

THE STATIONS OF THE BODY,
CLARICE LISPECTOR'S ABERTURA
AND RENEWAL

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Clarice Lispector is recognized as one of Brazil's master short story writers. Her figurative narratives are known for their evocative and suggestive moods, sensitive insights and sparks of awareness about the human condition, rather than for their actual storytelling in the conventional, mimetic and realist sense. Associated with those writers of the lyrical novel and their extensive use of metaphor, symbol and stream-of-consciousness for purposes of portraying introspection and perception, Clarice Lispector's short fiction as well as her earlier novels, for the most part, attempts to recreate the process of reflection — that inner world of feelings and emotions difficult to express and conceptualize. For the reader, the effect is one of experiencing through suggestive words and their images the psychic states of her protagonists and narrators, most of whom are women grappling with forces frequently alienate then from society's norms. Ergo, the creation of narratives which dwell upon and intimate obliquely the feelings and thoughts of characters struggling to come to grips with emotions they do not fully comprehend. Due to her sensory use of metaphorical language which often captures an intuitive sense germane to experience or unconscious and preconscious states, her writings in form and content have been labeled hermetic, expressionistic, and figurative, reflecting more human contemplation than specific, dramatic action. Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna refers to Clarice Lispector's aesthetics in this manner: "Sua literatura não é *realista*, mas *simbólica*, na medida em que o texto é o instaurador de seus próprios referentes e não se interessa em refletir um mundo exterior de um trabalho mimético."¹ (Her literature is not *realist*, but *symbolic* in the sense that the text is the fount for its very own referents and thus has no interest in mirroring the exterior world of a mimetic work.)

Owing to her relentless search for a hidden truth — a gleaming "apple in the darkness" of human tribulations and transgressions, the eternal *maçã no escuro* — Clarice Lispector has placed less attention upon such narrative components as action and plot, locale and space, elements which would inhibit her fluid style of expressive, thought-provoking odysseys through states of mind and emotion. In this vein, her voyages inward frequently evoke a solitary quest for existential perception as well as an explanation of the connections between human angst, God and the drama of existence. As a result, her language becomes a *vehicle* for consciousness-raising about such concepts as being and nothingness. In a 1975 interview with Celso Arnaldo Araújo, she characterized the function of her narratives in the following manner: "Qualquer pessoa pode entender a seu modo. Basta um mínimo de sensibilidade. Eu não trago mensagem, só uma forma."² (Anybody can understand in his own way. All one needs is a bit of sensitivity. I

don't bring a message, just the means.)

In terms of consistency, Clarice Lispector's work has always reflected this focus. Nevertheless, several critics have noted a change in her narrative, particularly in the '70's, during the last years of her life. For example, Hélió Pólvora believes the collection, *A Via Crucis do Corpo* (1974), to be an "abertura" in her career, a kind of renewal and "opening up" foreshadowed in the collection, *Onde estiveste de noite?* (1974), and the novel, *Uma Aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* (1969).³ In his cogent, book-length study, *Clarice Lispector* (1985), Earl E. Fitz refers to the *Via Crucis* collection as "...notable for presenting at times a Clarice Lispector very different from the one the readers had come to know."⁴ In reference to her last novel, *A Hora da Estrela*, published in 1977, the year of her death, Samuel Rawet in the *Suplemento Literário Minas Gerais* cited Eduardo Portella: "Devemos falar de uma nova Clarice Lispector, exterior e explícita, o coração selvagem comprometido nordestinamente com o projecto brasileiro."⁵ (We ought to be talking about a new Clarice Lispector, exterior and explicit, the savage heart Northeasternly aligned with Brazilian progress.) The overt, sociological concerns dramatized in this novel have led critics to recognize new themes and approaches. At the time of Lispector's death, Cristina Miguez, in homage to the author's literary legacy, wrote:

A partir de 1974, com *A Via Crucis do Corpo*, Clarice abre novo horizonte em sua prosa. O bom criador não se contenta, como disse Hemingway, em tirar sempre o mesmo suco da mesma garrafa. ... Clarice Lispector decidiu-se a atacar mais de frente a realidade, num processo, talvez, de impregnação naturalista.⁶

(From 1974 on, with *The Stations of the Body*, Clarice sets a new horizon in her prose. The fine artist is not content, as Hemingway once said, in drawing the same juice from the same bottle. ... Clarice Lispector decided to attack reality more directly, via a process filled with, perhaps, naturalist tendencies.)

