

CHAPTER 1



Mother, Body, Writing: The Origins and Identity of Literature in Clarice Lispector

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During a visit to Belo Horizonte in 1941, the young Clarice wrote a letter to her friend, the writer Lúcio Cardoso. At the time, she had not yet made her debut on the literary stage as such, despite having published some of her short stories in a few newspapers. But her letter already hints at an overwhelming, if faintly perceptible and still barely expressed desire (the 'estado potencial' [potential state] it mentions), which allows us to glimpse her burning quest for literature:

Encontrei uma turma de colegas da Faculdade em excursão universitária. Meu exílio se tornará mais suave, espero. Sabe, Lúcio, toda a efervescência que eu causei só veio me dar uma vontade enorme de provar a mim e aos outros que eu sou mais do que uma mulher. Eu sei que você não o crê. Mas eu também não o acreditava, julgando o q. tenho feito até hoje. É que eu não sou senão em estado potencial, sentindo que há em mim água fresca, mas sem descobrir onde é a sua fonte.

O.K. Basta de tolices. Tudo isso é muito engraçado. Só que eu não esperava rir da vida. Como boa eslava, eu era uma jovem séria, disposta a chorar pela humanidade... (Estou rindo).¹

Particularly revealing in this context is the reference to exile, fleeting because reduced to its figurative sense, but which will come to play a determining role in any reading of the writer's career. Equally noteworthy is the self-denomination which harks back to her origins ('Como boa eslava, eu [...] [Like a good Slav, I ...]) and which, even with the irony intended here, cannot help but point towards

literary models (one thinks immediately of Dostoevsky, a decisive literary reference for the young Lispector). It will not be easy to find a reference to the self of this kind again in her work.

Clarice had just reached the age of legal majority when, in early 1942, she put in a claim for naturalization, a drawn-out process that caused her great anxiety about the outcome of the President of the Republic's decision. In her first letter to Getúlio Vargas requesting the reduction of the waiting period under a legal technicality, she asserted that she was 'casualmente, russa também' [Russian too, by chance] and concluded by stating: 'um dia saberei provar que não a usei [a nacionalidade] inutilmente' [one day I will be able to prove that I did not use my nationality in vain].² In fact, from the moment that she became aware of her participation in the literary world, she was to defend her sense of belonging to the Brazilian nation, in spite of asserting herself in contrast to the dominant nationalist tendencies. Leaving the country at a time crucial to the construction of her name as a writer—straight after the publication of her first book—had serious repercussions for someone who for many years was only able to receive echoes of the critics' impressions of her work from a distance and with a time lag. We must not forget that the writing of her third book, *A cidade sitiada* [The Beseiged City] (1949), in Berne seems to a large extent to have been motivated by the silence that had greeted her second novel, *O lustre* [The Chandelier] (1946).

But the most important thing is to show that this feeling of exile was, came to be or always had been, above all, interior and not determined by any kind of geographical dislocation. The unknown land lies within ourselves. From Belém do Pará, where Lispector lived for a few months before going abroad, she wrote to her sisters: 'Que contar a vocês, quando o que eu desejo é ouvir? A vida é igual em toda a parte e o que é necessário é a gente ser gente' [What can I tell you, when what I want to do is listen? Life is the same everywhere and what matters is for us to be who we are] (18 March 1944).³

And at the beginning of the journey which was to take her to Europe, accompanying her diplomat husband, she sent these words (dated 19 August 1944) from Algeria:

Na verdade eu não sei escrever cartas sobre viagens, na verdade nem sei mesmo viajar. É engraçado como, ficando pouco em lugares, eu mal vejo. Acho a natureza toda mais ou menos parecida, as coisas quase iguais. Eu conhecia melhor um árabe com véu no rosto quando estava no Rio. Enfim, eu espero nunca exigir de mim nenhuma atitude. Isso me cansaria.⁴

When she returned to Brazil in the early 1960s after separating from her husband, she continued to pursue her voyage of self-discovery through a scrutiny of her inner self. The best example of this can be found in the way Clarice foregrounds the theme of exile precisely in the period that began with her settling back in Rio. This coincided with the maturation of her prose in the novel *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), but the text which best reflects this transitional phase is *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* (1969).

The appearance of the later novel is intimately associated with an event that took place in the biographical sphere, which it is crucial to introduce here: an accident. On 14 September 1966, around half past three in the morning, a fire broke out in her apartment. Lispector fell asleep with a lighted cigarette and woke up amid flames.⁵ The consequences of this incident were to be far-reaching, as can be seen from the fact that it even occasioned the need for a literal relearning to write, given that the part of her body that was most affected was her right hand, which suffered third-degree burns.⁶ In Diane Marting's bio-bibliography of Lispector, the text that introduces the section dealing with *Uma aprendizagem* (written by Marting herself) starts by pointing out, right at the beginning, that the novel was written straight after the accident in which the novelist's arms and legs were seriously burned. Marting suggests that maybe the idea of a love story had occurred to Lispector because her body had, in a sense, 'betrayed' her, and had forced her to endure a long period of convalescence, 'during which she may have longed for dialogue'.⁷ Nevertheless, another extremely important fact to note is that in August 1967, almost a year after the fire, Clarice began writing a column in the pages of the *Jornal do Brasil*, a practice that was to influence the composition of the 1969 book as well as those which followed it. Indeed, from then on, we can identify, to some degree, superficially at least, some relaxing of thematic and stylistic tensions, underscoring a new attitude towards the act of writing. In other words, we cannot help but associate the accident with a complex process of change in writing direction.

