You have probably recognized that the title of my essay is an imitation of the title of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I have chosen to pursue a kind of meditation on creation and perhaps also on the different attitudes that men and women show with regard to becoming an artist. The moment I say that, I reproach myself for using the words *man* and *woman*. We have difficulties nowadays with those words. At first I want simply to give a kind of warning. We always get confused because of those words, but we have to deal with them, we have to struggle with them. We must be very careful not to be too fascinated and deceived by them. When I use the word *man* or *woman*, I should open a parenthesis and explain what I mean by it. The first thing I want to say is simply this: when an author signs with a woman’s name, it does not mean that the book can be said to be “feminine.” This is banal, this is obvious, but I want to say it because I myself am a victim of what I am saying. Because I thought they were the best possible examples, I had to choose Joyce and Clarice Lispector — Joyce in order to illustrate what I feel about the artist as a young man and Clarice Lispector because of what she has to say about women. And it happens that he is a man and she is a woman. It could happen a little differently, maybe a man would have had something to say about female or “feminine” writing, or vice versa. And so every time I say “masculine” or “feminine,” or “man” or “woman,” please use as many quotation marks as you need to avoid taking these terms too literally.

I’ll tell you a series of stories regarding the first story in the world, which is Genesis. I’ll tell you something about how an artist is formed, about what actually makes an artist. The genesis of an artist is not unrelated to genesis generally speaking. There is a whole genre of literature which is concerned with that, the *Bildungsroman*, and this is what I’m going to speak about — about *Bildung*, about the education, the formation of the artist: But what I am interested in is the libidinal education of the artist, that is, what in his/her libidinal structure, in his/her affective, in his/her psychic structure is going to be determined particularly by sexual difference.

**Urszene or “Cènes Primitives”**

I’ll start with the opening of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*
Man. All the pieces I refer to deal with one scene which one could call a Primitive Scene, and when I use the expression "primitive scene," I use it in every possible way: that is, you'll think in Freudian terms of the primitive scene, and in some ways, the scene is a primitive scene, having to do with discovering a forbidden secret. But I'd like you also to consider the primitive scene in the way we would write the word cena in French without an "s"; without an "s," it means "the meal." "The primitive scene" is also "the primitive meal." The first scene, or the initiating scene of the artist, or of the artistic human being, is composed of the usual characters: the parents, father and mother, and so on. Of course, such a scene immediately brings into question the enigma of origins. The main character in this scene is somehow impersonal: it is the Law and its representative the Word — Words. Another very important character is the apple, the fruit, whichever you like, the meal. And then, usually, one finds the rest of creation — birds, hens, whatever.

During the first s-scene, there will emerge the questions that will be the essential questions of the life of the artist, particularly the question of knowing, of the desire for knowledge, of the means of knowing, and of the symbolic value of knowing. There are two types of knowledge: there is the knowledge we learn here in universities, which is the knowledge of knowing, which has to do with mastering; and there is another type of knowledge, which does not derive from higher education, but from the highest education, and that is knowing through pleasure — it is pleasure itself. In the first s-scene, there is a kind of struggle between the two types of knowing, the pleasurable and the symbolic. Which is going to win? That is the question.

The Taste of Knowledge

Now, I'll simply recall briefly the familiar story of Eve. She goes through the test of the apple. She is told by He who is called God that she must not eat the apple. She is told that she mustn't, because otherwise she is going to die. And this is a completely opaque message. It does not mean anything for her, since death does not exist in Paradise. This will give birth to Milton's Paradise Lost and even to all philosophy. So the message is: "Don't." That's all: "Don't." And there is the other message, that of the apple, which says: "Try me, I am beautiful." There is no reason why she should not try, because the death message is meaningless. So she tries, because she is a woman. That is what the Bible says, and it is probably true.

I think it is true that her decision must have been determined by something "feminine" in her structure, particularly her desire and her non-fear of knowing what is inside. So knowledge started for all of us with knowing with the mouth, by tasting. Taste is the first act of knowledge, for women and for all men who are women. And the price of it has been exile, death, but also work, art, creation.

It is very interesting to see when reading Bildungsroman that this primitive scene comes up immediately, of course with some variations. There is a very old primitive scene which is extremely interesting in a story I like, the story of Percival the Welshman, a medieval quest story. Percival is a kind of mixed being. Although he is supposed to be a man, he is a woman's son. His father has completely disappeared, and he has been brought up in a wild way. He is always called "wild" in the story. Percival has been living in a very happy way, in a forest, which of course is the mother figure, but since he is after all a boy and a man, he is
going to become a real, proper man by going through a series of tests which make up the quest.

