitz has rightfully suggested her characterization is both challenging and rather unsympathetic[8], but the reader's ambivalent reception of the protagonist plays into Lispector's meticulous construction of a layered, distinctly poststructuralist heroine. Amidst her confrontations with the unflattering reality of her constructed, social self, G.H.'s impending doubt and loss of identity lead to a more complex and thus, relatable protagonist. As Fitz writes, G.H. grows less of a polarizing member of the bourgeoise and, in turn, becomes "a radical, acutely self-conscious and self-questioning skeptic whose development … is marked by her growing consciousness of the role language plays in life" (100). From this perspective, G.H. is given something of a theoretical makeover: once the prototype for the modern individual in existential crisis, she is now the poststructuralist—and post-modern—subject in crisis. The intense Derridian nature of her introspection and the evaluation of language cause G.H. to reflect intensely upon the established norms and social paradigms that dominate her quotidian existence. But what purpose do notions of female sexuality and a woman's experience serve in G.H.'s overall function as the heroine of poststructuralist battle?

II. Corpus Christi or Corpus Mater?

As depicted in the four canonical gospels of the New Testament, the Passion begins a few days before Passover with the hatching of a conspiracy against Jesus Christ. Encompassing the subsequent days of psychological, physical and spiritual torture, the Passion will continue until his death on Good Friday. The Passion according to G.H. is rightfully subjected to a recurrent association with Christ and other textual signifiers as well encourage the G.H. / Christ analogy. *A paixão*'s 33 "chapters" mirror Jesus' age at death; if filled in, the six dashes that begin and end the text can read p a i x ã o.[9] Near the novel's end, even the protagonist claims "a condição humana é a paixão de Cristo" (175).

Just as Fitz proposes G.H. to be the heroine of a Derridian quest for language and analysis so too does Cixous suggest other nuanced tasks for the character. Revisiting the paradigm of Clarice-as-personage in *Vivre l'Orange,* she likens the author to a teacher.[10] As Marta Peixoto writes, "if Lispector gives and receives object lessons, Cixous, in analogous fashion, gives and receives Lispector's lessons. The benevolent exchange that Cixous observes between Lispector and objects repeats itself in the exchange between Cixous and Lispector" (*Passionate Fictions* 47). While this of course leads to the construction of Cixous as eager and faithful student, it also enables a reading of Clarice as G.H. (or Rodrigo S.M. or *Uma Aprendizagem*'s Lori for that matter) as teacher, demonstrating moments of profound realization and posting philosophical queries within the narrative. Throughout the Gospels, Christ's apostles frequently refer to him as *Rabbi* (teacher), as his sermons and parables serve as discursive moral lessons. Lispector's penchant for weaving profound and effective narratives about the most mundane of moments, particularly around such "tiny protagonists," has cultivated a great deal of scholarly and theoretical work, much of which concentrates on the poststructural concerns of language, signifiers and word play. Though I in no way suggest equating this Jewish Brazilian author with the Christian Messiah, I do believe that—from a Cixousian stance of Clarice as protagonist—one could easily consider *A paixão segundo G.H.* an epic parable of the human condition. Etymological clues also link the two; in Matthew 17:12, Christ is portrayed as πασχειν or suffering. Rendered *passio* in Latin, the present-day passion and its Romance language equivalents arrive via their respective

linguistic evolutions. Nevertheless Lispector has cleverly chosen *paixão* to convey both the spiritual and psychological anguish that G.H. will experience, but also as a linguistic link to Greek and Latin origins. In Portuguese *sofrer* signifies both "to suffer" and "to experience" thus Lispector's already dual-signifier (*paixão*) again doubles its semantic value, hinting at both the anguish and pain that G.H. will suffer (*sofrer*) and the inevitable change she will undergo (*sofrer*).

If Christ's Passion is rendered as a fulfillment of both Old and New Testament prophecies concerning the persecution of the Son of God, G.H. gives no indication of soteriological ambitions motivating her path. It seems rather that in her fastidious dawdling she actively pursues her Passion, provoking its manifest afflictions through her interior (thus written) speech acts and her psychological and spiritual queries. The nexus of her Passion is the maid's quarters where she will succumb to a labyrinth of language and philosophy but upon leaving the room, with no stable perception of her Jungian self, she engages in a realization of jouissance.