Scarcely had *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* been published than a trend became apparent among its first critics, that of identifying the characters with the author herself. In an article in the *Correio do Povo* on 27 July 1969, Paulo Hecker Filho presented the novel in the following terms: 'Uma mulher [...] chamada Lóri mas que é a própria Clarice, namora um Ulisses que continua a própria Clarice travestida

em professor universitário. Lóri–Clarice descreve o que sente durante o que seria essa aprendizagem do amor, embora desde o início ela seja magistral no assunto' [A woman, called Lóri but who is actually Clarice, falls in love with Ulysses, who is also a continuation of Clarice but this time in drag, in the character of a university professor. Lóri–Clarice describes what she feels during what could be called this apprenticeship in love, although from the outset she is already a specialist in the field].

Because the novel came out when it did, it was inevitably a target for certain queries based on games of identification, which, when read in the light of the real-life incident, the text encouraged. A question arises here: can we detect in Clarice's writing a deliberate intention to distract the reader, to divert her/him away from interpretations that are overreliant on the biographical facts, which would enable her/him to read the text as a reflection of that painful time? Yet, on the other hand (and most probably the author did exploit this effect), how can we help but read the novel through the biographical lens, considering the euphoric vision that convalescence brings about? The book would then act as the result (and the banner) of overcoming a crisis.

The importance of the accident should therefore be stressed because of the extremely violent impact it had on Clarice's life and because of the way that its consequences left a mark on her work. This impact can be seen through the prism of identification between and interchangeability of body and writing. Through metonymic contiguity, from the image of the wounded hand and body, we are led to the metaphor of the writing-body in its infinite capacity for regeneration.

One year later, the author began to verbalize what had happened to her in interviews or in her usual column in the *Jornal do Brasil*, which continued to appear throughout the time of the accident and recuperation. For example, in the *crônica* published on 13 July 1968, entitled 'A opinião de um analista sobre mim' [A psychoanalyst's opinion of me],⁸ she related the following story: several of her friends happened to be seeing the same analyst, to whom they spoke about Clarice. To compensate for the 'desgaste dos ouvidos do analista' [wear and tear on the analyst's ears] caused by hearing her name repeated over and over, Clarice sent him a book: 'Na dedicatória pedi desculpas pela minha letra que não está boa desde que minha mão direita sofreu o incêndio' [In the dedication I apologized for my handwriting, which isn't very clear ever since I burned my right hand in a fire]. The analyst commented that Clarice gave so much to others

and yet begs to be allowed to exist. The short text ends with a declaration that is a prayer, an act of grace and a way of life: 'Peço humildemente para existir, imploro humildemente uma alegria, uma ação de graça, peço que me permitam viver com menos sofrimento, peço para não ser experimentada pelas experiências ásperas, peço a homens e mulheres que me considerem um ser humano digno de algum amor e de algum respeito. Peço a bênção da vida.' [I humbly ask to be allowed to exist, I humbly implore happiness, an act of grace; I ask to be allowed to live with less suffering, I ask not to have so many cruel experiences tested on me, I ask both men and women to think of me as a human being worthy of some love and respect. I ask for life's blessing.]

Such a discourse replete with anaphoras leads us close to the register used in many of the fragments incorporated in *Uma aprendizagem*, which reflect this attitude of gratitude:

Ajoelhou-se trêmula junto da cama pois era assim que se rezava e disse baixo, severo, triste, gaguejando sua prece com um pouco de pudor: alivia a minha alma, faze com que eu sinta que Tua mão está dada à minha, faze com que eu sinta que a morte não existe porque na verdade já estamos na eternidade, faze com que eu sinta que amar não é morrer, [...] faze com que eu tenha caridade por mim mesma pois senão não poderei sentir que Deus me amou, faze com que eu perca o pudor de desejar que na hora de minha morte haja uma mão amada para apertar a minha, amém.⁹

At other times the tone is sharper, as happens in the interviews, when it is the interviewee herself who interrupts the interviewer in an atmosphere of embarrassment about the wounded body.

Most revealing of a mood similar to that which runs through the passages quoted above, however, is a fascinating passage from the unpublished manuscript 'Objeto gritante' [Screaming Object].¹⁰ On page 143 we come across a long fragment, a kind of prayer: 'Vou fazer um esforço sobrehumano e dizer profundamente a frase mais difícil de um homem dizer na terra: que seja feita a Vossa vontade, e não a minha, assim na terra como no céu' [I am going to make a superhuman effort and say profoundly the most difficult sentence for a man to say on earth: Thy will be done, and not mine, on earth as it is in heaven]. In this unpublished text, there are traces recognizable from the published texts—from its rhetorical-stylistic formulation, including the visible impact of the short sentences, to the dominant recurrence of themes and motifs, including, let us stress it here, the dialectic of amplification/reduction:

Meu senhor, eu às vezes sinto uma amplidão dentro de mim: mas eu tenho medo. Quero tanto Deus. Mas não consigo senti-lo. [...] Eu assim entrego as rédeas de meu destino a uma força maior que eu. Porque eu, meu senhor, não posso nada. Vejo-me pequena, fraca e desamparada na enorme casa de minha infância, sem ter a quem me dirigir e me sentindo abandonada por Deus.¹¹

The feeling of smallness and loneliness is intensified by the writer's condition as creator, but this condition (of 'artistic maturity') is also the place from whence she draws enough strength to help her 'carregar as dores do mundo' [carry the pains of the world]. The topic of solace spreads throughout the whole fragment, in which the enunciating subject addresses an indeterminate interlocutor ('meu senhor' [my lord]) who can easily be identified as the divine entity, despite the ambiguity of the use of lower-case letters. Help is being asked for some sort of crossing over, and the image of the hand is decisive ('pela sua mão irei sem muito medo ao desconhecido' [with your hand I will go without too much fear into the unknown]). It is precisely the hand that will arise as a central figure in Clarician imagery and rhetoric: from the outstretched hand ('dar a mão a alguém sempre foi o que esperei da alegria' [giving someone a hand has been what I have always expected from happiness]), to the hand eagerly sought in an hour of need (conjuring up the idea of the hour of death).

