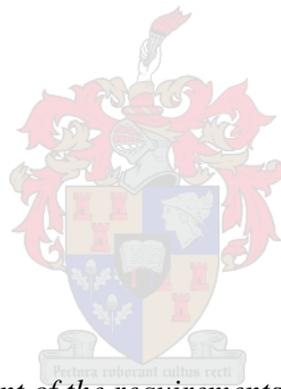


The Spectral Being of Whiteness: Exploring the presence of under-examined whiteness through the work of Clarice Lispector

By

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English Abstract

The lack of critical examination of whiteness and white racial identity in the work of Clarice Lispector (1920 – 1977) is reflective of a larger social and scholarly issue in Brazil and in English scholarship globally, in which whiteness is maintained as hegemony through maintaining the invisibility of whiteness. The presence of under-examined whiteness in Lispector's work is most notably highlighted in Lucia Villares' 2011 book entitled *Examining Whiteness: Reading Clarice Lispector through the Work of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison*, and is a key text in the development of this thesis. The universalisation of Lispector as a writer for [white] humanity is a conflation of the tendency of whiteness to maintain its unracialized social category through universalizing techniques found in religion, in writing and narrative authority, and through consumer capitalism. Brazil's racial democracy enforced a silence on race and racism that allowed for the entrenchment of institutionalized racism through the negation of race, a negation that is dualistically intertwined in the 'hyperconsciousness of race' (Vargas, 2004). This thesis seeks to investigate some of these moments of under-examined whiteness in Lispector's work, and in so doing, will attempt to highlight the mechanisms (namely through religion, narrative power, and capitalism) which allow for the maintenance of the hegemony of whiteness and its reach of power.

Keywords: Clarice Lispector, race, whiteness, Brazil, hyperconsciousness of race, racism, power.

Opsomming

Die gebrek aan kritiese ondersoek na witheid en wit rasse-identiteit in die werk van Clarice Lispector (1920 - 1977) weerspieël 'n groter sosiale en wetenskaplike vraagstuk in Brasilië en in die Engelse wetenskap wêreldwyd, waarin witheid as hegemonie gehandhaaf word deur die onsigbaarheid van witheid te handhaaf. Die beperkte aanwesigheid van ondersoekde witheid in Lispector se werk word veral beklemtoon in Lucia Villares se boek uit 2011 getiteld *Examining Whiteness: Reading Clarice Lispector through the Work of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison*, en is 'n sleutelteks in die ontwikkeling van hierdie proefskrif. Die veralgemening van Lispector as 'n skrywer vir die [blanke] mensdom is 'n samevoeging van die neiging van witheid om sy onge-rassialiseerde sosiale kategorie te handhaaf deur middel van veralgemeningstegnieke wat gevind word in godsdiens, skriftelike en narratiewe gesag, en deur verbruikerskapitalisme. Brasilië se rassedemokrasie het 'n stilte oor ras en rassisme afgedwing wat die verskansing van geïnstusionaliseerde rassisme moontlik gemaak het deur die ontkenning van ras, 'n ontkenning wat dualisties verweef is in die 'oorbewustheid van ras' (Vargas, 2004). Hierdie tesis poog om enkele van hierdie oomblikke van beperkte aanwesigheid van ondersoekde witheid in Lispector se werk te ondersoek, en sal sodoende probeer om die meganismes (naamlik deur godsdiens, verhalende mag en kapitalisme) uit te lig wat die handhawing van die hegemonie van witheid moontlik maak en sy reikwydte van mag.

Sleutelwoorde: Clarice Lispector, ras, witheid, Brasilië, oorbewustheid van ras, rassisme, mag.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	8
Chapter 1: Confronting Whiteness as Apocalyptic Catharsis in <i>The Passion according to G.H.</i>	
• Introduction.....	18
• Theoretical Background.....	20
• Confronting Whiteness.....	23
○ Confronting whiteness as disillusionment.....	23
○ Confronting whiteness as abjection.....	31
○ Confronting whiteness as apocalyptic catharsis.....	35
Chapter 2: Inscribing Whiteness through Narrative Power in <i>The Hour of the Star</i>	
• Introduction.....	40
• ‘ <i>On Paper...</i> ’: Theoretical [Frame]work.....	42
○ Frame theory/analysis.....	42
○ Pre-determinism and framing.....	44
○ Novel titles and framing.....	46
• ‘ <i>A Record of Preceding Events</i> ’: Narrator/Narrative Power.....	46
• ‘ <i>The Blame is Mine</i> ’: White guilt and white saviourism.....	49
• ‘ <i>The Right to Protest/Scream</i> ’: Universalising.....	52
• ‘ <i>The Hour of the [White] Star</i> ’: Idealizing White Beauty.....	58
• ‘ <i>As For the Future.</i> ’: Conclusion.....	60
Chapter 3: Commodifying a Life: The spectacle and thingification in <i>Selected Crônicas</i> and <i>A Breath of Life</i>	
• Introduction.....	63
• Brazilian Political Powers 1889-1961.....	66
• The [White] World Presents: Clarice Lispector.....	68
○ Biographical information.....	68
○ <i>Crônicas</i>	69
○ The Spectacle.....	72

○ <i>A Breath of Life</i>	79
Conclusion	89
Reference List	95

INTRODUCTION

A function of whiteness in society today is a reliance on shared trauma, a “liberal belief in a universal subjectivity” (hooks 167) in which all races are united under the umbrella of collective suffering. Such a scenario would erase the need for white people to grapple with not only issues surrounding race in society, but having to grapple with their own whiteness, and the effect of self-reflection imposed by the implicit and explicit appearance of their own racial identity. In his book *White* (1997), Richard Dyer states that in not racializing whiteness – in not recognizing whiteness as a race – whiteness begins to function as a social default. Dyer explains that “other people are raced, we are just people. There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that – they can only speak for their race” (2). When using the term ‘whiteness’, I am relying on the definition as outlined by Ruth Frankenberg in her paper “The Mirage of Unmarked Whiteness” (2001). She outlines eight points which seeks not to define whiteness as a cultural phenomenon, but rather as the underlying feature of institutionalized forms of racism that are entrenched and maintained by the institutions of whiteness. From these points, this thesis will operate according to a definition of whiteness as follows:

- Whiteness is that site of “structural advantage” from which one interprets, sees, and constructs social orders on macro, meso, and micro levels.
- Whiteness maintains and perpetuates a variety of “cultural practices and identities” that are normalized, and in this process, whiteness as an unraced category is always maintained.
- Within the category of ‘white’, those who belong are not marked by virtue of their skin colour; whiteness is always a “matter of contestation”.
- The privileges inherent in whiteness “inflect and modify” racial privilege, and the historical production of whiteness means that whiteness “has no inherent but only socially constructed meanings”.
- Frankenberg concludes her definition by reminding the reader that racial sites that are not necessarily social and relational constructions should not be undermined (Frankenberg 76).

Similarly, when I use the terms ‘white hegemony’, ‘white supremacy’, or ‘white power’, I am referring to the structural, institutionalised power that whiteness occupies in society, theorized by Mills (1997) as *The Racial Contract*:

What is needed, in other words, is a recognition that racism (or, as I will argue, global white supremacy) is *itself* a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties. The notion of the Racial Contract is, I suggest, one possible way of making this connection with the mainstream theory, since it uses the vocabulary and apparatus already developed for contractarianism to map this unacknowledged system (Mills 3).

Clarice Lispector’s work embodies the “self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty” (Waugh 2) that characterizes metafictional, postmodern writing. The metafictional nature of Lispector’s work tends to refuse any attempts at critical analysis. Due to this refusal, much of the research on her work tends to name and explore Lispector as a ‘universal writer’, her writing read as transcending national, social, and political borders. Clarice Lispector’s work has been described as “existential” (Moisés (1971); Fitz (1978); Anderson (1985); Marder (2013)), “postmodernist” (Fitz (1987) & (1988); Vieira (1991)) “post-structuralist” (Fitz (1988) & (2001); Schwarz (2015)), “lyrical” (Cixous (1989)), autobiographical, and “indeterminate”. Her work has been examined in a multitude of fields, and as such, can be analysed within a multidisciplinary paradigm. This tendency has resulted in Lispector’s position as a Brazilian national writer to be misunderstood, and the presence of political and social commentary that is quite evident in her work, remaining underexamined. There exists a tendency to locate Lispector’s work in a locus of “deterritorialization [...] as if the construction of Lispector’s belonging could have happened despite or outside the social and political environment of the nation” (Villares 15). This tendency can be seen as a direct result of how whiteness – particularly in its postcolonial form – maintains a hegemonic culture and climate; in the case of Brazil, its racial democracy and ‘whitening thesis’ as instilled in the late 19th and early 20th centuries cultivated a nationality set around whiteness.

My aim with this thesis is to explore how the very characteristic of self-reflexivity that is commonly used to describe Lispector’s work as ‘universal’ is the very technique she employs to explore how the ideology of whiteness functioned in Brazilian society in the 20th century. By using self-conscious and self-reflexive modes of writing, Lispector’s work explores the

identity crisis faced by the characters when first experiencing or seeing their own whiteness to function not only as form of oppression, but as a racial identity and ideology that had hitherto been meticulously denied. I do not argue that Lispector explores these social factors deliberately; in fact, her identity as an educated woman affords her a variety of ideological frameworks through which she views a racialized other, and a non-racialized self.

Marta Peixoto, in her book *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (1994), argues that Lispector's work highlights "the absurd hubris of the well-off writer", examining the function of the underlying mechanisms 'at work in the representation of oppression" (97). In her book entitled *Examining Whiteness: Reading Clarice Lispector through the Work of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison* (2011), Lucia Villares argues that even though Lispector's work is considered one of the most important bodies of work written by a Brazilian woman, "[she] is not really understood as a national writer" (15). Lispector is consistently cited as a primary example of a female writer from Brazil, and yet her position as a white woman within the Brazilian nation seems to be glossed over or ignored, except when referring to how 'unique' her narrative is as a Brazilian within the Brazilian canon. Villares argues that there is a tendency to read Lispector's work "as if [her work] could somehow float above reality, with no national body" (15). Similarly,

Critics have not done justice to Lispector's efforts to belong. Her ambivalent, ambiguous position as a writer who belongs to the canon but is seen as an outsider is not due to what her texts are, but to the fact that her texts are dealing with issues that are difficult to incorporate into accepted notions of what being Brazilian means. Lispector's ambivalent position (that of belonging but not quite) is at the heart of her narratives; her protagonists mirror and reflect this ambivalence, this discomfort. It is also at the heart of her narrative structures (Villares 19).

Villares' book is premised on the argument that Lispector's work highlights a parallel between the African ethnic heritage in Brazil and that which defines Brazil as a nation; this parallel attempts to focalize the 'symptoms' of whiteness that has remained unexamined (16) in Lispector's novels. The pioneering study of Lispector made by Villares will inform my line of inquiry throughout this thesis.

My thesis is based on a reading of a number of Lispector's chronicles (as translated by Giovanni Pontiero) in *Selected Crônicas* (1992), and three of Lispector's novels, *The Passion According*

to *G.H.*¹(1964) (translated by Roger W. Sousa in 1988), *The Hour of the Star*²(1977) (translated by Giovanni Pontiero in 1992) and *A Breath of Life*³(1978) (translated by Johnny Lorenz in 2012). I want to explore how the condensed form of the *crônicas* and short stories allow for a mass appeal, giving Lispector more popularity with a larger audience outside of the Brazilian ‘intellectual’ circles. The condensed form of the *crônicas* and short stories is something that appealed to “a more heterogeneous audience that read her regularly every Saturday, bringing about a readership that conversed with her via letters and even phone calls and casual street conversations” (Méndez 197). The “more heterogeneous” here refers to a white readership that is more heterogeneous in its class backgrounds; they are the very masses of the society which Lispector’s work stands to examine. Villares states that Lispector “engage[s] with and reflect[s] on the *vida íntima* [inner life] of the nation” (18). She explains that Lispector’s literature does not fit into the Brazilian literary canon for precisely the manner in which her work “reflect[s] and describe[s] in detail the experience of being Brazilian through the multiple intersections of gender, race and class” (19). I have chosen to discuss *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964) and *The Hour of the Star* (1977) because each novel deals with this ‘*vida íntima*’ in lengthened form. Villares argues that because of the length of Lispector’s novels, the narrative space of the novel acts as a “‘laboratory’ where Lispector was able to examine a subjective crisis” (16-17). Villares sees the exploration that Lispector endeavours to perform in her short stories as a condensed form of the novels through which she explores subjectivity. Lispector’s work invokes the presence of an ‘obstruction’, one which prevents her narrators/protagonists from “engaging with [their] surrounding world” (Villares 17).

I choose to look at Lispector because her metafiction serves to do so much more than just comment on the meaning of existence; through her work, we are given a glimpse into the racial, gendered, and class ideology that underpinned Brazilian society at the time her work was published. Furthermore, these mechanisms serve as a microcosm of how race constructions and racism are maintained as institutional features of maintaining white colonial power. By failing to analyse Lispector’s novels as commenting on racism, scholarly work on the author only maintains the whitewashing of academic work in the name of humanist philosophy. It should also be noted that the question of Lispector’s Jewishness is not being ignored in this thesis, although it is not a focal point. Lispector did not practice Judaism, nor did she necessarily identify with the orthodox Jewishness of her ancestors. There does exist an

¹ *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964)

² *A hora da estrela* (1977)

³ *Un sopro de vida* (1978)

ambivalence towards her own Jewishness in her work, and one that has accumulated a large body of research, particularly from Nelson H. Vieira (1991; 1994; 1995). In this thesis however, I am not discussing the question of Lispector's Jewishness in as much detail, as this question is beyond the scope of this thesis. I do however, recommend the work of Vieira (cited above and cited in my reference list) for further reading and research into Lispector's Jewishness and her ambivalence towards this aspect of her identity.

Research question and framework

The lack of examining and theorizing of whiteness in Lispector's work is largely as a result of "the undertheorization of colonial whiteness" (López 3) within postcolonial studies. The lack of scholarship that critically examines and explores whiteness as race, and the power maintained by the tentacles of whiteness in society has resulted in a passive acceptance of the mechanisms which maintain white colonial power. Because Lispector's work has been researched in a large number of fields, and can be understood from a large number of perspectives, critics and researchers have dubbed her work as 'universal'. Earl Fitz describes Lispector's work as that which "evolves, through the consciousness of the protagonist, into timelessness and universality, into a rarefied realm composed of pansexual ruminations about men, women, and the nature of being" (Fitz 59). In her *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, Hélène Cixous describes Lispector's work as "universally question[ing] the moral law and the law of language" (xvi). Cixous's work on Lispector has been critiqued for Cixous's appropriation of Lispector's self-reflexivity as a space from which Cixous can enact her own subjective experiences.

Cixous's readings of Lispector defy logic to such an extent that they seem to rule out any scholar's efforts to try to establish cause-and-effect links between the 'Clarice' she evokes and the name which Lispector may have won for herself as a female author from a third world country writing in a little-known language (Carrera 87).

Cixous tends to use Lispector's work as an avenue through which Cixous can develop her own subjective narrative, one which is written as theory. This mystification that presents itself as theory becomes categorized and read as theory; thus scholars who read Cixous in an attempt to engage their critical knowledge are offered a dream-like narrative of Cixous's subjective experiences in reading Lispector, presented as theoretical insight. Fitz ultimately endorses Cixous's work on Lispector and thus, the foundations of academic research on Lispector are

premised on universalizing techniques that fail to address the fact of Lispector's social commentary on whiteness from Lispector's own position of privilege and power as a white woman.

My research questions are thus focused on why there exists a tendency to place Lispector's work within the realm of the universal? As confirmed through the work of Villares (2011), the question of race is implicit in Lispector's work (whether or not this was intentional on the part of Lispector is not at question), and to ignore it is to engage in a typical technique of whiteness which seeks to erase the question of race in the name of a universal experience, one which would absolve whiteness of the responsibility and accountability required to acknowledge and redress the past. I theorize that the tendency to name Lispector's work as universal is one that reflects the tendency of whiteness to erase the question of race when confronted with whiteness's own racial identity. I will attempt to answer this research question by analysing three of Lispector's well-known texts as well as her *crônicas*, and attempt to provide an analysis which reveals the examination of white racial identity within each text. This analysis is not to say that Lispector's intention in writing these novels was necessarily an exploration of race, but rather that her work begets a study of white racial identity that has heretofore only been thoroughly addressed through the work of Peixoto (1994) and Villares (2011).

Brazil's racial democracy/whitening thesis

Although 'whiteness' and 'colonialist' are not synonymous, the visible, physical presence of whiteness across the globe is a consequence of Western imperialism and European colonisation. Brazilian independence in 1822 resulted in a great wave of nationalism across the country, and literary production was "characterized by an exhaustive textualization of origins, roots, foundational myths, and genealogies. The novelistic production of [José de] Alencar bears testimony to the simultaneous movements of deculturation and acculturation of two of the founding ethnic groups in Brazil: the Whites and the Indians" (Bernd 93). White elites in Brazil sought to investigate Brazilian culture, and what it means to be Brazilian. Independence, combined with the Romantic desire and tendency to glorify the beauty of the tropics, the 'noble savage' imagery, resulted in a strong appropriation of the image of the indigenous people. It became part of the country's political agenda to change and 're-present' what it means to be a Brazilian. These projects have, however, predominantly resulted in a further entrenchment of cultural and racial marginalization, one in which "white elites...deny [indigenous groups] the ability for independent cultural expression" (Lymburner 25). After the abolition of slavery in 1888, Brazilian society relied upon on a "tiresome monotony of black stereotypes" (Lymburner

26) in an attempt to determine where non-white Europeans could be integrated into Brazilian society. This, however, produced a “colonial fetish”, an “obsession with the [non-European] Other” (Lymburner 26) in which the tenets of the scientific racism of late nineteenth century Europe were to find its roots.

