

Clarice
Lispector
100
ANOS
entre
outras
artes

**A potência do olhar que
“toma conta do mundo” na
obra clariciana**

*The potential of “the look”
that “looks after the world” in
the writings of Clarice
Lispector*

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Resumo

Propôs-se o diálogo de *Água viva* (1973), de Clarice. Neste trabalho objetiva-se discorrer sobre a potência do olhar na escrita clariciana que olha o objeto e, em contrapartida, é também olhado por ele, o que provoca uma apreensão além do visível. Para isso, abordar-se-á de que forma a visão e seus desdobramentos ocupam uma centralidade espantosa na obra de Lispector e tece relação intrínseca com a crise da linguagem, cujas palavras não dão conta de exprimir o inexprimível.

Palavras-chave: Literatura. Olhar. Vazio. Perda. Linguagem.

Abstract

This work aims to examine the potential of “the look” in the writings of Clarice Lispector that views the object and, in contrast, is looked upon by it, thus causing an apprehension beyond the visible. With this in mind, it shall be examined how vision and its unfolding occupy an amazing centrality in Lispector’s work and weaves it into an intrinsic relationship with the crisis of language, whose words are unable to express the inexpressible.

Keywords: Literature. The Look. Emptiness. Loss. Language.

O que te digo deve ser lido rapidamente como quando se olha.

Clarice Lispector (1998, p. 17).

In examination of Clarice Lispector’s writings, one is faced with a constant recurring and permeating aspect. This is the problem of the nomination of language, which has already been extensively investigated in relation to Lispector’s work, first noted in *Near to the Wild Heart* and which continues to echo throughout until the author’s last works and more powerfully in *The Passion According to G.H* and *Água Viva*, which directly promote and discuss the deconstruction of representational language, one which has a fixed name for everything in the world.

Therefore, we come across *Água Viva* with a painter who ventures into the universe of words and, in doing so, finds “the full measure of silence” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 6), for the experiences that are lived and are found impossible to be transposed into words, a fact that triggers the crisis of the representation of language. Consequently, the narrator can only transmit the sensations and experiences that enter the universe of the unnameable and to show how words do not always satisfy. The way that the character aims to capture the moment when everything happens and “the look” is redirected to other things, such as objects, animals and inanimate beings who, in turn, return “the look,” communicating a void, a loss that words cannot fill. This return of “the look” that communicates a loss is thought to derive from what Georges Didi-Huberman states in the first chapter of *A inelutável cisão do ver*, found in his work *O que vemos o que nos olha* (2010), in which “the look,” a traditional object of philosophical, historical, literary and artistic investigation, has a prominent role and presence. It is a presence that is constituted due to an absence, as will be examined later. There are powers belonging to and within the visual.

In this chapter, Didi-Huberman states, “what we see is only worth — only lives — in our eyes through what sees us,” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2010, p. 29, translated by the authors)¹ in other words, the act of seeing openings in pairs — visible and invisible; the viewer and the viewed. In order to discuss this aspect, Didi-Huberman mentions minimalist art and places it under the burden of implying that there is always something that returns our look. When we view the philosopher, from the apparent simplicity of minimalist objects there is always something that looks back at us. From the simple displacement of these objects, there is something that looks at us. The lack of details and illusion actually serve as a background for a much greater experience, according to the critic.

Didi-Huberman also summons a passage from *Ulysses* by James Joyce where the character Stephen Dedalus sees his mother’s eyes before succumbing to his deathbed. The eyes look up to him as if begging for something. Soon after, he sees those same eyes close. We close our eyes to see — is what the whole passage suggests, because only when the character’s mother’s eyes are closed can he get a glimpse not only of his mother’s closed eyes, but also and most importantly, the whole experience that transcends the visual. As Didi-Huberman stresses: “Everything that appears to be seen is looked at by the loss of its mother” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2010, p. 32, translated by the authors)².

Something, like this, always looks at us imposing an “in” and “inside” when we see. To look, therefore, as a field in which visible and invisible merge, as is possible to read in the following excerpt taken from *Água viva*, where the narrator describes, or better yet, “looks at” an inanimate object, the chair. As the narrator looks at that object, she is also looked upon by the chair, because, “I look at the chair and this time it’s as if it too looked and saw. [...] Who invented the chair? It takes courage to write what comes to me: you never know what could come up and scare you” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 77-78). From this meeting of glances, an inspiration or a revelation comes to the narrator, something that to be written, to be expressed in words, the writer must have courage. Just another example of words not being able to satisfy the translation of the experience.