However, right at the beginning of the fragment, the appeal to the anonymous entity allows us to glimpse the fact that at the origin of all her troubles there is something which seems to be writing, the activity of the writer: 'Não se canse de mim. Não quero o papel heróico de mártir. No entanto vivo em martírio. Digo para mim mesma: não há motivo de sofrer tanto. Meu senhor, o senhor tem razão: mas eu sinto às vezes, quando tenho sucesso, medo que exijam o impossível de mim.' [Don't tire of me. I don't want the heroic role of the martyr. Although I live in martyrdom. I tell myself: there is no reason to suffer so much. My lord, you are right: but sometimes, when I am successful, I feel afraid that the impossible will be demanded from me.]

The 'romantic' concept of the creator, which subconsciously corresponds to Clarice's way of situating herself in the literary sphere, manifests itself above all in the way that the religious dimension is presented in her texts. The relationship with the divine is, just as it was for the Romantics, 'preponderantemente de natureza sentimental e intuitiva' [preponderantly of a sentimental and intuitive nature],¹² and insofar as it is a recurrent motif in the work of the author of *A paixão segundo G.H.* it could be said to reflect her attitude towards

what she repeatedly called the 'mistério da criação' [the mystery of creation].

This text, with its confessional tone, insisting on the feeling of vulnerability and pain, develops into the explicit representation of the unspoken motif that can be considered implicit in the whole confession, the 'predestined' existence of the writer: 'Meu mal é fazer perguntas, desde pequena eu era toda uma pergunta. Vou deixar de perguntar, vou deixar de esperar respostas. Ser escritor é não ter pudor na alma.' [My problem is that I keep asking questions, since I was little I have been nothing but questions. I am going to stop asking, I am going to stop expecting answers. Being a writer means there is no shame in your soul.]

Returning to 'Objeto gritante': in the fragment we have been analysing, we can see how the confession moves towards a meta-linguistic thematization of writing. Indeed, a cyclical method of structuring the discourse operates a return to the personal by way of the confessional register once again, and finally, to impose a reflection on the act of writing. Following on from the sentence 'ser escritor é não ter pudor na alma' [being a writer means there is no shame in your soul] comes a digression: 'Eu quero me cobrir toda. Quero me enrolar no cobertor quente e dormir.' [I want to cover myself up completely. I want to wrap myself in the warm blanket and go to sleep.] Significantly, a handwritten sentence, crossed out, would have functioned as the link between the two. Behind the crossing out, the following words can be deciphered: 'Esquecendo inclusive a minha mão enxertada por causa do incêndio' [Even forgetting my hand with its skin-graft caused by the fire]. This deviation in discourse which draws the line which links together suffering/being a writer/skin-graft/writing contributes towards a blurring of boundaries (a way of skirting round the difficulty), while the use of a cyclical structure imposes an intense vision: from the disembodied 'I' to poetics everything becomes co(n)-fused.

From naming the graft (a gift from/of self, to self) to the explicit metaphor of writing, the person experiencing these meandering, wandering reflections points to and exposes it at the same time:

Tendo lidado com problemas de enxerto de pele, fiquei sabendo que um banco de doação de pele não é viável, pois esta, sendo alheia não adere por muito tempo à mão do enxertado. É necessário que a mão do paciente seja tirada de outra parte de seu corpo, e em seguida enxertada no lugar necessário. Isto quer dizer que no enxerto há uma doação de si para si mesmo.

Esse caso me fez devanear um pouco sobre o número de outros em que a própria pessoa tem que doar a si própria. O que traz solidão e riqueza e luta. Cheguei a pensar-sentir na bondade que é tipicamente o que se quer receber dos outros e no entanto às vezes só a bondade que demos a nós mesmos nos livra da culpa e nos perdoa. E é também, por exemplo, inútil receber a aceitação dos outros, enquanto nós mesmos não nos doarmos a auto-aceitação do que somos. Quanto à nossa fraqueza, a parte mais forte nossa é que tem que nos doar ânimo e complacência. E há certas dores que só a nossa própria dor, se for aprofundada, paradoxalmente chega a amenizar. [...]

Lembrei-me de outra doação a si mesmo: a da criação artística. Pois em primeiro lugar por assim dizer tenta-se tirar a própria pele para enxertá-la onde é necessário. Só depois de pegado o enxerto é que vem a doação aos outros. Ou é tudo misturado, não sei bem, a criação artística é um mistério que me escapa, felizmente. Não quero saber muito.¹³

The distant yet present wound (excessive, obstinate, nightmarish) is the crossing of the dark desert where the self devours itself, consumes itself in its quest; it is a surrender to the realm of writing that is powerfully unleashed in an intense concentration of both the limited and the infinite. The overwhelming centrifugal violence that drags everything along with it, the ripping, the abysmal damage that attacked the physical body during the fire and submitted it to the full fury of the horrific, is equivalent to the painful labour that had always lingered within Lispector's literary body, where invisible scars generated words.