In light of the above comments, this study will point more specifically to those elements which manifest a change in Lispector's craft, particularly those which emerge in *A Via Crucis do Corpo*. Although critics have alluded to this collection as a manifestation of a shift in her narrative approach, there has been little attempt to examine these stories closely, from a technical and thematic standpoint, in order to define the "newness" in her narrative voice. The scant commentaries on these stories dwell upon the obvious - their direct treatment of sex and their openness in dealing with such themes as rape, nymphomania, prostitution, masturbation, and lesbianism. In other words, an expansion of the sensorial to areas that had remained in the past somewhat dormant, elusive or at best suggestive. Malcolm Silverman offers the following explanation for her former ambivalent or evasive attitude toward the portrayal of sex in literature:

... ambivalência de Lispector, até aqui bloqueada embora há muito incubada, em relação ao papel do sexo instintivo no contexto da sua tese. Possivelmente inibida pela tradicional dominação masculina dos valores sociais brasileiros, mas ultimamente instigada pela ascensão do feminismo, ela lhe deu um tratamento direto, começando com a publicação em 1969 de *Uma Aprendizagem ou O Livro de Prazeres*, concretizando-o em *A Via Crucis do*

Corpo, sua mais recente coleção de contos (1974).⁷

(... although dormant for some time, Lispector's ambivalence in relation to the role of spontaneous sex within the context of her work has up until now been stifled. Possibly inhibited by the traditional male supremacy in Brazilian social values, but ultimately provoked by the rise of feminism, she treated it more directly, beginning in 1969 with the publication of **An Apprenticeship or the Book of Pleasures**, and rendering it concretely in **The Stations of the Body**, her most recent collection of short stories [1974].)

The preoccupation with sex as a central theme appears forthrightly in the volume's foreword, entitled "Explicação." Here, while discussing the book's genesis and sexual tone, Clarice states: "E era assunto perigoso."⁸ ("And it was a dangerous subjectc." (In the same piece, she refers to criticism aimed at the collection's sexual focus:

Uma pessoa leu meus contos e disse que aquilo não era literatura, era lixo. Concordo. Mas há hora para tudo. Há também a hora do lixo. Este livro é um pouco triste porque eu descobri, como criança boba, que este é um mundo-cão.(8)

(Someone read my stories and said that that wasn't literature, it was filth. I agree. But there's a time for everything. There's also a time for filth. This book is a little sad because I discovered, like some dumb child, that this is a beastly world.)

In her 1975 interview with **Manchete** she makes a similar pronouncement: "Um crítico disse que o livro era um lixo, sujo, indigno de mim. Mas meus filhos gostaram e esse é o julgamento que mais me interessa."⁹ (Some critic said that the book was filthy, dirty, unworthy of me. But my children liked it and that's the judgment which interests me more.)

With the above statements, it is understandable why **Via Crucis** represents a departure, i.e., at least a thematic one in terms of its sexual frankness, one that undoubtedly was pulsating in earlier narratives where an undercurrent of suggestive images hinted at Clarice Lispector's sensual and provocative nature and prose. However, owing to her consistent integration of form and content, it is not surprising to find in these stories a harmonious coordination of theme and technique. In tune with this keen sense of form and content, her use of narrative points of view, internalized dialogue and colloquial language will be examined with aim of better understanding her aesthetic **abertura** in this collection. Moreover, since **Via Crucis** has been afforded little in-depth treatment, it will be important to study these seemingly simple, concrete and realistic short stories for traces of the thematic complexity apparent in her earlier collections and novels. Along with the above concerns, attention will be placed upon Clarice Lispector's feminine perspective, one which gains new strength within this volume's scope. Interestingly, the feminine stance, couched in her earlier work as a dependent/independent dialectic of female versus male, becomes in this volume one conveying the theme of repression and liberation - a theme congenial with those surfacing in Brazilian socio-political literature of the seventies. Professor Marilena Chauí in her book, **Repressão Sexual** (1984), refers to one of the stories in this collection to illustrate the repressive and hypocritical demands made upon female

morality in contemporary Brazilian society.¹⁰

Taking a cue from its title, this collection specifically portrays the sacrifice and hardships women undergo in dealing with the carnal aspects of their identity. Their saga is dramatized here as a *via sacra* or way of the cross/body, - tableaux of the various stations of the body, depicting different ordeals or sufferings stemming from society's identification of their bodies as objects for sexual gratification and child-bearing as well as models for family morality. In this manner, the reader may interpret the whole collection as a painful exposé, striving for a liberating awareness, consciousness or response which may emerge from the actual reading process, just as the faithful pray and make the way of the Cross or the Stations in order to gain grace or plenary indulgences.