In 1855, *Inequality of the Human Races* by French thinker Arthur de Gobineau was published, a text that soon became one of the earliest and most fundamental texts that offered a classifiable system of scientific racism (Lymburner 34). Premised on the essentialist notion that “innate characteristics of each ‘race’ formed the base of all and anything that individuals and groups were capable of, and any alteration of those characteristics through miscegenation led to ‘degeneration’” (Lymburner 33). Despite de Gobineau’s open dislike of Brazil, his work appealed to proto-nationalists in Brazil, because “he merged racial classification with a coherent social and political narrative” (Lymburner 34). However, because much of what constituted Brazilian identity was rooted in miscegenation, Brazilian society could not be representative of the ‘Aryan’ ideal as promoted by scientific racism. At the turn of the 20th century, with the ideologies of scientific racism and Social Darwinism firmly taking hold in Brazil, white elites were faced with the question of how to compensate for Brazil’s global image within a European-centred world and emerging culture. Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, a medical doctor and ethnographer, accepted the tenets of scientific racism and eugenics, and is credited with developing “the “first scientifically respectable ethnographic study of the Afro-Brazilian by a Brazilian”” (Skidmore quoted in Lymburner 35). These discourses led to what is known as Brazil’s “whitening thesis” (Lymburner 39; Andrews 485), or *branqueamento*. Brazilian doctors and scientists who supported the proponents of scientific racism believed that in any case of miscegenation, “the white genetic component would tend to dominate” (Andrews 485), which would, over time, result in a population “in which African and Indian ancestry” (485) would be nullified, a white-washing of genes. Elites of the time “sought to do this by integrating miscegenation as practice within a eugenicist framework of racial purification” (Lymburner 39). This led the First Republic of Brazil (1891-1930) to ban immigrants from Africa and Asia, making “concerted efforts to attract European immigration” (Andrews 486).

In 1933, Gilberto Freyre, a revisionist social theorist, attacked the Brazilian whitening thesis project. Freyre’s argument was that all human beings are fundamentally equal, but that their environments and cultures create differences between them, which is why there is a difference between races and how races are viewed. Much of Freyre’s work was written in reaction to his experience of racial segregation in North America, which led to his construction of a “vision

of Brazil's past (and by extension, its present and future) that proved deeply appealing to many Brazilians" (Andrew 488). Freyre believed that "some environments and cultural configurations mitigated this inequality or at least predisposed more egalitarian societal relationships" (Lymburner 43). Much of Brazil's national identity from the 1930s is thus premised on the desire to differentiate themselves from the US, and on a desire for a racial democracy. By the 1950s and 1960s, the racial democracy as a myth was becoming more apparent, after years of scholarship and critique published by Afro-Brazilian and white liberal writers. Vargas (2004) says the following of the racial democracy myth:

In its more direct formulation, the racial democracy myth suggests that all Brazilians, independent of their racial background, are equals and live without racially motivated conflict. The force of such myth becomes impressive when we take into account that Brazil had the largest Afro-descended population in the hemisphere and is second only to Nigeria in the world. It is also significant that, historically, Brazil was the very last country to end slavery, in 1888. Still reverberating today, the myth thus constituted an impressive ideological tool that was extremely useful to Brazilian elites: by emphasizing harmony and racelessness, inequalities that were, at base, derived not only from class, but also from race and gender, among others, were silenced and replaced with a sense of national pride and moral superiority (Vargas 445).

Contrary to the overt racial segregation that took place in North America and in South Africa, Brazil sought to erase the notion of race altogether, and in so doing, erase the cultural histories of different racial groups. Through homogenization through miscegenation, Brazilians believed they had created a racial paradise, one in which *brasilidade* could be best cultivated and nurtured.

The manner in which scholarship on Lispector's *crônicas* and her contributions to women's pages has failed to recognize the parodying techniques she employs to highlight gender and racial performativity has resulted in whiteness (as an unracialized social category) being maintained through centralizing mechanisms, presenting whiteness and white femininity as default experiences. In "A Quiet Woman From Minas" (12) and "God's Sweet Ways" (13-15), she tells the story of Aninha, a "quiet" (13) and "clumsy" (15) woman from Minas Gerais, who works as a domestic worker in Lispector's home. In "Enigma" (68), Lispector simultaneously performs whiteness as well as parodically critiquing the performance of whiteness. She encounters a woman "dressed in her maid's striped uniform but who spoke as if she were the

mistress of the household” (68), experiencing a sense of unfamiliar familiarity with this woman who “spoke like a mistress [...] and looked the part in spite of her maid’s uniform” (68). In “Hateful Charity” (114-116), Lispector tells the story of how she encounters a young boy begging outside a coffee shop and he asks her “something to eat lady, buy me something to eat” (114). Shortly thereafter, she encounters a woman on a bus with a young boy “dressed in girl’s clothes” (115) who tells Lispector that she owes last month’s rent on her home, to which Lispector responds by taking “two thousand *cruzeiros* from [her] bag and, filled with self-loathing, [she] handed the notes to the woman” (116). In “Idle Conversation” (143), Lispector makes a story-like statement about her nameless domestic worker who “hum[s] the loveliest melody” and who “did not know she was creative” (143). In each of these *crônicas*, Lispector’s narrative explores the duality that underlies the perpetuation of whiteness in society, particularly underscoring “the race-based meta-opposition that grounds much of [whiteness]’ thinking: white as colonizing, colonial/non-white as colonized, postcolonial” (López 6).

The Passion according to G.H (1964) is a novel that has been thoroughly researched. It follows the internal monologue of the protagonist G.H, a white woman who finds a cockroach in the living quarters of her domestic worker, Janair, and G.H proceeds to have an identity crisis – “Every moment of finding is the losing of oneself” (Lispector 8). Scholarship on this novel has largely focused on the existential crisis G.H. has when encountering the cockroach, with parallels drawn between G.H.’s narrative and Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915). However, G.H.’s confrontation with the cockroach can be read as a confrontation with her whiteness, a confrontation with the abjection she faces when white hegemony and her position therein is threatened. In *The Hour of the Star* (1977), the protagonist Macabéa is described by the narrator Rodrigo S.M as “ugly” (Lispector 22). She is a young Northeastern girl whose naivety blinds her to “the presence of racism and the need to perform whiteness” (Villares 75) that is evident in not only the other characters’ behaviour, but in their treatment of Macabéa. Naivety, and ignorance, play an important role in the establishment of whiteness as a universal point of departure. In her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Val Plumwood outlines the features of dualism. The second feature of dualism is that of “*radical exclusion (hyperseparation)*” (49); this feature is characterised by “polarisation, to maximise distance or separation between the dualised spheres and to prevent their being seen as continuous or contiguous” (49). Through such hyperseparation, the ‘dominant’ group is always ignorant of marginalised groups’ experiences, whereas the latter are thrust into a foreign culture in which their difference from the ‘dominant’ group is their essential identifier. In Macabéa’s case, who

is not explicitly described as any particular race, her naivety functions in the sense that it veils her ability to see the assimilation of her position in Western culture.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss *The Passion according to G.H.*, one of Lispector's most discussed and analysed novels. In this chapter I will explore how whiteness maintains itself through homogenization, and how even when this homogenization is deconstructed, whiteness still relies upon stereotypes in order to conceptualize their unlearning. *The Passion* relies upon what Julia Kristeva would term 'the abject'; G.H calls her unlearning a loss of her "fear of the ugly" (Lispector 13), and in doing so, her whiteness undergoes a change under the scrutiny of her own examination of both herself, and the felt absence of her domestic worker Janair.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss *The Hour of the Star*, the final novel completed by Lispector before her death in 1977. In this chapter I will examine the effects of narrative, or author-ial power, and how writing alterity results in the maintenance of whiteness through homogenisation and universalisation. When whiteness writes alterity, the social frames (Frow, 1982) or lenses through which they construct their characters dictate the construction of ideology through misrepresentation. The narrator Rodrigo S.M. relies upon ideological constructions of poverty, whiteness, and femininity in order to create his character Macabéa, a task that ultimately results in the misrepresentation of large groups of people through homogenisation, radical exclusion, and universalisation, as theorized by Plumwood (1993).

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the women's pages and *crônicas* published by Lispector throughout her lifetime, as well as discussing her final novel *A Breath of Life*, incomplete when she died. I point out how the maintenance of whiteness is achieved through white women, who – ignorant or not – rely on the notion that they are "innocen[t] from racism based on the belief that they are oppressed by patriarchy, and therefore share interests with other oppressed people... their oppressed status gives them epistemic privilege" (Leonardo 407-408). In discussing *A Breath of Life*, I will focus on how the project of trying to read Lispector's work as autobiographical has resulted in a failure to examine the more overt references to racial and gender oppression as maintained through consumer capitalism and the commodification of nostalgia (Mbao, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

Confronting Whiteness as Apocalyptic Catharsis in *The Passion according to G.H.*

‘Jesus Christ, when he organizes, the way he puts the organisation together, he makes it invisible. When you look at your body, you don’t see your liver and your muscles and your brains hanging out. What he did is he put the finest organisation, and he put a beautiful skin over it. When you look at the Mafia, they also use the same type of organisation. Everything visible is transitory, everything invisible is permanent and will last forever. The more you can make your organisation invisible, the more influence it will have’ (Doug Coe, quoted from the documentary *The Family* (2019). Season 1, episode 1: ‘Submersion’).

Introduction

Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion according to G.H.* was published in 1964, and it remains one of her most studied novels. The novel is set in the Rio de Janeiro apartment of a white, middle-class woman named G.H., who also narrates the novel. G.H.’s domestic worker, Janair, has recently resigned, and G.H. goes to Janair’s quarters of the apartment in order to clean. Janair is described as black, as an “African queen” (35), and as a “mulatto⁴ woman” (48). G.H. expects that “the maid’s room was probably filthy” (26), but is surprised to find a clean, ordered room, and “that the maid, without saying anything to me, had fixed the room up the way she wanted it...” (29). Whilst in the room, G.H. finds a cockroach in the wardrobe (39), tries to kill the cockroach (45), only to realize that she had only maimed it, and that it was still alive (47). A white mass starts to ooze from the cockroach, and she proceeds to see the cockroach as herself, as a former lover, and as the child she aborted; contemplating the meaning of this act of maiming the cockroach, and the deconstruction it brings of her world, as well as the meaning of her confrontation with the cockroach in her former domestic worker’s room. The novel ends with G.H. eating part of the white mass oozing from the cockroach (159), an act which G.H. refers to as a “baptism” (173).

A large amount of the published research on Lispector’s work, and particularly on *The Passion according to G.H.*, have interpreted G.H.’s confrontation with the cockroach through

⁴ The term “mulatto” is a Latin American term that refers to any person who is mixed race, most commonly referring to people of white European and black African ancestry.

existential frameworks. Earl Fitz's extensive research done on Lispector's work (1977, 1978, 1980, 1988, 2001) is one of the most commonly cited bodies of research that does not consider Lispector's writing as social commentary. The passage below, taken from 'A Discourse of Silence: The Postmodernism of Clarice Lispector' (1978) interprets *The Passion according to G.H.* as a "confront[ation of] the chaos of existence" (425) and provides the general narrative that can be found in most existential readings of Lispector's work:

G.H. chooses to confront the chaos of existence by struggling with language until it yields to her the authenticity of being that she demands. [...] G.H. also ends up engulfed in a state of silence, though in her case it is the silence of a private solitude achieved through articulated self-liberation. For her, as for most of Lispector's characters, this is the silence of isolation, the silence born of the realization that whether we know it or not and whether we like it or not, in this world we are alone (Fitz 425).

Readings of Lispector's work as commentary on issues of race, class, and gender are few. Solange Ribeiro De Oliveira (1987) argues that this tendency to place Lispector's work in universal and existential readings has led to a failure in providing a "comprehensive view of her work" (117). She argues that "the cultural features of [Lispector's] fiction have been outshone by its discourse – so densely poetic if seldom obscure – and by its subjective and philosophical probings [*sic*]" (120). The consequences of this tendency are explored in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Lucia Villares (2011) argues that Lispector's characters experience a disruption in their understanding of what it means to be "a national subject", a disruption that occurs because of the "feeding of the notion of a homogenous Brazilianness" (142). Brazilians during the 1900s adhered to Brazil's 'whitening thesis', the notion that – through miscegenation and cultural dilution – the white gene would, in time, eradicate the apparent and visible presence of blackness. This led to any mention or discussion of race to become taboo, with race being treated as a mythical construct. Villares argues that this disruption that G.H. experiences is because of her whiteness being made apparent to her. I argue that G.H.'s confrontation with the cockroach is an analogy for G.H.'s confrontation with her whiteness, as well as the realization that there has existed a national bid to eradicate any discussion of race as a means of oppression, rather than as a means of reaching a racial paradise. Her confrontation begins to draw on what Julia Kristeva (1982) has theorized as the abject, which refers to that which is "both unknown and known, what is ambiguous and uncertain, and what is "out of place""

(Rudge 504). G.H. confronting her whiteness, seeing her whiteness reflected, is a violation of the 'rules' of the racial democracy. One does not speak of race, and the confrontation of racialized whiteness exposes 1) a false consciousness underpinning G.H.'s identity, 2) the realization that ignoring racialized whiteness has become so normalized that its appearance becomes symbolized (through the cockroach) as the abject, something which “disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4). Although Villares’ research also draws on Kristeva’s theory of the abject in a similar manner, Villares identifies the cockroach’s function as “a filter, determining the way reality penetrates our consciousness, [a] filter [that] forces one to recognize gender” (167)⁵. This thesis focuses rather on the cockroach being a symbol of G.H.’s first encounter with her own racial identity, as well as her grappling with whether or not to accept this discourse that is new to her, but “had been happening for centuries” (Lispector 60). I focus on Kristeva’s theorizing of the abject as that which is present in religious writings, particularly the Christian Bible. Kristeva states that the abject becomes “exclu[ded] or taboo”, and there is a dialectic of cleansing the abject which constitute all religious histories (Kristeva 17). G.H.’s character experiences her eating of the white matter oozing from the cockroach as a baptism, a “perform[ance of] the lowest of all acts” (Lispector 173). This form of catharsis through the abject is explored in this chapter.

This chapter begins with a theoretical discussion that lays the foundation for the arguments presented. I then discuss the act of confronting whiteness represented in the text as 1) disillusionment, 2) the abject, and 3) as apocalyptic catharsis, each part further divided into sub-sections with sub-headings.

Theoretical Background

Lispector’s work is undeniably existential in the themes it explores. Her narrative techniques include the use of stream of consciousness-style lamentations and revelations, metafictional narrative construction, self-reflexive stories, and a grappling with the absurd as it manifests in fiction and reality. In *The Passion according to G.H.*, the protagonist G.H. encounters a cockroach, and this encounter triggers an entire novel of observations and ruminations on G.H.’s life and the meaning of her existence. The presence of the cockroach presents the most overt allusion to the famous existential writer Franz Kafka, and his novel entitled *Metamorphosis* (1915). In Kafka’s novel, the protagonist Gregor Samsa wakes up as roach-

⁵ Villares draws on Kristeva’s discussion of the ‘female body and its procreative power [as] belong[ing] to the realm of abjection’ (167), and the exploration of gender is a pertinent theme in the novel. It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

like creature, and the novel explores how, in the face of the absurd, the quotidian of daily life continues. Gregor's family do not question his metamorphosis, nor does Gregor question it. In the novel, Gregor's character also grapples with the fact that although his physical body has changed, his mind, or his human consciousness, has not. As a result, Gregor must learn how to adapt and use his new body in order to continue to survive in this world. In *The Passion according to G.H.*, G.H. also encounters a cockroach, although rather than becoming the cockroach, she finds the cockroach in the wardrobe of her former domestic worker's room (39). When G.H. proceeds to imagine herself as the cockroach (57), she refers to her self-encounter as an "inner metamorphosis" (59). These more overt references, as well as a variety of others – the space in which each take place, the drawings of 'faceless figures', the initials of the protagonists, to name a few (Dixon 301)⁶ – are succinct points that would offer an extensive comparative analysis between Lispector and Kafka's respective novels. Other comparisons between Lispector's work and that of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre have also been made (Ruta, 1989). However, existentialist literature – and philosophy in general – is white, male-dominated, and where female writers are cited as existential, they are invariably white women (Mills, 2007). In his short book entitled *The Racial Contract* (1997), Charles W. Mills uses the features of social contract theory to highlight how the most powerful political system in existence – that of white supremacy – has not been considered as a political system (1-2), one in which racism inscribes itself in "power structure[s] of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties" (3).

There is also a fair amount of research which locates social commentary in Lispector's work, but these rarely include the topic of race, focusing rather on readings of gender and class commentary. In *The Passion according to G.H.*, G.H.'s perspective on her gendered position in society changes following her encounter with the cockroach. Early in the novel, G.H. states that her sculptures are described in her art world as "[not] bad if they were less amateurish", and she considers that – "for a woman" – this is a great boost to her social ranking (18). She states that this places her "in an area between man and woman, socially speaking. Which left me much freer to be a woman, since I was making no formal effort to be one" (18). Her placement of herself as "between man and woman" asserts the underlying issue of patriarchal oppression of binary gender systems: G.H. is not-male, but by having a greater social

⁶ Paul B. Dixon's paper entitled "'A Paixão Segundo G.H': Kafka's Passion According to Clarice Lispector" (1981) offers a detailed comparative analysis of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Lispector's *The Passion according to G.H.*

reputation, she is also less-female; she can never be entirely respected in society because she will always be not-male, but she can always ensure a mediocre social ranking by negating her 'female-ness'. After encountering the cockroach, G.H. refers to Janair's room as the "new world" that she has been forced to see; the room functions here as the space in which G.H. sees reality for the first time, realizing that there exist power structures to which she is both subject and object. She states that before she entered the room, she was "I", but after she entered, "the room then gave me the dimensions of "she"" (52). The room makes G.H. aware of her position in society as a woman, one in which she is marginalized, regardless of her class or social standing. De Oliveira (1987) as well as Villares (2011) both offer readings of *The Passion according to G.H.* as an encounter with gender and class. G.H.'s encounter with her gendered social standing runs parallel to her encounter with her racialized social standing. Just as G.H. realizes that she is not defined as human, or even as female, but rather by negation of her femaleness, so too she comes to realize that Janair is defined by the negation of her blackness. It follows from this that Janair's social standing is dependent on a society that bases its meritocracy and social status on the proximation of one's skin colour to whiteness, or lighter skin. Furthermore, she comes to see her own position within that society, realizing that much of her merits and social standings have been as a result of access to particular privileges within a white hierarchy.