Clarice can be situated alongside those authors who live their writing in an immersion that allows no interval and turns them into their writing. Literature is set in motion in a process whereby life participates in the gestation of one territory among many. The intensity of the surrender presupposes the inclusion of the self (working on itself) in the process of investigation that writing constitutes. This very idea was developed in the lecture on avant-garde literature that Lispector was to deliver in several venues: 'É maravilhosamente difícil escrever em língua que ainda borbulha, que precisa mais do presente do que mesmo de uma tradição. Em língua que para ser trabalhada, exige que o escritor se trabalhe a si próprio como pessoa.' [It is marvellously difficult to write in a language which is still bubbling, which needs the present more even than it needs a tradition. In a language which, in order to be fashioned, demands that the writer works on herself as a person.]¹⁴ Lispector's refined self-awareness of the craft of writing enables her to highlight insistently the notion that the chosen path is not tantamount

to skill but is rather a conscious passage through passion. The degree of difficulty is a self-imposed order that begs for surprise. When asked in an interview in the magazine *Vêja* about whether the idea of abandoning literature had been well thought-out or was more of a spontaneous decision, she replied:

Foi uma coisa muito pensada. Eu tinha medo de que escrever se tornasse um hábito e não uma surpresa. Eu só gosto de escrever quando me surpreendo. Além disso, eu temia que, se continuasse produzindo livros, adquirisse uma habilidade detestável. Um pintor célebre — não me lembro quem — disse, certa vez: ‘Quando tua mão direita for hábil, pinte com a esquerda; quando a esquerda tornar-se hábil também, pinte com os pés’. Eu sigo este preceito.¹⁵

The vague memory of a name in the reply she gave only serves to accentuate the exemplary nature of the episode described. In other contexts, however, the name of the painter is identified. For instance, João Cabral de Melo Neto, in a poem in *Serial*, introduces the name of the artist Joan Miró (‘Quis então que desaprendesse / o muito que aprendera, / a fim de reencontrar / a linha ainda fresca da esquerda’ [He wanted it [his right hand] to unlearn / all it had learned / so as to recover / his left hand’s still fresh curve]).¹⁶ In an essay from *Discours/Figure*, François Lyotard quotes the example of Paul Klee, who said to his students: ‘Exercise your hand, or even better, both hands, because your left hand writes differently from your right, *it is less skilful and therefore more manageable*. The right hand flows more naturally, the left writes better hieroglyphics. Writing is not about being clear, but about expression—think of the Chinese—and the exercise becomes ever more sensitive, intuitive, spiritual.’¹⁷

In a footnote, Lyotard explains that the emphasis is his and adds that Klee used to draw with his left hand and write with his right. The idea set out using the example of Klee as a starting point touches deep within the dark areas of the nature of the creative act. In contrast to the hand that shows, that displays itself in the sense of foreseeable and controllable clarity, and operates in the ‘register of the visible’ and the easily recognizable (‘the hand that sketches for the eye that “sees”’), the left hand symbolizes the nocturnal side of the unforeseeable, which opens up difficulties in productivity. Lyotard associates the left hand with the ‘feeling eye’—an association that allows for an opening-up and for the eruption of madness. One could say, then, that such an appropriation is apt to represent the practice of Clarician

writing. The accident makes more visible the work of the Clarician 'left hand', which had always been active.

In the readings of certain scholars, Lispector created a literature that gave away the fact that she was actually born into a different language, that she had in her childhood lived with another language. Grace Paley asks the question: 'At what age did she enter the Portuguese language? And how much Russian did she bring with her? Any Yiddish? Sometimes I think that this is what her work is about [...] one language trying to make itself at home in another. Sometimes there's hospitality, sometimes a quarrel.'¹⁸ One cannot help but recognize a certain empathy (akin to psychological transferral) on the part of the person pondering these questions, in that Paley recognizes herself in a similar situation to the daughter of Russian emigrants. This is in part how we should understand the interpretation that she projects intuitively: 'it must have been that meeting of Russian and Portuguese that produced the tone, the rhythms that, even in translation (probably difficult) are so surprising and right'.¹⁹

If the essence of the problem does not lie in this way of putting the question, it does, however, open the way for some crucial questions to be asked. Is the language the host, or is the author the host of the language she works with? If there a language to be forgotten, how can one forget the language heard in one's childhood home? What might remain as an example, as a mark of this enclosed space of difference?

In her critical study *Langues de feu*, Claire Varin puts particular emphasis on something she considered a decisive revelation in her research into the works of the Brazilian writer: she had learnt from Clarice's eldest sister Elisa that their parents had spoken Yiddish at home and that Clarice understood the language despite not being able to speak it.²⁰ Varin goes on to insist on the fact of Yiddish being spoken up until the death of the writer's mother.²¹ We also know that Clarice went to a Jewish school in Recife (the *Collegio Hebreo-Idische-Brasileiro*) where she took Yiddish, Hebrew and Religious Studies classes.²² This leads us to a vital insight: that it is around the maternal figure that the origin of Clarice's literature revolves.