The religious parallels not only stem from the title, the biblical references and the repeated question of God in many of the stories, but also from the volume's very structure: "É um livro de treze histórias. Mas podia ser de quatorze. Eu não quero"(8). (It's a book of thirteen stories. But it could have been one of fourteen. I don't want it to be.) While refusing to establish a possible equation between the fourteen Stations of the Cross and the number of stories in the collection, Clarice Lispector nonetheless provides fourteen narratives if one were to include the "Explicação," her foreword, which for all purposes could represent her "story" of how the collection came to be - that is, her being commissioned to write three of the stories on a Friday and her having completed them and most of the others by the following Monday, May 12 being Sunday, Mother's Day, and the 13th, the date commemorating the liberation of slaves in Brazil. The juxtaposition of, and allusion to, these dates are hardly gratuitous when one considers the volume's feminine bent.

Although one may draw direct parallels between specific stories and the symbolism in the respective Stations of the Cross, Clarice Lispector did not wish to create such a rigid framework. However, the reference to the body, a woman's body, is the underlying thematic thread through all of these narratives and it is via this motif where she makes some of her strongest statements about women's roles in society. The related themes of carnal and divine passion, as well as one's Calvary or death, bestow upon these very short stories a *Via Dolorosa*esque ambience, a symbolic pilgrimage where the very brief, quick nature of each narrative propels the reader on to the next. As an uninterrupted exercise in meditation, these stories, as the fourteen Stations of the Cross, engage the reader to proceed from one to the other until the volume is completed. The stress upon the forward movement envelops the collection as a whole and in turn influences the rhythmic flow of each individual story.

In the parlance of short story criticism, the terms "mimetic" and "lyric" have been coined to characterize, respectively, narratives which, on the one hand, display an "inconspicuous language of prose realism," and, on the other, the "figured language of poems."¹¹ Since Clarice Lispector's kinship to lyrical prose has already been mentioned, a theoretical classification of lyric versus mimetic will serve well in accounting for the formal differences in her later writings. In the insightful study, *Coming to Terms With the Short Story* (1983), Susan Lohafer discusses much of the pertinent scholarship related to the short story and its poetics. While presenting an overview of poetic fiction and the theses of such critics as Charles May, *Short Story Theories* (1970), and Ralph Freedman, *The Lyric Novel* (1963), Lohafer champions the work of Eileen Baldeshwiler and her studies on the lyric short story where she identifies the poetic elements in contrast to those narratives which have a more mimetic base.¹² For our purposes, this classification

will lead to a more clear definition of Lispector's narrative techniques in the *Via Crucis* collection which adheres less to the lyric mode and more to the mimetic. As a contrasting theoretical base, consideration shall be given to the four elements Baldeshwiler includes in her classification of poetic fiction: (1) marked deviation from sequenced chronological action; (2) exploitation of such resources as tone and imagery; (3) a concentration upon increased awareness rather than upon completed action; and (4) a high degree of suggestiveness, emotional intensity, achieved with a minimum of means.¹³ As described, the above points quickly call to mind such famous Lispector stories as "amor" and "A Imitação da Rosa," stories which reflect via minimal action a more poetic vision of a psychological state or reality. Although it would be unfair to regard this volume as deprived of the poetic, it does appear that this mode is less pronounced in this particular collection. In other words, sequenced chronological action, less figurative language and imagery, emphasis upon completed action and the use of the "inconspicuous language of prose realism" are the predominant elements in these stories.

In terms of narrative point of view, the third person omniscient voice is used to describe the forward movement of the action or plot. But plot development can also be found in the considerable use of interior monologue, both direct (internalized dialogue) and indirect. However, in this case, the viewpoints are articulated in a most colloquial style, conveying to the reader a telluric and immediate picture of the central characters and their telling the story via their thoughts. Due to the colloquial or conversational style of the language, there is an emphasis upon noun/object and verb/action icons with minimal use of adjectives. The effect is a very approachable text, via accessible language, commensurate with the empathetic and easily identifiable plights of middle to lower middle class women and personages. This effect is enhanced even more in the few stories told intimately in the first-person and complemented with dialogue. To these formal devices, dramatic irony is added, that is, circumstances which at any given point in the story force the reader to ponder over their puzzling or conflictual role in the story. This element, above all, accounts for most of the thematic insights distilled in the narrative process.