In order to look upon the unnameable, it is necessary to start towards a “New Kingdom.” This kingdom consists of visibility, where sensations and perception reign. Sensation is the way to capture what happens. After all, as the narrator/painter states, “I don’t know how to capture whatever exists except by living here

¹ In Portuguese, “O que vemos só vale — só vive — em nossos olhos pelo que nos olha”.

² In Portuguese, “Tudo o que se apresenta a ver é olhado pela perda de sua mãe.”

each thing that arises and no matter what it is” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 12). In the works of Lispector, this loss is accompanied by a look that desires, even more than discovering, to capture the mystery of things, however, as the narrator of *Água viva* emphasizes: “There is much to say that I don’t know how to say. The words are lacking” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 22).

Moreover, we find in Lispector’s writing a “look” that wishes to translate the unspeakable, the unique experience. In the case of *The Passion According to G.H.*, her encounter with the cockroach is configured as the breaking point of the always organized and stable system in which the character lives. G.H wishes to name something that is not in the order of representation but rather in the order of the fulguration of the instant. Looking at the cockroach and, in turn, being looked upon by it leads the character to try to find a new word that can express what she saw. However, the character comes back with only the unspeakable, emptiness and loss. The unspeakable can only be given to her through the failure of language:

I have to the extent that I determine — and that is the splendor of having a language. But I have much more to extent that I am unable to determine. Reality is raw material, language the way I seek it — and how I don’t find it. But it is from seeking and not finding that what I have not known is born, and I instantly recognize it. Language is my human endeavor. I have fatefully to go seeking and fatefully I return with empty hands. But — I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can be given me only through the failure of my language (LISPECTOR, 1988, p. 170).

In the attempt to translate an experience, the character seeks the language that, in reality, is her “raw material”. And, as she doesn’t find it, it is perceived that is “from seeking and not finding that what I have not known is born, and I instantly recognize it”. Therefore, Lispector’s narrative tries to narrate itself “reaching emptiness, the self without a mask, having as horizon [...] the identification between being and saying, between the written sign and the experience of the thing, unspeakable and silent” (NUNES, 1995, p. 155, translated by the authors)³.

This idea is central to studying Clarice Lispector, as it runs through all of her poetics. In *Água viva*, the character’s view of the world and the things that surround her fills the void left by an unspeakable language. Through the images raised by the inventive look found in the work in question, emptiness and loss merge and are confused with fullness, the sublime and the mystery of life.

Loss is the foundation that drives every reflection proposed by Didi-Huberman. It is by it and through it that everything is revealed. Didi-Huberman states that, within us, there is a split that separates what we see from what sees us and that this split is ineluctable, something that prevails i.e., to win against what you cannot fight. This split opens through loss, the emptiness of what looks at us. The “look,” as a human dimension of vision defining its intentionality and purpose, according to Jacques Aumont, is constituted as a work of loss that touches us in our deepest being “and from that point it looks at us, concerns us, chases us” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2010, p. 33, translated by the authors)⁴. Loss is closely linked with being (*ser*) and not with having (*ter*) because:

[...] The familiar experience of what we see seems most often to give rise to a feeling: when we see something, we usually have the impression of gaining something. But the modality of the visible becomes inescapable — that is, voted for a question of being — when to see is to feel that something inevitably eludes us, that is: when to see is to lose. Everything is there (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2010, p. 34)⁵.

For the statement “when seeing is to lose,” the following premise is established: to lose is to have. Therefore, it is possible to read the following statement by G.H: “I have much more to extent that I am unable to determine” (LISPECTOR, 1988, p. 170). Loss, therefore, with its character of escaping, operates a double movement in which “we close our eyes to see” flows into “we open our eyes to experience what we do not see”, perceived when what we look at affects us immediately. In this manner, the writing of Clarice Lispector

³ “Chegar ao esvaziamento, ao *eu* sem máscara, tendo como horizonte [...] a identificação entre o ser e o dizer, entre o signo escrito e a vivência da coisa, indizível e silenciosa” (Original Portuguese).

⁴ In Portuguese, “e desse ponto nos olha, nos concerne, nos persegue”.