Regarding this question of origins, we might look at an episode that has to do with the figure of the mother and implications of guilt. The deep-rootedness of the feelings of guilt assume such a weight that it is projected widely onto all aspects of life. The confessional tone of the *crônica* from the *Jornal do Brasil* on 28 June 1969 highlights this

most clearly: 'Ah quisera eu ser dos que entram numa igreja, aceitam a penitência e saem mais livres. Mas não sou dos que se libertam. A culpa em mim é algo tão vasto e tão enraizado que o melhor ainda é aprender a viver com ela, mesmo que tire o sabor do menor alimento: tudo sabe mesmo de longe a cinzas.' [Ah, how I should like to be one of those who can go to church, accept penance and come away feeling liberated. But I find it difficult to liberate myself. The guilt I feel is so vast and deeply rooted that I might as well learn how to live with it, even if it takes away the taste of the tiniest morsel of food: everything tastes of ashes even from a distance.]

Without going into the field of 'psychobiography', which throws light on the development of the 'repercussions of the infantile trauma' in certain areas of a writer's works,²³ we must be aware of a key moment which emerges phantasmatically, obscure and unfathomable. In another *crônica* Clarice says:

Fui preparada para ser dada à luz de um modo tão bonito. Minha mãe já estava doente, e, por uma superstição bastante espalhada, acreditava-se que ter um filho curava uma mulher de uma doença. Então fui deliberadamente criada: com amor e esperança. Só que não curei minha mãe. E sinto até hoje essa carga de culpa: fizeram-me para uma missão determinada e eu falhei. Como se contassem comigo nas trincheiras de uma guerra e eu tivesse desertado. Sei que meus pais me perdoaram eu ter nascido em vão e tê-lo traído na grande esperança. Mas eu, eu não me perdoou.²⁴

Like a strange, invisible cloud, the failed mission (the lost mother) sets the stage for the 'scene'—something that hides in an underground realm and escapes, to emerge like a nocturnal ghostly intrusion. The wound is permanently reopened in the guilt and anguish reinscribed in the literary experiences. The original scene creates the enigma that falls back onto itself. The uncertainty that leads to the enigma stems from the overlapping versions and the hesitant enunciations of the story.²⁵ And it is also through this enigma that the image of the exile (orphan) will gain meaning. Some basic accounts show the significant ambivalence: 'mas eu era uma criança alegre' [but I was a happy child], the author repeats when she refers to the shadowy setting of her childhood, marked by poverty and the pain of a sick mother. In the same way, the image of the mother, which she will try to reproduce, will be marked by a fundamental ambivalence, oscillating between the failed mission and the projection onto the impossible figure of the total mother, the protector of the world:

Embora eu saiba que, mesmo em segredo, a liberdade não resolve a culpa. Mas é preciso ser maior que a culpa. A minha ínfima parte divina é maior que a minha culpa humana. O Deus é maior que minha culpa essencial. Então prefiro o Deus, à minha culpa. Não para me desculpar e para fugir mas porque a culpa me amesquinha.²⁶

Could it be that the persistent image of Clarice is, indeed, that of the writer–mother? Despite what she asserts in some interviews, despite having tried at times to establish such an image, what prevails is an intensely dramatic and lonely face. She and the text, she and the writing for which she had once (before the birth of her own children) sworn to fight: ‘Não escrevi uma linha, o que me perturba o repouso. Eu vivo à espera de inspiração com uma avidez que não dá descanso. Cheguei mesmo à conclusão de que escrever é a coisa que mais desejo no mundo, mesmo mais que amor’ [I didn’t write a line, which disturbs my repose. I live in hope of inspiration with an eagerness that gives me no rest. I have even reached the conclusion that writing is the thing I desire most in this world, more than love even] (letter to her sisters, 8 May 1946).²⁷ The corrosive tone and the embracing the awareness of an unforgiving reality—that is, of death—spring forth from guilt. It is fundamental to consider the scene in the light of textuality; we can read the body written into it. We could say that writing is a manifestation of desire to the same degree that it is a remission of guilt.

The need for her father to adapt—even in terms of his profession as a salesman—following the death of her mother, opened up opportunities for acculturation. Symbolically the paternal figure emerges as representative of this assimilation. It is thus that we see the father move away from Recife and head towards Rio de Janeiro with his three daughters. Claire Varin’s reading relies on the importance that she attributes to the relationship with the mother’s tongue and the consequences arising from that relationship. These ‘expériences auditives’ [aural experiences], the clandestine circulation of this ‘langue errante’ [wandering language] immersed the future writer ‘dès sa plus tendre enfance dans un état de destabilisation d’une langue unique “pure”’ [from her earliest childhood in a state of destabilization of a unique ‘pure’ language].²⁸ It is the body that reveals this tension precisely in one of the symbolic places that allow difference to be upheld:

Elle cache sous sa langue liée un conflit psychique converti en symptôme corporel. Faute d’assumer la langue de sa mère, elle se charge partiellement

de sa paralysie. La langue yiddish, sème le désordre dans sa langue parlée d'autant plus secrètement que son [r] style français nous conduit sur une fausse piste. Le langage du corps maternel résonne dans la bouche de la fille.²⁹