The first thing that happens to him is that he goes out of the forest and meets with real knights in full armor, with swords and helmets. And they are so brilliant and invisible in a way that he thinks they are angels, and he falls in love with them. Then starts his real, manly education. In the second episode he finds himself in a castle which belongs to a man called “The King Fisherman,” and this man is paralyzed, that is, he is a figure of castration. Percival is invited to a huge meal, which is fantastic, and he enjoys it considerably and keeps eating. During the meal, he sees somebody crossing the hall, bearing all kinds of dishes to another room. This happens several times and every time with great ceremony. Now and then he also sees a long lance going through the room with blood dripping from it, and he keeps wondering: What is that? What does that mean? Where is it going? But he had been told, just before entering the castle, by a wise man who acts like a kind of teacher, that good men mustn’t ask questions, that is impolite and that one mustn’t. So he refrains from asking questions, although he really would like to know.

At this point the narrative starts threatening Percival. The narrative starts saying: You know, Percival, you are doing wrong. You should ask questions. Something horrible is going to happen if you don’t ask questions. Ask questions! But the narrative speaks mutely in the book at the enunciation level. Percival does not understand, does not hear. And when the meal comes to an end, suddenly there is a huge explosion, and the narrative shouts: You see what you have done! You haven’t asked questions, and so you’ll be punished. Now you are a horrible sinner, and because of you the world has lost a second time. The King Fisherman, who would have been saved by Percival if he had asked questions, will remain paralyzed for eternity.

When we read that, we are completely appalled. If we are innocent, as we supposed to be, we do not understand what happened because Percival did what he was told to do. And then something in the narrative said that he should have done just the contrary, which is completely incomprehensible, illogical, and mysterious. But that is it. And the moral of the story is — this is exactly the mechanism of the law — that we are guilty. We have got to learn about guilt, and the best way to do that is to be completely innocent. The first stage in education is to come to know the law as it is, that is, as pure law, pure interdiction, pure “you mustn’t,” which makes for its power. The law is completely negative, it is absolute, and it gives no signs, except that kind of strange order. In fact, in the beginning, there was a “Not” or a “No.” Whereas, in the beginning of the women’s bible, there is the “Yes” of Molly Bloom.

An illustration of the power of the law is a very famous little text by Kafka, called Before the Law (Vor dem Gesetz). It starts this way: “Before the law, there stands the doorkeeper.” A man from the country asks for admittance to the law. The doorkeeper says: You can’t come in. And the man says: When can I go into the law? And the doorkeeper says: I don’ know, maybe later. The doorkeeper is a big man with a big beard, and he looks very fierce. So the little countryman just stands in front of the law and waits. And he waits all his life. By and by he changes, because time passes, and he becomes very, very small, bit-size, as small as a pea. In the meantime, the doorkeeper has grown very tall and the countryman looks up at the beard of the doorkeeper. He is about to die and suddenly he has an idea. He had been thinking all the time in front of the law, and he suddenly realizes that during all these years he has never seen anyone coming to the law and asking for
entrance, as he has. So he asks the doorkeeper, How is it that no one has come and
done as I did? And the doorkeeper shouts very loudly because the man is actually
already dead, "Because this was your own door," and he shuts the door.

So the little countryman will never have known anything about the law? He
will never have known whether the law had an inside. He didn’t step in, he didn’t
go over the threshold, he stayed there all the time. So he did not know anything
about the law, that is, he knew everything about the law. All his life he stayed in
front of the law, just as the law wanted. So he was in the law without knowing it.
And, of course, it was his own door, his own law; he made law to himself (which is
called autonomy). We behave as country people when we read Kafka’s fable.
Because we read "Before the law stands the doorkeeper," and we go on reading
and staying in the front of the door of the text, and go on and die. And suddenly
we can ask, we can wonder, But what is the law? The text-as-law functions
the moment the sentence starts; we are in front of the sentence exactly as in front of a
door, and we don’t move. We don’t even think about it.

**In Front of the Pome: The Sound of the Law**

Now to take the little text by Joyce, which is exemplary of what an artist,
not a countryman, is going to do with the law when he is in front of the law. These
pages tell us everything about the artist. They start like a kind of fairy tale, and we
have everything that makes a human being: "a cow," as a mother, of course, and "a
baby tuckoo." The first adult character who comes to the page is the father: "His
father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy
face." Who is "he"? We don’t know. There is a confusion of personal subjects in all
the text. "He was baby tuckoo." We don’t know whether it is the father or the baby
who is "he." But the father is hairy, exactly as the doorkeeper; that is, he is a real
"man." Now, the little boy is going to get educated in two pages. On the first page,
there are three very short poems. The first is:

O, the wild rose blooms
On the little green place.

And the second:

Trai la la la
Trai la la la
Trai la la la.

In these two pages, Stephen Dedalus becomes a boy, a son, and an artist, and this
is the way it goes. First he has to face the father, who tells him the story. The
father is his own storyteller. The mother, who is the classical anal mother — that
is, she makes him clean, body and soul — has a very special role because she
makes him dance on the piano. For Joyce, the mother is also a substitute for the
church: she makes him move like a puppet, but she is second to the father. Then
comes a series of little events, and the final and most important event comes on the
next page: "The Vances lived in number seven." Exactly as in a nursery rhyme:
They lived in a shoe.
They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen’s father and mother. When they
grown up he was going to marry Eileen. He hid under the table. His mother said:

—— O, Stephen will apologise.