⁵ In Portuguese, “A experiência familiar do que vemos parece na maioria das vezes dar ensejo a um *ter*: ao ver alguma coisa, temos em geral a impressão de ganhar alguma coisa. Mas a modalidade do visível torna-se inelutável — ou seja, votada a uma questão de ser — quando ver é sentir que algo inelutavelmente nos escapa, isto é: quando ver é perder. Tudo está aí”.

is at the heart of this issue and it is in this sense that we call on her work, especially *Água viva*, to dialogue with what Didi-Huberman proposed.

In *Água Viva* the narrator vents: “It’s so hard to speak and say things that can’t be said. It’s so silent. How to translate the silence of the real encounter between the two of us? It is so hard to explain: I looked straight at you for a few instants. Such moments are my secret” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 47). This affirms that when words are not capable of translating silence (or so many of the other themes in Lispector’s poetics), when words denounce a loss, something linked to untranslatability, escapes, it is “the look” that emerges as the sensitive responsible person who transmits such a moment, such a secret.

The sensitive world is only within the eye’s reach. Merleau-Ponty points out, in one of the excerpts from *O olho e o espírito*, that, “the seer does not appropriate what he sees: only if it approaches him by looking, does he open himself to the world” (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1975, p. 278, translated by the authors)⁶. Everything that the seer sees and feels is within sight. To discuss the instant of vision, for example, the narrator of *Água viva* affirms the need to be more discursive than the instant itself, implying the effort of words to express these moments of perception, whereas, just the movement of looking is enough to capture the glimpse. Proof of this is when she affirms: “many instants will pass before I unfold and exhaust the single and quick complexity of a look” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 48), that is, until she managed to concatenate in words, the one and rapid complexity of just a single glance, many others have already passed and the character would not be able to express such an event.

Therefore, in *Água viva*, we note some important relationships regarding “the look” and its implications in the link between the looker and the looked upon. For this reason, the main character seeks to establish possible relations between the visible and the invisible that are intertwined in the act of seeing and looking upon us. This work, considered by many to be the most experimental of her narratives, alludes to a fictional production of a heterogeneous and hybrid nature, ratified by its main character — sometimes subterfused under the pronoun “I” — when declaring that it is: “No use trying to pin me down: I simply slip away and won’t allow it, no label will stick” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 7). The book can be considered a novel, a chronicle and a diary since it presents itself as a junction, mixture and hybrid from an engineering and inventive look.

Sônia Roncador, in *Poéticas do empobrecimento*, proposes that between the end of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s, Lispector, “embarks on new aesthetic projects” (RONCADOR, 2002, p. 13, translated by the authors)⁷, and within them, constructs a composition model based on assembly. According to Roncador, Lispector’s last works are marked by heterogeneity. Diary, informal conversation, juxtaposition of images and lines; “assembly of discrepant fragments or fragments of different rhetorical levels” (RONCADOR, 2002, p. 34, translated by the authors)⁸ contribute to the realm of Lispector’s writing from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Lispector’s draws on a mounting method, which aims to produce, for example, a kind of bad taste effect. As Lispector composes a text by assembling juxtaposed elements, different from each other, such as the noble and low elements, it causes an aesthetic deflation of her writing, as previously mentioned.

Therefore, in the text from 1973, a language is found that struggles to free itself from the rigidity of the nomination and from a representative language, a fugitive language from a place where everything has a fixed shape. All this is proposed by Lispector’s new aesthetic-literary project, where there is a significant structural change culminating in hybrid texts that eliminate the narrative temporal sequence, or lyrical style, of a more colloquial tone, proposing a narrative that lacks plot. After all, in *Água viva* there is an athematic theme. The message that desires to be transmitted is that her text is not closed. It does not constitute a single genre, but on the contrary, is a mixture, juxtaposition, montage and, even further, an image. Images that are formed in the search for what lays behind thoughts. Lispector sometimes affirms a constant pilgrimage in search of, or rather, “behind” what is “behind thought”. What is to be found behind thoughts are images. Since the image comes before the word, it precedes the text in the process of meaning. This is one’s sense of discovery, what guides the reader in the search of the unnameable.

⁶ In Portuguese, “o vidente não se apropria daquilo que vê: só se aproxima dele pelo olhar, abre-se para o mundo”.

⁷ “Embarca em novos projetos estéticos” (Original Portuguese).