In interviews, Lispector had no problem in deconstructing the situation, by referring to the physical reason for her accent—a 'trapped tongue'—always in order to emphasize that she belonged to Brazil; but at the same time she continued to give contradictory information that caused confusion. According to one of the author's friends, the playwright and phonetic speech doctor Pedro Bloch (who was also born in the Ukraine and arrived in Brazil at the age of three), her defect in diction was not due to a 'trapped tongue' but could have been caused by the fact that Clarice, when she was little, imitated the way her parents spoke.³⁰ Pedro Bloch even seems to have managed to correct the impediment but 'ao reencontrá-la meses depois o médico notou que ela tinha voltado a usar os "erres". A razão desta atitude, segundo Clarice, devia-se a seu receio de perder suas características, pois sua maneira de falar era um traço da personalidade.' [When he met her months later the doctor noticed that she had started pronouncing her 'r's again. The reason for this attitude, according to Clarice, was due to a fear of losing her characteristics, since her way of speaking was a personality trait.]³¹

For Lispector, the literary terrain became a quest born of the tension between an effect of deterritorialization and her insertion into a space at the very limits of the language to which she actually desired to belong. In the tension between the clear boundaries of a geographically referentialized space and the search for a potentially unlimited space that could subsume all creative energy lay the fact that she was a foreigner, trying not to be one yet being one at the same time. Her nomadic transit originates, then, in the inhabitable zone of conflict that language constitutes. One could go so far as to say that it is in the very work on language that her transit is based.

Clarice wrote a short but significant text with the title 'Declaração de amor' [A declaration of love] (*Jornal do Brasil*, 11 May 1968), where she shows that she is aware of the task that she faces. She declares that the Portuguese language, 'como não foi profundamente trabalhada pelo pensamento, a sua tendência é a de não ter sutilezas e de reagir às vezes com um verdadeiro pontapé contra os que temerariamente ousam transformá-la numa linguagem de sentimento e de alerteza. E de amor' [not having been fashioned painstakingly and thoughtfully,

tends to lack subtlety. It can also hit out at anyone foolish enough to try and transform it into a language of emotion and awareness. Or a language of love]. Her thoughts imply a non-peaceful confrontation—language itself will have to learn to react. Out of the conflict there emerges a desire to elaborate, a listening to one's internal voice, a dealing with subtleties that resembles the way thoughts are formed. Being inside the language as a foreigner presupposes a jolting of genealogies in such a way as to inscribe oneself in a place that, at the same time, you also aim to make your own:

O que eu recebi de herança não me chega. Se eu fosse muda, e também não pudesse escrever, e me perguntassem a que língua eu queria pertencer, eu diria: inglês, que é preciso e belo. Mas como não nasci muda e pude escrever, tornou-se absolutamente claro para mim que eu queria escrever em português. Eu até queria não ter aprendido outras línguas: só para que minha abordagem do português fosse virgem e límpida.³²

The proclamation of a desire for a flat place—a language like a territory—does not presuppose an ideal of purity or crystallizing untouchability. The Clarician steppes are created in the search for this utopian space but also emerge, above all, in the extent to which the combat within it makes it possible to bring to the arena of language the madness of what is going on inside. To make it sing or whisper on the plains of an aggressively differentiating exteriority. José Gil asserts that when one discovers that one's homeland is one's mother tongue (in an allusion to a famous quotation by Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa), one also realises that the 'visão da pátria' [vision of the homeland] is transformed by language:

que o país real é atravessado e transfigurado por múltiplos outros, feitos do 'tecido de que são feitos os sonhos'. Abriu-se um espaço diferente: o país natal da língua é uma estepe ilimitada que leva a regiões desconhecidas, onde o leitor reconhece em si rostos anónimos, por vezes excessivamente estranhos. Aí ele descobre-se estrangeiro, negro, índio, branco, barata, baleia, árvore, pedra. Homossexual, transexual, ímpio e piedoso, blasfemador. O país natal compõe-se de infinitos territórios estrangeiros; a língua materna de inúmeras línguas outras, línguas mestiças e crioulos, calões, falares idiolectais, murmúrios inaudíveis, sons elementares.³³

Here we hear echoes of Deleuze: the repercussions throughout literature of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the infinite fabrics that make up the territory of the language. Hence, in Lispector's writing, Deleuze's thoughts are repeated countless times: the art of

literature is that of being a stranger in your own language. Literature is a kind of foreign language which is not another language 'mais un devenir-autre de la langue' [but a becoming-other of language].³⁴

Situating itself in a border zone, Clarice's literature implies the exclusion of any type of hierarchalization and proposes the establishment of a nomadic space: a being not from any one place, but rather existing in an infinite gravitation which is all places. Frontiers, which serve territories, impose categorizations, genre or conceptual distinctions. In the Lispectorian universe, heterogeneity, discontinuity and instability lead us to the space *in-between*. In terms of genre, her oeuvre can be categorized somewhere between fiction, essay and poem. We might say that, paradoxically, this is a kind of immobility in transit. The permanent autognosis of the side of immobility associates itself with the fleeing being, with problematization. The founding of the name (of literature) is thus sought on the horizon of the *non-place*.

We could say that Clarice Lispector is the first, most radical affirmation of a *non-place* in Brazilian literature. All great literature is marked by a principle of deterritorialization, although this does not necessarily imply a strategy that annuls geographical reference (in this context one only has to recall the skill of Guimarães Rosa). It is precisely the dereferentializing mode of Clarice's writing, the greatest proof of its difference, that will earn her a canonical place in the literature of her country. This is especially important because of the fact of her appearing in a period when literary affirmation was achieved through strategies of regionalism, which, even when articulated in dialectic with universalism, made it necessary to locate the specific region. And the true scope of this assertion of the reality of the *non-place* that Clarice's work presents can only be perceived when one keeps in mind the imposed obsession with territory within a vast cultural space with a very wide variety of implications and motivations, where literature is by and large a literature of place.