De Oliveira goes further and discusses the contrasting imagery of deserts and dryness with that of moisture and wetness as an analogy of space, highlighting the "opposition poor northeastern versus wealthy southern Brazil [...] corresponding to the different climatic conditions of the "two Brazils"" (125). The Brazilian Northeast consists of nine states, and was created in reaction to the 1919 drought (Albuquerque Junior 43). The term 'Northeast' does not refer to the geographic demarcation of the literal northeastern region of Brazil, but rather to the states that were affected by the 1919 drought. Media coverage in the southern parts of Brazil emphasized the dryness of the land, the rampant poverty amongst Brazilians and European immigrants (Lispector's family arrived in the northeastern town of Recife, in Pernambuco, along with many other Jewish immigrants fleeing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe). The northern region, and particularly the Northeast, was largely misunderstood by southern Brazil, and a large variety of cultural tropes and stereotypes were created in defining the dry and impoverished Northeastern region. The Northeastern region, in turn, chose to define themselves against the South, cultivating a northeastern identity that was marked by its difference from the Brazilian South (Albuquerque Junior 46). Through "Northeasternizing"

practices and discourses [...] a multiplicity of lives, histories, practices, and customs make up the reality that lies behind what we now know as the Northeast” (Albuquerque Junior 43).

In *The Passion according to G.H.*, G.H. describes Janair’s room as “the outback of [her] home” (29), a “dry, empty space in [her] fresh, cozy, moist home” (30). G.H.’s experience of the reality of a racialized Brazil is described in the novel as her experience of being “on the desert” (52). This imagery contrasts with descriptions of G.H.’s space, which she describes as having “moist light and shadows, nothing here is sharp” (22). She tries to locate the comfort of her reality within the desert that is her confrontation – she tries to console herself with the knowledge that there is evidence of a large “lake of potable water” that is underneath the Sahara desert, “a humidity that must be found again” (101). The comfort and luxury that is associated with humidity and G.H.’s apartment reflects the world to which G.H. had been accustomed, that of a middle to upper class lifestyle in the wealthy Rio de Janeiro. The imagery of sharp lines and overwhelming sunlight that permeate descriptions of Janair’s room reflect the drought that inscribes the discourse of the Northeast, and reflects the working class and G.H.’s ‘other’. G.H.’s confrontation with her white racial identity taking place in Janair’s room suggests that G.H.’s confrontation is one that occurs because she is now able to see Janair as an individual with her own history and culture, one in which G.H. does not belong and is not wanted. This is G.H.’s confrontation with her own whiteness. She experiences feelings of disillusionment, abjection, followed by a feeling of loss that she calls apocalyptic; these experiences will be discussed in the following section.

Confronting Whiteness

Confronting whiteness as disillusionment

White Fragility

For white people, a confrontation with whiteness occurs in a variety of situations. When their racial privilege is pointed out or exposed, and especially when these privileges are threatened; when they are reminded of these very privileges – regardless of their class background – as reasons for their access to particular resources or positions in society; when their whiteness is pointed out as reason for their prejudiced behaviour; when their language or ‘jokes’ are called out for being racist; essentially, any time a white person’s behaviour, language, meritocracy, access to resources or jobs, or their history is highlighted as racist or racialized, a confrontation with whiteness occurs. The most common reaction to this confrontation is often uncontrollable emotions of guilt, anger, self-pity, or fear, followed by an array of defence mechanisms

(DiAngelo 57). Robin DiAngelo (2011) refers to this reaction as white fragility. She argues that these emotional reactions “function to reinstate white racial equilibrium” (57). DiAngelo explores factors that inscribe white fragility: *segregation, universalism and individualism, entitlement to racial comfort, racial arrogance, racial belonging, psychic freedom, and representation* (italics in original) (58-63). I will focus here on the factors of *segregation* and *individualism*. Through *segregation*, white people rarely encounter people of colour as equals, and white people are rarely – if ever – taught about racism and their positionality in society as racialized beings. This results in “white interests and perspectives [being maintained as] central” for white people (DiAngelo 58). In the case of Brazil, the history of their racial democracy enforced not only segregation, but a stigmatization of any references made to race or racial inequalities. Vargas (2004) states that,

...to this day, black people in Brazil are expected to enter residences through “service doors” and “service elevators”; black [people] are not expected to be in elite shopping and recreational areas and, in general, not expected to be outside of poor neighborhoods – except, of course, if working in [...] occupations such as domestic servants, babysitters, and street cleaners. Brazilian apartheid allows for the relative and temporary inclusion of black [people] into residential and commercial areas [...] as long as, and only if, their inclusion is facilitated by a non-black person (Vargas 455).

In *The Passion according to G.H.*, G.H.’s apartment is designed according to the historical architecture of Brazilian homes. Most Brazilian homes, even apartments, have separate quarters for domestic workers, and these always have a service entrance (Furtado, 2019). G.H.’s apartment connects to “the service area” via a “dark hallway”, at the end of which “two doors face each other... the service exit and the door to the maid’s quarters” (Lispector 29). The separation between G.H.’s apartment and Janair’s room – a separation that is not entirely separate – is symbolic of the social order instated by the racial democracy. The racial democracy re-directed Brazilian society’s focus from racialized social orders, and instead attempt to focalize any socioeconomic issues as class issues. G.H. acknowledges that she had become financially comfortable over time, and that if she did not “belong to the class that [she does] by reason of both money and culture, [she] would normally have had a domestic’s job in some rich people’s great house” (25). Thus, G.H. is aware of inequalities that exist between herself and Janair, but she has yet to understand these inequalities in terms of racism.

Through *universalism and individualism*, white people are taught that their reality is the same reality experienced by people of colour; furthermore, “they are taught to value the individual and to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a racially socialized group” (DiAngelo 59). Thus, their history, and their position as oppressors in the history of people of colour, is erased, “hid[ing] the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today” (59). When economic, political, and social factors are cited as spaces in which white privilege exist, whiteness will claim that these are accessed through determination and hard work, denying the existence of privilege, or claiming a lack of work ethic amongst people of colour (DiAngelo 59). This results in an “essential dichotomy” that is created as “‘specifically raced others’/‘the unracialized individual’” (59). Val Plumwood (1993) argues that the feature of “backgrounding (denial)” (48) is what underpins this dualistic thinking. The “unracialized individual” cannot exist without the existence of “specifically raced others”; the former is dependent on the latter for its existence, as the ‘unracialized individual’ is “defined *against* the inferiorised other” (Plumwood 48; italics in original). Similarly, Vargas (2004) argues that the denial of race inherent in Brazilian society is entirely borne out of, and perpetuated through, a duality of “hyperconsciousness of race/negation of race” (444).

Hyperconsciousness of race

This hyperconsciousness is made clear in the opening chapters of Lispector’s novel. *The Passion according to G.H.* begins with G.H.’s considerations of how to articulate what she had experienced the day before. In her discomfort in experiencing what she refers to as a “[loss] of human constitution” (6), G.H. states that she will need to find herself again, “even if finding [her]self is again the lie that [she] live[s] on” (4). She states that she will need to be cautious if she wishes to prevent her privilege, her “third... protective leg” from “grow[ing] back in [her] as easily as a weed” (6). She also goes on to state that she is struggling to understand what she saw: “I don’t even know if I saw it, since my eyes ended up not being separate from what I saw” (7). In each of these cases, G.H. makes it clear that she is aware of a system of power that is in place in society that is benefitting her. She calls the life she currently leads a “lie” (4), and acknowledges her privilege as a ‘third leg’ that is able to ‘grow back’, suggesting that she has temporarily lost this leg (although her confrontation would not erase access to this leg, but G.H. cannot yet conceptualize this). When she states that her “eyes [are not] separate from what [she] saw”, she is realizing that what she is confronting and experiencing is not a new world, nor can her individual self be removed from what she sees. What she sees is entirely determined

by her gaze, as well as the system which has worked to divert or manipulate her gaze away from herself and onto an-other. She goes on to state this confrontation is one that forces her to explore “the forbidden weft of life” (7), the forbidden referring to speaking of race or racialized whiteness in Brazil. The fact that white people are aware of the racialized inequalities that underpin Western societies and choose to ignore this fact, is a result of what DiAngelo (2011) refers to as “racial arrogance” (61). She argues that because white people’s self-image is positively framed through mainstream media and entertainment, often in negation of people of colour, there results “a sense of entitlement because many whites... have a very limited understanding of racism” (61). Thus, white people do not understand inequalities in terms of race, or they choose not to, but this is not due to a lack of consciousness of the existence of differences in access to resources, but rather a denial of that which threatens their comfort and acknowledges their histories in a negative frame.

In *The Passion according to G.H.*, the protagonist’s reaction to confronting her whiteness is one of fear and disbelief. Unlike the protagonists in the majority of Lispector’s other novels, G.H. does not grapple with the act of writing and its inadequacies in expressing meaning. Rather, what she fears most is having to confront herself within her confrontation with herself. “[H]ow to explain that I cannot bear to look out, only because life is not at all what I thought it was and is in fact something other...” (Lispector 5). Her confrontation with herself as a racialized white woman is what unsettles her. She states that she “never thought it would be the immense disencounter that it was” (Lispector 9). Her initial reaction is to wonder “Is [her] sacrifice for continuing to be human just forgetting?” (9). G.H. equates “human” with her “former” self, that of a middle-class white woman who still believed that she lived in the great racial democracy of Brazil, and had never before confronted or even seen her whiteness so clearly until now. She considers the ease with which she could simply forget this “disencounter”, pretend it did not happen and continue living her life of privilege. This confrontation becomes the “problematic aspect of [the] text” (Waugh 22) because she knows that this knowledge that comes from her confrontation will threaten white hegemony, as well as her access to the privileges inherent in this hegemony. “Why is it that just looking is so greatly disorganizing? And disillusioning too. [...] Maybe disillusionment is the fear of no longer fitting into a system?” (Lispector 5). The notion of the racial democracy in Brazil becomes a “disillusionment” to G.H., because her whiteness and her racialization has now become apparent, and this has shattered the illusion of racial democracy and freedom that she had accepted as fact in Brazil.

The Passion of Jesus Christ and G.H.

G.H.'s experience of unlearning and confrontation with her whiteness is one that she experiences as comparable to Jesus's suffering for humanity's sins in the Christian Bible. The title of the novel calls G.H.'s story '*The Passion*'; the word 'passion' comes from the Latin *patior* which means 'to suffer' (Murray). "Truth doesn't make sense! That's why I was afraid of it, and still am. Forsaken as I am, I give everything over to you – so you can do something pleasant with it" (Lispector 11). G.H.'s use of the word 'forsaken' alludes to a parallel that is implicitly being drawn between G.H.'s 'suffering' in confronting her whiteness, and the suffering endured by Jesus Christ. This alludes to the only moment in the Bible where Jesus questions God's plan, when he is on the crucifix, and moments before his death, he cries out: "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?*" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (NIV551, Matthew 27:46). The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John refer to 'The Passion of Jesus Christ'. The humility in Jesus's suffering to forgive the world of their sins lay in his faith in and acceptance of God's plan. Often, Christian teachings highlight the strength it took for Jesus, also a human being ('just like you and me', the pastor says), to have such faith in a plan that he knew would end in his suffering. G.H. sees herself as forsaken, abandoned by the powers that protected her from her whiteness, powers that she had never questioned until this moment. This highlights the white entitlement that is threatened when white people confront their own whiteness; her 'suffering' at having to unlearn and renegotiate her position in society, and having to acknowledge that her successes are not entirely achieved through just hard work and determination, is likened to what is considered the greatest sacrifice ever made in Christian theology.

Before the reader learns of her encounter with the cockroach, G.H. refers to her encounter as a "disorganization" (3), a loss of "[her] human constitution" (4), an experience that "made [her] sort through the forbidden weft of life" (7). What becomes clear in these thoughts is that there has been a disruption in her articulation of the society to which she felt she belonged. She comes to realize that in order to navigate this confrontation, she must acknowledge her position in a privileged society that benefits only G.H. and people like G.H. She uses the analogy of likening whiteness to a "superstructure", an analogy that reveals that G.H. not only understands how oppression works, but that she always had the knowledge of how the system from which she benefitted has maintained its power. She explains that – in confronting her whiteness – she will need

to acknowledge that G.H. was a woman who lived well, well, well, who lived in the top layer of the world's sands, and the sands had never given way beneath her feet; the harmony was such that when the sands moved her feet moved in concert with them, so everything stayed firm and compacted. G.H. lived on the top floor of a superstructure, and, even though it was built in the air, it was a solid building, she herself too in the air, like bees weave their life in the air. And the same thing had been happening for centuries, with the necessary or incidental variations, and it worked. It worked – at least nothing spoke, and no one spoke, no one said “no”: so, it worked.

But precisely the slow accumulation of centuries automatically piling up was what was making that building in the air very heavy, without anyone noticing, that building was becoming saturated with itself: it was becoming more and more compacted instead of more and more fragile. The accumulation of living in a superstructure was becoming ever closer to too heavy to stay in the air.

Like a building with all its occupants sleeping securely at night not knowing that its foundations are sagging and, at one instant unannounced by their tranquillity, the beams will give way because the building's cohesion is slowly being pulled apart, a millimetre per century. [...] yesterday, without warning, there was the crash of solidness suddenly become crumbly in demolition [...] The world had reclaimed its own reality, and, just like after a catastrophe, my culture had ended (Lispector 60-61).

In the first paragraph in the extract above, G.H. states that she will need to acknowledge her privilege. Not only does she live in the “superstructure” that is white hegemony, she lives on the top floor, which is associated with financial privileges. She likens the superstructure to a beehive, further indicating the importance of the work done by white people according to G.H. She states that the dynamics of maintaining the importance and the power of the lives of the people who reside in this superstructure had been a project that has been maintained for ‘centuries’, and because the system worked to protect and maintain the privileges of the people in the superstructure – white people – the existence of the superstructure and was never questioned by those people. One way in maintaining ideology is to ensure that those who are expected to subscribe to the ideology are never aware of the workings of that ideology, and that the ideology is never questioned. This is most commonly maintained through slow violence. Rob Nixon (2011) states that “[t]he explicitly temporal emphasis of slow violence

allows us to keep front and center the representational challenges and imaginative dilemmas posed not just by imperceptible violence but by imperceptible change whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time” (11). G.H. states that the superstructure’s growth can be attributed to the “slow accumulation of centuries” (Lispector 60); this slow violence results in whiteness’s inability to connect the agency that they currently possess with any forms of spectacular or slow violence that occurred over time throughout history. Whiteness’s denial of their role played in slavery and other forms of racial violence, for example, and the inequalities that still entrench structural social relations as a result of slavery is a direct consequence of this inability to negotiate the “relationship between human agency and time” (Nixon 11). G.H. goes on to state that the “cohesion” of this superstructure was becoming threatened, and her encounter with the cockroach is the moment in which the superstructure began to crumble, resulting in what G.H. calls an end to her culture.

White fragility, as understood by G.H.’s reaction to her loss of superstructure, brings to mind God’s offense taken at the building of The Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. When God sees the people of the earth building a tower that would reach the heavens, he fears that “if as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (NIV, Gen 11:6). He decides to “confuse their language” and this led to humanity being “scattered... over the face of the whole earth” (Gen 11:9). God feared the power of a humanity that is united and that works together, as this threatened the faith and servitude that was expected of humanity towards him as God, and so used his power to enforce the separation and division of humanity into different, uncommunicating nations. In this analogy, ‘God’ and ‘white hegemony’ are of equal power, and both seek to maintain control by creating difference and presenting this difference as a reason for hyperseparation. Plumwood (2011) names “radical exclusion (hyperseparation)” as a feature of dualism (49). She argues that in attempting to enforce stereotyped views about the ‘other’, the ‘central’ needs to emphasize the radicality of the differences that exist between themselves and the ‘other’; where no differences exist, they should be created and distorted (49). She states that in ensuring that social cohesion between oppressed groups and the oppressor does not occur, it is important to ensure the “polarisation...between the dualistic spheres and to prevent their being seen as continuous or contiguous” (49). God’s polarisation of humanity through created difference is akin to the slow violence that is enacted by white hegemony through the superstructures that exist in society. Furthermore, the fact that this analogy, as well as the parallels G.H. draws between her ‘suffering’ and Jesus’s suffering, both analogize whiteness with omniscient and

omnipresent power and ultimate goodness as taught by the Christian Bible, speaks to the God complex (or entitlement) that is upheld as an ideological feature in white social consciousness.

G.H.'s homogenisation

When G.H. enters Janair's room to clean, she is surprised to find the room clean and tidy. Although the cockroach does not represent Janair, there are parallels drawn between the presence of the cockroach and the absent Janair. G.H. thinks of Janair's appearance:

The features – I discovered with no pleasure – were a queen's features. And her posture as well: her body, erect, slim, hard, smooth, almost fleshless, with no breasts, or ass. And her clothes? It wasn't surprising that I had used her as though she had no presence: under her small apron she always wore dark brown or black, which made her all dark and invisible – I shivered to discover that till now I hadn't noticed that that woman was an invisible woman (Lispector 33).

G.H. also describes the dying cockroach as “a dying mulatto woman” (48). Villares (2011) argues that G.H.'s remembrance of Janair unsettles G.H., because G.H. realizes that Janair is an individual, and her identity is not defined by her occupation as a domestic worker. Janair also embodies all that a domestic worker is forbidden from being in Brazilian society: “openly black, African and Brazilian, critical and articulate” (Villares 162). In the room, G.H. takes notice of the “whitewashed walls” and “recoil[s] in surprise and revulsion” when she sees a charcoal drawing on the wall behind the door (Lispector 31). The drawing is the outline of “a nude man, a nude woman, and a dog more nude than dogs really are” (31). She begins to see the images as mummies, and she becomes uneasy at the fact that the drawings do not touch, they do not form a group, they simply look straight ahead, “as though [the figures in the drawings] had never seen any of the others and had no idea that anyone existed beside [them]” (31-32). G.H. states the image was not decorative, “it was writing” (32). Villares (2011) argues that because of Brazilian society's unequal distribution of resources amongst races at the time the novel was written, Janair would most likely have been illiterate (147). Thus, the drawing is in fact Janair's means of self-expression, a luxury that she as a black woman had never been afforded:

My discomfort was somehow amusing; had it never occurred to me that in Janair's silence there might have been a criticism of my life-style, which her silence must have labelled “a man's life”? how had she thought of me? (Lispector 32).