Dante said:

—— O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.

And the chapter finishes this way:

Pull out his eyes.
Apologise.
Apologise.
Pull out his eyes.

Apologise,
Pull out his eyes,
Pull out his eyes,
Apologise.

This is the first work of art of Stephen the artist. How did it happen? It is exactly the story of Percival or of Eve. He has been threatened with a horrible
chastisement, and doesn’t know why, of course. It is because he hid under the
table? Or did he hide under the table because he was already threatened? We don’t
know anything about it and he doesn’t either. The whole thing comes down to his
mother saying that he is going to apologize — so he is guilty; then he can commit
his sin. And aunt says: “O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.” And
he becomes Prometheus, Oedipus, and Stephen. And what does he do? He makes a
poem out of it, a little poem with rhymes. He had picked up the word “apologize”
and subverted it into a little poetry, which is his way of playing with the law. What
he does — and this is already a big difference and all art goes through this
difference — is that he accepts the law in order to transgress it. And he
transgresses by being attentive to what is inside the words. He enjoys it, so what
he will take care of is the sound of the law, not the message of the law. This is how
he becomes an artist.

I want to compare Joyce’s text, noting a large difference, with a text by
Clarice Lispector. Clarice Lispector is a Brazilian writer, and for me she is the
greatest writer in the twentieth century.¹ I rank her with Kafka. Her first book,
which she wrote when she was only seventeen, was called *Near to the Wild Heart.*
Now, “near to the wild heart” is a part of a sentence from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* It is a quotation. But Clarice Lispector didn’t know anything about
Joyce when she wrote that text. A friend of hers told her: “This makes me think of
*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,*” and he suggested the title. *Near to the
Wild Heart* is the story of the making of a young woman who will become an artist.
In a small chapter called “The Bath,” we see her in an episode which is extremely
telling. The girl is about twelve when this happens.

At the moment when the aunt went to pay for the purchase, Joana took the book and put
it carefully with the others, under her arm. The aunt turned pale.

In the street the woman searched carefully for the words:
—— Joana... Joana, I saw...

Joana gave her a rapid look. She remained silent.
—— Well haven’t you anything to say? — couldn’t contain herself the aunt, her snivelling
voice.
  — My God, whatever is to become of you?
  — Don’t be frightened, Aunt.
  — But still only a little girl... Do you know what you did?
  — I know...
  — You know... know the word?...
  — I stole the book, is that it?
  — But, God protect me! I don’t even know to do anymore, since she admits it besides!
  — You made me admit it.
  — You think one can... one can steal?
  — Well... maybe not.
  — Why then?...
  — I can.
  — You?!” cried the aunt.
  — Yes, I stole because I wanted to. I will steal when I want to. It doesn’t do any harm.
  — God help me, when does it do harm Joanna?
  — When one steals and one is afraid. I’m neither happy nor sad.

In this way she is innocent. She is very, very far from the law, actually outside the reach of the law. There is an echo of this, but not at all in the same way, in Joyce Stephen proclaims: “non serviam” (I won’t serve). She doesn’t say even that. She says: the sin is to be afraid. If I am not at war with myself, then I am innocent. It is a very strong position. She stole a book. The book is her apple.

The Mother Father of the Artist

Let’s look at the passage called “The Father,” the passage that opens the book. The first lesson is a lesson of the law of life, not the law of law and interdiction, but the law of life, the law of the living. The girl’s world is introduced by “Papa’s machine.” Again, a Papa is there, he is writing, and he has the machine. He is a real father, and has everything a father should have. The little girl is immediately alerted by all the sounds around her. She has an ear, which is very important for the artist, as it is for Joyce, and she is extremely bored. So the first observation she makes is in the second paragraph:

Leaning her forehead against the cold, bright window-pane, she looked at the neighboring courtyard, the big world of the hens-who-didn’t-know-they-were-going-to-die. And she could feel as if it were quite close to her nose the warm, tightly-packed earth, so fragrant and dry, where she knew very well, knew very well one earthworm or another was stretching itself before being eaten by the hen that the people were going to eat.

She does know about life and death, through the experience of hens: this is her first remark on the world, and it is not that of Stephen Dedalus. Then we attend the first moment of creation.

This comes very soon, as in Joyce, and she is going to create a poem under the same kind of conditions: she doesn’t know what to do with herself, so she tries to attract the father’s attention. This is going to be a recurrent theme.
She dismissed the difficult thought distracting herself with a movement of her bare foot on the dusty wooden floor. She rubbed her foot, looking askance at the father, waiting for his impatient, nervous look. Yet nothing came. Nothing. Difficult to aspirate people like the vacuum-cleaner.

— Papa, I've invented a poem.
— What is it called?
— Me and the sun.

Translate: Me and the father.