Last but not least, it is important to stress that the need to put in practice an experimentalism obsessed with difference underlies Clarice's writing, marked by a dense reflexive range. Such a need reflects on one hand a deliberate desire to innovate, to break with tradition, and on the other the creativity of an inner spirit that is permanently on the boil in its endless search for an original means of expression. Nevertheless, it does not seem possible to completely dissociate this constant effervescence from the deep-rooted disquiet that permeates nearly all her texts, a disquiet surely not divorced from

a vision of a world faced through the pain of estrangement. This brings to mind the memory of the lost mother. Even the ludic nature of a writing that thrives on successive fictional experiments does no more than accentuate by contrast the disquiet that radiates from each and every text where the *wounded body* is, in the final analysis, intensely reflected.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. 'I met a group of classmates from the Faculty on an excursion. My exile will become a little easier, I hope. You know, Lúcio, all the fuss I caused has only served to make me feel an enormous urge to prove to myself and to others that I am more than just a woman. I know that you don't think so. But I didn't believe it either, considering what I have done up to now. It's just that I am still existing in a potential state, I can feel that there is fresh water inside me, but I cannot find the source. / O.K. That's enough silliness. All this is very amusing. But I didn't expect to laugh at life. Like a good Slav, I was a serious young girl, prepared to sob for humanity ... (I'm laughing).' Lúcio Cardoso Archive, Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, Rio de Janeiro.
2. Teresa Cristina Montero Ferreira, *Eu sou uma pergunta: Uma biografia de Clarice Lispector* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1999), 89–90.
3. Quoted in Olga Borelli, *Clarice Lispector: Esboço para um possível retrato* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1981), 106.
4. 'In fact I don't know how to write letters about travel, in fact I don't even know how to travel. It's funny how, because I don't stay very long in places, I don't see them. I find Nature more or less the same, things are almost identical. I was more familiar with Arabs wearing veils when I was in Rio. Anyway, I hope never to demand any attitude from myself. It would be tiring.' *Ibid.*
5. Ferreira, *Eu sou uma pergunta*, 224.
6. *Ibid.*, 225.
7. Diane E. Marting (ed.), *Clarice Lispector: A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1993), 15–18 at 15.
8. This *crônica* appears in the collection *A descoberta do mundo* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1984).
9. *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres*, 16th edn. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1989), 58–9: 'Shaking, she knelt next to her bed for that was the way one prayed and said in a low, serious, sad voice, stammering her prayer with slight embarrassment: "unburden my soul, make me feel that Your hand is in mine, make me feel that death doesn't exist because in reality we're already in eternity, make me feel that to love is not to die [...] make me be charitable toward myself or else I won't be able to feel that God has loved me, make me not feel ashamed to want the hand of a loved one to clasp mine at the hour of my death, Amen.' *An Apprenticeship, or The Book of Delights*, trans. Richard Mazzara and Lorri A. Parris (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 34. Note the insistence with which this topic will occur, as for example in the following passage from 'Objeto gritante', an unpublished typescript that developed, in a

much condensed form, into the novel *Água viva* [Living water] (Clarice Lispector Archive, Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, Rio de Janeiro), fos. 154–5: ‘Vou escrevendo o que vier aos dedos. Por falar em dedos, fico tão agradecida com o fato de eu não ter perdido a mão direita no incêndio: iam amputá-la com medo de gangrena. Mas uma de minhas devotadas irmãs, preciosas que elas são, pediu ao médico encarecidamente que esperasse. Ele esperou. {escrito à mão: ‘Mas o médico esperou’}. E não foi preciso cortá-la. Posso pegar em qualquer coisa. Sabem mesmo o que é isto: pegar? É privilégio.’ [I’m going to write whatever comes to my fingertips. And speaking of fingers, I’m so grateful for the fact that I didn’t lose my right hand in the fire: they were going to amputate it because they were worried it would become gangrenous. But one of my devoted sisters, who are so precious, earnestly asked the doctor to wait. He waited {handwritten: ‘But the doctor waited’}. And it wasn’t necessary to cut it off. I can pick up anything. Do you know what it means: to be able to pick something up? It is a privilege.] See Alexandrino E. Severino, ‘As duas versões de *Água viva*’, *Remate de males* 9 (1989), 115–18.

10. Document from the Clarice Lispector Archive.
11. ‘My lord, I sometimes feel an amplification inside me: but I’m scared. I want God so much. But I can’t manage to feel him. Therefore I hand over the reins of my destiny to a force greater than myself. Because I, my lord, can’t do anything. I see myself as small, weak and without shelter in the huge house of my childhood, without anyone to look towards and feeling abandoned by God.’
12. Vítor Aguiar e Silva, *Teoria da literatura* (Coimbra: Almedina, 1983), 559.
13. ‘Having had to deal with problems with the skin graft, I found out that a bank for skin donors isn’t a viable project since the skin, because it is foreign, doesn’t adhere for very long to the hand receiving the graft. The skin has to be taken from another part of the patient’s body and immediately grafted onto the relevant place. That means that the graft is a gift from oneself to oneself. This case started me wondering a bit about the number of other times that people have to give things to themselves. Which brings loneliness and enrichment and struggle. I started to think–feel about kindness which is typically something one wants to receive from others and nevertheless sometimes it is only the kindness we show ourselves that frees us from guilt and forgives us. And it is also, for example, useless to receive the acceptance of others, when we ourselves do not give ourselves the self-acceptance of who we are. As for our frankness, the strongest part of ourselves is the part which has to give us cheer and goodwill. And there are certain pains which only our own pain, if truly deep, paradoxically, manages to alleviate. I remembered another kind of gift we give ourselves: that of artistic creation. For in the first place, you could say that we try to tear away our own skin to graft it on where necessary. Only after the graft has taken can we start to think about giving to others. Or it’s all mixed together, I don’t really know, artistic creation is a mystery that escapes me, thankfully. I don’t want to know much.’
14. Clarice Lispector, ‘Literatura de vanguarda no Brasil’, *Movimientos literarios de vanguardia en Iberoamérica: Memoria del 11.º Congreso* (Mexico City: University of Texas, Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 1965).
15. ‘It was something I thought about a lot. I was scared that writing would become a habit and not a surprise. I only like to write when I surprise myself.’