G.H.'s lack of awareness of Janair's silent disdain for G.H. is indicative of the expectation – an expectation held by white people of people of colour – of servitude and duty that underpins white ideology. Mills (1997) argues that “the Racial Contract has underwritten the social contract, so that duties, rights, and liberties have routinely been assigned on a racially differentiated basis” (93). It never occurs to G.H. that Janair is not the homogenized stereotype of “maid”, but an individual, and an individual who has opinions that did not shed G.H. in a good light. “Janair was the first outside person whose gaze I really took notice of” (Lispector 32). G.H. acknowledges Janair as ‘other’ to G.H., and Janair is not the first person ‘outside’ of G.H.'s circles to gaze at G.H., but Janair's gaze is the first that G.H. becomes aware of. G.H. allows Janair's ‘silent hatred’ in this moment. She laments that she is surprised by this hatred, “the worst kind of hate: indifferent hate. Not a hate that individualized me...” (Lispector 33). G.H. is experiencing the effect of being homogenized. She realizes that Janair's hatred of her is because Janair homogenizes G.H. as the white, middle-class woman that she is, and whiteness very rarely understands or tolerates its own homogenisation. This is largely because white fragility struggles to accept the notion that they have been subject to, and fooled by, “the white racial insulation ubiquitous in dominant culture” (DiAngelo 60).

Whiteness functions as rose-tinted glasses to those who subscribe to ideologies that underpin whiteness and unacknowledged white racial identity; when those glasses are removed and the gaze of difference becomes visible, whiteness struggles to see how it has hidden reality from itself. In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger states that the way in which we see people and objects is determined by our social frames; “we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (1). Janair's gaze effects a self-awareness in G.H. After G.H.'s encounter with the cockroach, she states that this new world that she has been exposed to provides different “modes that mean *to see*” (Lispector 68). She states that ways of seeing consist of “looking at the other without seeing it, possessing the other, one eating the other, one simply being in a corner and the other being there too” (68).

Confronting Whiteness as Abjection

Julia Kristeva (1982) theorised the abject body as one that excretes waste and oozes liquids, and in the undesirability that exists in what is seen as repulsive in the human body (vomit, excrement, pus, blood) is what results in a rupture in the illusion of cleanliness and immortality (2-3). She states that when human beings are confronted with that which is considered undesirable about their bodies, they are forced to confront themselves as temporary matter. They encounter “the border of [the] condition as a living being” (3). Kristeva explains that it is

not necessarily the lack of hygiene that causes this reaction, but rather the fact that “identity, system, [and] order” have been disrupted (4). Confrontation with the abject is never a confrontation with something that is external, it is always a realization of an externalized fear, one that has been forced out of one’s perspective. Self-abjection is the result of the realization that alterity is based on an objectification of the other “that laid the foundations of its own being” (Kristeva 5). G.H.’s confrontation with her whiteness is one of abjection, because G.H. realizes that not only does there exist an external power that has worked to maintain white hegemony, she realizes that this power already existed in her, she had simply not been aware of it in this way before. Because of Brazilian social relations being dictated by the negation of race, the sudden rupture in the silence on the topic of race results in a moment of self-abjection for G.H. G.H. is terrified of the cockroach she finds, and cannot understand why her meticulous “disinfect[ing]” of her house had somehow missed this room and this cockroach. “In my primeval horror of cockroaches, I had learned to guess their ages and dangers, even at a distance; even though I had never really come face to face with a cockroach, I knew their life processes” (Lispector 39). This quote again speaks to the feature of homogenizing that underpins whiteness. G.H. – although having never seen a cockroach – feels that she has experienced enough to know she fears the cockroach and that she does not wish to interact with the cockroach.

Cockroaches are repulsively fascinating insects. The earliest known cockroach fossils date back to around 140 million years ago (Evangelista & Kohli). Cockroaches are omnivorous, but are able to feed off of grass, wood, and decaying matter. They are often greasy or give off a feeling of dampness to touch, and they have a terrible odour. The dampness is due to a secretion of a “lipid-based wax” that aids in the prevention of water loss, the odour is as a result of uric acid that is stored in their fat and is recycled (Nuwer). Cockroaches will also feed off human flesh, nails, and eyelashes in cases of uncontrollable infestations (Nuwer). Cockroaches are also incredibly fast – “relative to their size, they’re one of the fastest terrestrial animals on Earth” (Nuwer), and their movements are often unpredictable. Female cockroaches deliver a large number of offspring in a single birth (around 40-60), and they are capable of parthenogenetic reproduction – producing offspring without the need for male cockroaches (Gayomali). Cockroaches are also able to adapt to their environments rapidly, and their minimal genetic components allow for the speculation that excess radioactive exposure would not result in the rapid mutation of genes as in mammals. These are all factors that contribute to some of the primary reasons why people develop a phobia of cockroaches – katsaridaphobia. The vast majority of Specific Phobias consist of an irrational and excessive fear of a situation, object, or

animal (Lake 112), and the fear response is often not proportional to the phobia trigger. G.H. states that her fear of cockroaches stems from the fact that “they were obsolete and at the same time still living” (Lispector 40). Fear also triggers a fight-or-flight response. G.H. states that she is “surprise[d]” by her fear, and in an attempt to leave the room, she trips and falls, her “attempted flight [becoming] an act ill-fated in itself” (41). Of fear, Kristeva (1982) states,

The phobic has no other object than the abject. But that word, “fear” – a fluid haze, an elusive clamminess – no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a mirage and permeates all words of the language with nonexistence, with hallucinatory, ghostly glimmer. Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject (6).

The cockroach then starts to move out of the cupboard. G.H., in fear, decides that she will try to kill the cockroach. “...I raised my hand as though to take an oath, and in one move I slammed the door on the cockroach’s half-protruding body...” (Lispector 45). She realizes that she had not slammed the cupboard door hard enough, and that she had trapped the still-living cockroach in the cupboard door. G.H. then begins to study the cockroach, stating that she “had never really seen a cockroach. I had only felt repugnance at their ancient, ever-present existence... but I had never come face to face with one, even in my mind” (Lispector 48). G.H. realizes that the “true inhabitants” of this room were Janair and the cockroach, and that in this room – although she had entered as ‘I’, “the room gave [her] the dimensions of “she”” (52). G.H. is now seeing herself as other, and realizes that she too is othered by her whiteness, and that her whiteness does not inherently constitute her centrality, not even in her own home. Villares argues that the ghostly presence of the absent domestic worker Janair enforces a perspective of “black consciousness” upon G.H., “mak[ing] G.H.’s position as white explicit” to herself (154-155). G.H. explains that she had once “felt this feeling before” (51) when she was shocked from seeing her own blood for the first time. Whiteness functions similarly in that it is not aware of its own mortality, and moments when that mortality is made visible, whiteness cannot comprehend it. She calls this confrontation a “horrible truth” because “it wordlessly contradicted everything [to which she] had been accustomed” (51).

Kristeva argues that in monotheistic religions, the abject is perpetuated through that which is forbidden. Interacting with that which is forbidden becomes seen as sinful, encountering “a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness – but always nameable, always totalizable” (Kristeva 17). Leviticus 11 outlines foods that are

considered “clean and unclean” (NIV 59); the only insects that are considered clean are locusts, grasshoppers, and cricket species, “but all other winged creatures that have four legs you are to detest” (Lev 11:23). The condemnation of ‘unclean’ foods is not only based on radical exclusion; one is expected to harbour hatred for all creatures considered unclean. When any object or act is forbidden – especially in the name of purity – that object or act is not only radically excluded but it is also shed in a negative or even vulgar light. Furthermore, touching or eating of an unclean insect results in one’s own uncleanliness until a new day begins. The dualism of clean/unclean, pure/impure is invoked in the condemnation of particular living beings or objects as unclean. That which is unclean is considered a threat to that which is clean, as well as to the power held by that which is clean (Plumwood 50). Plumwood argues that religious thought works “to mark out, protect and isolate a privileged group” (49). For G.H., the cockroach – representative of her whiteness – embodies the abjection of forbidden impurity. She mentions the Bible’s condemnation of impurity, and wonders why these creatures were created if they are to be condemned and taboo. “I had committed the forbidden act of touching something impure” (63), and she notes that her impurity is an “indirect moment of self-knowledge” (63). G.H.’s confrontation with her whiteness is considered impure because it reveals to her that her self-identity is entrenched in a system which has sought to remain invisible in an effort to demarcate and maintain privileges that are only afforded to white people.

A thick, white pulp begins to ooze from the cockroach (54), and by the end of her confrontation, G.H. decides that it is necessary for her to eat it (159). In the Old Testament, the Passover refers to when God vowed to kill the first-born sons of Egyptian families, unless they sacrificed a lamb or a kid and smeared the blood over their front doors. This blood was a sign for God to pass over those homes (Book of Exodus). The Passover is celebrated as God’s freeing of the Israelite slaves of Egypt, and in contemporary rituals – as with Good Friday – is remembered with communion. The act of eating of Christ’s body (the bread) and drinking of his blood (the wine) is how those who partake are able to be cleansed and forgiven for their transgressions. Through this act of consuming another, there is an affirmation of “transience and interrelatedness. To eat the other means to abolish the separation between subject and object” (Pahl 188). For G.H., the eating of cockroach abolishes the world in which G.H. is subject and Janair object; she is also exposed to a world in which G.H. becomes the object of a gaze that she has never noticed before. G.H. eating of the cockroach is her communion; the “neutral” cockroach is the sacrifice that was necessary for G.H.’s unlearning, and she “consumes in

despair” (Pahl 189). G.H. calls this an act of transcendence, and in describing the “bad taste in her mouth” (160), she is reminded of a verse from the Book of Revelation – ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (NIV 687, Revelations 11:15-17). God’s letter to the Church in Laodicea appeals their people to cease their indifference in their beliefs. Much like G.H., who is privileged, her encounter with the cockroach appeals her to cease her indifference towards her whiteness. G.H. tries to spit the taste of the cockroach out of her mouth, but she tastes the “taste of a nothingness” (160). This experience of transformation that G.H. undergoes can be understood in the following quote: “[w]hen the conscious subject has to change, to alter, to become different by consuming and being consumed, it does not simply transform itself, it goes blank, which is a comical moment on the path to despair. The conscious spirit or subject cannot take account of its despair rather, it can only respond to it by naively starting anew” (Crockett & David 13). The despair felt by G.H. is seen as her cathartic moment before “starting anew”.

Confronting whiteness as apocalyptic catharsis

G.H.’s catharsis models the cathartic study of the *via crucis*, or The Stations of the Cross. For G.H., “[t]he *via crucis* isn’t a wrong way, it is the only way, you get there only through it and with it. [...] when she has experienced the power of building and, in spite of the taste of power, prefers desistance. Desistance has to be a choice. To desist is a life’s most sacred choice. To desist is the true human moment. And it alone is the glory proper to my condition. Desistance is a revelation” (Lispector 170). The fourteen stations of the cross refer to the fourteen trials that Jesus Christ faced on his last day, beginning with his condemnation, and all the events that led to his crucifixion. In Catholic churches, the stations are typically found as small figures or paintings that depict each station; in practice of devotion, each station requires the meditation on the suffering that Jesus experienced, accompanied by a particular prayer that is recited or sung at each station. Meditating and praying at each station requires intensive self-reflection on the suffering endured by Jesus Christ for those who follow him (and those who do not). There is an element of guilt in this process – and as with any reflection on The Passion of Jesus Christ – because one is taught that one’s sins are forgiven only because of the suffering that was endured by Jesus, a suffering that one intimately imagines through the stations. However, this teaching also inscribes the idea that – as long as one meditates upon these stations

frequently enough, and one feels a strong sense of guilt and remorse – one is forgiven and absolved of one’s sins. If one replaces that initial feeling of guilt with white guilt, a similar reasoning ensues when considered in terms of racism. White guilt is a forerunner in the victimhood rhetoric that permeates most white people’s responses to their involvement or connection to slavery, apartheid, or racial segregation throughout history. G.H., after intensive reflection on her confrontation with her whiteness, as well as the physical eating of the body of the cockroach (parodying the ritual of eating communion bread), feels as if she has undergone a baptism, suggesting that she is “born again and cleansed of her sins. Thus, G.H. appeases her guilt by reflecting on how this confrontation changes her entire worldview, experiencing a form of abjection, and because of this (white, fragile) suffering she endures, she is forgiven, absolved, baptized of her sins as a white person. There is no sense of accountability to one’s actions in the devotional practice of meditating upon the stations, one need only focus on the suffering of another to feel enough guilt and remorse over how our actions are absolved through another’s suffering. The act itself does not require accountability, because in the transcendent world, only God can judge us, and so only God (who cannot speak beyond your interpretation) can pass judgement over our actions. In this rhetoric, the world of humanity – society, race, gender, class, power – is not important in the grander scheme of things, because humanity’s only salvation is in God and in Jesus. For white Christians, this is the ultimate justification of renouncing accountability, because God is the ultimate, universal judge, and in his name, white people are absolved of their racism, more so if they “did not know that it was racist”, as the rhetoric goes.

G.H. states that she needs to cease her indifference if she is to return to the space of the sacred; to cease is her revelation (170). Invoking the book of Revelation – also referred to as the Apocalypse of John – suggests that G.H.’s only hope at salvation is for her current understanding of society to desist, resulting in G.H.’s own identity apocalypse. Her world of privilege and ignorance must end apocalyptically, cleansing G.H. of her past and the accountability required for her to move forward without giving up her privileges.

‘Epistemology of ignorance’⁷

Denial of the existence of information that would require responsibility and accountability in effecting the required changes in a system is a form of “implicatory denial” (Cohen, 2001). Forgetting and silence on racialized political and social systems in which whiteness holds a

⁷ This sub-title is informed and quoted from the book entitled *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (2007) by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana.

position of power is wrapped up in hyperconsciousness of race (Vargas 2004). G.H. becomes hyper-aware of race and ultimately *chooses* to forget and rather to pretend. Thus, her negation of race is wrapped up in a hyperconsciousness of race. She has become aware of the systems from which she benefits because of her being a white woman, and she chooses ignorance. John Berger speaks about how in the art world, seeing an artwork is affected by “assumptions [which] no longer accord with the world as it is [...] these assumptions obscure the past” (4). G.H.’s denial is a form of obscuring the facts of her history, and thereby relinquishing responsibility and accountability. Society as a whole tends to live in denial of their responsibility towards any forms of oppression – gender-based violence, rampant poverty, abuse of non-human animals – society tends to treat anything that does not affect them directly as non-important to their direct experience, and thus not something to which they hold any accountability. When white people are told that their social position is *because* of their white privilege, the denial of this fact comes easily, because when whiteness refuses to acknowledge their perpetual position in a political system that benefits them, they simply continue to live their lives of privilege. There is no entity to which whiteness can be held accountable, because the most powerful systems in the western world are constructed in support of whiteness and its power. Berger states that “a fear of the present leads to a mystification of the past” (4), and whiteness obscures historical fact in ways that both appeases its guilt, as well as in ways that maintain its centrality. G.H. chooses to forget what she has learned through her encounter with the cockroach:

(One thing I know: if I reach the end of this account, I’ll go, not tomorrow but yet today, to eat and dance at the Top-Bambino, I mightily need to have a good time and distract myself. I’ll be sure to wear my new blue dress that makes me look a little thinner and gives me color, I’ll phone Carlos, Josefina, Antonio, I don’t remember clearly which one of the two men I thought might be in love with me or if both were, I’ll eat *crevettes* tonight, tonight my regular life will be starting again, the life of my common happiness, I’ll need for the rest of my days my slight, sweet, good-humored commonness, I, like everybody, need to forget.) (Lispector 155).

Not only does G.H. have a choice in the matter of taking responsibility for her whiteness, she sees the act of forgetting as the idea of taking a break, as if she needs time off after a tiresome week at work to have fun and forget about her work. The nonchalance with which she treats her unlearning is indicative of the fact that accountability is not an inherent fact of knowing, and when white people are expected to hold themselves accountable, this discomfort is easily

avoided by feigning ignorance. This is only possible because nothing happens if a white person does not take responsibility for their whiteness. They continue to be privileged, and they continue to use these privileges without much concern for how this privilege is maintained.

G.H.'s experience of confronting her whiteness triggers a victim mentality in her. She experiences her unlearning as something which "happened to [her]" (8), and something which she will be able to overcome if she is "brave" (9). She describes her experience of seeing the racialized reality of her world as something that was "preconditioned" by her "foresight" (9). This foresight refers to the epistemology of silence and ignorance that entrenches society in a white-central system. She contemplates the possibility of maintaining distance between herself and this new knowledge, wondering whether or not she could simply just understand without action. She hopes that her experience of understanding will still allow her to "emerge from it as intact and innocent as before" (8). G.H. knows that this knowledge will require "the sacrifice of having no power" (170), and she chooses ignorance; "where seeing is knowing, and knowing is taken to precede fair conditions of accountability," G.H. chooses not to be held accountable for her whiteness (Jungkunz & White 439). Mills (1997) states that white people struggle to understand and identify particular behaviours as racist, and this results in a "racialized moral psychology [where white people] will then act in racist ways *while* thinking of themselves as acting morally" (93). G.H. – in the hopes of preserving her former culture and identity – states that if she tries, she will be able to think of her experience in another way, in "a way that is within our language" (60). The use of the word 'our' reinforces G.H.'s knowledge of a demarcation between herself and people of colour, and she acknowledges that white supremacy has a discourse that negates and polarises a racialized understanding of whiteness. G.H. considers this a "leaving [behind] of [her] human salvation" (75). Salvation is only granted to G.H. if she does not interact with the impure, and pretends that her confrontation meant nothing. The kingdom of God being analogous to white hegemony means that salvation for G.H. requires silence on the new knowledge she has of the world. G.H. also states that she knows that she can still feign ignorance by "keep[ing] [her]self from having seen" (85).

Mills (1997) states that in order for the Racial Contract to be dismantled, white people need to cease in their passive-but-consensual acceptance of the system cultivated by the Racial Contract:

There is a real choice for whites, though admittedly a difficult one. The rejection of the Racial Contract and the normed inequities of the white polity does not require one to leave the country but to speak out and struggle against the terms of the

Contract. So in this case, moral/political judgements about one's "consent" to the legitimacy of the political system and conclusions about one's effectively having become a signatory to the "contract", *are* apropos – and so are judgements of one's culpability. By unquestioningly "going along with things," but accepting all the privileges of whiteness with concomitant complicity in the system of white supremacy, one can be said to have consented to Whiteness (Mills 107).