As stated above, the stories as a whole represent diverse aspects of the same themes - the sufferings or plight of the female with regard to her body. The strong identification with the body, positive or negative, stems from an image of oppressive male authoritarian figures, such as God and patriarchs, who impose their carnal views and moral codes upon women. In the first story, the heroine, "Miss Algrave," a puritanical, serious and religious English virgin, living in London, negates the existence of her flesh by adopting a strict moral code which accounts for her loneliness and unhappiness. Shocked by the lack of shame in the world, she vows never to have someone touch her: "E lamentava muito ter nascido da incontinência de seu pai e de sua mãe. Sentia pudor deles não terem tido pudor" (16). (And she lamented very much having been born from her father and mother's incontinence. She felt ashamed of them for their not having had shame.) However, Miss Algrave does in fact discover carnal pleasure, even with fervor, via her seduction by an extra-terrestrial, Ixtlan from the planet Saturn. Ironically, the vibrant yet tender awakening of her sexuality betrays both a spiritual as well as a passionate quality that only the E.T. can embody and symbolize. Her dealings with terrestrial men, as she slips into a life of prostitution for sexual gratification and livelihood, convince her that they are vile beings to be used and denigrated - a decidedly ironic result of her newly discovered sexual nature. Her anger, in the form of vengeance, after so many years of neglect and socio-economic abuse, also

stems from her past virginal behaviour, a consequence of society's rigid morality for women. In an imagined scene of internalized dialogue, she directs her rebellion and self-assertion at her stingy and insensitive boss:

Chega de datilografia! Você que não me venha com uma de sonso! Quer saber de uma coisa? Deite-se comigo na cama, seu desgraçado! e tem mais: me pague um salário alto por mês, seu sovina! (22)

(Enough of typing! Don't come around here with your wily ways! You want to know something? Come to bed with me, you bastard! and there's more: pay me a high salary each month, you skinflint!)

Narrated from her point of view, the story shifts frequently from indirect to direct interior monologue in order to capture, in her own words, her thoughts and actions. But instead of long paragraphs of interior monologues interspersed with an omniscient narrator, a clipped style of short paragraphs, many two to three sentences in length, narrates Miss Algrave's adventures from prim, proper and repressed secretary to extra-terrestrial sex and then to self-realization as a whore. The narration cultivates a quick-paced, immediate, almost first-person colloquial directness which finds its outlet in the direct discourse at the story's center, her dialogue with Ixtlan, the E.T. Furthermore, while she develops an awareness about herself, this is illustrated by occasional images that are very concrete:

Ela nunca tinha sentido o que sentiu. Era bom demais. Tinha medo que acabasse. Era como se um aleijado jogasse no ar o seu cajado. (18) (She had never felt what she then felt. It was too good. She was afraid it would end. It was as if a cripple had thrown his crutch up in the air.)

In this way, the story imparts a realist one, in spite of the fantastic and ironic element of the E.T. Narrated in a very conventional manner with beginning, middle and end, the story leaves the reader with a sense of completed action:

E quando chegasse a lua cheia - tomaria um banho purificador de todos os homens para estar pronta para o festim com Ixtlan. (22)

(And when the moon was full - she would take a bath purifying her from all the men in order to be prepared for the feast with Ixtlan.)

Here one senses Miss Algrave's unsympathetic view (tone set by her name) of terrestrial love and men, her own sexual nature being a combination of a religious and carnal sense of love: "Ela pensava: aceitai-me! Ou então: 'Eu me ofereço.' Era o domínio do 'aqui e agora' (18). (She would think: accept me! Or else: 'I offer myself to you.' It was the dominion of the 'here and now.')

But the ironic conflict raised between her terrestrial and extraterrestrial experiences provides an insight into her ambivalence - this insight or perception being similar to the effect of awareness instilled in the readers of Lispector's earlier work. The insertion of a fantastic, dramatically ironic component in an otherwise mimetic story accounts in part for Clarice Lispector's new narrative approach, that is, her way of achieving

Poe's famous "single effect" of perception through the use of conflict or contradiction. Moreover, thematically, the female protagonist's joy of sex affirms the joy of self-realization as a woman. However, the moral/immoral and saint/sinner dialectic related to her body still looms over her and undercuts her joy: "... será que vou ter que pagar um preço muito caro pela minha felicidade?" (20). (... am I going to have to pay a high price for my happiness?)

The emphasis upon male as well as female sexuality is central to the second story, "O Corpo," where it becomes clear that Xavier is a voraciously sexual animal who displays no consideration or sensitivity toward the two, supposedly non-jealous, women he jointly lives and sleeps: "Na noite em que viu **O último tango em Paris**, foram os três para a cama: Xavier, Carmen e Beatriz. Todo o mundo sabia que Xavier era bígamo: vivia com duas mulheres" (28). (The night he saw **The Last Tango in Paris**, the three of them went to bed: Xavier, Carmen and Beatrice. Everybody knew that Xavier was a bigamist: he lived with two women.) Through simple language, the omniscient narrator indirectly establishes, from the start, sympathy for the two women:

Foi ver **O último tango em Paris** e excitou-se terrivelmente. Não compreendeu o filme: achava que se tratava de filme de sexo. Não descobriu que aquela era a história de um homem desesperado. (23) (He went to see **The Last Tango in Paris** and got himself terribly excited. He didn't understand the film: he thought it was a film about sex. He didn't know that that was the story of a desperate man.)