III. Jouissance, autoeroticism and poetry

A woman's jouissance, as defined by Luce Irigary in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, should be both an un-archaic and a-teleologic experience.[11] Since both of these characteristics correspond to the text's allegorically *Unheimlich* effect, can we associate its cyclical progression, as indicative of G.H.'s libidinal undertaking, with such a notion of jouissance? Because of Irigaray's stress upon women's psychosexual Otherness, we must refocus our discussion on the importance of textual components that stress G.H.'s femininity and biological sex. I contend here then that any continuation of the G.H./ Christ analogy is contingent upon an assertion and recognition of G.H.'s gender, evidencing a concise philosophical, political and artistic endeavor on Lispector's part. Such a notion, of course, will coincide with the traditional Catholic treatment of the Virgin Mary. Though Catholic dogma/ doctrine may emphasize the Holy Trinity of Father-Son-Holy Spirit, it also reserves a distinctly holy place, both spiritually and biologically for the Blessed Virgin Mary, venerated for her virgin birth and her assumption into Heaven.[12] Given Lispector's Jewish upbringing yet casually cultural observation of Catholicism, particularly in the country with the world's largest Roman Catholic population, certainly one could argue that G.H. represents a deeply

codified, radical reinterpretation of Mary. While I anticipate the possibility of such a provocative argument, I contend that because of the narrative's emphasis on contemporary feminist situations, the female body, reproduction and erotic pleasure, it does not coincide with traditional or mythological treatments of the virgin birth. As most critics argue, G.H., rather, is the female embodiment of the Every(wo)man, subjected to a passion as psychologically and existentially, though by no small way as physically, intense as that of Christ.

In Lacan's expansion of Freud's pleasure principle, if a subject continuously attempts to transgress the limitations placed upon his/her enjoyment, s/he inevitably violates these restrictions leading to jouissance, the singular coupling of pain with pleasure. Once the subject has exceeded the maximum limit of pleasure, his/her enjoyment immediately transforms into pain, thus pleasure leads to anguish, suffering and torment. Although jouissance marks the final "chapters" of Lispector's novel, one rarely equates the text with Lacan's discussion of initial moments of pleasure and enjoyment. But evidence of the contrary exists primarily within the textual construction of G.H.'s biological, gendered body. Just as one doesn't suddenly and miraculously arrive at jouissance, several exterior circumstances lead G.H. towards her self-inflicted Passion. While Janair's departure and an inferred separation from a previous lover are significant moments in her evolution of self, it is G.H.'s brief and ambivalent brush with maternity that bears considerable psychological and symbolic weight. As referenced in one of the text's several analeptic sequences, G.H.'s contemplation of the dying cockroach's neutral and fertile ovaries provokes the memories of her pregnancy and subsequent abortion:

> Lembrei-me de mim mesma andando pelas ruas ao saber que faria o aborto, doutor, eu que de filho só conhecia e só conheceria que ia fazer um aborto. Mas eu pelo menos estava conhecendo a gravidez. Pelas ruas sentia dentro de mim o filho que ainda não se mexia … (90)

G.H. comprehends the life-altering potential of her pregnancy. By fully acknowledging the fetus's corporeal presence, she recognizes future negotiations of her established identity and social self. In experiencing motherhood,

she would have to undertake an inevitable destabilization of her subjecthood, a conscious and intentional metamorphosis. The character is all too aware, perhaps hyper-attentive, to the fluid instability of selfhood:

> A identidade—a identidade que é a primeira inerência—era a isso que eu estava cedendo? era nisso que eu havia entrado? A identidade me é proibida, eu sei…me reorganizarei através do ritual com que já nasci, assim como no neutro do sémen está inerente o ritual da vida. A identidade me é proibida mas meu amor é tão grande que não resistirei à minha vontade de entrar no tecido misterioso … (98)

Identity here is inherently tied to sexual intercourse and the reproductive process. The hint of the sex act and its obvious sensate delights, neutral and indistinct as they may seem, suggest Lacan's restrictions of pleasure in his appropriation of Freud's pleasure principle. Rather than embark upon the predictable pleasure/ pain paradigm, G.H. chooses to subvert the patriarchal Freudian model, opting to abort the fetus. If, as Freud states, a woman's pregnancy signifies her sole chance of possessing the father, indicating her desire to possess his penis, then G.H.'s termination of her pregnancy deviates from this paradigm. In her expansion of the Freudian model, Irigaray hypothesizes that the pregnant subject's fulfillment is contingent upon having a son.[13] Aborting the unsexed fetus, the potential link to a textually absent and irrelevant father, G.H. rejects Freudian psychosexual conventions and negates possible readings into relationships with her parents or children who evidently do not and have never existed. Lispector's text is then exempt from the usual discourse of penis envy and the Electra complex, instead gesturing towards a more unconventional reading of female sexuality and maternity.