G.H. has already made the decision to "consent to whiteness", and it is a decision that she justifies through her apocalyptic catharsis with the cockroach. By eating of the white fluid of the cockroach, G.H. has consumed of the sacrifice as a cleansing of herself; she has meditated on the suffering endured by the cockroach as well as herself, and feels that she has been absolved by simply having had the confrontation with her whiteness. She will choose to live in denial, because not only do her privileges afford her the luxury of being able to turn a blind eye, but because she has suffered enough by having to experience the ordeal she encountered with the cockroach. G.H.'s 'suffering' is a suffering that maintains her centrality as a white woman. She may have confronted her whiteness and become aware of a social order that is racialized in its inequalities, but the suffering that is the root of her catharsis is not the suffering of those oppressed by whiteness, but rather the suffering G.H. had to endure in having her world of privilege be deconstructed and exposed. G.H. suffers because she was made uncomfortable, and her white fragility and guilt try to maintain her position of privilege through denial.

The quote which precludes this chapter highlights the mechanisms of white social and political power, or, the Racial Contract, as described by Mills (1997). For an institution to maintain far-reaching power, the mechanisms of that power must remain as invisible as possible. Whiteness as hegemonic, institutionalized power has been able to maintain and perpetuate its ideologies by negating race as a necessary factor in the consideration of social and economic inequalities. However, the negation of race is something which is only done with ease by white people. Because of the lack of racialized discourse around whiteness, the fact of whiteness's stronghold over society is not considered in terms of race, and thus, the problem is never highlighted. In many cases, class is configured as the more primary issue, and white scholars often attempt to avoid or deny talk of race by claiming that class struggles trump race struggles in an attempt to delegitimize the issue of race, a topic that is explored in Chapter 3. Without an examination of whiteness that dismantles the invisibility of the mechanisms of whiteness that entrench its systemic power, the Racial Contract cannot be addressed.

Chapter 2

Inscribing Whiteness through Narrative Power in *The Hour of the Star*

There were silent constellations, and that space known as time which has nothing to do with her or with us. And so the days passed (Lispector, *The Hour of the Star* 30).

Introduction

*The Hour of the Star*⁸ is Clarice Lispector's final complete novella. Published in Portuguese 1977, just months before Lispector's death, the 84-page novella tells the story of nineteen-year-old Macabéa through the perspective of the male narrator Rodrigo S.M. Writing from a position of various social privileges, Rodrigo takes the reader through the problematic process of trying to write alterity. The novella utilizes the "self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty" (Waugh 2) of metafiction to expose "the pervasiveness of authority by signalling and dismantling the insidious control behind a narrator's or an author's **author**-itarian stance" (Vieira 585, bold in original). This chapter analysis will be informed by Patricia Waugh's chapter entitled "Literary self-consciousness: developments" in which Waugh explores the function of literary self-consciousness (as a feature of metafiction) in modernist and postmodernist literature (21-28). This chapter also follows by Waugh's analysis of framing theory. Of metafictional narratives she states:

Whereas loss of order for the modernist led to the belief in its recovery at a deeper level of the mind, for metafictional writers the most fundamental assumption is that composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one's 'reality'. Writing itself rather than consciousness becomes the main object of attention. Questioning not only the notion of the novelist as God, through the flaunting of the author's godlike role, but also the authority of consciousness, of the mind, metafiction establishes the categorization of the world through the arbitrary system of language (Waugh 24-25).

Put differently, metafiction exposes not only the act of writing as something which both requires and begets authority (a sort of pre-authority), but also exposes how attempting to write

⁸ *A hora de estrela* (1977), first translated into the English by Giovanni Pontiero in 1992, and then again by Benjamin Moser in 2011. This thesis uses the Pontiero translation.

another's consciousness – writing alterity – is a form of oppression. Furthermore, Waugh's article analyses the notion of frames and frame-breaking as applied to novels. A frame can be defined as "a rigid structure... that underlies or supports a system, concept, or text" (Lexico). Waugh argues that "contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins" (29). Waugh's discussion of frame analysis stems from Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974); Waugh defines frame analysis as follows:

Contemporary metafiction, in particular, foregrounds 'framing' as a problem, examining frame procedures in the construction of the real world and of novels [...] Analysis of frames is the analysis... of the organization of experience. When applied to fiction it involves analysis of the formal conventional organization of novels. What both Goffman and metafictional novels highlight through the foregrounding and analysis of framing activities is the extent to which we have become aware that neither historical experiences nor literary fictions are unmediated or unprocessed or non-linguistic or, as the modernists would have it, 'fluid' or 'random'. Frames are essential in all fiction. They become more perceptible as one moves from realist to modernist modes and explicitly laid bare in metafiction (Waugh 28; 30).

As one will see in this chapter, the narrator Rodrigo S.M. relies upon social, political, and geographical frames to tell the story of the character Macabéa. Lispector's novel deconstructs the frames through which Rodrigo narrates Macabéa, "question[ing] the process whereby literature represents oppression" (Peixoto 89). By using social frameworks to interpret and organize Macabéa's life and behaviour, the narrator of *The Hour of the Star* subscribes to features of dualism as outlined in Val Plumwood's chapter entitled "Dualism: the logic of colonisation" (1993), particularly the feature of homogenisation (53-54).

This chapter will begin by discussing frame analysis and theory through a brief discussion of the theory's origins in Goffman's work; after this context has been set, the application of frame analysis to literature and narrative as outlined by Waugh and by Frow will also briefly be discussed. Following this, in an analysis of Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*, this chapter will discuss the position of the narrator, arguing that Rodrigo S.M.'s position as narrator is analogous to the colonial power structures which are still entrenched in society through under-examined whiteness. By unwittingly (but not excusably) engaging in the features of dualistic thinking as a social frame, Lispector's narrator Rodrigo S.M. – as a narrator and character –

“attacks directly and mocks those writers who see themselves as capable of changing the oppressive status quo through their writing” (Marques 108). Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*, although focalizing the dualistic thinking between the “poor north-east/wealthy south” (Ribeiro de Oliviera 122), highlights how author-ial narrative power and its maintenance of rich (white) hegemony in narrative/literature is a microcosm of society’s maintenance of rich (white) hegemony.

On Paper...: Theoretical [Frame]work

Frame theory/analysis

Frame analysis theory is a sociological theory that explores the manner in which human beings organize their social experiences and their ‘realities’. Much of frame analysis is attributed to the work of Ervin Goffman, particularly his text entitled *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974). Goffman states that

definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition frame (10-11).

The theory is typically applied to mass media and advertising as a deconstructive tool in order to highlight the manner in which society’s perceptions are manipulated and guided by framing techniques. Goffman distinguishes between two types of primary frameworks, namely “natural and social frameworks” (22); natural frames refer to events that are “due totally, from start to finish, to “natural” determinants” (22). These frames are “unguided”, and their “determinism and determinateness prevail” (22). An example of such framing would be studies in “physical and biological sciences” (22), fields in which there is no positive or negative value placed upon these events, they are simply accepted as “naturally-occurring” and are often expected. An example of such a framework would be the sun rising, or any information published in an ephemeris. Conversely, social frameworks “provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being” (22).

In terms of this theory’s application to literature, John Frow (1982) explains that there exists both natural and social frameworks for a literary text. The natural frameworks of a literary text consist of features such as the cover pages, the publication houses and publication dates, the

name of the author, dedication pages, and introductory quotes (Frow 26). Frow explains that these aspects all create a frame through which we read a text before reading the content. These frames create “expectations” (22) of a text prior to any engagement with the content. The cover page of the 1986 translation of *The Hour of the Star* possesses the natural frames of the translator’s name, Giovanni Pontiero, with the first page of the novel providing a brief biographical note on both Lispector and Pontiero. Two review quotes, one from *Vogue* magazine, and one by Hélène Cixous, followed by a short synopsis, frame the back matter of the novel. Although these frames are considered natural, they still create social frameworks when one looks at how these frameworks function. Waugh (1984) argues that “frames in life operate like conventions in novels” (30). Hélène Cixous’s review states that for Cixous, “[Lispector] is the greatest writer of the twentieth century. [Cixous] rank[s] her with Kafka... [Lispector’s] work will become a model of ‘feminine writing’” (*The Hour of the Star* back matter). This review frames Lispector, as well as *The Hour of the Star*, as comparable to the existential literature of Franz Kafka, as well as placing her in the frame of *l’écriture féminine*, simply because of the placement of Cixous’s name and the association made with Cixous and ‘feminine writing’. By placing this review next to a review from *Vogue* magazine, Lispector’s novel is framed as having a range of potential audiences, from the women who read fashion pages, to the women who read the academic work of Cixous (access to education being the underlying mechanism of privilege at work here). The synopsis of the novella is a quote taken directly from the novella, and frames the novel as a ‘universal’ story, one that is about the “thousands of girls like this girl from the Northeast [...] in the slums of Rio de Janeiro” (*The Hour of the Star* synopsis). This universalizing tendency, as will be seen in this chapter, is one which is consistently relied upon by Rodrigo S.M. throughout the novella. Thus, the natural frames of the novella have already placed the novella in a variety of frames, each with its own allusions and perceptions that are intricately linked to the social hegemony within which it functions.

To consider the social frameworks more closely, Frow states that “the most intensive frame is that constituted by the beginning and, especially, the end of the narration” (26). The page before the narrative begins has a quote by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, which reads: “Clarice stirs in the greater depths, where the word finds its true meaning, portraying mankind” (Lispector 6). Inserted by the translator of the English text, Giovanni Pontiero, this quote frames Lispector, as well as the novella, within two frameworks. First is the gendering of humanity as “mankind”, which is ironic considering the fact that one of the primary considerations in the novella about

writing alterity is the very use of a male narrator – Rodrigo S.M. – who is writing a female character – Macabéa (one of many positions of alterity the narrator *reads* our protagonist through). Second, Lispector’s work is universalized, framing Lispector and her work as being capable of “portraying mankind” (Lispector 6). Thus, prior to any reading of the narrative of the actual story, the lenses through which the reader is guided into reading the novella are reliant on universalizing frameworks (a topic explored in detail in this chapter and in Chapter 3).

The Hour of the Star begins with a short section entitled “*The Author’s Dedication* (alias Clarice Lispector)” (7, italics in original). The question of the narrator’s identity is immediately foregrounded in the novel with the use of the word “alias”, as this is an explicit acknowledgement that Rodrigo S.M. is not just a character created by Lispector. This does not necessarily mean that Lispector and Rodrigo are the same person, but rather, Lispector is making the point that when one writes a character, the author’s self cannot ever be entirely removed from that character. Just as we cannot remove Lispector’s voice from her male narrator’s narrative, so too can Rodrigo never completely remove his own voice from that of Macabéa’s. Hence, the greatest problem with any attempt at writing alterity is that the author cannot be entirely objective, they cannot remove themselves from those who they write with any sense of entirety. Frow describes the “beginning of a text [as] the point at which the distancing between author and narrator usually occurs [...] this distancing, like that effected by a prologue and epilogue, both reinforces the difference between the realm of narration and the realm of the narrated and eases the reader into the fictive world...” (26). If anything, one can argue that in attempting to write alterity, Lispector/Rodrigo does not reveal the ‘otherness’ of Macabéa or those who they attempt to write – but rather make their own alterity in trying to write what they do not know more apparent. Stockwell speaks about *The Hour of the Star* and Macabéa as being a “veiled” character, in that all we learn about her and know about her is learned/seen through two veils: the first veil being that of Rodrigo as a male narrator, and the second veil being “the fact that there is nothing at all special about Macabéa” (248-249). The veil functions in the same manner as the frame, in that it renders both the narrator (as creator of the veil) as well as the character (the wearer of the veils created by the narrator) as invisible, both to the readers as well as to each other.

Pre-determinism and framing

Hard (or scientific) determinism refers to the scientific and philosophical view which holds that all cognitive and physical events are “conditioned by their causes and are describable by

scientific law” (Archie); soft determinism concurs that physical events are causal, but that cognitive “choices have only to do with mental processes and have no actual effect in the external world” (Archie). The notion of predeterminism stems from a combining of theology and scientific determinism, and argues that events “throughout eternity have been fore-ordained by some supernatural power in a causal sequence” (Archie). The notion of author/narrator as God can be understood as a form of predeterminism, something which appears extensively in *The Hour of the Star*.

I am holding her destiny in my hands and yet I am powerless to invent with any freedom: I follow a secret, fatal line. I am forced to seek a truth that transcends me. Why should I write about a young girl whose poverty is so evident? Perhaps because within her there is seclusion. Also because in her poverty of body and soul one touches sanctity and I long to feel the breath of life hereafter [...] Now I only wish to possess what might have been but never was (Lispector 20-21).

Rodrigo acknowledges that even in writing “the other”, he must follow “a secret fatal line” (20), one in which Macabéa’s life and social position/class is pre-determined in a sense because of the racial and class history in Brazil (and the world). The last part of the quote, “Now I only wish...” – Rodrigo “might have been” impoverished, but never was because of his privilege; he wants to possess this experience because then he has something to write about, to appease his desire to have something ‘different’ to write about, because he “can no longer bear the routine of [his] existence” (21). Framing functions as a form of predeterminism in a novel, or as Waugh describes it, function as “conventions [...] they facilitate action and involvement in a situation” (30). Metafictional literature tends to draw attention to frames as they function in society, highlighting the fact that “it is impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins” (Waugh 29). This impossibility of knowing is a crisis that Lispector/Rodrigo face when writing *The Hour of the Star* – “how does one start at the beginning, if things happen before they actually happen? If before the pre-prehistory there already existed apocalyptic monsters? If this history does not exist, it will come to exist” (11). Furthermore, the tendency to focus on “the arbitrary nature of beginnings” is characteristic of metafictional novels (Waugh 29). *The Hour of the Star* begins with “[e]verything in the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born. But before prehistory there was the prehistory of prehistory and there was the never and there was the yes. It was ever so. I do not know why, but I do know that the universe never began” (11).

Novel titles and framing

Following the Author's Dedication is a page of thirteen titles for the novella (Lispector 9). These are the most obvious frames created for the reader, used "to formulate ideas about possible meanings of the text with no influence by prior knowledge of actual details" (Feracho 77). Lispector's signature is printed between the fourth and fifth titles, further instating her identity as author and narrator in the text. Each title presents a frame through which to read the novel; the sections that follow in this chapter will use some of these titles in order to discuss and analyse the text, demonstrating the manner in which the frames through which *The Hour of the Star* is read are pre-determined before the story has begun.

***A Record of Preceding Events*⁹: Narrator/Narrative**

The Hour of the Star begins with Rodrigo S.M's considerations on how to begin writing this story. As the narrator, he immediately possesses power in the sense that he decides the manner in which Macabéa and her supporting characters are framed to the reader. He states that he has no intention of writing "anything complicated, although [he is] obliged to use the words that sustain you. The story – I have decided with an illusion of free will – should have some seven characters, and obviously I am one of the more important" (Lispector 13). Rodrigo acknowledges himself as a character of great importance, since he is the storyteller. He also addresses the reader as 'you', which – as Irene Marques (2011) argues – begs the question of who exactly Rodrigo is addressing. The necessity for his words to give sustenance to his readers suggests that this story will not necessarily "change the oppressive structures regulating Brazilian society" (Marques 109). Furthermore, his acknowledgement of his free will being an 'illusion' suggests that – although he does not yet know the character he is about to create – she already exists in a predetermined state. Her story (as Rodrigo is about to tell it) is already subject to frames that have predetermined how Rodrigo will write about her, and frames that have predetermined her character. As a narrator, Rodrigo S.M. sees it as his "duty" (Lispector 13) to write about Macabéa. Rodrigo has clear power over Macabéa and her survival; he turns bread to gold (like a god) – "Yet I have no intention of adorning the word, for were I to touch the girl's bread, that bread would turn to gold – and the girl (she is nineteen years old) the girl would be unable to bite into it, and consequently die of hunger" (15).

Rodrigo's introductory description of Macabéa reveals his positions of privilege; he describes "her delicate and shadowy existence" (Lispector 15) in what he clearly believes to be sensitive

⁹ *A Record of Preceding Events* is one of the alternative novels for *The Hour of the Star*.

terms; “she was barely literate” (15) having only spent three years in primary school, “she was so backward” and “so simple-minded” (15). The pity he feels for Macabéa’s lack of education and literacy is palpable, stating that “the girl had acquired some dignity” (15) when she had become a typist. By characterizing Macabéa as someone who is to be pitied for not having the education that Rodrigo and his readers were given, Rodrigo believes that he is somehow aiding in dismantling white, colonial hegemony that underlies the frames which dictate his society. However, as Marques argues, instead of “deconstructing and challenging hegemonic ideas [...] the writer then, becomes the hegemonic figure (voice) par excellence for what she or he thinks as being misery, happiness, self-realization, fulfilment, and so on” (109).

Rodrigo writes that “[t]he idea of transcending my own limits suddenly appealed to me” (Lispector 17). He sees writing alterity as transcendence of his limitations, likening a social limit (not writing an-other’s experience) to the idea of a personal limit, as if it is just something to overcome through discipline. Rodrigo’s attempts to understand the experience of impoverishment offers glaring insight into his ignorance; he believes that in order to “put [him]self on the same footing as the girl from the North-east”, he: ‘mustn’t shave for days’; that he “must acquire dark circles under [his] eyes from lack of sleep... like a manual labourer”, and that he should be “...wearing threadbare clothes” (Lispector 19). Rodrigo believes that he should stop taking care of his appearance, that he should exhaust himself as someone who works in manual labour, and that he should wear clothing that is not well-made. His understanding of poverty, and of Macabéa, is learned by ear, as he “write[s] by ear”, likening his experience of learning about Macabéa to the process through which he learned “French and English” (Lispector 18). He only understands Macabéa by what he has heard about her through society, through the frames that construct his reality (Marques 110). In her book *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), Trinh T. Minh-ha explains that “narrow representation” is what leads to the belief amongst writers that they somehow exist “before her/his own book, not simultaneously *with* it” (29, italics in original). She explains that it is because of this “image of God alone” creating and constructing our mental, physical, and spiritual realities that writers view themselves as the Gods/Goddesses of their literary worlds (29). This is much like the Author in Lispector’s novel *A Breath of Life*, as well as the narrator in *The Hour of the Star*. Both take us through the creation of their character, as if they exist before their characters and the worlds their characters inhabit, and these characters’ lives are predetermined according to the frames to which their authorial creators are subject.

