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## The Art of Survival: A Textual Analysis of Clarice Lispector's *The Fifth Story*<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The present paper proposes a textual analysis of Clarice Lispector's short story titled *The Fifth Story* (*A quinta história*). The short narrative was published in 1964 in the collection *The Foreign Legion* (*A legião estrangeira*) and is an example of Lispector's intense fascination with the creative process. In addition, the story discusses the idea of survival, which, in my view, is vividly and visibly reflected in the metanarrative presented by Lispector. Finally, the unusual structure of *The Fifth Story* undeniably draws attention to the complexity of Lispector's poetics.

**Keywords:** Clarice Lispector, short story, literary awareness, metanarrative, survival.

The Ukraine-born Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) is one of the most important Latin American authors of the twentieth century and is

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is partially based on the author's master's thesis (A. Gabor, *A Lesson in Loving the Word: Translating Clarice Lispector into Polish*, Master's thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst 2017).

considered a major female short story writer and novelist in world literature.<sup>2</sup> Her writing can be described as a journey into the human mind; it is characterised by profound introspectiveness infused with subjectivity and steeped in philosophy. Moreover, in her writing, Lispector manifests a deep literary awareness, which she would often express in interviews: “The problem of artistic creation has always fascinated me”, and “[t]he word is my means of communication. I could only love it”.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, the treatment of language and the word is of paramount importance in Lispector’s writing in the sense that it represents a connection between form and content, draws attention to the process of writing, the creation of a literary text and exposes the dynamics between the author and the work she produces.

One of the stories which best illustrate Lispector’s fascination with the metanarrative aspect of writing is the short narrative *The Fifth Story* (*A quinta história*)<sup>4</sup> from the 1964 collection *The Foreign Legion* (*A legião estrangeira*).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lispector is the author of novels, short stories, chronicles and children’s literature. Her novels include: *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), *The Chandelier* (1946), *The Besieged City* (1949), *The Apple in the Dark* (1961), *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), *Apprenticeship or the Book of Delights* (1968), *The Stream of Life* (1973), *The Hour of the Star* (1977), and, posthumously, *A Breath of Life: Pulsations* (1978). Short story collections (I am using titles proposed by Katrina Dodson in *The Complete Stories*): *Family Ties* (1960), *The Foreign Legion* (1964), *Covert Joy* (1971), *The Imitation of the Rose* (1973), which contains stories previously published in the three volumes mentioned earlier, *Where Were You at Night* and *The Via Crucis of the Body*, both published in 1974, and *The Beauty and the Beast* (1979). Some of her children’s books include *The Mystery of the Thinking Rabbit* (1967) and *The Woman Who Killed the Fish* (1968); most of her journalist writing (chronicles) were compiled in the collection *Discovering the World* (1984).

<sup>3</sup> C. Lispector, *De corpo inteiro*, Rio de Janeiro 1975, p. 61. All translations of this book by Agnieszka Gabor-da Silva.

<sup>4</sup> *A quinta história* first appeared in the women’s section “Entre mulheres” (*Between Women*) of the newspaper “O Comício”, on August 8, 1952. It was only a short excerpt, limited to the recipe on how to kill cockroaches, signed with one of Clarice’s pseudonyms—Teresa Quadros—and titled *Meio cômico mas eficaz... (A comical but effective means)* (see: N.B. Gotlib, *Clarice: uma vida que se conta*, São Paulo 1995, chapter. “Readers of Clarice”, p. 190). In 1962, it appeared in the newspaper *Senhor*. After it had been published in *A legião estrangeira* (1964), it was republished in the newspaper “Jornal do Brasil”, in 1969, and in the collection *A descoberta do mundo* (1984), with changes only to the title: *Cinco relatos um tema (Five accounts one theme)*. The story also appeared in the collections *Felicidade clandestina* (1971) and *A imitação da rosa* (1973), without changes in the text. See: S. Hahn, *O texto concreto: a reescrita dos textos em Clarice Lispector*, Master’s thesis, Federal University of Santa Catarina, 1995, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that 1964 witnessed not only the publication of the collection *The Foreign Legion*, in which *The Fifth Story* appeared, but also the release of the novel *The Passion According to G.H.* (*A paixão segundo G.H.*), which belongs to Lispector’s greatest works. As she later commented, the attention given to the novel entirely repressed the interest around the volume of short stories (N.B. Gotlib, *op.cit.*, p. 344). Apart from the date, the two texts have the presence of cockroaches in common.