As in the first story, the narrative tells the tale, in simple, straightforward fashion, of Xavier's insatiability, his adulterous adventures with a whore: his "wives" indignation; their lesbian explorations; his proclivity toward exhibitionist sex; their subsequent, brutal stabbing of Xavier as he sleeps like a baby; their burying him in the garden; their eventual confession and their unexpected, last-minute release by the police. This story, a reversed crime-of-passion, mocks the usual events in a situation where a man righteously kills the woman to salvage his honor and then is miraculously absolved. The enslaved woman, already submitted to an unnatural situation, are forced to endure the humiliation of Xavier's dalliance with a prostitute. The following passage exemplifies the shifting, ambiguous, interior monologue from direct to indirect to omniscient narrator, disclosing the brief and unobtrusive shift from clips of thought to descriptive narration of the action:

Como é que começou o desejo de vingança? As duas cada vez mais amigas e desprezando-o.

Ele não cumpriu a promessa e procurou a prostituta. (27)

(How did the desire for vengeance begin? The two of them each day closer friends and despising him. He didn't keep his promise and went out looking for the prostitute.)

The shockingly savage murder reveals their strong compulsion for vengeance as well as the women's physical and willful strength:

O rico sangue de Xavier escorria pela cama, pelo chão, um desperdício.

Carmen e Beatriz sentaram-se junto à mesa da sala de jantar,

sob a luz amarela da lâmpada nua, estavam exaustas. Matar requer força. Força humana. Força divina. As duas estavam suadas, mudas, abatidas. Se tivessem podido, não teriam matado o seu grande amor. (29)

(Xavier's rich blood ran all over the bed, the floor, a waste.

Carmen and Beatrice sat down next to the dining room table, beneath the yellow light of the naked light bulb, they were exhausted. Killing takes strength. The two of them were sweaty, silent, spent. If they could have, they wouldn't have killed their greatest love.)

The power and brutality springing forth from these two women surprise and terrify the policemen. Moreover, when Carmen insists on their being placed in the same cell, the policemen are disgusted and want to avoid any scandal:

- Olhe, disse um dos policiais diante do secretário atônito, o melhor é fingir que nada aconteceu senão vai dar muito barulho, muito papel escrito, muita falação. (32)

("Look," said one of the policemen in front of the astonished secretary, "the best thing is to pretend that nothing happened, because otherwise there's going to be a lot of noise, a lot of paperwork, a lot of talk.")

As if their actions and lesbian relationship would corrupt or shatter social and sexual morality, Carmen and Beatriz are allowed to go free and live in Montevideú. The implications concerning society's reactions in this story, as in the first, translate into Clarice Lispector's strategies for conveying indirect sociological criticism about social repression and the potencial rebelliousness in women. Reacting herself to statements about her lack of socio-political commitment, Clarice Lispector in 1975 responded in this manner:

Não existe escritor, pintor, ou qualquer artista, que não reflita sua época. A meu modo, estou participando. Eu falo sobre angústias, alegrias, sentimentos humanos. Há algo mais participante do que isso?¹⁴

(There isn't a writer, painter, or artist whatever, who doesn't mirror his times. In my way, I am doing my share. I talk about anguish, joys, human feelings. Is there anything more committed than that?)

Other stories in the collection transmit a sociological consciousness, not customarily associated with Lispector's prose. In the story, "Praça Mauá," most reminiscent of Dalton Trevisan's underworld of "inferninhos" and hypocritical souls, Lispector unmasks the dual side of the petty bourgeoisie:

Carla era dançarina no "Erótica." Era casada com Joaquim que se matava de trabalhar como carpinteiro. E Carla "trabalhava" de dois modos: Dançando meio nua e enganando o marido. (69)

(Carla was a dancer in the club "Erotica." She was married to Joachim who killed himself working as a carpenter. Carla

"worked" in two ways: Dancing around half-naked and by being unfaithful to her husband.)