In her essay "Così Fan Tutti," Irigaray expertly parodies Lacan's treatise of the subject's sexualization within phallogocentric discourse. In accordance with Kristeva, Cixous and even Lacan himself, she illustrates women's exclusion from the Symbolic Order in a critique of Lacan's theories of sexual difference in language that is nevertheless grounded within these theories (85-101). Irigaray's expanded, rather cryptic treatise on woman's jouissance asserts that

it can be experienced in two forms: the first is phallic while the second is more uniquely feminine, linking sex, maternity and the female body. This Irigarayian reinterpretation of jouissance can be applied, along with that of Freud/Lacan, in diverse readings of Lispector's text.

The first possible reading, which I will develop below, reinforces the Freudian model of the pleasure principal at the base of G.H.'s experience with Lacanian jouissance. Unconventional as it may seem, I contend that one can read *G.H.* as a poetic treatise on autoeroticism as evidenced in the novel's narrative structure, poetic language and the text's physical topography. In her analysis of *Água viva*'s metaphorical and rhetorical fixation with Heideggerian philosophy, Judith Payne identifies the text's most prevalent tropes as being of birth, death, love, knowledge and existence. As developed in a quasi-epistolary discourse between the unnamed narrator/ protagonist and her unidentified male referent, these topics are encompassed in the narrative's fluid, cyclical structure and its greater questions of gender, existentialism and epistemology. Payne writes, "In *Água Viva*, the female protagonist who directs her discourse to an ambiguous narratee, refers to her body experience, and employs birth imagery as a major narrative device" (767).

This can be easily appropriated to a reading of *G.H*. Considering the unnamed, yet gendered *tu* who G.H. frequently addresses in relation to her pregnancy and its physiological processes, we're led to questions of biology, intercourse and reproduction. Her sophisticated and philosophical rhetoric, coupled with the innate sensate characteristics of her artistic profession, suggest values of aesthetic judgment and Hegelian aesthetic philosophy. In his treatise on the relationship between art and nature, Hegel stresses that the former can merely imitate the latter; beauty, as a consequential by-product is determined via the individual's subjective gaze where sensory contemplation intercedes reason. The artistic process and aesthetic judgment within the narrative extend beyond G.H.'s craft, its intense physicality encompasses both her biological self and physical body. Her sexed, maternal body becomes the nexus of aesthetic experience, jouissance and narrative. In her epistolary meditations on maternity and the sacred, Julia Kristeva illustrates the female body as "a strange intersection between *zoo* and *bios*, physiology and narration, genetics and biography.

Freud drew the map of that cleavage, adding the stages of the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious to the biological reservoir" (14). In its complexity, G.H.'s gendered body serves as a motherboard of the human experience.

G.H. must represent *gênero humano* in its totality, not simply in a post-structural or existential quest, but also in its reproductive, romantic and sexual capacities. Linking an emphasis on the aesthetic, sensate experience to that of erotic and sensual pleasure, Clarice avoids limiting G.H.'s sexuality to the reproductive act. Even Freud dismissed positing reproduction at the core of human sexuality, finding non-reproductive acts such as masturbation or kissing to be undeniably sexual (376). Via a path of semiotic, structural and intertextual clues, we are led to a reading of the text as the autoerotic experience. I wish to be clear: I am not referring to the theoretical analysis of writing as a masturbatory act, rather the auto-erotic act as mimetically symbolized in *G.H.*