Afonso Romano de Sant'Anna considers the structure of the text "concentric and spiraling" because it revolves around the same topic—the narrator's plan to kill cockroaches—and is therefore abundant in "intratextual connections," that is, textual references that occur within the same text.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as Sant'Anna affirms, the narrative contains intertextual connections because its structure "is a small-scale model of a process that is repeated throughout Lispector's entire oeuvre."<sup>7</sup> In this way, *The Fifth Story* is a significant piece of writing since it constitutes a key that opens the door to understanding Lispector's aesthetics.

As mentioned above, the text in question exposes Lispector's literary concept: "This story could be called *The Statues*. Another possible name is *The Murder*. And also *How to Kill Cockroaches*. So I will tell at least three stories, all true because they don't contradict each other."<sup>8</sup> Immediately after signalling the fragmentation of the piece, the narrator reaffirms its unity: "Though a single story"—in order to break it again—"they would be a thousand and one, were I given a thousand and one nights."<sup>9</sup> The narrator's reference to Scheherazade brings about the issue of survival; after all, the Persian queen would tell the one thousand and one stories to save herself from being sacrificed. The present paper will attempt to describe Lispector's form of survival and the implications of the unusual structure of the story on the author's creation process.

## Cockroach: the respected and the repelled

Evandro Nascimento points to the dual significance of the cockroach in relation to the human being: its remoteness, because "on the scale of values attributed to the living being, insects are at the end, together with bacteria and viruses" and its proximity, because cockroaches inhabit people's homes.<sup>10</sup> Although Nascimento's observation is accurate, it lacks the fact that cockroaches are considered invaders of human dwellings and they cannot be tamed like other animals, despite belonging to the animal species. They are not useful

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<sup>6</sup> A.R. de Sant'Anna, *The Epiphanic Ritual of the Text*, in: *La palabra según Clarice Lispector: Aproximaciones críticas. A palavra segundo Clarice Lispector: Aproximações críticas. The Word According to Clarice Lispector: Critical Approaches*, eds. L. Namorato, C. Ferreira, Lima 2011, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, transl. K. Dodson, New York 2015, p. 309.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> E. Nascimento, *Clarice Lispector: uma literatura pensante*, Rio de Janeiro 2012, p. 41. All translations of this book by Agnieszka Gabor-da Silva.

like bees or associated with any virtues, such as ants, which are seen as hard-working. They are a source of disgust because of their association with filth, they feed on human food leftovers, and they are carriers of various diseases. Even if we run away from a cockroach or try to kill it, “its being out of sight does not make it out of mind” because “no matter what we do, its filthiness is inescapable”.<sup>11</sup>

On a less disgusting note, cockroaches are “considered the oldest beings on the planet”, as “cockroaches were always there, as long as there was life”.<sup>12</sup> The cockroach, then, evokes ambivalent feelings: of respect, due to its antique continuity as a being and as an untamed species, and of repulsion, because of its invasive nature and association with dirt. Interestingly, the narrator is only triggered to perform the actual cleansing once she starts preparing the fatal mixture, since before that the cockroaches only inhabited her thoughts. By transforming the abstract into the concrete, the narrative takes the reader through the meanders of the motives, the implementation, and the aftermath of the crime against cockroaches.