- Furthermore, I was afraid that if I continued to produce books I would pick up a detestable skill. A famous artist—I don't remember who—once said: "When your right hand is skilful, paint with your left, when the left becomes skilful too, paint with your feet." I follow that rule.' 'Escritora mágica', *Veja* 30 July 1975, 88.
16. João Cabral de Melo Neto, 'O Sim contra o Sim', *Obra completa* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1995), 297–301 at 298; trans. Richard Zenith as 'Yes Against Yes', *Selected Poetry, 1937–1990*, ed. Djelal Kadir (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1995), 123–7 at 125.
 17. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discurso, figura* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1979), 231.
 18. Grace Paley, Introduction to *Soulstorm: Stories by Clarice Lispector*, trans. Alexis Levitin (New York: New Directions, 1989), pp. ix–xi at ix.
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. Claire Varin, *Langues de feu: Essai sur Clarice Lispector* (Laval: Éditions Trois, 1990), 25.
 21. *Ibid.*, 58.
 22. Ferreira, *Eu sou uma pergunta*, 43.
 23. Dominique Fernandez, *L'arbre jusqu'aux racines: Psychanalyse et création* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 40.
 24. 'My birth was planned in such a lovely way. My mother was in poor health and there was a well-known superstition which claimed having a child could cure a woman who was ill. So I was deliberately conceived: with love and hope. Only I did not cure my mother. And to this day I carry this burden of guilt: my parents conceived me for a specific mission and I failed them. As if they had been relying on me to defend the trenches in time of war and I had deserted my post. I know my parents forgave me for being born in vain and having frustrated their great hopes. But I cannot forgive myself.'
 25. See Nádia Gotlib, *Clarice: Uma vida que se conta* (São Paulo: Ática, 1995), 68, on these different versions about the mother's illness: 'E a mãe, Marieta, fica sempre em casa, paralisada por causa da doença. Segundo Clarice, a doença aconteceu "por causa de meu nascimento" [...]. Há outra versão, que passam para a menina Clarice. "Eu morri de sentimento de culpa quando eu pensava que eu tinha feito isso quando eu nasci, mas me disseram que eu já tinha nascido. Não: que ela já [...] era paralítica." [And her mother, Marieta, did not leave the house, paralysed because of the illness. According to Clarice, the illness came about 'because of my birth'. There is another version which was passed down to Clarice as a child. 'I suffered from feelings of guilt when I thought that it was me who had done that when I was born, but they told me that I was already born. No: that she was already paralytic.']
 26. 'Although I know that, even in secret, freedom does not absolve guilt. But one must be greater than guilt. My least divine part is greater than my human guilt. God is greater than my essential guilt. I therefore prefer God to my guilt. Not to excuse myself and get away but because guilt lessens me.' *A paixão segundo G.H.*, 15th edn. (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1991), 91; *The Passion according to G.H.*, trans. Ronald W. Sousa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 79.
 27. Quoted in Borelli, *Clarice Lispector*, 114.

28. Varin, *Langues de feu*, 26.
29. 'Behind her speech impediment she hides a psychic conflict that has become a physical symptom. Because she does not adopt the language of the mother, she becomes partly to blame for her paralysis. The Yiddish language spreads disorder in her spoken language just as secretly as her French [r] which leads us down the wrong track. The language of the body of the mother sings out of the mouth of the daughter.' *Ibid.*, 64.
30. Ferreira, *Eu sou uma pergunta*, 229.
31. *Ibid.*
32. 'What I have inherited from others is not enough. If I were mute and unable to write and people were to ask me which language I should like to belong to, I would say English, for its precision and beauty. But since I was not born mute and could write, it became absolutely clear to me that I what I wanted was to write in Portuguese. I should even have preferred not to have learnt other languages just in order to keep my command of Portuguese virginal and limpid.'
33. 'that the real country is crossed and transfigured by multiple others, fashioned from "such stuff as dreams are made on". A different space has opened up: the native country of one's language is an endless steppe that leads to unknown regions, where the reader recognizes in her/himself anonymous faces, sometimes excessively strange. There s/he discovers that s/he is foreign, black, native, white, a cockroach, a whale, a tree, a stone. Homosexual, transsexual, impious and pitying, a blasphemer. The native country is composed of infinite foreign territories; the mother tongue of numerous other languages, mestizos and Creoles, slang, idelect speech, inaudible murmurs, elemental sounds.' José Gil, 'A invenção das estepes', *Público* (24 Sept. 1994).
34. Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique* (Paris: Minuit, 1993), 15.