Without waiting long she recited: — "The hens that are in the courtyard have already eaten two earthworms but I didn't see."
— Yes? What do you and the sun have to do with the poem?
She looked at him for a second. He hadn't understood...
— The sun is above earthworms, Papa, and I made up the poem and didn't see the earthworms...
— Pause. — I can invent another one right now: "O sun, come and play with me."

Another bigger one:

"I saw a little cloud
poor earthworm
I think that he didn't see,"
— Very pretty, little one, very pretty. How does one make up such beautiful poetry?
— It isn't difficult, you have just to go along saying.

Now you know everything about how to make a poem, but you have got to have the father's attention, and it is going to be a certain type of poetry and writing, if you keep in mind the hens that are going to die and the earthworms that are going to be eaten.

What about the father? He presides over all creation. All those biographies or autobiographies or Bildungsromane give the father a very special place. We know about Kafka's father. Joyce's father was very important. For Clarice Lispector, whose work will become a model of "feminine" writings, the father was there too. How? She is the father's daughter, and he is really the one to whom she refers before she does anything. She either acts against him of for him, but she is always under his eyes. He legitimizes the artist. The chapter called "The Mother" starts ... with the father (!):

One day the father's friend came from far away and they embraced each other. At dinner-time, stupefied and contrite, Joana saw a naked yellow hen on the table. The father and the man were drinking wine and from time to time the man said:
— I really can't believe that you managed to have a daughter...

Which is indeed surprising, for there is no mother in the mother chapter, only the naked yellow hen on the table — and the man are going to eat the hen.

Laughing the father turned toward Joana and said:
— I bought her down at the corner...
The father was gay and grew serious too, making little balls with the bread.

The father has bought himself a daughter, and this is the way it always goes; but
this is positive in a way. He wanted a daughter, and he did what he had to do for that. Actually she is so much the daughter of the father, that this is what is said as regards her future or her fate:

— What are you going to do when you grow up when you’re a young woman and everything? [says the friend]
— As for everything she hasn’t the slightest idea, my dear fellow —— declared the father
— but if she doesn’t get angry I’ll tell you about her plans. She told me that when she grows up she’s going to be a hero...

Of course everybody laughs except te little girl. It is true that she starts by being the father’s hero, the father’s tiny hero. This is completely phallic, and we have to admit that. But does it mean that this is the end? No. What Clarice points out all the time is that the mother is all important, even if she is dead, even if she is absent, even if she is only a naked hen on the table. In the next chapters, the theme of the mother will emerge again and again as remembrance until actually she, in a way, is resurrected within the daughter.

Something extremely beautiful is that, at the second moment when Clarice, the tiny little girl, has consulted the father regarding what she should do, she starts working on words, a little like Joyce, but what she works on is the sex of words:

— Papa, what shall I do?
— I already told you: go and play and leave me alone.
— But I’ve already played, I swear to you.

This goes on and on. The father finally gets bored and says:

— Hit your head against the wall!
She moves away making a little braid in her smooth hair. Never never never yes yes, she sings very softly. She has learned how to braid lately.

Now, if we are good Freudians, we’ll see that this means that she has learned to write. Freud has indeed formulated this hypothesis, that writing came from braiding, and particularly braiding the hair of the sex. So this is what she does. She braids her hair; that is, she already knows how to write. The first words that come out are: “Never never never yes yes....” And what does she think about the words?

Mistress of the house husband children, green is man, white is woman, flesh-colour can be son or daughter. Is “never” man or woman? Why is “never” neither son nor daughter? And “yes”? Oh, there were many entirely impossible things. One could spend entire afternoons thinking.... Never never yes yes. Everything was like the noise of the tramway before falling asleep, until until one feels a little fear and one sleeps.

This chapter ends with the little girl going to sleep on the words “never,” “yes,” and “the sex,” and in the arms of the father.

It was the embrace of the father. The father meditates for a moment. But no one can do anything for the other, one helps. The child goes along, so free, so slight and precocious.... He breathes hurriedly, shakes his head. A little egg, that’s it, a live little egg. What will become of Joana?
The father is a kind of hen too.

This is also an important feature, and we’ll see it recur in a fantastic little Lispector text called “Sunday, Before Going to Sleep” (“Domingo, antes de Dormir”). This story says everything about the relation between the artist-daughter and the family. In Brazilian, the signifiers play on the masculine and feminine all the time: the main signifier, the word Sunday is “Domingo,” which means the day of the Master, and it is masculine. The whole story is inserted within Domingo, within Sunday, or within the father; it starts with the masculine, but it finishes with the feminine.

In the final sentence the masculine Domingo turns out to be the feminine night. This is how the Brazilian text plays with genders, both exchanging them and en-gendering them!

Domingo foi sempre aquela noite imensa que gerou todos os outros domingos e gerou navios cargueiros e gerou água oleosa e gerou leite com espuma e gerou a lua e gerou a sombra gigantesca de uma árvore pequena.