### Fighting against facts

The first story, titled *How to Kill Cockroaches*, resembles an objective summary or a report because it merely states the facts. A tale devoid of tensions and reflections sounds rather unfamiliar to Lispector: “Facts trip me up. That is why I am now going to write about not-facts, that is, about things and their gaudy mystery”.<sup>13</sup> She therefore embarks on another journey and rewrites the first story. By means of the familiar technique of saying one thing and unsaying it, she proceeds: “The second story is actually the first one”, but the reader senses that it is not true, because the title is different—*The Murder*.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the second reiteration of the text introduces the motif and carries out the assassination of the cockroaches, something that was not present in the first version. The narrator begins the second account with justifying her right to commit the crime: “The truth is that I was only complaining about cockroaches in the abstract, since they weren’t even mine: they belonged to the ground floor and would crawl up the building’s pipes to our home. Only once I prepared the mixture did they become mine too”.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, she

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<sup>11</sup> J.A. Lockwood, *The Infested Mind: Why Humans Fear, Loathe, and Love Insects*, Oxford 2013, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> E. Nascimento, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> C. Lispector, *A Breath of Life: Pulsations*, transl. J. Lorenz, New York 2012, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Eadem*, *The Complete Stories*, *op.cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

becomes overtaken by the feeling of resentment and outrage, and she finally voices her objection to the invasion of the cockroaches. It is also at this point that the narrator views the insects as the “other”, and she gives herself right to protect her “peaceful home” against the “invisible” and its “secret curse”.<sup>16</sup>

### The cockroach as “the other”: a dive into subjectivity

In Janine Tobeck’s view, the act of appropriating herself of the cockroaches permits the narrator to regain control over the story and render her “the true and the absolute subject” of the text.<sup>17</sup> However, since the cockroaches now became a part of the narrator’s life—a problem to be solved—they are represented as a threat to reason, “the incommunicable secret of an otherness that disturbs the identity of the self” and “erodes the tranquil mind”.<sup>18</sup> For the sake of regaining her “rational unity”, the narrator must eliminate the source of the problem, and while being guided by a “secret fear”, she becomes aware of her own “secret curse”, which ultimately leads to her distress.<sup>19</sup> As Tobeck interestingly points out, by taking possession of the cockroaches and thus accepting the other as part of her own self, the narrator transforms herself into a single subject “who contains too much”, and borders on “self- destruction”.<sup>20</sup> This happens precisely at the moment of distributing the lethal powder on the floor “until it looked like something from nature”, because only in this way the cockroaches—which are as “clever” as the narrator—will consume the poison without sensing any danger.<sup>21</sup>

The conflicting feelings the narrator experiences once she decides to get rid of the cockroaches reflect Lispector’s views on the unknown. In the short chronicle entitled *Not to understand*, she manifests her seeming acceptance of the unspoken: “*I do not understand*. That phrase is so overwhelming that it transcends any understanding. Our understanding is always limited. But not to understand can be without frontiers. I feel myself much more complete when I do not understand. [...] The desirable thing is to be intelligent and not to un-

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 310.

<sup>17</sup> J. Tobeck, *Crime and Commitment: Literary Engagement in Clarice Lispector's O crime do professor de matemática and A quinta história*, “Luso-Brazilian Review” 2012, vol. 49., no. 1., p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, *op.cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>20</sup> J. Tobeck, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, *op.cit.*, p. 310.

derstand”.<sup>22</sup> And yet, not understanding is “overwhelming”, just like Tobeck describes the narrator in *The Fifth Story* as a subject who “contains too much”, after she had decided to solve the cockroach problem. That is why the desire to *understand* is brought forward: “Apart from the occasional moment of disquiet: I should like to understand a little. Not too much: but at least to understand that I do not understand”.<sup>23</sup> If the cockroaches are to symbolise the incomprehensible, the sphere covered by not understanding, then the narrator’s internal resistance is justified by Lispector’s words above. In addition, her uneasiness with eliminating the cockroaches is, at the same time, an attempt to eradicate a part of her own self.

It should be noted that the narrator only imagines how the cockroaches enter the laundry room where she had previously distributed the poison, but we never read how the insects die. We only see them dead on the floor, “hard”, and “huge”.<sup>24</sup> The mission has been accomplished: “in our name, day was breaking” just like “in our name” the narrator had earlier measured and weighed the ingredients “with a slightly more intense concentration”.<sup>25</sup> Although the reaffirmation of subjectivity is supposed to reassure the narrator of her decision, it fails to do so, and neither the reader nor the author is satisfied with the reiteration. In the author’s and the reader’s terms, the pursuit of the “correct” way to represent “how to kill cockroaches”, “the murder” or “the statues” is not yet complete.