⁸ “Montagem de fragmentos discrepantes ou de fragmentos de níveis retóricos diferentes” (Original Portuguese).

Lispector’s writings present an agonistic world, according to Lúcia Helena (2006) and what we find in the 1973 work is just that: a subject who reflects on the act of writing and, in doing so, plunges into pain and the non-acceptance of a world that categorizes beings and life, into helplessness, fear and loss. All these elements that present a disconcerting subjectivity under a breathtaking look at everything while reflecting upon everything and improvising on themes that guide her through life, hence managing life, death, painting, writing, flowers, animals, etc.

Karl Erik Shollhammer, in *Além do visível: o olhar da literatura*, stresses that, “visible images are sources of inspiration for literature, but in literature, visible images intersect with non-visible ones and establish a relationship of mutual inspiration with them” (SHOLLHAMMER, 2007, p. 10, translated by the authors)⁹. This occurs when we accept the invitation to close our eyes “to see and open our eyes and to experience what we don’t see” in the domain of the invisible, the non-verbal.

Because of this, we believe that the interest in the dimension of the visible, the visuals in Lispector’s work arise when words fail to convey a state of mind, a disposition behind the thought. The writer, therefore, uses images to speak the unspeakable, or rather, to suggest the unspeakable. And these images are seen through words. The author’s view, then, appears linked to these themes and proposes itself as the mainstay of an aesthetic that favors images that, in turn, project a transgression through language, as in the case of flowers, which we will discuss later. Therefore, images are linked to the crisis of language, the heterogeneous, the theme of death, animals, and of an indescribable inner experience. Images impose themselves beyond the limits of word registration. All of this supported by “the look” — “a look that looks after the world”.

The narrator/painter says: “I’m tired. My tiredness comes often because I’m an extremely busy person: I look after the world” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 53) and, from that small statement, the narrator/painter goes on listing the facts for how she looks after the world. For example: she looks from the terrace of her house to the stretch of beach along the sea; she looks at the almond trees on the street where she lives; she sees the starry and navy blue night sky; she says she looks after the malnourished nine-year-old boy dressed in rags. The character also testifies that she looks after the botanical garden and says she remains “exhausted,” adding, “I must look after thousands of plants and trees and especially the giant water lily. It’s there. And I look at her” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 54). In this way, we realize that her eyes testify to life being born, growing and dying, as is seen in other passages.

These and other images express the expressionless, which in turn, is not subject to form. In fact, if we think about it from another perspective, it is the expression of emptiness, lack and loss. Observe the following statement by the narrator: “Note that I don’t mention my emotional impressions: I lucidly speak about some of the thousands of things and people I look after. Nor is it a job because I don’t earn any money from it. I just get to know what the world is like” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 54). Her gaze gets a glimpse of and testifies to the expressionlessness that prevents her from printing her emotional impressions before the world she “looks after.” It carries with it lack and emptiness.

For Lispector, the expressionless is the “it,” the neutral, the non-human. Due to this, in front of the water lily, the almond trees, the nine-year-old boy, the starry and navy blue sky, the narrator is faced with the expressionlessness in which the world escapes her. She thus reaches the limits of language that passes to be expressed through the visualization of these things. The character does not mention her impressions about the world. She only knows what the world is like through “the look” that focuses on the expressionless. She therefore manages to apprehend the expressionless, the inorganic present in the objects around it. As Mayara Guimarães points out regarding the novel *The Passion According to G.H.*:

When one understands that to reach the inhuman he/she must first reach the living nucleus, one discovers that it is necessary to invent a language that can shape the inexpressible — the neutral — through the word, and that does not repeat the traditional expressiveness of the work of art. With this, the narrator realizes that the only form of expression of the void, of the neutral — which is the deepest living nucleus — is the expressionless. [...] For Lispector, the expressive is the artistic

⁹ “As imagens visíveis são fontes de inspiração para a literatura, mas na literatura as imagens visíveis se cruzam com as não-visíveis e estabelecem com elas uma relação de mútua inspiração” (Original Portuguese).

form represented by the subjectivity that defines the beautiful, the ordering of the form and the values (GUIMARÃES, 2009, p. 32)¹⁰.

In Lispector’s works there is a desire to build literature that proposes to abandon representation and expressiveness. However, the only form of the expression of emptiness, of the neutral is the expressionless that has always been a blind and secret search, since in *The Passion According to G.H.*, where we read the following statement: “I don’t want half-light, I don’t want well-made face, I don’t want the expressive. I want the inexpressive. I want the inhuman within the person” (LISPECTOR, 1988, p. 150).