The great Domingo(d) has eventually given a textual birth to “uma árvore pequena,” a little sha-tree. The wee tree, both feminine and phalic, stands small and erect at the end of the Domingo(ne) world.

The ends of the text are then phallic though feminine.

As for the middle of the text, it has a center, a visible some, constituted of words which are underlined in the original. Twice underlined: typographically and linguistically, since those attractive signifiers are imported from foreign languages. This is how this Brazilian receptacle of foreign immigrants looks:

Foi quando conheceu ovomaltine de bar, nunca antes tal grosso luxo em copo alto, mais alenteado pela espuma, o banco alto e incerto, the top of the world. Todos esperando.

“Ovomaltine” and “the top of the world” are two strange expressions, which are there in order to indicate that there is “the top of the world”, there is a superior world which is the world of art and of words. And now we are going to see how the little Eve reaches the world. Instead of the apple, we have “ovomaltine.” (Ovomaltine is a kind of chocolate drink that is made in Switzerland.) This is the story about the discovery of the mystery of ovomaltine. It starts with the father taking the family to the city. He takes the daughters out on Sunday, so there is going to be a feast. He has a privileged relation with the youngest daughter, which is the way it always happen: it is the King Lear’s way. Everything is a little magical because it is Sunday, because it is Domingo, because it is the father. They go to a bar. And what happens in the bar? First of all, they sit on stools and the stools are swivelling, and they go higher and higher; everything becomes elevated under the father’s influence. “The youngest daughter wanted to sit on one of the stools, the father found it amusing. And this was gay.” And the father was satisfied, and God thought it was good, “She then acted more charming and already this was not so gay.” What happened then? She wanted to please the father, and she immediately lost grace, exactly as one loses grace when one becomes over-narcissistic. She wanted to be higher and higher and nicer in the eyes of the father, even too much so.

Then there came the test of the meal, but this meal was not going to be an apple: “To drink, she chose something that wasn’t dear.” That’s to please the father, because they have different economies; he is for not spending, and she is
for spending:

...although the swivelling stool made everything dearer. The family stood, waiting. Timid and voracious curiosity with regard to joy. That was when she knew bar ovomaltine, never before such a great luxury in a tall glass, heightened more by the foam, the high and uncertain stool, the top of the world. Everyone waiting. She fought from the first against the nausea but went on to the end, the perplexing responsibility of the unhappy choice, forcing herself to like what must be liked, from then on mixing, with the minimal excellence of her character, a rabbit’s indecision. Also the astonished distrust that ovomaltine would be good, the one who isn’t worth anything is me.

What she has to decide is this: If what I think is good is bad, then I am the bad one. And that’s the way women usually act.

She lied that it was the best because standing there they were witnessing the experience of dear felicity: did it depend on her that they believed or not in a better world? [It did depend on her.] But all of that was surrounded by the father, and she was well within this small world in which walking hand in hand was the family.

And just before falling asleep, she has a vision of the world:

Out of the window, on the white wall: the gigantic and fluctuating shadow of the boughs, as if of an enormous tree, which in truth did not exist in the patio, there only existed a meager bush; or the shadow of the moon. Sunday [that is, the father] was always that immense night that engendered all the other Sundays and engendered cargo ships and engendered oily waters and engendered milk with foam and engendered the moon and engendered the giant shadow of a little tree.

So the father is all-engendering, but he is the mother. Father was always that immense mother that engendered everything. And the father’s side of creation is that it is all made of shadows and appearances. What the little girl has learned there is that the creation of the father, the world of the father, is a world of appearances that are bigger than reality. And she is, when is a girl, contained within the father although she knows about reality and about truth; but Domingo, the father, must remain this huge night otherwise he would vanish, of course, as a shadow. She is conscious of that. She realizes that there are two worlds: one is the world of pleasure and truth, the other the world of wanting to please the father and of having to lie in order not to hurt him. She also discovers the world of language: “ovomaltine” has a bad taste but it has a nice sound, particularly when it is “de bar.” This is a kind of deconstruction of the superficiality of the law. The foam is the truth of the law. When she says that the one who is not worth anything is herself, this is really a description of sublimation. She is willing to pay for the father. But as a writer she will choose the other world because she is the one who has tasted of the other side.

Clarice, in all her works — and this is her courage — will always say that she knows about the part of the father, she knows how to deconstruct it, but she does not abolish it, she shows it, and the she goes beyond it. What she is going to do later is to state the truth about ovomaltine, that it has a bad taste and that she wants to throw it up. But she will go even further until the time when she can even try to swallow it in order to know everything about life, even what is bad, what is disgusting, until she reaches the point where she can say that everything is as good
as anything. She is going to look for a kind of equivalence, not because she abolishes taste, but because she wants to respect everything exactly as it is, because she wants not to lie.

Clarice is going to lead us on a quest for the truth of existence — the truth of life, which is something very difficult. In a way, she will become a kind of mother. Of course, this is idealistic, since not all mothers are good. But what she becomes is a kind of mother of creation, a mother of life, and this will consist in what she calls taking care of things very carefully. She will finally elaborate a kind of philosophy, or even a kind of set of morals.