“I see the girl from the North-east looking in the mirror and – the ruffle of a drum – in the mirror there appears my own face, weary and unshaven. We have reversed roles so completely” (22) Rodrigo cannot truly see Macabéa, because not only does he universalize her as a Northeastern girl, his rendition of her looking in the mirror only reflects his “own face” (22). In Trinh’s discussion of “[t]he infinite play of empty mirrors” (22) in *Woman, Native, Other*, she says “[w]riting necessarily refers to writing. The image is that of a mirror capturing only the reflections of other mirrors” (22). She explains that when she says something like “I see myself seeing myself”, it is in the sense that there exists a “play of mirrors” in which the ‘original’ subject becomes destabilized by the inability to recognize which reflection is the “original ‘I’” (22). Trinh states that “writing *for... by... and from* the people” is writing which creates a play of mirrors, “a multipolar reflecting reflection” unconditioned by subjectivity and objectivity, and yet “reveals them both” (22). When one can achieve such writing, there exists no hierarchical system for people to fall into, “neither I nor you come first” (22). However, Trinh says that we smudge our mirrors, and create more smudges as we try to wipe away old smudges. We use mirrors as a tool for vanity, feeding our “narcissistic relation of me to me” (22). Writing, as a mirror through which ‘the writer’ accesses self-reflexivity, can so easily fall into the trap of self-absorption. That is to say, it risks a kind of narcissism in which the writer obsesses over the appearance of the reflection while the writer – and thus the writing – wilts away in reality. The ‘real writer’ sees their appearance in the mirror and through the “power of identification” allow the reflection to fragment into reality, “while the tool itself becomes invisible” (Trinh 22). Thus, a shattered mirror “destroy[s] the dual relation of I to I, but it leaves the infiniteness of life’s reflections intact” (23). These fragmented reflections can be seen as the frames through which Rodrigo is writing Macabéa; he writes from a position of privilege, socially, financially, and racially. He writes from a “cubby-hole where [he] has locked [him]self away” (Lispector 22), he writes from a room of one’s own. Rodrigo calls himself “more actor than a writer [...] forc[ing] another’s breathing to accompany [his] text” (22-23), suggesting that his narrative/narration is a performance, one in which he uses “another’s breathing” (23), another’s *life*, to give life to his words. Lesley Feracho (2005) explains that “[t]he underlying supposition is that she is silenced in society and as such is invisible, even to herself” (78).

***The Blame is Mine*¹⁰ – White guilt and white saviourism**

“Her existence is sparse. Certainly. But why should I feel guilty? Why should I try to relieve myself of the burden of not having done anything concrete to help the girl?” (Lispector 23).

Rodrigo’s own alterity in relation to Macabéa is most apparent in how he expresses guilt and remorse for their respective positions in the social hierarchy, whilst simultaneously berating Macabéa and all those who live in poverty for making the poor choices that led to their class positions. This implies his belief that she possesses an inability to think and behave in the same manner as he does. “She wanted more, for it is true that when one extends a helping hand to the lower orders, they want everything else; the man on the street dreams greedily of having everything. He has no right to anything but wants everything. Wouldn’t you agree?” (Lispector 35) – another example of failing to write alterity; Rodrigo believes that a “man on the street” is greedy for desiring access to a lifestyle in which he has everything he desires; he also believes that man to have no right to anything, because his poverty is somehow his choice. Rodrigo expresses both relief and “remorse” for not “hav[ing] been born [Macabéa]” (38). He states that “[t]he fact that I am not her strikes me as being a cowardly escape. I feel remorse, as I explained in one of my titles for this book” (38). The title referenced here is *The Blame is Mine*. His narrative continues to jump between having an existential crisis over his ability to “exploit the written word with the utmost ease” (36), to expressing frustration at “the lower orders [being] greed[y] in their need” (35). He states that Macabéa “embodies a truth I was anxious to avoid. I don’t know whom I can blame, but someone is to blame” (39).

Frow argues that narrative that exists in brackets is a conscious handling of “unrealities” in which the unconscious of ideology functions (27). “By delineating aesthetic space as an ‘unreal’ space [...] the frame both neutralizes direct referentiality and calls attention to the concentration of meaning within this space: the absence of immediate meaning creates an expectation of *total* meaning” (Frow 27). Thus, when Rodrigo expresses himself in bracketed narrative (of which there is a significant amount), this narrative is taken by readers as factual, due to the idea that by addressing the reader in brackets, Rodrigo is somehow speaking to them in reality, as if he were telling the readers the story rather than the story being read. For example, Rodrigo explains “(The girl worries me so much that I feel drained. She has drained me empty. And the less she demands, the more she worries me. I feel frustrated and annoyed. A raging desire to smash dishes and break windows. How I can I avenge myself? Or rather,

¹⁰ *The Blame is Mine* is one of the alternative titles for *The Hour of the Star*.

how can I get satisfaction? I've found the answer: by loving my dog that consumes more food than she does. Why does she not fight back? Has she no pluck? No, she is sweet and docile.)” (Lispector 25-26). Before an analysis of what the narrative in these brackets introduces, if we consider Frow’s point on narrative that is bracketed, the existence of the brackets immediately “concentrat[es]” the content of the bracket. The content itself (analysed in the next paragraph) thus stands as an unconscious iteration of ideological meaning, suggesting that that which is said should be taken as possessing “*total meaning*” (Frow 27).

Rodrigo’s lamentations in these brackets speak to his white guilt, or his guilt felt for the privileged position he holds in society. Whiteness often struggle to understand its privilege; Rodrigo sees Macabéa’s life as a choice to some extent, as if she can just change her life by “fight[ing] back” (26), not understanding that it is the class and social privilege to which Rodrigo is privy that maintains Macabéa’s marginalised and invisible position in society. This notion is explored by Lispector through a book that Macabéa sees at work that her boss, Senhor Raimundo, had left on the table:

The book was entitled *The Shamed and Oppressed*. The girl remained pensive, perhaps for the very first time she had established her social class. She thought and thought and thought! She decided that no one had ever really oppressed her and that everything that happened to her was inevitable. It was futile to struggle. Why struggle? (Lispector 40).

Macabéa lacks the education – both culturally and pedagogically – to understand her own oppression, and thus accepts the “inevitab[ility]” of her life events, subconsciously following a framework created by the oppressors who perpetuate Macabéa’s ignorance. Marques argues that the fact that Raimundo, Macabéa’s most “immediate oppressor” (114) – who has both the power to read and be “fond of literature” (Lispector 40) as well as the power to control Macabéa’s livelihood – does not do anything to assist in minimizing the oppression faced by Macabéa (Marques 114). Furthermore, simply having the time and the ability to read is a privilege that is highlighted here. Rodrigo/Lispector point out a problem with literature in that those who are capable of reading this text are likely “financially secure and enjoy the comforts of life” (30); these people ought to “step outside [themselves] and see how others live” (30). He goes on to state that “if [the reader] is poor, he will not be reading this story because what I have to say is superfluous for anyone who feels the pangs of hunger” (30). The fact that the readers who are reading this story about Macabéa and her oppression, as well as Senhor Raimundo who – whilst exploiting Macabéa and his other employees – is reading a book

entitled *The Shamed and the Oppressed* highlights the fact that the privileged elites are clearly very aware of the existence of oppression. Regardless of the fact that Rodrigo's story of Macabéa's oppression is veiled, the readers are aware that oppression exists in any kind of form, but they deny this existence beyond the literature which they read, because their experience of reading is something which they do not wish to mar with any productive action that might effect a change in the hegemony that maintains their positions in society.

Marques points out that both Rodrigo and Raimundo seem to believe that in writing (Rodrigo) and reading (Raimundo) about the oppressed, they are somehow helping Macabéa and her fellow universalized oppressed, allowing for "a therapeutic effect for both the writer and the reader" (115). Even when Rodrigo addresses his readers in a reprimanding tone, there is still a tone of therapeutic guidance to the oppressors in this journey upon which they must embark to better themselves in highlighting the 'unfamiliar' of oppression: "Here I am acting as a safety-valve for you and the tedious bourgeoisie. I know that it is very frightening to step out of oneself, but then everything which is unfamiliar can be frightening" (Lispector 30). This maintenance of Macabéa's position as oppressed and beyond redemption by writing her into literature is further entrenched by Rodrigo's narrative, locking Macabéa in the story read by privileged folk much like Rodrigo. He feels "frustrated and annoyed" (25) because he cannot "avenge [him]self" (25) if Macabéa does not indicate that she wants to fight, or at least be fought for. Macabéa does not know of her social/class position, "she wasn't even aware that she was unhappy" (25). Rodrigo writes this book to make himself feel better about Macabéa's misfortunes, and to appease his own guilt over his privilege in society. The book "function[s] as an antidote to appease [the] guilty conscience [...] of those who can but do nothing to change the status quo, those who in fact want to maintain the status quo for their own benefit" (Marques 114). Rodrigo's belief in his power over Macabéa confirms the ignorance inherent in his privilege; he outrightly describes Macabéa as lacking charm (after describing her blowing her nose on her dress (Lispector 27), suggesting that he is the one who gives Macabéa charm, not because she is herself charming. His logic is that because he loves her, and finds her charming, she is somehow deserving of these qualities, because he pities her. Rodrigo "suffer[s] on her account" (27), further entrenching the presence of a sense of (white) guilt/saviour complex. He also reduces Macabéa's humanity by stating that she lacks awareness of her existence as a human being, stating that she "did not know that she existed, just as a dog doesn't know that it's a dog" (27); non-human animals lack self-awareness, something which distinguishes them from human animals, and Rodrigo suggests that Macabéa lacks this self-awareness.

***The Right to Protest/Scream*¹¹: Universalising**

Titles

The Hour of the Star is one of thirteen different titles given to this novella. Following the Author's Dedication is a page which lists the thirteen titles, with Lispector's signature breaking the list format between the fourth and fifth title. Feracho (2005) states that the titles act as a "preface" to the novella, providing possibilities of frames through which to read the novella; "[t]he direction of interpretation is thus from external knowledge to an interpretation of the dedication that influences an analysis of the titles" (77). This analysis of the titles not only speaks to frame theory as previously discussed, but speaks to the very act of attempting to write alterity in that Rodrigo's knowledge of Macabéa is premised on knowledge that is external to both himself, and to Macabéa – knowledge which exists as social frames (or veils, or lenses).

Naming/Names

Olímpico

Naming in *The Hour of the Star* is used to explore how white hegemony is maintained through the repression of naming/labelling. Olímpico's last name is de Jesus, which is a surname assigned to children with an absent father figure ("illegitimate" (45)); this identity of illegitimacy is attached to him immediately upon introduction – he lies about his full name, stating that it is Olímpico de Jesus Moreira Chaves, in order to hide this fact of his childhood. The capitalist system is "based on sharp class distinctions" (Marques 118), and Macabéa and Olímpico's position in their society maintains the class system that both keeps and needs them at the bottom of this system. Olímpico does not refer to himself as a "worker" but as a "metallurgist" (Lispector 45). By referring to himself as such, he feels that he holds a greater professional standing than someone who is just referred to as a "worker" (45). The fact that Olímpico chooses to adorn his name and his job title speaks to the fact that he is subject to (and aware of) the power of labels in society. "'Metallurgist and typist' were categories of some distinction" (Lispector 45). Macabéa places importance in their status because of their job names. Marques highlights the irony in the fact that Olímpico does not understand that the distinction made between the job titles of general 'worker' and the specialized job position of 'metallurgist' is one made to "separate... workers through specialization, [making] it more difficult for them to see themselves as part of the larger capitalist entity" (118).

¹¹ *The Right to Protest/Scream* is an alternative title in *The Hour of the Star*.

Lispector observes that “Olímpico’s job was to collect the metal rods as they came off the machine and load them on to a conveyor belt. Macabéa never got round to asking him why the rods were put on a conveyor belt” (Lispector 45). Much like the white hegemonic system which oppresses Macabéa and Olímpico maintains its power through a lack of questioning, Macabéa and Olímpico do not question the necessity of the tedium of Olímpico’s job. Both Olímpico and Macabéa are unaware of their power as being the majority (in the sense of oppression/impoverishment/working class). Marques states that Olímpico – in wishing to be “a rich man, [...] a demon of power” (Lispector 45) – believes that the capitalist system is “legitimate” (Marques 118). Olímpico firmly believes that if he attains financial and material wealth, he will become one of the privileged to whom the “good life” is owed (Lispector 52). Even Olímpico’s attraction to Glória later in the novel is motivated by Glória having “a father and mother, and that she ate a hot meal at the same hour every day”, qualities that made her “someone of first class quality” (Lispector 59). Marques further points out the irony in Olímpico’s desire for affluence and power by highlighting that Olímpico does not realize that the working class to which he belongs “is in fact the very pillar of the entire system” (119), and if he and the rest of the working class started questioning the status quo, “the entire system would collapse” (119).

Ideology can only be maintained and perpetuated if it remains unquestioned. Another feature of dualism as discussed by Plumwood is the feature of “radical exclusion (hyperseparation)” (50), which relies on polarising groups in order to avoid any meaningful interaction, thus ensuring that the privileged group does not question the treatment of the oppressed group, because they (the oppressed group) is somehow inherently and inevitably subject to their oppression. This ultimately leads to an acceptance of ideas and beliefs without question, thus maintaining any hegemony at play. By not questioning the radical exclusion, homogenisation can maintain the stereotypes upon which it relies as fact, thus further entrenching the justification of the exclusion for the privileged groups. The title *The Right to Protest* speaks to the fact that protest comes from questioning the status quo, from questioning inequality. Those who oppress can continue to do so if those whom they oppress stay silent and unquestioning. Lispector explores this notion through the character of Olímpico. In another conversation between Macabéa and Olímpico, Macabéa asks Olímpico about words that she had heard when she listened to Radio Clock (Lispector 49-50). She asks him an array of questions about things she had heard, and his answers are given with frustration, giving a clear indication that he does not know the answer to most of her questions. When Macabéa asks “[w]hat does culture

mean?”, Olímpico responds “Culture is culture” (50). Macabéa asks Olímpico what a count is, and he responds “A Count is a Count, for God’s sake!” (50). The point here is the Olímpico does not question the meaning of these terms, he takes their existence and meanings as fact, reiterating Olímpico’s victimhood to an oppressive system that he believes is saving him.

Macabéa

Before Macabéa’s name is mentioned, she is universalised as a northeastern girl; she is grouped by Rodrigo as just another of:

all those unfortunate girls’ (Lispector 12), ‘...this girl among thousands of others like her’ (13); ‘...their bodies, their only real possession’ (14). ‘[Macabéa] scarcely has a body to sell; nobody desires her, she is just a harmless virgin whom nobody needs’ (14) ‘thousands of girls like this girl from the Northeast’ (14); ‘They aren’t even aware of the fact that they are superfluous and that nobody cares a damn about their existence’ (14); ‘they never protest, for there is no one to listen (14).

As Plumwood explains, for a “superior” group to maintain power, they must look like they are all the same and unified, and they must make sure that the “inferior” group are also seen as all the same and not capable of change (53). Rodrigo’s homogenisation of Macabéa and all girls from the Northeast is a direct feature of how white hegemony maintains and perpetuates its ideology. Rodrigo’s universalising narrative not only diminishes Macabéa’s individuality, but he suggests that her existence is a “mere accident of nature”, as she is just an abandoned “foetus wrapped up in newspaper” (36). Rodrigo does go on to state that all humans are accidents of nature, but that he “only escaped a similar fate because [he] is a writer” (36). The position of power here again is not in the creative act of writing, but in the position of privilege in which Rodrigo’s ability to write any character he sets his heart on is enclosed. Writing is representative of a position of privilege.

When Macabéa first meets Olímpico, he is confused by her name; he states that “it sounds like the name of a disease... a skin disease” (43). Macabéa responds that she agrees, but that her mother vowed to “Our Lady of Sorrows” that if Macabéa should survive, she would name her as such. Macabéa was nameless “for the first year of [her] life” (43). Macabéa’s “name that nobody has ever heard of” (43) is a product of a vow. Macabéa is named after the Jewish rebellion group the Maccabees. Stockwell (2012) argues that the meaning of Macabéa’s name, and whether or not it may be suited to the implied meaning, is hindered by the veil through which we are told (about) the story the of Macabéa. Stockwell explains that “the Jewish rebel

army who wrested control of Judea from Hellenic rule and [who] were martyred for their cause” (248) are hardly emulated by the character description of Macabéa as given to readers by Rodrigo. We cannot confirm or deny Macabéa’s representation of the martyrdom of the Maccabees, largely because what we know about Macabéa is veiled through Rodrigo’s narrative (Stockwell 248). Rather, the appropriacy of Macabéa’s name’s origin lies in the fact of the lost texts and translations of the original Hebrew text of the Maccabees:

Indeed, Macabéa’s name inscribes her not only within the story of the Maccabees, but within the entire tradition of Judaism. As befitting Lispector, though, it does so in an enigmatic way. The original Hebrew text of I Maccabees, after all, is lost; all that remains to us is the Greek translation contained in the Septuagint (II-IV Maccabees, on the other hand, were originally written in Greek). Macabéa, therefore, would be the inheritor of a lost writing: she inherits a story of revolt, but one told in the language of the other, the language of a hostile other. (Stockwell 264-265).

Thus, Macabéa’s story as it is entrenched in the narrative of the other is historically – through her name – indicative of the very lens of alterity through which the story of the Maccabees is told through their oppressive other’s (the Greeks) language.

Religion

Religion as an oppressive power is something which is explored throughout the novel. Radical exclusion, as explained above, is relied upon by many religions. As discussed in Chapter 1, religious teachings that forbid that which is ‘impure’ are entirely dependent on the radical exclusion of groups or objects in order to maintain control. This impurity is defined in relation to that which is considered ‘pure’. Macabéa, although having sworn off religious belief, still engages in the habitual practices that her aunt had taught her, and that have been maintained through religious guilt and shame:

As she slept, she often dreamed that her aunt was rapping her on the head. More surprisingly, she often dreamed about sex, she, who to all appearances was completely asexual. When she finally woke up, she was overcome by feelings of guilt without being able to explain why. Perhaps because everything that is pleasurable should be forbidden. Guilty and contented. Her doubts confirmed her sense of guilt and she mechanically recited three Hail Marys, Amen, Amen, Amen.