In *Água viva*, what we find is a character who craves the unexpected, the silence and the meaninglessness that comes from the expressionless. According to her words: “You read me in silence. But in this unlimited silent field I unfurl my wings, free to live. So I accept the worst and enter the core of death and that is why I’m alive. The feeling core. And that it makes me quiver” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 49), or to paraphrase, the narrator accepts silence, which is part of the universe of the expressionless and enters the core of death. However, by entering it, simultaneously, it enters the core of the sensitive as well. This affirms that through the expressionless the character comes out of a hardened, categorical writing and when this finally happens, it is possible to enter the core of sensitivity for which images play a central role. After all, art can be something that touches the inexpressive.

“To look after the world” is to touch the inexpressive. It is to feel as if it gives you the power to find out what the world is like. However, this mission is accompanied by a painful path that forces you, for example, to: “remember the inexpressive and therefore frightening face of the woman I saw on the street. With my eyes I look after the misery of the people who live on the hillsides” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 54). Through this, it is possible to observe that it is “the look” that provides emotional impressions and directs its perception of the world. Through “the look” the character apprehends the moments that she longs for.

Put in another way, “the look” goes beyond the banal. For example, amongst many passages we find one that refers to the image of flowers in which the narrator/painter weaves a series of intimate, reflective and sublime considerations about them: “Now I shall speak of the sadness of flowers” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 49) and by looking at flowers she is able to deconstruct a traditional view that for a long time propagated over them, just as Georges Bataille did in the essay entitled *A linguagem das flores*. In this short text, the French writer aims to deconstruct the traditional and symbolic view of beauty that one has of flowers, especially roses, as an image of love.

Bataille discusses the metamorphosis of the flower ideal, arguing the value of the flower in the world. He affirms that within a flower there is an instinct of life and death that is intrinsic to him and that, commonly, the decorative elements in flowers replace essential organs that supply life and death culminating in the idea that love smells like death. Therefore, it is understood that love does not embody itself a red rose but it is much more than that. If we say that flowers are beautiful, it is because they seem to conform to what they should be, i. e, because they represent, for what they are, the human ideal. However, removing the petals you can find the smaller part, the stigma. We can find the ugliness, leaving only the tuft with a sordid aspect.

Bataille investigates the language of flowers in order to show us that the ideal of beauty disappears as a result of ugliness, which in turn, is linked to death, the grotesque. The author discusses the physically low, ugly elements that constitute a symbolic ideal of beauty spread over flowers. In opposition to this, Bataille creates an anatomy of the flower, with the clear intention of revealing the ugliness that is only seen when removing the petals of the flower. His anatomy focuses on the interior, which does not correspond to its exterior beauty, and from there it weaves its considerations.

The author discusses, for example, the grime of its organs (*salissure*), talks about the corolla and its sign of failure because it rots impudently in the sun. Bataille also shows the reverse of idealization, of the flower ideal because it removes lyricism, beauty, the purest feelings — what leads to the asceticism of the

¹⁰ “Quando entende que para atingir o inumano precisa primeiro atingir o núcleo vivo, descobre que é necessário inventar uma linguagem que possa dar forma ao inexprimível — o neutro — através da palavra, e que não repita a expressividade tradicional da obra de arte. Com isso, a narradora percebe que a única forma de expressão do vazio, do neutro — que é o mais profundo núcleo vivo — é o inexpressivo. [...] Para Lispector, o expressivo é a forma artística representada pela subjetividade que define o belo, a ordenação da forma e os valores” (Original Portuguese).

flower’s vision — and engrafts the dark and deadly side present in it. What is considered to be elevated, noble and sacred is demoted by a subversive vision.

That being said, we direct our view to the scenes in which flowers appear in Lispector’s prose, particularly in *Água viva*. There are entire pages in which the character makes some considerations about flowers that make us want to dialogue with Bataille’s text. When she looks at the flowers, she points not to the ideal of beauty commonly propagated, as we have seen, but, rather to the sadness, characteristic of what is in suffering and affliction. It is about what flowers represent to her eyes, her feelings or even to that moment of improvisation.