### I write, therefore I am: *The Fifth Story* as a manifesto

Nicolino Novello argues that Lispector’s “search for the language and for the true mode of writing” reflects the other side of her literary consciousness, that is, Lispector’s “severe self-criticism” represented by “an eternal discontentment” toward her own literary production.<sup>26</sup> Although Lispector manifests her deep concern with the creation process of her texts, as shown in *The Fifth Story*, I believe that Novello’s comment essentially highlights the arduous aspect of writing. I do agree with the assumption that Lispector was very much a self-conscious writer, but her search for the true literary expression, in my

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<sup>22</sup> Eadem, *Discovering the World*, transl. G. Pontiero, Manchester 1992, p. 227. Emphasis—C.L.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, *op.cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 309-310.

<sup>26</sup> N. Novello, *O ato criador de Clarice Lispector*, Rio de Janeiro 1987, pp. 62-63. All translations of this book by Agnieszka Gabor-da Silva.

view, is also motivated by her resistance to stopping writing, because that would mean to cease to know how to write. I write, therefore I am (a writer):

When I am not writing, I simply do not know how one writes. And if this most sincere of questions did not sound childish and sham, I would seek out some friends who are writers and ask them: how does one write? [...] No one is more surprised than me when I write. Nor have I ever got used to the idea of being called a writer. Because unless I am actually writing, I really do not know how to write.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, the text can be perceived as Lispector's own manifesto on writing, stressing the very activity and experience of producing a literary work and allowing it to be rewritten as many times as the author decides. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, artistic completeness is never achieved, because even if the creation "appears finished to others, the created object always seems to us [the creators] in a state of suspension; we can always change this line, that shade, that word. Thus, it never *forces itself*".<sup>28</sup> That is why Lispector continues her process of verbalising the narrator's cockroach problem.

The third story—titled *The Statues*—begins in the same way as the previous two, but concentrates largely on the aftermath of the murder, when the narrator "awake and still sleepy" crosses the kitchen and enters the laundry room which "from the perspective of its tile floor" is "even sleepier than I".<sup>29</sup>

The narrator's discovery of the "dozens of statues, rigid" that "have hardened from the inside out" is compared to the outcome of the tragedy in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, to which the narrator is the witness. This analogy is not entirely accurate, as the witness in *The Fifth Story* is at the same time the killer, while the ash-covered Pompeii was destroyed and buried by a force of nature with the eruption of the volcano Mount Vesuvius.

For Tobeck, this "god-like height" of a witness allows the narrator to imagine "the apocalypse as it took place from the perspective of her [the narrator's—A.G.-S.] victims".<sup>30</sup> Here we see the cockroaches engaged in "the orgy in the dark", and although their movements will have been made difficult by the hardening plaster, they "will have greedily intensified the night's joys" up to the point when they "turn in stone, in innocent shock".<sup>31</sup> We further read that other cockroaches are "suddenly assaulted by their own core, without even the slightest inkling that some internal mold was being petrified!" until they abruptly "crystallise, the way a word is cut off in the mouth: it's you I...".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. Lispector, *Discovering the World*, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>28</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *What Is Literature? and Other Essays*, Harvard 1988, p. 49. Emphasis—J.P.-S.

<sup>29</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, *op.cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>30</sup> J. Tobeck, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

Finally, one cockroach seems to have discovered its ill fate too late: “because I looked too deep inside myself!” instead of indulging in making use “of things with the gratuitous charm of being in vain”.<sup>33</sup>

According to Tobeck, the voices the narrator gives the cockroaches reflect her own, and thus they suppress “any subjectivity” the insects could have possessed.<sup>34</sup> In addition, as the critic aptly observes, the last cockroach represents the destructive effect of subjectivism because the insect is “punished for believing that all could be understood through contemplation of the self by being fixed forever in a state of realizing too late and of not knowing, of being unable to be the last word”.<sup>35</sup> We observe that Lispector presents the reader with a two-fold metaphor of infinity. On the one hand, the cockroach looking too deep inside itself is stalled in time, as if in a painting or a photograph. Its discovery is never to be completed and, thus, it is deprived of choice or freedom to respond to the situation. On the other hand, the internal gaze is essentially an ongoing process, because we never *find* ourselves, just like the author never encounters the veritable form of writing: “the most suitable form for a chicken has yet to be found”, and a single story that might as well be “a thousand and one”.<sup>36</sup>