She prayed but without God she did not know Him, therefore He did not exist. (Lispector 33-34);

‘On another occasion, she heard the message: ‘Repent in Christ and He will give you great joy.’ So she decided to repent. Not quite knowing what she had to repent of, the girl from the North-east repented of everything. The preacher added that vengeance is a deadly sin. So she sought no revenge’ (37).

Religion uses the narcissistic technique of gas-lighting to make society feel guilty about sexual desire. Many religious rituals are mechanical; people do not always know why they engage in religious rites and rituals; it is simply something that is learned as expected behaviour. Macabéa does not even believe in God, and yet her behaviour can so easily be dictated by the rites and rituals of religion. When Macabéa dreams about sex, she cites three Hail Marys, which is a devotional practice that takes place after confession in the Catholic tradition. The Hail Mary’s are intended to work towards a purification of oneself and one’s sins. Religion also makes for a powerful tool in creating indifference, a quality inherent in maintaining the homogenisation of any groups. Rodrigo states that “[t]o eat communion bread will be to taste the world’s indifference, and to immerse myself in nothingness” (19). The analogy of the ritual of eating communion bread – the body of Christ – being akin to the world’s indifference speaks about how religion cultivates ambivalence; the fact that Catholicism is a western religion furthers the analogy of western/colonial/whiteness being indifferent to alterity. Many western religious teachers/teachings (and here I am speaking specifically of both white and privileged congregations and followers) are premised on the notion that if one remembers to ask for forgiveness, and if one takes communion and acknowledges Jesus Christ as the redeemer, then their sins will be forgiven. The “comforting sentiment” (19) of this works to appease any guilt felt by the privileged elites, because not only did the Lord predetermine their fate as privileged, He already forgave them for the sins of not doing anything to change the hegemony that oppresses. As stated by Frantz Fanon in his essay “Concerning Violence” (1963), the Christian religion is “the foreigner’s Church” and does not seek to educate black folk of the ways of God, but “to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor” (32).

“It must be said that the girl is not conscious of my presence. Were it otherwise, she would have someone to pray to and that would mean salvation. But I am fully conscious of her presence: through her I utter my cry of horror to existence. To this existence I love so dearly” (33). Here, Rodrigo’s role as an omniscient creator shifts to that of a more realistic image of the societal hegemony which he and his narrative represent; he is aware of her presence both

because he is the narrator and because her presence (both as Macabéa and as the universalized northeastern girl) makes him uncomfortable. "...through her [he] utter[s] [his] cry of horror to existence" (33). Macabéa's presence does not make Rodrigo acknowledge his privilege; it ignites his feelings of guilt, and anger towards life and society, and in order to make himself feel better, he writes (about) Macabéa. Not only does Macabéa not have an opportunity for salvation, but Rodrigo's narrative suggests that he – as a privilege white male guiltily but contentedly maintaining the hierarchical status quo – is not willing to allow such salvation to Macabéa. Coca-Cola being Macabéa's favourite drink furthers the analogy of the presence of a God, in this case the God that is capitalist consumerism. Rodrigo uses an analogy that likens Coke to the hegemony of whiteness:

[...] the record that is about to begin is written under the sponsorship of the most popular soft drink in the world even though it does not earn me anything; a soft drink that is distributed throughout the world. It is the same soft drink that sponsored the recent earthquake in Guatemala. Despite the fact that it tastes of nail polish, toilet soap, and chewed plastic. None of this prevents people from loving it with servility and subservience. Also because [...] this drink which contains coca *is today*. It allows people to be modern and to move with the times (Lispector 23).

Coke is likened to whiteness here in the sense that Lispector/Rodrigo points out that Coke is a terrible tasting drink, and yet people do not question it, they love it 'with servility and subservience', much like whiteness is idealized and placed on a pedestal in society (Marques). Whiteness is also never racialized, thus making it not only an unquestioned ideal, but something which can essentially sponsor this narrative as well as natural disaster, as long as it remains unchallenged/unquestioned/unexamined. In *Marxism and The Philosophy of Language* (1973), V.N Vološinov states that "consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws" (13). Thus, ideological power can be maintained through ideological manipulation of the consciousness. This is achieved through methods of slow violence. Through the gradual and meticulous manipulation of language, behaviour, and thus, thought, hegemonic power is maintained by disguising itself as identity, and as culture. Plumwood's features of dualism – "backgrounding (denial), radical exclusion (hyperseparation), incorporation (relational definition), instrumentalism (objectification), homogenisation or

stereotyping” (48-55) – articulate how dualistic thinking is cultivated in order to maintain hierarchical, colonial power through the slow violence which underpins ideology.

‘The Hour of the [White] Star’: Idealizing White Beauty

Macabéa’s sickliness is constantly emphasized, and she is never racialized (although this is usually an indication that the individual in question is white); her skin is referred to in terms of its opacity; this further highlights that it is not enough to just be white in society, one must also possess enough financial privilege in order to maintain an aesthetic of health: Macabéa is described as having been born with rickets (27), her skin covered in liver spots (26), and “[h]er eyes were enormous, round, bulging and inquisitive... some deficiency of the thyroid gland...” (26); “the parts of her skin unaffected by the blotches had the subtle glow of opals” (26-27). The heat she lives in causes Macabéa to sweat, “a sweat that gave off an appalling stench” (30), and she has been “suffering from a persistent cold” for the last year (31). Macabéa tries to cover her sun spots with a white foundation powder, “which gave the impression that she had been whitewashed but it was preferable to looking sallow” (26). Villares (2011) argues that the white powder used by Macabéa is representative of Macabéa’s “attempt to perform whiteness” (286); the fact that Macabéa appears whitewashed is symbolic not only of the psychological whitewashing that is required in idealizing white beauty, but also of the fact that Macabéa’s attempts at performing whiteness appear “artificial, not real” (286). Macabéa is characterized as physically (and subsequently sexually) unappealing, and her “mimicry” (Marques 286) of whiteness (as opposed to Glória’s more convincing performativity) renders Macabéa’s characterisation as someone to pity all the more disheartening. Glória is described as having

rich Portuguese wine in her blood and a provocative way of swinging her hips as she walked, no doubt to some remote strain of African blood. Although she was white, Glória displayed that vitality one associates with a mulatta¹². She dyed her curly mop of hair bright yellow though the roots remained dark. But even without the peroxide she was fair, and that made her superior as far as Olímpico was concerned [...] Olímpico could see that Glória was built for bearing children (Lispector 59).

Glória’s body is accepted by the white gaze because she has lighter skin, and her body performs those qualities of associated with fertility and ‘vitality’. Glória’s African ancestry is not

¹² The term ‘mulatto’ or ‘mulatta’ were used for people with one black parent and one white parent, and is not considered offensive by many in Latin America. However, the origin of the word comes from the word ‘mule’, which is a term used for the offspring of horse and a donkey (Fly, 2010).

obvious when considering her skin colour and physical appearance, but rather in the way she moves – her hips are pointed to as signs of fertility (as pointed out by Olímpico). In contrast, Macabéa's body is described as “parched” (59), her ovaries described as being “shrivelled” (58). Rodrigo states that Macabéa needs to gain weight, because her body is drier than “toasted breadcrumbs” (38). The imagery of dryness that permeate descriptions of Macabéa's body invoke the dryness associated with the Northeast. As discussed in Chapter 1, the discourse of the Northeastern region was constructed in reaction to depictions of the Northeast as barren, dry, and impoverished following the 1919 drought. Aside from Macabéa's universalization as the girl from the northeast, the cultural configuration of the dry Northeast is embodied through Macabéa's sickly, infertile body. Infertility amongst women is still considered unnatural in many societies today; many feminist scholars and activists use menstrual blood as a means of liberation for ‘women’, failing to consider that there are cisgender women who do not menstruate (as well as ignoring the trans-exclusionary implications of this liberation). Macabéa's infertility are signs that point to her undesirability; Rodrigo finds it strange that Macabéa would dream about sex, “she, who to all appearances was completely asexual” (Lispector 33). There is nothing to suggest that Macabéa does not possess any form of sexual desire, but because she is undesirable in her physical impoverishment, the significance of her own feelings and desires becomes irrelevant. Rodrigo thus implies that to a man, Macabéa is not sexually desirable; the consideration of female sexual desire is also irrelevant because she is a woman, and for a woman to desire sex would be considered unchaste. To Olímpico, Macabéa's social and financial impoverishment is considered excusable because of the implied sexual ‘purity’ of her virginity. Olímpico, in a moment of frustration with Macabéa, states that “[o]nly the fact that [she is] a virgin stops [him] from cursing [her]” (Lispector 49).

Macabéa asks Olímpico about the word “mimetism” (Lispector 55), to which he responds: “That's not a nice word for a virgin to be using. Why do you have to keep on asking questions about things that don't concern you? The brothels in the Mangue are full of women who asked far too many questions” (Lispector 55). Sexual purity is associated with virginity, whereas sexual impurity is associated with sex workers. This thinking is rooted in religious teachings, and is a method of trying to control women through shame, through the duality of purity/impurity. The notion of the chaste, naïve women who knows nothing of the world and should remain so by not questioning society and the notion of educated women who question society and question the hegemony to which they are subjected to (sex workers) are dualisms which entrench the polarity between women, and allow for a vocabulary of authority through

which narrators such as Rodrigo (and men such as Olímpico) are able to maintain the oppression of women. Rodrigo is surprised that “the breath of life” is able to move through Macabéa’s parched body, stating that this breath is “as abundant as the breath of a pregnant woman, impregnated by herself, by parthenogenesis” (Lispector 59). The image of the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ who was immaculately conceived, is parodied here, as Macabéa’s parthenogenesis is not because of her being chosen by God, but because she is pitied by God/Rodrigo. There are also parallels that can be drawn between Macabéa and the cockroach in *The Passion According to G.H.* Female cockroaches are able to reproduce by parthenogenesis; G.H. fails to kill the cockroach when she slams the door on it, and there is a white substance which oozes from the cockroach before its eventual death. When Macabéa is hit by a car at the end of *The Hour of the Star*, she lays on the ground in the road bleeding for some time before she dies. Just as the cockroach led to G.H.’s confrontation with whiteness, Macabéa acts as the cathartic confrontation with alterity that Rodrigo needs to appease his guilt, or relieve his boredom.

‘As For the Future.’: Conclusion

The fifth title for *The Hour of the Star*, appearing after Lispector’s signature, is ‘As For the Future.’, preceded and followed by a full stop (9). This statement/title appears in the novel twice: first, in Rodrigo’s introduction to his novel, he states that “[t]his is no caprice on [his] part – hopefully this need for confinement will ultimately become clear” (Lispector 13). He states that if the title were followed by an ellipsis, there would be room for “speculation”. The second appearance of this title is at the end of the novel. Macabéa goes to see a fortune-teller named Madame Carlota (71-78). Before Macabéa’s cards are read, Madame Carlota’s client before Macabéa leaves her appointment with “her eyes red from weeping” (72). Madame Carlota had told this client that “she’s going to be knocked down on the road” (77). Madame Carlota tells Macabéa about the “terrible life” (75) that Macabéa has had, to Macabéa’s surprise, as “it had never occurred to her that her life was so awful” (75). Madame Carlota then states that she has some good news for Macabéa. Madame Carlota says that Macabéa’s life “will change the very minute [she] leave[s] this house” (76), and that Macabéa will “come in for a great fortune that a foreign gentleman will bring to [her]” (76). Macabéa is both excited as the prospect of this new life, as well as “horrified. Only now did she recognize that her life had been miserable. She felt like weeping as she perceived the other side” (78). Macabéa leaves Madame Carlota’s house reeling with excitement, “[a] person enriched with a future” (79). Then, as Macabéa crosses the road, she is hit by a “luxurious” yellow Mercedes driven by a

“fair-haired foreigner” (79). Macabéa’s head hits the pavement, and for the next five pages, we read a mingling of Rodrigo’s thoughts and his continued writing of Macabéa’s thoughts as she lay dying on the pavement. Macabéa’s last words are “As for the future”, before she “vomit[s]...blood” (84), and then Macabéa dies.

Madame Carlota’s fortune came true in that Macabéa did meet a foreigner, and the great fortune that she would inherit was in fact the fortune of death. The fact that the title ‘*As For the Future.*’ is framed by two full stops suggests that Macabéa’s future is confined within this text. Rodrigo’s decision in having Macabéa be killed demarcates her legacy and her life into the narrative that Rodrigo has written. Macabéa has no future, and any future that she could have had is contained within the narrative of *The Hour of the Star*, written by an-other, through the veils and frameworks of Macabéa’s other. Rodrigo even uses Macabéa’s death as a means of centering himself, lamenting on his guilt:

Alas, all is lost, and the greatest guilt would appear to be mine. Let them bathe my hands and feet and then – let them anoint me with the holy, perfumed oils. Ah, such a longing for happiness. I try forcing myself to burst out laughing. But somehow I cannot laugh. Death is an encounter with self. Laid out and dead, Macabéa looked as imposing as a dead stallion. The best thing is still the following: not to die, for to die is not enough. It fails to achieve my greatest need: self-fulfilment. Macabéa has murdered me (Lispector 85).

In this passage, Rodrigo begins by expressing his guilt for having to kill his character Macabéa, and ends the passage by claiming victimhood, in that Macabéa’s story/plight had caused so much sorrow that he felt that he had been murdered by Macabéa. Lispector makes a reference here to John 12 in the Christian Bible. After having raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus and his disciples visits Lazarus at his home, where Mary washes Jesus’s feet in “expensive perfume” (NIV 596, John 12:3). However, Judas Iscariot states that this is wasteful, and that the perfume could have been sold for money to give to the poor. “He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it” (NIV 596, John 12:6). Rodrigo frames himself as Jesus, but Lispector frames him as Judas; when framing himself as Jesus, there are two implications about Macabéa’s character. The first implication is that Rodrigo writing the death of Macabéa is his way of giving Macabéa “a life”, as Jesus gave Lazarus life; as Rodrigo states when Macabéa is dying, “...she had been born for death’s embrace” (Lispector 83). The second implication is that Rodrigo gives Macabéa life by writing her story, and publishing a book for the privileged,

educated world to remember her by. Rodrigo's allusion to himself as Jesus – the Son of God – both confirms and reiterates the notion of narrator as God.

The allusion to Rodrigo as Judas is more subtle. Rodrigo's project in trying to write alterity is one that appears – to him and his fellow, educated, privileged readers – a noble one, and one of great honour. However, Rodrigo knows (despite his feigned ignorance) that he cannot possibly know or write about the experience of Macabéa, or any other 'girl from the northeast'. This insistence on appropriating and misrepresenting in the name of a charitable and honourable reputation amongst Rodrigo's like-minded readers is how whiteness turns a blind eye to the suffering of anyone who is undermined or oppressed by the institutions of whiteness. The line that follows in the next paragraph after Macabéa's death starts with "*Et tu, Brute?*" (Lispector 84). This reference to Caesar's words to Brutus when he finds out that Brutus had betrayed him further entrenches Rodrigo as Judas. Macabéa does not speak these words; the italicization of these words suggest that they are Rodrigo's thoughts, and – from the story we have just been told – it is unlikely that Macabéa would have known much about Caesar, or the famous literary embodiment of Caesar's betrayal. The fact that Rodrigo would see his own killing of Macabéa as a betrayal is reiterated by this famous line coming to his mind. This analogy thus frames Macabéa as Jesus, the one who was betrayed. Rodrigo's misrepresentation of Macabéa is akin to western religion's betrayal of the story of Jesus Christ through re-appropriating the image of Jesus as a white religious icon. The fact that Rodrigo thinks of this himself reinstates the fact that Rodrigo knows that he has betrayed Macabéa – and all those she comes to represent – for his own self-fulfilment.

Chapter 3: Commodifying a Life: The spectacle and thingification in Lispector's *crônicas* and in the novel *A Breath of Life*

Introduction

In Brazilian households the name 'Clarice Lispector' needs no further introduction. In Brazil, there are statues erected in her name, her face appears at bus stops; her novels were (and still are) prescribed as set-works in schools, and there are entire university departments devoted to courses on the work of Lispector. Lispector was and still is idolized in Brazil, from a focus on her physical appearance to the mysticism and elusiveness that permeate her work. From 1943 until her death in 1977, Lispector authored 9 novels, 9 short story collections, and 5 children's books. Her journalistic work began with her first ever publication, a short story called *Triumph* ["Triunfo"] published in a magazine called *Pan* in 1940. In 1952, she wrote for the *Comício* tabloid section entitled "Between Women" [Entre Mulheres] under the pseudonym Tereza Quadros. From 1959-1961, she wrote for and responded to letters for the "Ladies' Mail" [Correio Feminino-Feira de Utilidades] under the pseudonym Helen Palmer, in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, whilst also working as the ghost-writer for model and actress Ilka Soares for the column "Just for Women" in the tabloid *Diário da Noite*. Lispector's wrote *crônicas* for the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* from 1967 to 1973 (Méndez 197). Lispector's journalistic work allowed for the growth of what is often referred to as a 'more heterogeneous' readership of her work (Stanco, 2007; Capello, 2008), although this heterogeneity simply refers to a white readership that is more heterogeneous in its class backgrounds. The fact that Lispector's work was accessible to white working-, middle-, and upper-classes, as well as to both men and women (and often exclusively to women), and in a manner that spoke to the struggles of each, is what underpins the Brazilian project to claim Lispector as uniquely Brazilian. The irony of the fact that most of her journalistic contributions parodied the content of women's pages is often overlooked. Brazilian national identity went through many changes in the early 1900s, and Brazil borrowed much of their earlier cultures from American and European influences; thus, any opportunity for iconizing a writer whose work defies literary genres globally would not be passed.

The novel *A Breath of Life: Pulsations* (1978) is Lispector's final novel, and was unfinished at the time of Lispector's death in December 1977. Lispector wrote the novel whilst afflicted with

terminal cancer, and the novel is her most overt autobiographical text, although it is stated explicitly in the novel that “it is not autobiographical, you all know nothing of me” (Lispector 25). After Lispector’s death, her friend and assistant Olga Borelli, who worked for and lived with Lispector for eight years (*A Breath of Life* xiii), organized the novel. In the only existing English biography of Clarice Lispector, entitled *Why This World* (2009), Benjamin Moser states that “[i]n *A Breath of Life*, both Angela and the male author character [that] Clarice interposes between herself and Angela are Clarice Lispector, far more than any of her previous creations have been” (356). Lispector was well-known for being quite enigmatic as both a writer and as an individual. The fact that Moser, as well as many critics who have written about Lispector, insist that all her texts – and particularly *A Breath of Life* – are autobiographical, despite Lispector’s insistence that it is not, suggests an attempt at “restor[ing] the personal narrative to some form of authority of traditionally hegemonic narratives” (Mbao 64). If one considers the cover art of the English translations of Lispector’s work that have been published by New Directions, the majority of the novels have a photo or painting of Lispector’s face as the cover art (*The Besieged City*; *The Passion According to G.H.*; *The Complete Stories*; *A Breath of Life*; *Near to the Wild Heart*; *Selected Crônicas*).