Although she writes that, “The rose is the feminine flower that gives herself wholly and such that the only thing left to her is the joy of having given herself. Her perfume is a crazy mystery. [...] The way she opens herself into a woman is so beautiful” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 50), emphasizing, therefore, the erotic view of the rose. In other passages the narrator states that the *Angelica* species is dangerous; the orchid is *exquisite* and unfriendly; a tree aeonium is always dead; a night-blooming jasmine “has a perfume of the full moon. It’s phantasmagoric and a bit frightening and is for people who like danger. It only emerges at night with its dizzying scent. [...] It’s highly dangerous: it’s a whistle in the dark, which no one can bear. But I can bear it because I love danger” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 52), even the carnation “the carnation has an aggressiveness that comes from a certain irritation. The ends of its petals are rough and impudent. The carnation’s perfume is somehow mortal (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 50), and furthermore, she writes that some of them resemble a deceased child’s coffin.

The flower, therefore, does not live up to its representation offered by certain poets, but is the result of a subversive, transgressive look. Color, smell, pollen and pistil reveal much more than beauty, other elements that language cannot express. Through the viewpoint, the character in *Água viva* offers an adjective to flowers that escapes the representation of the ideal of beauty they are given.

Furthermore, it is essential to mention the poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto, since he adopts the same procedure when writing, “Antiode”. In this poem, João Cabral uses the vision of the flower in order to show what goes against the Ode — an artistic form of Greek origin whose theme is an homage represented in a serious and solemn tone — which is against uplift, modesty, the sublime, “purity” and “beauty”: the romantic feelings said to be profound in which we clearly perceive the poet’s intention to unravel the flower in order to discuss the process of the construction of the literary text.

In line with Clarice and Bataille, Cabral dissects the image of the flower until it reaches “poem manure”. We realize that his stance against the sacredness of poetic language is explicit as soon as we read the title and subtitle — “contra poesia dita profunda” —, already denouncing the tonic of the verses. His poetry is incisive in declaring:

Poetry wrote you: Flower! Knowing
that you are feces. Feces like any other,
generating mushrooms
(rare, fragil, mushrooms) in the moist heat of our mouth
(MELO NETO, 2014, p. 36, translated by the authors)¹¹.

It is noticed in “Antiode” there exist various passages that mention the corporeal and organic such as the words “ovary, intestines, feces, mouth, vomit, spit”; showing us the “body” of a poem that is transformed. A poem that admits not a “flower-virtue,” but instead “life and death” in its entrails.

Like Lispector, Cabral lowers the rhetorical levels of the poem and brings out those grotesque words or, “impossibilities of poetry.” Both are against the ornamental and poetic sense of the tradition of good taste. Both emphasize literary works that are anti-narrative and anti-literary. Benedito Nunes reminds us that “Antiode” is part of João Cabral’s negative poetry triptych, as he discusses the recurring marks of modern lyric poetry that Hugo Friedrich, in *Estrutura da lírica moderna* (1978), lists it as negative categories, which

¹¹ “Poesia te escrevia: flor! Conhecendo / que és fezes. Fezes como qualquer, / gerando cogumelos / (raros, frágeis, cogumelos) no úmido calor de nossa boca” (Original Portuguese).

represent ugliness, decomposition, grotesqueness, deformation, dehumanization, strangeness, and absurdity, given its high coefficient of negative elements.

In one of his letters to Clarice Lispector, the poet himself assumes: “You know perfectly well that you write the only current Brazilian author prose that I would like to write” (LISPECTOR, 2002, p. 216, translated by the authors)¹² revealing an affinity with the writer’s poetics, which also pertain to all these categories mentioned above. In the language of both, the flower is at the service of the intention of the artist, sculptor and poet since the image of the flower opens in two poles or rather, two ends.

Rejecting high language, profound poetry and removing the sublime emblem commonly related to the image of the flower, this poem reveals the discovery, or the blooming, of another flower: the flower that is feces. Benedito Nunes, when discussing Cabral’s poem, points out that in this second section:

Mention is made of the image that is used and to which properties are attributed that no longer belong to the primitive object. It is the “image of the flower,” not flower as an object, which has two ends, like a rope. From the flower as an object, a first degree image, we move on to a second degree, which is the image of the flower mentioned in parentheses. We are not just on the metaphor plane, but on the metaphor analysis, whose elements are presented as dissociated and en route to other possible dissociations (NUNES, 2007, p. 40, translated by the authors)¹³.