As a possible parody of a Trevisan story, familiar phrases and expressions are repeated here to invoke the false, parasitical, vampirisque demi monde of Carla and her homosexual friend Celsinho: "E o nome de guerra de Luisa era Carla" (69). (And Luisa's pseudonym was Carla.) "O nome de guerra de Celsinho era Moleirão" (71). (Celsinho's pseudonym was Softy.) Their double life is narrated in a series of adventures, sprinkled with such socio-economic commentary as: "O 'Erótica!' estava cheio de homens e de mulheres. Muita mãe de família ia lá para se divertir e ganhar um dinheirinho" (73). (The club 'Erotica!' was filled with men and women. Many a mother would go there to have a good time and to earn a little extra cash.) The dramatic irony in this story revolves around the expected roles normally identified with gender. Here Celsinho, the *bicha* (fag), manifests more maternal instincts than Carla and, in addition exudes more sexual attraction *via-à-vis* their shared male suitors. A further irony surfaces here with the fact that men still dominate or gain the upper hand even when they are role-playing as women.

The structural device that accompanies the corporeal thesis in all these stories is the introduction of the "unexpected" through dramatic irony which in effect serves to undermine the predictable or the foreseeable in narratives which, on the surface, are conventional and mimetic. Consequently, the reader faces a series of stories which do indeed "épater le bourgeois" in their portrayal of the feelings and roles of women in society. For example: an eighty-one-year-old woman who still desires sexual gratification; the sexually repressed nun who rebels against family and Church in order to marry; women who can't be maternal; women who kill as opposed to being killed (homicide instead of uxoricide), etc. As the embodiments of the theme of female sexuality, these narratives subvert the patriarchal, homocentric, male-deity supremacy, authoritarian figures rampant in society. But the challenge that is set forth also aims to underscore general human suffering as well, not solely female. Perhaps the story that best captures the essence of this more human perspective is "Via Crucis" where the prototypical Maria das Dores becomes a latter-day Virgin Mary with her impotent husband as a modern St. Joseph. In parodic fashion, the awaiting of the Messiah's birth and the self-sacrifice cultivated to protect him only serve to diminish the sanctity of Maria's and Jesus' roles:

- Maria das Dores, mas que destino privilegiado você tem!
 - Privilegiado, sim, suspirou Maria das Dores. Mas que posso fazer para que meu filho não siga a via crucis? (34-35)
- ("Oh Mary of Sorrows, but what a privileged fate you have!")
"Privileged, yes," sighed Mary of Sorrows. "But what can I do so that my son doesn't end up going the way of the Cross?")

The legendary and holy story told in modern, simple, colloquial prose, with allusions to Brazilian **espiritismo** (spiritualism) **curandeiras** (folk healers), mocks this "privileged" mother and child:

De manhã bem cedo ia espiar as vacas no estábulo. As vacas mugiam.
Maria das Dores sorria-lhes. Todos humildes: Vacas e mulher.
(37)

(Early in the morning she would go and take a peep at the cows in the stable. The cows mooded. Mary of Sorrows smiled at them. All so humble: Cows and woman.)

By sabotaging the sanctified aura usually afforded this tale, Lispector subverts the male Christian ethic and its insidious teachings. The story's concluding statements - mundade, realistic, and very **terre a terre** - reinforce Clarice Lispector's vision for both female and male:

São José cortou o cordão umbilical. E a mãe sorria. A tia chorava. Não se sabe se essa criança teve que passar pela cia crucis. Todos passam. (38)

(St. Joseph cut the umbilical cord. And the mother smiled. the aund cried.

It is not known if this child had to go the way of the cross. Everybody does.)

While the mimetic qualities of these stories are enhanced by more naturalist, frank, concrete, blunt, even kitschy circumstances and settings, the collection acquires a veritable "real," historical quality with the four stories using first-person narration. Besides their imparting a more immediate proximity with the dramatized narrator as she tells her tales, there exists a conscious attempt to flavor these narratives with an autobiographical tone - the voice being that of Clarice Lispector herself. In each of these four stories, the narrator is a writer who lives alone in a Rio apartment where most of the action or storytelling takes place. These four stories are remarkable for their direct, face-to-face, up-front, honest quality in discussing such themes as motherhood, alienation, literary image, sexuality, and death. Maintaining the **via crucis** tone, these stories nevertheless stress the importance and value of life, despite its disappointments, tragedies and scabrous sides. The two stories which appear to be the most autobiographical are at the actual center, the veritable core of the collection. They make references to that weekend when the stories were purportedly written. The palpable, **à flor da pele** (close to the skin) nature of the stories provides keen insights into the Lispector temperament. Stylistically simple and colloquial as the other stories, regardless of their selfquestioning, introspective orientation, frequently captured via internalized dialogue, these two narratives are perhaps, for this collection, the most revelatory about the author. In this sense, they convey a mimetic quality about her character and personality. The intimacy and inherent verisimilitude of the first-person voice are also enhanced by Lispector's actual reference to titles of some of the other stories in the book:

- Já pedi licença a meu filho, disse-lhe que não lesse meu livro. Eu lhe contei um pouco as histórias que havia escrito. Ele ouviu e disse: está bem. Contei-lhe que meu primeiro conto se chamava "Miss Algrave." Ele disse: " 'grave' é túmulo." (58)

(I already asked my son's forgiveness, I told him not to read my book. I told him a little about the stories I had written. He listened and said: Fine. I also told him that my first story was called "Miss Algrave." He said: " 'grave' means tomb!")