I have given names to the types of attitudes she reaches, the first one is the art of having. What she points out in many books is that many human beings have lots of difficulties in having what they have. We don’t know how to have what we have — the moment we have, we lose.

The Art of Having What We Have

“Clandestine Felicity” is the story of a young girl — of course, she is Clarice Lispector herself — who desires madly to be lent a beautiful book, and this book is in the hands of another little girl who is a horrible little girl, a nasty little pest, and this little girl has a very special position because her father is a bookshop keeper — so she is the happy one. The little girl tells Clarice: I’ll give it to you, you come to my house, and you’ll have it. The idea of getting the book immediately transforms Clarice into what she calls the hope of joy. She herself becomes an incarnation of the hope of joy, she is pure joy, pure hope, and she does not live anymore, she swims in a kind of suave sea. Now she runs, or she flies, or she swims through the city, and she comes to the house of the other little girl who opens the door and says: Oh, I forgot you know, I gave it to somebody else, but why don’t you come tomorrow? So Clarice goes away and thinks: tomorrow, and tomorrow becomes hope, and she says tomorrow will come, and tomorrow is already today, and she is again full of joy. So tomorrow, which is today, she comes back, flying, swimming, and so on through the city and she comes to the door, and the little pest opens it and says nastily: Oh, I completely forgot. I gave it to somebody else, so please come tomorrow: and this goes on and on.

The bookshop keeper’s daughter keeps Clarice on tenterhooks all the time. She is sadistic, and she thinks that she is torturing Clarice, but Clarice is in Paradise because she is hoping and hoping and hoping, and she is full of tomorrows. Finally, because it is a real story, one day the mother of the little pest appears and she wonders why that little girl is coming every day and what she is doing there, and she discovers the whole game. And it happens that she is a good mother, so she is disgusted with her own daughter and immediately puts a stop to the thing. She brings the book to Clarice and says: You can keep it for the time you want. And immediately Clarice is the wealthiest person on earth because she has everything she wanted, for all the time she wanted. An ordinary girl would lose everything immediately, she would read the book and it would be finished. But Clarice has a kind of instinct, and now that she has the book she manages to keep her having of the book, and for this she invents an art of having which is fantastic. She runs home with the book but doesn’t begin to read it. First of all she goes to the kitchen, she makes herself a sandwich, and she eats the sandwich as she would eat the book. Then she creates all kinds of sham difficulties: she puts the book somewhere and forgets where she has put it so she can hope and have it tomorrow.
She looks for it everywhere, she finds it again, and all this finally is the creation of "clandestine felicity." She has invented having forever, and she says: "How I delayed!... I was a delicate queen." But to become a "delicate queen" is very difficult, if you try. Clarice has this relation to the object of desire: it is a book that she desires, but she treats it exactly as if it were a lover or an apple.

The Art of Keeping Alive

"The Foreign Legion" teaches something a little different. It is a kind of tragic story which tells about the impossibility of people keeping what they love and how to learn not to lose what is loved. It has to do with the art of giving and the art of keeping. This is not the same as the art of having, as we will see. In this story Clarice is an adult woman. She has a kind of forced little girl friend, called Ofelia, who has imposed herself on her. Ofelia comes every day, and it is the master of the situation. She keeps giving advice to Clarice, saying that everything she does is wrong, that she doesn't know how to bring up her boys, and that she has bought too many things in the supermarket, and so on. She acts exactly as if she were the law, this tiny little girl, and Clarice is fed up with her; but she respects her.

One day something very important happens. Clarice has bought a little chick for her own children, and suddenly the little girl Ofelia hears the cheeping of the chick, which is in the kitchen, and the little girl herself changes. She, in a way, dies and is born again, and this is how it happens: she is suddenly torn by the pain of desire. She has never desired anything in her life, and this simple cheeping of the chick has gone through her and torn her apart. And now she is exposed to what Clarice calls the best in the world, that is a chick. One can understand that it stands for a child. This little girl, then, goes through a crucial test, because for her, to accept desire is to acknowledge that she wants something and that she lacks something, and she is much too proud to admit that. So she suffers terribly, she struggles against desire and finally, thank Good, desire wins. That is, she gradually and painfully allows herself to desire what she desires.

Clarice sees the little girl as being at the same time her own mother, as giving birth to herself by a kind of partition. A Lacanian would describe this as the somewhat comparable experience of division — but the little girl is divided by herself, by her own desire, and in an agony of pain she finally gives birth to herself as a desiring being and admits to herself that she desires the chick. During that time, Clarice is working very hard in order to give the child the chick. And how can she succeed in giving the child the chick? In not giving her the chick. Because the girl is so proud and so hard that if Clarice gives her the chick, she will reject it. So she must proceed obliquely and help the girl gain access to the object by effacing herself. She says that she becomes the silence for the girl, that is, she accompanies the girl during all that metamorphosis by keeping silent, by looking at her, by witnessing her transformation and not touching her, not suggesting anything to her. She helps her to be free and goes as far as to help her finally to express her desire with words. In the end, when the girl had admitted there is a chick and asks: Can I go to the kitchen? Clarice says: Go to the kitchen if you want to, do what you want. And she obliges the little girl only by these words to want what she wants, not to deny that she wants what she wants. But the message suggested is solemn and mystical: "Go to the mountain" she insists. For it is in the going to the (kitchen) mountain, that the little girl will once find the strength to feel that the
mountain can walk to her.