In this excerpt, Nunes shows that there are two images provided by the flower contained in the poem: one of the first degree, which is the object flower, and another of the second degree, which we could very well label as the poetic construction. The flower, in parentheses, unfolds, since it is the one that provides the “two-pointed” image, which continues to be developed and from it new images are produced. The flower, that is a word, opens itself up into two images: one that performs its function as an organ in the sense of, “the mouth that eats,” and the other, “the mouth that adorns,” is at the service of poetic making, because there are “the two mouths of the flower image”: the real and the created, i.e. the fictional. The image of the mouth, therefore, as an image of the flower as a word. It is at the service of poetic making. Hence, the poem is seen as a “machine”: a language machine that makes new images: the flower that language allows and that focuses on construction: “poetry, I know what other words you are,” as is written in another verse. The flower and the mouth, therefore, become, more than objects; they become matters of poetry. The flower is the word, the jump, the explosion and the machine.

It is worth remembering that “Antiode” is inserted in *Psicologia da composição*, a work that brings together eight poems that highlight the process of poetic creation and *Água viva* is a book that similarly deals with the making of poetry and literature. In one of her excerpts the narrator guarantees: “When a person is already no longer breathing you give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation: you place your mouth upon the other person’s and breathe. And the other starts to breathe again. This exchange of breaths is one of the most beautiful things that I’ve ever heard about life” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 57).

In both the poem and the excerpt taken from the book, we witness the image of the mouth as something that goes beyond an organ of the senses. We have in the excerpt the image of the mouth that needs another mouth to take its breath from it. We could read the passage as the deficiency that the word has in naming and, from there, it is necessary to make a “mouth to mouth” with the other arts. The dynamics of mouth breathing is a metaphor for understanding the generating movement of creation. One feeds the other. To talk about the creative process Clarice “breathes,” and absorbs “oxygen” from other arts. Lispector’s literature “gasps,” poetry from the mouth, with paintings, drawings and music. The mouth then becomes a literary creation. All of this is within the domain of the arts, since “No, all this isn’t happening in real facts but in the domain of-of an art: yes, of an artifice through which a most delicate reality arises which comes to exist in me: the transfiguration happened to me” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 14).

¹² “V. sabe perfeitamente que escreve a única prosa de autor brasileiro atual que eu gostaria de escrever” (Original Portuguese).

¹³ “Faz-se menção à imagem que se usa e à qual se atribuem propriedades que não pertencem mais ao primitivo objeto. É a ‘imagem da flor’, e não a flor objeto, que tem duas pontas, como uma corda. Da flor como objeto, imagem de primeiro grau, passamos a uma de segundo grau, que é a imagem da flor mencionada entre parênteses. Não estamos no plano da metáfora apenas, mas no da análise da metáfora, cujos elementos aí se apresentam dissociados e a caminho de outras dissociações possíveis” (Original Portuguese).

Therefore, a flower is a mouth as well as feces that in turn, are also poetry. The image of the flower seen as feces and the mouth that adorns the deceased, “deprives itself of the poetry of all superfluous apparel and all illusory depth of every adornment of fantasy and of the sublimation of sentiments” (NUNES, 2007, p. 45, translated by the authors)¹⁴, a trait explored by João Cabral, Clarice and Bataille. Therefore, there is an object-flower and a feces-flower constructed by the poem. It is the created artistic flower that unfolds into a flower, mouth, feces and desecrates poetic language.

All of this is relating back to “the look”. To look at something is to apprehend it beyond what is visible, far from the frontiers in which it manifests itself immediately before our eyes, because we weave it with a movement of perception provided by the senses, which in this case, is vision. That being said, it is easy to see that Lispector and Bataille weave an intimate relationship between language and imagery, material concreteness versus abstraction of the idea. Both pursue the invisibility that is present by absence: absence of the word. After all, the vision of the flower and everything that is intrinsically linked, demonstrates that it certainly cannot be properly expressed with the help of language.

It is necessary now to return to the beginning of the discussion that was proposed by Didi-Huberman and his statement that something looks back at us when we see it, but that it does so through a void or a loss. In *Água viva*, the narrator reports that:

There’s a thing in the air-the body alerts me that something new is coming and I bristle all over. I don’t know why. That very spring I was given the plant called primula. It’s so mysterious that in its mystery is contained the inexplicable part of nature. It doesn’t look at all unique. But on the precise day when spring starts its leaves die and in their place are born closed flowers that have an extremely dumbfounding feminine and masculine perfume (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 56).