The fourth version of the story does not have a title but begins with the same words “I was complaining about cockroaches”. This time, upon seeing the “plaster monuments” on the floor, the narrator reflects on the temporality of the poison-based solution, since “this very night a slow and living population will renew itself in single file”.<sup>37</sup> She then asks herself whether she would “renew the lethal sugar every night” but she is not opposed to her fate, because she “trembled with wicked pleasure at the vision of that double life of a sorceress”.<sup>38</sup>

The next sentence represents, again, an identification with the cockroach: “I also trembled at the sign of plaster drying: the compulsion to live that would burst my internal mold”.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the fragment reflects the narrator’s own fear of death or it merely states the obvious, namely, that “living leads to death”.<sup>40</sup> She immediately finds herself in “a harsh instant” before a choice between “two paths” she thought “are bidding each other farewell and sure that either choice would be a sacrifice: me or my soul”.<sup>41</sup> Although the narrator

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>34</sup> J. Tobeck, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>36</sup> C. Lispector, *The Complete Stories, op.cit.*, pp. 280, 309.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 311.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 311-312.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 279.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 312.

makes a decision and she may now “secretly boast” in her heart “a plaque of virtue: This house has been disinfested”, her opposing feelings regarding her choice are reflected in the very oxymoron “secretly boast”.<sup>42</sup>

## Writing as a form of violence

Toback claims that, in fact, the narrator realises “the impossibility of standing on either path” because they are inseparable, and that is why Lispector leaves the fourth reiteration of the story untitled and suspended.<sup>43</sup> Toback interprets “the double life of a sorceress” accepted by the narrator as an aspect of violence in writing: “to go on telling or writing a story is to renew an interminable crime by utilising the object violently in the service of the subject”.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, Lispector “kills” the cockroaches in all the four versions of the story. For Toback, however, the subject equals the *word* while the object represents the idea, or the *non-word*. According to Toback, this relationship is shown in the chronicle *Writing Between the Lines*:

To write, therefore, is the way in which someone uses the word as bait: the word fishes for something that is not a word. When this non-word takes the bait, something has been written. Once what lies between the lines has been caught, the word can be discarded with a sense of relief. But here the analogy ends: the non-word, upon taking the bait, has assimilated it.<sup>45</sup>

In Toback’s opinion, the violence of the text is represented by the animal imagery: “the writer uses bait to be eaten by a fish which will assumedly, in turn, get eaten” and “while the writer may seem to have the upper hand, being in a position to discard or abandon the word, Lispector then violently ends the analogy, and lets the non-word—even though caught—persist, devour, assimilate”.<sup>46</sup>

Although I agree with Toback’s animal analogy of the excerpt, I do not view it as an act of violence done on the *word*, which becomes devoured by the *non-word*. In my view, when “what lies between the lines has been caught”, that is, when the act of writing takes place, it is a result of a compromise between the *non-word* and the *word*, rather than a disproportional tug-of-war. In fact, violence is what Lispector opposes in writing: “Since one has to write, the least one can do is to avoid suppressing the words between the lines”.<sup>47</sup> It

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> J. Toback, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 202.

<sup>45</sup> C. Lispector, *Discovering the World*, *op.cit.*, pp. 508-509.

<sup>46</sup> J. Toback, *op.cit.*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>47</sup> C. Lispector, *Discovering the World*, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

is important to point out that there can be more than a single compromise between the *non-word* and the *word*, just like there are numerous representations of the egg as seen in the short narrative *The Egg and the Chicken*, or five versions of one story as seen in the piece analysed in this paper.