The little girl finally reaches the kitchen. It has been a very long way, and there is love between the girl and the chick. Then, there is a silence. Clarice goes on working, and suddenly she becomes aware of something very ominous in the silence. The little girl comes back and says in a very polite and unusual way: I think I’m going to go back to my place. Clarice runs to the kitchen and, of course, she discovers that the little girl has killed the chick. Why? It was too much for the little girl, she was not ready. She went a long way in order to desire, and in the end, she just couldn’t keep what she had desire. She had had as much as she could have, neither more nor less, and as little as she could have them. She is at the stage when she can possess only in losing. And this is tragic. Clarice runs up to her and shouts, but the little girl is too far away in history to hear her; she shouts: You mustn’t be afraid, don’t be afraid because we don’t know how to love well, we’ve got to learn how to love well. Sometimes one kills out of love, after that one forgets and one learns how to love well without killing. This lesson deals with living beings, but then Clarice will extend the respect of life to everything that exists, including the inanimate.

The Art of Blessing

"The Partaking of the Bread" is an illustration of what one can call the art of blessing or the benediction of things as they exist. It is different from the stories I have already discussed, because it is much more symbolical; it is a general metaphor of respect. It is the story of an invitation which is addressed to no one. People come into a place, they are in a bad mood, and suddenly they discover that a table has been set with all kinds of wonderful things to eat and drink and that it has been set for no one, for he who comes, for strangers. But since it has been set gratuitously, without any intention, without being dedicated to anyone in particular, it is really for mankind. And this is a shock for those who come in — the first instance of awareness in this text. And then, not only are those who have not been invited but who are welcome, treated magnificently, but also everything on the table is perfect and beautiful. All things shine as "epiphanies" of themselves (Joyce would say) because everything is so beautifully arranged. Everythings stands by itself, and as Clarice says, "everythings is clean of twisted human desire." There has not come between all the things and all the human beings anything that could spoil the pure beauty by an addition. There is no "foam", there is no "swivelling stool," there is no added desire, there is nothing that disfigures the things or the persons: "Everything is as it is, not as we had wanted." There has not been any projection of desire. We project desires on people we cant. We want them to be as we want them to be. Here the tomatoes are just exactly round, beautiful, red tomatoes, and they are "for no one." They are just pure tomatoes, absolute tomatoes. And everything is this way. Everything is "existing and whole":

Just as a field exists. Just as the mountains. Just as men and women, and not us the avid ones. Just as a Saturday. Just as barely exists. Exists. In the name of nothing, it was time to eat. In the name of no one, it was good. Without any dream.

And she proceeds by describing the cleanliness of it — without any dream, without any excessive desire. She goes very far, she even says "without tenderness": "I ate without the passion of piety. And without offering myself to hope." That is, without
the future coming over and crushing the present; and "without nostalgia," that is, without the past brushing the present away. This is a lesson in respecting things as they exist, by not making them subservient to any type of human interference. In the name of no one, it is good; that is really the ultimate lesson.

What I want emphasize is the "on one." One can reach that point of equanimity, which is also felicity, only if one has been able to achieve a very difficult attitude toward oneself. This is what Clarice calls "de-personalization," getting rid of the ego, coming to the point where one is so free of egocentrism that one can be open completely to the other. And this is how she describes it in one of her best books, The Passion According to G.H. The idea is very precise: she does not deny desire, she keeps desire, but as long as desire is not disfiguring.

I have avidity for the world, I have strong and definite desires, tonight I'll go down and eat, I won't use the blue dress but the black one. But at the same time I don't need anything. I don't even need a tree to exist. I don't impose my need on things, they exist without my asking them, demanding them, to be there. I know now of a mode that dispenses with everything — and also with love, with nature, with objects. A mode that dispenses with me. Even though as for my desires, my passions, my contact with a tree — they continue being for me like a mouth eating.

This paradoxical. One mustn't think — and she insists on this, she is very clear about it — that she is against love. She is for good love, she is for the love that respects, for the love that doesn't try to appropriate, but that lets things remain as they are, and lets other human beings be as they are. She is on the way to defining how to be a woman. This is how she defines it:

Everything that characterizes me is scarcely a mode by which I am more easily visible to others and by which I end up being superficially recognizable to myself. As there was a moment in which I saw that the cockroach is the cockroach of all cockroaches, so I want for myself to find in me the woman of all women. De-personalization as the great objectification of oneself. The greatest exteriorization one reaches. The first step in relation to the other is to find in oneself the man of all men, the woman of all women.