The primrose, a plant that apparently has nothing unique to itself — such as minimalist objects that are seen as simple geometric volumes — disturbs the character’s gaze and causes within her a mystery so great that, even though her body is “all excited” in the face of this mystery, she cannot find the explanation given the smell of a “new thing” that the plant evokes, because the primrose contains the “inexplicable of nature.” So, we are immediately invited by the narrator to enter a new kingdom: “Pay attention and as a favor: I’m inviting you to move to a new kingdom” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 50). The realm of the sensitive in which word, image, and “the look” rule together.

As it is not able to grasp the total essence of objects, “the look” circumscribed in *Água viva* surrenders a “heavy life all in symbols” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 13-14), especially when the narrator/painter talks about the fleeting moments, unable to fully apprehend herself. The loss that occurs at the moment when “the look” seeks to give meaning to things, to objects, and is redirected when the character approaches those objects. Sometimes we come across passages that serve as witness to this. In Lispector’s prose, “the look” operates in different ways. One of which is when it refers to an identification with animals that constitutes itself as another recurring aspect in Lispector’s works. In *Água viva* when the narrator comes across a caged black panther, she recounts:

A caged black panther. Once I looked a panther right in the eye and she looked at me right in the eye. We transmuted. That fear. I left completely darkened inside, the “X” uneasy. Everything had happened beyond thought. I miss that terror that exchanging glances with the black panther gave me. I know how to terrorize (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 73).

It is not the first time that we have encountered this type of scene in Lispector’s work. Let us recall not only G.H’s encounter with a cockroach, but also the exchange of looks following that encounter: “Two cockroaches mounted on the cockroach, and each eye reproduced the entire animal” (LISPECTOR, 1988. p. 48). Such an encounter with the cockroach generated a bond of affinity between the character and his opposite, since what was seen was imposed on “the look”, and the way of seeing became an identification, or, as in the case of the above excerpt, a transmutation, i.e., the possibility of being for oneself what is mirrored in the eyes of the other.

¹⁴ “Despoja-se a poesia de todas as roupagens supérfluas e de toda profundidade ilusória de todos os ornamentos da fantasia e da sublimação dos sentimentos” (Original Portuguese).

Transmutation is seen under several biases. Among them, one that can be read as the animal side of the work that — it is a revelation of the inner animal that lives inside us. In this way, it is possible to affirm that the encounter with the panther generated a profound identification and interaction between the viewer and the viewed to the point that both transmute. The character empties herself of her human condition to be equal to the animal. After all, in previous passages she had already reported that: “I don’t humanize animals because it’s an offense-you must respect their nature-I am the one who animalizes myself” (LISPECTOR, 2012, p. 42-43). The power of “the look” identifies the human being to the thing, to the animal.

According to Evando Nascimento in *Clarice Lispector: uma literatura pensante*, “the look:”

No longer as a substitute for reason, as *theóréó* (contemplating; observing, examining, looking with interest; considering with intelligence) Greek suggests, but as a dangerous trigger of an experience of things, which takes us to the fringes of the human, where men border with animals and things in general (NASCIMENTO, 2012, p. 70)¹⁵.

Consequently, we find in the writings of Clarice Lispector a shrewd literature about the unraveling the life’s mysteries, especially with regard to non-human life. There is always an exchange, the self in the other or one constituting the other. Nascimento affirms that *Água viva* “has something to become animal, to become plantlike, to become a thing”¹⁶. It is a book almost object, almost plant, almost animal. Animals, plants, flowers, things, in essence, all objects prevail, think and reflect an insurmountable literature. Consequently, the process of discovering the mysteries of life, and the creation that governs literature, emerges from images through a phenomenological “look.”

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¹⁵ “Não mais como suplente da razão, tal como *theóréó* (contemplar; observar, examinar, olhar com interesse; considerar com a inteligência) grego sugere, mas como deflagradora perigosa experiência coisal, que nos leva aos confins do humano, ali onde os homens confinam com bichos e coisas em geral” (Original Portuguese).

¹⁶ “Tem algo de tornar-se-animal, de tornar-se-planta, de tornar-se-coisa” (Original Portuguese).

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