The narrator's physical trajectory and the architectural layout of her penthouse apartment conjure up semiotic imagery alluding to the masturbatory act. If we envision this privileged urban space as the text and critics alike have suggested, situating it in Rio's Leme neighborhood, it would be located on either Avenida Atlântica or Rua Gustavo Sampaio (where Clarice remained until her death). Today both of these streets still house Leme's tallest apartment and condominium buildings and any one of their penthouses would offer a panoramic view of the city, as G.H. states "de lá domina-se uma cidade" (29) with the Atlantic to the south and the *Morro de Babilônia* due north. In the moments leading up to her journey into the maid's quarters, G.H. leaves the *mesa de café*, and passes through the kitchen en route to the hallway towards Janair's room. She stops in the service area and proceeds to finish smoking a cigarette at a nearby window, contemplating the building's structure:

> Olhei para baixo: treze andares caíam do edifício. Eu não sabia que tudo aquilo já fazia parte do que ia acontecer. Mil vezes antes o movimento provavelmente começara e depois se perdera … Olhei a área interna, o fundo dos apartamentos para os quais o meu apartamento também se via como fundos … O bojo de meu edifício era como uma usina. A miniatura da grandeza de um panorama de gargantas e canyons. (34)

Even within the narrative's earliest moments, Clarice employs a spatial lexicon that foreshadows uterine referents and allusions suggestive of female anatomy—*gargantas, canyons, fundo*, etc. After tossing her cigarette away, G.H. heads down the *corredor escuro* that leads to the apartment's service area, its penultimate space, and finally the maid's quarters. It is of no small consequence that she describes this area as the *bas-fond* of her house, the French language signifier standing in for a series of suggestive terms—seedy, low and perhaps most importantly, stomach or guts. As the majority of the narrative's plot and conflict will occur within this *bas-fond*, we can read *G.H.* as situated in a subtle revision of Plato's cave as metaphor for interior space and womb that stops short of hysteria. Lispector offers another puzzle of linguistic association here, one incorporating her multilingualism and adopted Catholicism. As G.H. begins to helplessly watch the cockroach ooze pus, she conjures up an idiosyncratic variation of the *Ave Maria*'s final stanzas: "Santa Maria, mãe de Deus, ofereço-vos a minha vida em troca de não ser verdade aquele momento de ontem" (75). Working from the notion of the French *bas-fond* as suggesting *intestines* or *entrailles* as included in the Ave Maria's vernacular variant ("Vous êtes bénie entre toutes les femmes et Jésus, le fruit de vos entrailles, est béni"), we can circularly associate the Portuguese version's *ventre*-as-womb with the *bas-fond* of the service area.

A variety of other signifiers evidence a reading of Janair's room as a uterine metaphor. Although we encounter an occasional adjective frequently accompanying other clichéd tropes of female genitalia (*úmido, vivo, escuro*), Lispector's continuation of the subtle analogy is expertly crafted. Once inside the maid's quarters, G.H. again evokes the womb/ stomach imagery, describing the room as "o retrato de um estômago vazio" (42). This of course foreshadows G.H's eventual contemplation of her own empty womb, leading to the analeptic discussion of her former pregnancy. But what is rather striking is the finely crafted metaphor of Janair as African queen (42), "[a] mulher que era a representante de um silêncio como se representasse um país estrangeiro, a rainha Africana" (42). Though the majority of critics read this passage in terms of racial and socio-economic inequalities[14], it also serves as decidedly pointed psychoanalytical trope. In appropriating Freud's oft-quoted and critiqued

analogy of adult female sexuality as the "dark continent," Lispector writes G.H. entering its literary embodiment, a privileged, gendered space, so intimate that even she has not ventured into it for some six months. And though Janair has previously occupied and dominated this space, her African kingdom, it inevitably belongs to G.H. and reflects both her individual taste and physical topography, as she has previously indicated, "O apartamento me reflete" (29).

We can tie in this reading of the maid's quarters as the textual embodiment of female sexuality with the autoerotic act through a discursive and structural analysis. Once again, in the intense moments of G.H.'s contemplation of the cockroach's torn body, she leads the reader to a series of sensate associations, beginning with the memory of her former lover, an unnamed man:

> Lembrei-me de ti, quando beijara teu rosto de homem, devagar … e quando chegara o momento de beijar teus olhos—lembrei-me de que então eu havia sentindo o sal na minha boca, e que o sal de lágrimas nos teus olhos era o meu amor por ti (88).