Every woman is the woman of all women, on condition that "de-personalization" has taken place. When one reaches that, when one is courageous enough to drop the heavy self and open to the other, then everything can happen, then one becomes really "the woman of all women." This is what she calls the secret mission of life: "The gradual de-heroization of oneself is the true work that labors (with itself) under the apparent work, life is a secret mission." She expresses this by a kind of metaphor: the getting rid of the name.

The de-heroization of myself is undermining subterraneously my building, accomplishing itself, unbeknownst to me, like an ignored vocation. Until it be finally revealed to me that the life in me doesn't have my name. And I too have no name, and this is my name. And because I de-personalize myself to the point of not having my name, I answers each time that someone says: I.

This is difficult to achieve, but one at least has to try. When one achieves what Clarice achieved, then one reaches what she calls, in a beautiful way, the "point of wheat."
The Art of Receiving: The Point of Wheat

What is the "point of wheat"? It is the relation one can have with the other and with the world when one has "de-heroized" oneself by not forgetting the other; even if it is a cockroach, or even if it is the rain, then one has the type of love that the rain and the earth have one for the other. And that could be defined as a kind of economy of attention. This is completely explained in the little text called "So Much Mansuetude." (I have kept the word "mansuetude," which is a Brazilian word that also exist is French but is no longer used in English.) "Mansuetude" means kindness, serenity, but the etymology of the word suggests the taming of the hands: and it has to do with knowing how to use one's hand in a good way. In "So Much Mansuetude," Lispector opposes two types of economies: one is that of consolation. Formerly she used to be organized to console herself from anguish and pain. So she was always exchanging pain and joy: "But now I have to handle this simple and tranquil joy." And it is extremely difficult; she is not used to joy and has to learn about it. And this joy is like a hand of grace. Nothing is happening, she is at the window:

I go then to the window. It is raining a lot. Out of habit I am searching in the rain what in another moment would serve me as a consolation. But I don't have any pain to console.

So she is using the rain, she is looking for something in the rain, and she has no pain, and nothing happens. But then suddenly she realizes that she has everything. She is herself in front of the window and the rain is raining and she says:

Ah, I know. I'm now searching in the rain for a joy so great that it becomes sharp, and it puts me in contact with a sharpness that resembles the sharpness of pain. But the search is useless. I am at the window and only this happens: I see with beneficent eyes the rain, and the rain sees me in agreement with me. We're both busy flowing.

Nothing happens except that she and the rain are both busy flowing. She has no need, she has no lack, and again, as in "The Partaking of the Breads," she insists on having without having to thank, that is, avoiding completely the system of debt — this is pure receiving. And she says: "What simplicity. I never thought the world and I would arrive at this point of wheat."

This is the point of wheat: one grows and that is all, without even thanking God or Nature, exactly as the rain. And this is the way she becomes a woman. "I am not a thing that says thanks for having transformed itself into another. Am a woman." And there she has suppressed the personal pronoun. She is pure "I am" — "I am a woman, am a person."

(Am) a woman develops. Being a woman is indeed being more than a woman, is being a woman in translation, being a woman continuing, extending, being a selfless woman, a woman and. But not a woman and anything else regardless of any quality. No: woman develops into equivalents or "semblables." "Am a woman, am a person, am an attention, am a body looking through a window. Just as the rain is not grateful for not being a stone." She (the rain, a chuva is feminine) is a rain. "Perhaps this is what we call being alive. No more than this: alive. And simply alive from a serene (mansa) joy."

No paying, except attention. Being alive without asking for thanks, just looking with beneficent eyes. One really has to make a big effort, and particularly one has to overrule the ego and the pretense of mastering things and knowing
things. Then we reach the point when we can say as she says: it is only because I
don’t know anything in an appropriating way, “because I don’t know anything and
because I remember nothing,” because I am not a prisoner of the past and I am not
a captive of the future, “and because it is night, then I stretch out my hand and I
save the child.” The serene, joyful writing hand of the artist saves the child, any
child, and signs: Am Alive...

NOTE

1. See Clarice Linspector, *Perto do Coração Selvagem* [Near to the wild heart] (Rio de Janeiro,
1944); *Domingo, antes de Dormir* [Sunday, before going to sleep] (São Paulo, 1978);
“Felicidade Clandestina” [Clandestine felicity] in *Felicidade Clandestina, Contos* (Rio de
Janeiro, 1971); “A Legião Estrangeira” [The foreign legion] in *Felicidade Clandestina; “A
Repartição dos Pás” [The partaking of the bread], in  *A Legião Estrangeira, Contos* (São
Paulo, 1977); *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* [The passion according to G.H.] (Rio de Janeiro, 1974);
and “Tanta Mansidão” [So much mansuétude], in *Onze Estivestes de Noite* (Rio de Janeiro,
1974). All excerpts are translated by Ann Liddle and Sarah Cornell.