One of these two stories, "Por Enquanto," speaks to the author's

loneliness, the tiny deaths we go through in daily life, the down-and-out sensation of emptiness - all characteristic of her existential heroes and heroines. She also speaks to the transitory nature of the carnal and the melancholy which may be overcome by resisting and keeping oneself busy:

A questão é saber aguentar. Pois a coisa é assim mesmo. Às vezes não se tem nada a fazer e então se faz pipi. (...)

Quando a gente começa a se perguntar: para quê? Então as coisas não vão bem. E eu estou me perguntando para quê. Mas bem sei que é apenas "por enquanto!" (54-55)

(the thing to do is to know to withstand it all. Because that's what it's all about. Sometimes one hasn't got a thing to do and so one pees. (...))

When people begin to ask: What for? Then things don't go very well. So I am asking what for. But I know only too well that it's only "for the time being!")

The concrete **mundo-cão** that surfaces in these stories becomes directly linked to Clarice Lispector's aesthetic sense of creation. Her identification with this world and its evocative power stems from her curiosity, imagination, disgust as well as her empathy. In other words, her social consciousness as a woman and a writer evolves from the linguistic link between her real emotions and the tangible nature of the stories she tells:

Ele, o pai da moça, vestido com terno verde e camisa cor-de-rosa de listrinhas. Como é que sei? Ora, simplesmente sabendo, como a gente faz com a adivinhação imaginadora. Eu sei, e pronto. (...)

Não sei que fim levaram essas pessoas, não soube mais notícias. Desagregaram-se? pois é história antiga e talvez já tenha havido mortes entres elas, as pessoas. A escura, escura morte. Eu não quero morrer. (67-68)

(He, the girl's father, was dressed in a green suit and a striped pink shirt. How do I know? Well, by simply knowing, just as one does when one guesses out-of-the-blue. I know, and that's it. (...))

I don't know how these people ended up, I didn't get any more news. Did they separate? Well it's an old story and maybe there've been a few deaths among them. Dark, dark death. I don't want to die.)

Besides pointing to her preoccupation with death and the lives of her suffering protagonists, this story, "Antes da Ponte Rio-Niterói," describes Clarice's simultaneous fascination and disgust with human transgressions as a veritable resource for her storytelling:

O que fazer dessa história que se passou quando a ponte Rio-Niterói não passava de um sonho? Também não sei, dou-a de presente a quem quiser, pois estou enjoada dela. Demais até. Às vezes me dá enjoão de gente. Depois passa e fico de novo toda curiosa e atenta.

E é só. (68)

(What to do with this story which happened when the Rio-Niterói bridge was only a dream? I too don't know, I give it as a present to anyone who wants it, cause I'm sick of it. Much too much. Sometimes I get sick of people. After. this passes and I again become very curious and attentive.

And that's about it.)

The desire to portray feelings about her life and its tribulations and to connect them with the people she knows and observes is only new in its no longer requiring an elaborate, figurative mask to recreate an inner reality. Due to the unpredictable, ironic situations in each story, an inner response on the part of the reader emerges, forcing one to speculate and ponder over the implications of the sudden shift in action or in the narrative change from fiction to history.

As a conclusion, the story "O Homem Que Apareceu" is a fine illustration of Lispector's new approach. Composed mainly of dialogue between her and a desperate, failed poet who visits her apartment, the first-person narrator serves as contrast to the I in the dialogue, the I and the sense of the "other" being the formal and thematic dialectic for self-examination - a being and a being seen. In the simple plot, the burnt-out poet appears to be seeking some solace from the established woman writer, as if being a woman were also synonymous with her being maternal to everyone:

Eu estava muito triste. E sem saber o que fazer para ajudá-lo.
É uma terrível impotência, essa de não saber como ajudar. (43)
(I was very sad. Not knowing what to do to help him. It's a terrible weakness, not knowing how to help.)

Her inability to provide him with tea and sympathy leads to her feeling of helplessness and his indirect accusation:

- Você tem mania de oferecer café e coca-cola.
- É porque não tenho mais nada para oferecer. (44)
("You have the habit of offering coffee and coca-cola."
"That's because I have nothing else to offer.")