Touching upon sight, touch and taste, this associative aesthetic path leads us back to the totality and sensuality of the sensate experience. In directing her thoughts toward the former object-choice of her desire—the would-be father of her never-was child—G.H. constructs a sexual fantasy that guides the masturbatory act. Pires addresses G.H.'s frequent narrative commands to her unknown interlocutor to "*segura a minha mão*," "sem a ajuda da mão, ela não consegue avançar" (180). Furthermore, the evocation of this unknown hand serves as a referent to her absent lover, "G.H. se revela sedutora, mas também seduzida … quando presica criar uma mão imaginária para suportar o sofrimento por que passa … G.H. começa a se reconhecer como mulher" (178). Because such a task differs substantially from the philosophical struggle of the human condition, G.H.'s auto-recognition as a woman must incorporate her anatomical and sexual difference, most importantly an exploration of her biological self.

Still not convinced? Obvious as it may seem, we can re-read the inclusion of the *pré-clímax/clímax* dichotomy in the second "chapter" not just as a

meditation on Hegelian *Dasein* or Lacanian identity formation, but also as an indication of the profound changes that G.H. has experienced. Her life pre-Passion is that of the *pré-clímax* whereas the *clímax* occurs in the final pages of the narrative. As the text ends, G.H. declares "E então adoro" (179), the phrase followed by the same six dashes that begin the text. The phantom inclusion of *paixão* swells with semantic value: romantic and religious passion, suffering, experience and—profane as it may seem—links Christ's Passion to religious and sexual ecstasy via the *petite mort*. This intense cumulus of (orgasmic) sensations at the text's end mirrors that of Molly Bloom's final, capitalized and punctuated Yes (*Ulysses* 783). It is only appropriate then that *petite mort* also serves as the famous Barthesian metaphor for the pleasure of reading.

Because these final moments of pleasure end the text, I would counter that Lacanian jouissance, particularly the restrictions of the pleasure principle, are insufficient in describing G.H.'s autoerotic experience. If anything, *G.H.* demonstrates an inversion of the paradigm for her pleasure/ orgasm arrives only after she has suffered both in her mundane existence (*pré-clímax*) and after the encounter with the cockroach. She does not risk experiencing the excessive pleasure that will induce further pain. G.H.'s climatic jouissance—contingent upon her biological and gendered body, brushes with maternity and symbolic and physical self-exploration—aligns with Irigaray's secondary, exclusively female assignment. A shift in reading can also lead to an additional discussion of jouissance in the context of poetry and the act of literary production. If we accept Cixous' and Fitz's suggestions of approaching Clarice's literature as poetry, structurally possible here in the repetition of phrases that end and begin chapters, as well as approaching the text as discursive interior monologue, we arrive at a hybrid of oral literature, text and poetry. G.H. thus "writes" her text/ poetry as she speaks, therefore the act of writing itself leads to jouissance, as Kristeva demonstrates in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In a discussion that pre-dates Cixous' *Le rire de la méduse*, Kristeva inserts laughter as a metaphor for the pleasurable "practice of the text," positing that "every practice which produces something new … is a practice of laughter," thus the novelty of textual (re)production is an indication of "the jouissance invested therein and this quality of newness is the equivalent of the laughter it conceals" (224).

A paixão segundo G.H. reaches us as the bi-product of the narrator's experience/ suffering, perhaps in lieu of G.H.'s absent child. Decidedly marked with the presence of a feminine jouissance and discussions of maternity and dominated by the dark continent of female sexuality, we should no longer read the text as an intricate metaphor for the passion of a generic human race, but rather, a woman's passion, body and sexuality. Lispector's linguistic and biblical wordplay as well multiply the possibilities for cross-readings of the text's soteriological and mystical elements. As heavily commented upon as *A paixão segundo G.H.* may be, there still exists, I believe, the potential for more alternative and unconventional readings such as these.

Notes

[1] In one of G.H.'s many intense visualizations of her urban and physical surroundings, she evokes the ancient civilizations of Asia Minor. As Marta Peixoto suggests, this demonstrates Lispector's tendency to gently integrate biography into fiction as "in the 1960s, one of the favelas in Lispector's neighborhood, Leme, was called Morro da Babilônia" ("Fatos são pedras duras" 118).

[2] "it has many points in common with both genres: it may be more productively described and analysed as the writer's self-portrait' … [her] auto-graphic presence in *A descoberta do mundo* is precisely that: a complex interplay of self-referential elusiveness … with an ardently confessional emphasis on a complete revelation of the writing subject's most intimate sense of selfhood in the process of being spelt out in language … The theme of self-disclosure … manifested itself in Lispector's work as early as 1964" (30-31).