Perhaps that is why Lispector decides to give the final series of the text a title that does not have anything to do with cockroaches, poisoning or death: *Leibniz and the Transcendence of Love in Polynesia*. It begins with the already familiar sentence “I was complaining about cockroaches”, but this is where it ends as well. Does the title matter, then, if the content of the story is more important, informative, dense, or meaningful? Does not the reader of the text already know what another installment of the story is going to be about? For Tobeck, the fifth version can be read “to remind us that if we have journeyed to the point of accepting the idea of writing as murder, of a story as a crime”, we should not forget that our starting point was “*The Thousand and One Nights*—stories told to stop murders and to foster justness through a broadening of imaginative horizon”.<sup>48</sup>

## Writing as a form of survival

If we agree with Tobeck’s observation, then Lispector’s fifth version can be read as a futile act of resistance, because neither the reader is able to stop anticipating the content of the story, nor does the narrator propose a different idea of developing the text. If we stick, however, to the initial metaphor of survival evoked by Scheherazade, the final reiteration—which the title of the entire short story actually points to—may symbolise the author’s attempt to preserve the idea. The concept, albeit disguised in a defamiliarised title, stresses the continuity of the creative process represented by multiple facets. In the same way that Sant’Anna points to blank spaces in the novel *The Passion According to G.H.*, considering them “connections, not ruptures”, the final silence in *The Fifth Story* is “a way to allow the reader, just as anguished as the protagonist, to breathe”.<sup>49</sup>

Another interpretation of the final installment of the text has to do with agency in relation to the writer and language. Lispector would often deny her agency as a creator while writing, and, instead, she would attribute creation as such to inspiration, which, in turn, would dictate the language she was supposed to use. In the chronicle entitled *The “True Novel”*, the author describes this dependency on the linguistic tool and highlights the importance of search and discovery in her writing:

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<sup>48</sup> J. Tobeck, *op.cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>49</sup> A.R. de Sant’Anna, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

I know perfectly well what makes a true novel. Yet when I read such novels with their web of facts and descriptions, I simply feel bored. And when I write a novel it may not be in the classic mould but it is nevertheless a *true* novel. Except that what guides me in my writing is always a sense of research and discovery. No, not research into syntax for its own sake, but for a syntax which will convey as faithfully as possible what I am thinking when I write. Besides, after careful consideration, it strikes me that I have never *chosen* my language. All I have ever done was to follow my own intuition.<sup>50</sup>

She points elsewhere to the difficulties of writing under inspiration:

Every time after finishing writing a book or a short story, I think—in despair and with all certainty—that I will never write anything again. I feel lost especially after I finish a more serious work. There is an emptiness that can be called—without exaggeration—hopeless. But for me, it is even worse: the germination and the gestation of a new work can take years; years in which I fade. When days later I read something I wrote, I feel certain disillusionment, dissatisfaction.<sup>51</sup>

Based on the author's poetics and ethics of writing, the final version of *The Fifth Story* can be read as the writer's surrender to language dictated by inspiration, or as the author's commitment to creation process that is abruptly stopped. In Novello's words, in "the act of writing, creating something through the written means, the language becomes a creative factor" that is even stronger than the writer, who, in turn, is merely "the result, the final product, the 'masterpiece' of a language creating the writer".<sup>52</sup> In this way, it is the writer who is the object, while the language she uses becomes the subject of the text. If Tobeck's argument calls the narrator the murderer, in the proposed interpretation she would instead be an accomplice, while the language would be fully responsible for the act.

## Conclusions

*The Fifth Story* by Clarice Lispector proves, as we have seen, that narrative can be interpreted from a multiplicity of perspectives. The principal characteristics of the text are fragmentation, continuity, and the relationship between the author and her work. As we have pointed out, it is not the *what* that stands out in *The Fifth Story* but rather the *how*, that is, *how* the author goes about developing her work. It raises the following questions: who is the legitimate

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<sup>50</sup> C. Lispector, *Discovering the World*, *op.cit.*, p. 400. Emphasis—C.L.

<sup>51</sup> O. Borelli, *Clarice Lispector: Esboço para um possível retrato*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Rio de Janeiro 1981, p. 69. All translations of this book by Agnieszka Gabor-da Silva.

<sup>52</sup> N. Novello, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

agent in the creation process? who is the receiver? when does the process in itself cease and does it ever reach a conclusion? All these issues touch upon the realm of literary consciousness, a perspective that is an essential element of Clarice Lispector's aesthetics.

## Literature

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