His sense of failure and desperate declaration about possibly killing someone someday remind her of the film, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, translated into Portuguese as *A Noite dos Desesperados*. His painful angst has touched her and in one way has snuffed out her *joie de vivre*, even if momentarily, or "por enquanto":

Isso foi ontem, sábado. Hoje é domingo, 12 de maio, Dia das Mães. Como é que posso ser mãe para este homem? perguntou-me e não há resposta.

Não há resposta para nada.

Fui me deitar. Eu tinha morrido. (45)

(This was yesterday, Saturday. Today is Sunday, May 12, Mother's Day. How can I be a mother to this man? I asked myself and there is no answer.

There is no answer to any thing.

I went to bed. I had died.)

By allowing herself through more mimetic, colloquial fiction to describe how she has been touched by others, Clarice Lispector reaches out to a wider readership in this collection. In so doing, she nonetheless addresses those social issues and philosophical concepts which she has always developed in her earlier work - self-determination, sexual independence, authenticity, the absurdity of life, male/female relationships, bad faith, being and nothingness, oppression and rebellion. All these themes are embedded in this collection but are couched in everyday language or discourse, direct or internalized, and proceed from external, ironic action and description toward internal questioning, expression and consciousness. The emphasis upon the physical world of objects and actions becomes the springboard for the world of feelings and moods. Earl E. Fitz in his study of Clarice's last novel, *A Hora da Estrela*, compares this less elusive approach to T.S. Eliot's understanding of the "objective correlative" - "the vehicle by means of which emotion can be expressed in the objectivity of the art form, the only way the author can conjure up and express the proper emotional response."¹⁵

In *A Via Crucis do Corpo*, the reader responds to the intense dramas, sexual entanglements and ordeals affecting characters who, despite their moments of anguish and suffering, recognize in the face of death the value of living: "Viva eu! que ainda estou viva" (61). ("Hooray for me! I who am still alive.") In *A Hora da Estrela*, her last book, the spark of life in the heroine's barren existence is celebrated symbolically in the novel's title. In a similar manner, *A Via Crucis do Corpo*, with its mimetic orientation of female sexual strife and abuse, leads to a kind of carnal knowledge - an *Hora do Lixo* - that ultimately celebrates the value of living through a heightened awareness of our natures as imperfect, suffering beings.

As Benedito Nunes states at the conclusion of his book *Leitura de Clarice Lispector* (1973), literature for Clarice was her vehicle for selfknowledge:

Narrar é narrar-se: tentativa apaixonada para chega ao esvaziamento, ao Eu sem máscara, tendo como horizonte - existencial e místico mas não mítico - a identificação entre o ser e o dizer, entre o signo escrito e a vivência da coisa, indizível e silenciosa.¹⁶

(To narrate is to narrate about oneself: a passionate attempt at reaching the emptying, the maskless I, having as a horizon - existential and mystical but not mythical - the identification between being and saying, between the written sign and the experience of life, indescribable and silent.)

NOTES

1. Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna. *Análise Estrutural de Romances Brasileiros*, 2^a ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes Ltda., 1974), p.184. (All translations in this paper from the original Portuguese into English are by the author of this study).
2. Celso Arnaldo Araújo, "Clarice Lispector: Uma Escritora no Escuro" in *Manchete*, No. 1202, May, 1975, pp.48-49.
3. Clarice Lispector. *A Via Crucis do Corpo*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1984), inside jacket.
4. Earl E. Fitz. *Clarice Lispector* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1985), p.114.

5. Samuel Rawet, "A Hora da Estrela ou As Frutas do Fresta, ou um Ensaio de Crítica Literária Policial" in **Suplemento Literário, Minas Gerais**, No. 648, March 3, 1979, p.8.
6. Cristina Miguez, "A Morte de Clarice Lispector" in **Folha de São Paulo**, December 10, 1977, p.29.
7. Malcolm Silverman. **Moderna Ficção Brasileira**, trad. João Guilherme Linke (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira; Brasília: INL, 1978), p.82.
8. Lispector. **A Via Crucis**, p.7 (all quotes from text will subsequently be followed by the page numbers in parenthesis).
9. Araújo, pp.48-49.
10. Marilena Chauí. **Repressão Sexual: Essa Nossa (Des) Conhecida**, 3ª ed. (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1984), pp.196-197.
11. Susan Lohafer. **Coming to Terms with the Short Story** (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p.21.
12. Lohafer, pp.18-20.
13. Lohafer, pp.19-20.
14. Araújo, p.49.
15. Earl E. Fitz, "Point of View in Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela*" in **Luso Brazilian Review**, 19 (1982), 195-196.
16. Benedito Nunes. **Leitura de Clarice Lispector** (São Paulo: Edições Quíron, 1973), p.155.