[3] In summarizing the plot, Cixous writes that the story deals with "two little girls, a fat one and a thin one, Clarice … from the moment the little fat girl tells the thin one: come, I will lend you this book—an admirable, biblical sentence—from that moment on, Clarice already has" (Cixous, *Reading* 125).

[4] In *Clarice: Uma vida que se conta*, Nádia Batella Gotlib incorporates biography into her brief discussion of the text: "[*Felicidade clandestina*] conta o clandestino prazer da menina pobre Clarice diante da posse do livro (*Reinações de Narizinho*, de Lobato), como se fosse ele um homem. Era um livro que ela não poderia comprar e pede emprestado, após as inúmeras e seguidas torturas impostas pela colega de escola" (400).

[5] After leaving her husband Maury Gurgel Valente in 1959, Lispector and her two sons returned to Brazil and settled in an apartment in Leme, where she would stay until 1966, when she was seriously burned suffering from an accidental house fire. Afterwards, she moved to another apartment in Leme, on rua Gustavo Sampaio, where she would stay until her death. While writing *G.H.*, Lispector would have been somewhere in her early forties, still relatively young—given her tendency to change her date of birth and while G.H. has had an abortion, Lispector had experienced a miscarriage years earlier on a holiday in London. In the Eng-

lish-language biography of Clarice, Benjamin Moser also draws parallels between the latter two events (196).

[6] The initials G.H. are frequently read as *Gênero Humano*.

[7] Including the Molly Bloom-esque interior monologue of the short story "Devaneio e embriaguez duma rapariga," in *Laços de família* (1960). In *Uma Aprendizagem ou O Livro dos Prazeres* the protagonist Lori begins a love affair with a college professor named Ulisses and later, in a rather erotically-charged passage, Lóri slowly walks into the early morning waves of the sea, her pet dog awaiting her on the shore. The scene is reminiscent of both Stephen Dedalus' encounter with a dead dog and subsequent masturbation upon Sandymount Strand within the Proteus episode and Leopold's eventual autoerotic encounter upon the same shores in Nausicaä within *Ulysses*.

[8] Fitz describes G.H. as "wealthy, privileged and (the social implications of her mysterious 'inner experience' aside) very bourgeois, [she] is not a character one can warm easily to" (98).

[9] By substituting these dashes with *paixão*, the text's initial lines would read, "Paixão estou procurando, estou procurando" (9) which strongly supports the idea of G.H.'s Passion as deliberate and intentional. The novel's possible last phrase, "E então adoro. Paixão" (179) would evidence a different, though no less important, connotation of the word *passion*. However, in classic Lispectorian style, these dashes remain ambiguous; other words relevant to the central narrative could be substituted as well: *barata* or *Janair*. While both undoubtly contribute to the the narrator's passion, a substitution of *paixão* in these dashes again, works best poetically and thematically.

[10] "A l'école de Clarice, nous pouvons, même s'il nous semble qu'il est trop tard, sur cette terre, et trop sombre pour que regarder ait un sens, prendre les leçons de voir vivant; apprendre à voir de trop près: à prévoir. Il fait si clair sous les yeux de Clarice" (*Vivre l'Orange* 89).

[11] "La jouissance des femmes serait—pour elles, mais toujours selon lui—irréductiblement an-archique et a-téléologique. L'impératif qui leur serait imposé—mais uniquement de l'extérieur, et non sans violence—étant « jouis sans loi »" (93).

[12] As taught within Roman Catholic dogma, the Virgin Mary "having completed the course of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" (Pope Pius XII par.44).

[13] "*L'envie d'obtenir du père le pénis sera relayée par celle d'en avoir un enfant* … le bonheur de la femme ne sera complet que si le nouveau-né est un pétit garçon, porteur du pénis tant convoité" (41).

[14] As Pires notes, Janair (as well as the cockroach) "formam uma unidade obscura, que se contrapõe à clara falta de pessoalidade de GH … seus contrapontos, Janair e a barata, são criaturas que provêm das trevas, uma da África, a outra dos subterrâneos da cidade, são duas sombras amlgamadas no contraponto de G.H." (157).

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