This chapter will argue that the publishing and literary project in trying (and largely succeeding) to frame Lispector as a universal Brazilian and a universal writer, is due – in part – to the ideologies of the Brazilian racial democracy, and the nationalising project that marked the *modernismo* period of Brazilian society. By focalizing the trauma Lispector and her family faced, as well as trauma experienced throughout her adult life, academics and critics have tended towards framing Lispector as a symbol for how trauma can somehow erase the ‘race struggle’. That trauma experienced in childhood is used as reason enough to claim exception from one’s whiteness is at the heart of white fragility. Leonardo (2005), in discussing white women who oppose affirmative action, states that because white women understand that they are oppressed by patriarchy, and this leads them to believe that they “share interests with other oppressed people... their oppressed states gives them epistemic privilege” (408). It is undeniable that each of Lispector’s novels do include an element of autobiography, but I argue that this is only because Lispector writes from experience. By highlighting the existential tropes in Lispector’s work as universal experiences, Lispector and her work are framed as “the human experience”, un-raced, and therefore not subject to racialised analyses. “The unresolved past retains some influence on the present because it creates a fluidity of time in which memory and

pain interweave. Nostalgia allows the past to be placed, thus preserving it as an anchor in uncertain times” (Mbao 66-67).

In his 1997 chapter entitled “The matter of whiteness”, Richard Dyer states that “...as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it” (12). Centering the ‘unresolved past’ of whiteness, and the subsequent normalizing of white trauma being unraced, is why Lispector’s work as existential and humanist and universal has become such a saturated research approach, (as with any existential, postmodern writers). If one writes about the suffering of existence, the ‘human condition’, then all discussions on class and race are rendered as marginal to the ‘human struggle’. Universalizing and homogenisation tend to stem from a denial of the existence of race and racial constructs in Brazil, as discussed in previous chapters; however, this tendency to universalize Lispector has been a project supported and endorsed by non-Brazilians as well. In his paper entitled “Hyperconsciousness of Race and Its Negation: The Dialectic of White Supremacy in Brazil” (2004), João Vargas states:

...Brazilian social relations – their practices and their representations – are marked by a hyperconsciousness of race. Such hyperconsciousness, while symptomatic of how Brazilians classify and position themselves in the life world, is manifested by the often vehement negation of the importance of race. This negation forcefully suggests that race is neither an analytical and morally valid tool, nor plays a central role in determining Brazilian social relations, hierarchies, and distribution of power and resources (444).

Thus, both Brazil and white scholars’ tendency to universalize Lispector is due to the effects of the inevitable homogenisation that comes from race denial, a denial that can only be rooted in ‘hyper-consciousness’ of race. In this chapter, I will argue that the image of Lispector that has been painted on an international scene is one that tries to entrench the universality and centrality of whiteness, one that maintains the denial/negation of race and racism as something that should concern white people. Because of the association made between women’s magazines and modernity, the power held by someone like Lispector as a women’s pages writer has been considered a feature of her universality as a writer. However, the fact that her audience would be predominantly the literate, educated white women of the middle and upper classes of society has resulted in whiteness remaining under-examined in her work, as well as racist rhetoric and imagery that is used in her work to be overlooked or ignored. The result is what Guy Debord (1967) would refer to as the spectacle.

This chapter will start with a brief discussion of Brazilian modernism, as well as the political climate in Brazil during the presidency of Getúlio Vargas (1934-1945; 1951-1954) and his predecessor, Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961). I will then provide a brief biographical history of Clarice Lispector's life, followed by a discussion of the Debord's concept of the spectacle, and its application to Lispector's *crônicas* and her journalistic work. The negation of race in the name of class struggles as function of whiteness will be discussed. Thereafter, I will discuss how one can read her novel *A Breath of Life* as an autobiographical novel, as well as discussing what is missed when reading *A Breath of Life* as only autobiographical, focusing on the dialogical techniques employed in the story. Thereafter, this chapter will look at how the novel *A Breath of Life* – not through the story itself, but through its being named autobiographical – results in what Wamuwi Mbao (2010) explores as “the commodification of nostalgia... aris[ing] out of a perceived lack, or from perceptions of dislocation and uncertainty” (64).

Brazilian Political Powers: 1889-1961

From 1889-1930, Brazil was a federal republic, leaving Brazilian political power resided in the hands of the rich elites; each political party represented a different state. In the late 1800s, Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais – two of the richest southern states – came to an agreement that they would take turns running for presidency each year, thus ensuring that presidential power remained in their hands. Sao Paulo was known for its production of coffee, and Minas Gerais was known for its dairy production, which led to this alliance being referring to as the coffee-with-milk policy. As a result of increased industrialisation in the Brazilian south, an urban, bourgeois middle-class formed; this, coupled with the introduction of notions of trade unions and anarchic revolt by European immigrants, resulted in a large number of strikes to take place from 1917. Despite increased revolt from the army, as well as the growth of communist and fascist parties, the coffee-with-milk policy continued. In 1926, Arthur Bernedes (Minas Gerais) handed over his presidency to Washington Luís (Sao Paulo). The 1929 stock market crash affected Sao Paulo's coffee exports, and Luís – losing his own shares and wealth in the crash – chose to instate Júlio Prestes, a fellow Sao Paulo state leader, thus breaking the coffee-with-milk policy. This led to the formation of the Liberal Party – the Liberal Alliance, led by Getúlio Vargas and João Pessoa. The Liberal Party consisted of former Minas Gerais leaders, former Democratic Party members, military reformists who were part of the *tenentes*, industrialists, and intellectuals and elites. Vargas ran against Luís in the 1930 elections, but lost. The Liberal Alliance claimed that the elections were rigged, and a coup d'état ensued. Rebel soldiers marched from the south of Brazil, claiming power over each state. By the end of 1930, after

most of Brazil had been taken by the Libera Alliance, Luís handed over his presidency to Vargas in an attempt to avoid any further violence.

Getúlio Vargas and the *Estado Novo*

Getúlio Vargas was one of the most important political figures in Brazilian history. His form of populism resulted in a “state [that] became the corporatist patron of an expanding urban working class by trading social benefits and political access for labor’s dependence and support” (Bak 255). The dictatorship that became known as the *Estado Novo*, or New State, began in 1937; Vargas believed he had found the middle ground between communism and fascism, borrowing from Mussolini’s policies (Garfield, 2015). Vargas’s populism relied on the trope of the nuclear family, with Vargas presenting himself as the “father of the poor” (Wolfe 92). Vargas’s dictatorship was marked by a variety of nationalising policies, radical economic reform, and rapid industrialisation. Under Vargas, women were allowed to work in factories, which meant that many of his policies “reflected concerns about the status of working women” (Wolfe 92), and the racial democracy became further entrenched in political and social policies; his authoritarianism would later become the foundation of Brazil’s military dictatorship from 1964-1985.

Juscelino Kubitschek

Following Vargas’ suicide in 1954, Juscelino Kubitschek (popularly known as JK), then the governor of Minas Gerais, ran for presidency in 1955, and was elected president in 1956 (Brown). JK’s presidency was marked by significant industrializing and modernizing developmental projects, his motto being “fifty years progress in five” (Beal 1). JK developed a new city called Brasília that was to be a model of his motto. Brasília was constructed as a symbol of national development and progress, but was often seen as an artificial idealized space that existed to represent the wealthy and the elites, and thus not inclusive of ‘the people’. Many writers who wrote about the city critiqued its exclusivity and the utopian notions implied by its inception. Lispector’s *crônica* “Creating Brasília” (1970) explores how the city’s artificiality makes the city feel indifferent and empty, as if the city has yet to have any life breathed into it. I will explore this *crônica* in more detail later in this chapter. JK’s policies differed from Vargas in the sense that JK hoped to “transform workers into consumers as a form of political incorporation” (Wolfe 92); his policies emphasized that women’s roles were as housewives.

Brazilian Modernism has been guided by an “aesthetic project... and a political, ideological project” (Coutinho 759). Brazil held a strong desire to be included in the global modernising efforts of the western world, whilst also searching for a “literary identity” with which to align themselves (759). Brazilian modernism often borrowed from other western cultures, particularly those in Europe.

The [White] World Presents: Clarice Lispector

Biographical Information

Clarice Lispector was born Chaya Pinkhasovna Lispector in 1920 to Jewish-Ukrainian parents Pinkhas Lispector and Mania Krimgold Lispector, in Chechelnyk, Podolia in the Ukrainian People’s Republic (now Ukraine). Her sister Leah was 9, and her sister Tania was 5. Following the First World War (1914-1918), and amidst the Russian Civil War (1917-1922), anti-Semitism in the Pale of Settlement¹³ grew increasingly violent. In 1918, the first of ‘at least a thousand’ (Moser 26) pogroms began across Eastern Europe. ‘Pogrom’ means ‘outrage’ or ‘havoc’ in its original Russian, and is an ‘organized, violent attack on/demolition of a particular religious or ethnic group’. A “typical pogrom” constituted a group/gang entering a town and murdering “without distinction” (Moser 25) every man, woman, and child. Most woman and girls were violently raped before being murdered, and the town and the households would be ransacked and looted before the group would continue onto the next town; after just a few days, a new group would typically enter the town and initiate yet another pogrom – “Thus, for instance, Boguslav was taken five times during one week” (Moser 25-26). Although there is no direct reference in Lispector’s work to Mania being raped during the pogroms, there are several indirect references in Leah’s unpublished memoir (Moser 29), as well as in her own published novel (written many years later) entitled *No exílio* (1945), “In Exile” (Moser 29-30). Clarice’s conception, as Moser speculates, was likely due to Pinkhas and Minas’ reliance on ‘local superstition’ (29). Moser explains that “[t]o this day in Chechelnyk”, it is still a common belief that a chancre (a genital ulcer that is formed by syphilis) “will disappear during pregnancy” (29). Although there were some cases when the chancres did disappear during pregnancy, it always came back worse¹⁴. The fact that Clarice Lispector was not born with the disease is thus worth mentioning. There is a saviourism created around Lispector’s birth, as if

¹³ The Pale of Settlement refers to a space demarcated in imperial Russia for Jewish people.

¹⁴ ‘...40 percent of births to syphilitic mothers are stillborn. As many as 70 percent of the survivors are infected, and 12 percent of these will die prematurely. In the middle of a war zone, without adequate nutrition, the percentages would be even higher. To the extent that one can speak of luck in a situation such as this one, Clarice was extremely lucky’ (Moser 30).

she was somehow chosen for a representative role. The fact of her mother's assault, her family's fleeing Europe and emigration to Brazil, her mother's paralysis, her mother's death, her father's struggle to support them financially, her father's complicated and painful death are all commonly cited as the childhood trauma that Lispector attempts to work through in her writing. In 1943, she was married to the diplomat Maury Gurgel Valente, with whom she travelled throughout Europe and parts of the US for Valente's work. They had two children, Pedro and Paulo; Lispector was not very happy in her marriage, and in 1959, she and Valente divorced before Lispector moved back to Rio de Janeiro. In 1959, Lispector took a sleeping tablet, and fell asleep with a lit cigarette. She awoke to find her entire apartment in flames, and in an attempt to save her writing, she tried putting out the fire with her hands. After a neighbour had seen the smoke coming from her apartment, her son was called and came to her rescue. She sustained severe burns on her right hand (which resulted in severe pains whenever she wrote thereafter) and on her legs. Lispector was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1977, and she died just a few months after her diagnosis. (Moser's biography on Lispector discusses these events in great detail).

Crônicas

Trying to define the Latin American *crônica* is a project that has garnered a large amount of research (Rotker, 1992, 2000; Monsivais, 2002; Bielsa, 2006; Stanco, 2007; Mahieux, 2011; Castillo, 2015; Ungro, 2016). The *crônica* originated in the Ibero-American regions, but the origins and development of the genre differs in the different regions. Ungro (2016) tracks the evolution of the *crônica*, starting with the *Crônicas de Índias* (Indian Chronicles) of the 16th and 17th centuries, which were largely defined by the telling and retelling of stories through "diaries, reports, letters and other forms of narration" (110). The *Crônicas de Modernista* (modernist chronicles) were boosted by the advent of the printing press, the growth of publishing houses, and the distribution of newspapers and magazines as sources of information (Ungro 111). *Crônicas* can be very short, or longer forms of writing, and usually encompass both journalistic and literary qualities. Many Latin American poets and writers were the authors of chronicles (Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera from Mexico; José Martí from Cuba; Rubén Darío from Nicaragua) and the resulting product became known as a hybrid form of literature and journalism, high and low forms of modernism, "an intersection between factual and subjective" (Ungro 111). This resulting duality was not a result of an insurgence of new narrative forms or methods, but rather because of the social gestalt that characterized that era, "full of

controversies and discontent” (112). The rise in fame of contemporary *crônicas* can be attributed to the *crônicas* produced by Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Márquez.

The primary features of a *crônica* include focalizing ““real events and characters that have a certain quality of immediacy and presentness”, “a descriptive intention”, the central position of the author, and emphasis on style, and “a strong presence of orality”” (Ungro 116, quoting Bielsa 39). Chronicles are intimately tied to urban spaces, cityscapes, and modernisation. “The importance of the chronicle at the turn of the twenty-first century hinges on its inherent ability to capture urban life in all of its chaotic, fragmented, and often dysfunctional grandeur” (Mahieux 12). The *crônica* is often considered a reactive form of writing, developed in reaction to mass, popular culture. Bielsa (2006) states that *crônicas* “manifest a descriptive, but also an interpretative intention focused upon the everyday images that shape modern life” (Bielsa 55, qtd in Stanco 2). Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic becomes quite clear in the descriptions of life in the city. The dialogic of a text refers to the differing veils or lenses through which the people of a city view themselves, their city, and their culture. Using the same language, multiple voices become clear in any novel – particularly in a city – voices which reflect the heterogeneity of “a cross-class audience” resulting in “the potential to articulate resistance to dominant cultural norms” (Bielsa, 2006, qtd in Capello 253). Although *crônicas* employ complex literary techniques, they “find strength in their ability to remain accessible to a broad readership because of their grounding in the city’s familiar spaces” (Capello 253). This results in a dialogic representation of the city reflected “back to itself” (253).

In Lispector’s *crônica* “Creating Brasília” (145-149), she explores the creation of the city Brasília by President Kubitschek to symbolize his plan for rapid modernisation. In her *crônica*, Lispector describes Brasília as “artificial” (145), with inhabitants that are still without culture, due to how new the city is, and how suddenly it came about. Brasília was built in just over 4 years, and was a part of JK’s plans to bring Brazil to the forefront of industrial and modernizing development. The project, however, relied greatly on foreign investments, and as a result, Brazil’s inflation rose just as rapidly as the city. Lispector’s *crônica* describes the lack of humanity that exists in the city, stating that if a photo had to be taken of her in Brasília, only the city’s landscape would appear after the photo had been developed (147). The city was built to “reach the Heavens” (147), drawing a metaphor between the rapid expansion and The Tower of Babel in Leviticus. The emphasis on the architectural modernism suggests that the importance of city resides in the buildings rather than the people who will inhabit the city (Beal 2). Brasília was built as a symbol of national progress, but the only the vision of national

progress is available to the whole nation. Access to the city will require an economic privilege, a privilege that intersects and is entangled with race.

Lispector's *crônicas* and women's pages

Lispector's *crônicas* and tabloids in the women's pages parody the modernist enterprise that placed women as symbols of commercial economic modernity; "...media and advertising portrayed women as a primary cause of measure of modernity" (Majerus 620). Lispector's parodying of this advent of modernism critiques the social systems and social relations that underpin narratives of gender normativity and performance. Linda Hutcheon (1986) writes about postmodern architecture, pointing out the language that underpins our social and cultural discourse:

...the formal and the ideological cannot be separated, for that architectural *langue* is part of a broader, cultural discourse that is the product of late capitalist dissolution of bourgeois hegemony and the development of mass culture. But the uniformization and commodification of mass culture are among the totalizing forces which postmodern art tries to confront – from within. It knows it cannot escape implications and so turns this face to its own use. It contests uniformity by parodically asserting ironic difference instead of either homogeneous identity or alienated otherness ("Politics of Postmodernism", 183).

Lispector's writings for women's pages – as discussed by Méndez (2017) – exist "as discursive gestures that destabilize normative models of femininity and denaturalize gender binarisms" (198). By writing women's pages which dictate how women should dress, behave, what women should do to maintain a man's attention, even going as far as how women "should stand, sit down, and even walk" (Méndez 200-201)¹⁵, Lispector parodically overturns the performativity of the feminine gender. The readership of the women's pages written by Lispector consists of women

who were heirs to the ideal of domesticity still prevalent in Brazilian society and at the same time transforming themselves into the *garota moderna* (modern woman) [...]; a burgeoning cultural industry and a newly empowered mass media targeted these *garotas modernas* as some of their most coveted consumers (Méndez 199).

¹⁵ The piece on 'suggestions for your legs' pose' (Méndez 200) was published in 1960 in the Ladies' Mail section of *Correio da Manhã*, when Lispector was writing as a ghost-writer for Ilka Soares.

In other words, these were women who maintained the idealized notion of a modern domestic [white] women, who is both a powerful homemaker as well as the centralized image in the popular modernism that permeates women's magazines, thus "affirm[ing] that modernity was to a great extent *about* women's large-scale entrance into public life and culture" (Majerus 623).

The majority of Lispector's women's pages have not been translated into English, and as such are fairly inaccessible to English-speaking scholars. Méndez's article "'*Aulinhas de Sedução*" [Small Lessons in Seduction]' (2017) offers a detailed discussion of Lispector's women's pages in English, with translations of particular pieces which she discusses in terms of their parodic function. I will focus here on the English translations of Lispector's *crônicas*, which offer the same parodic narratives on a wider range of topics. By naming Lispector as a universal writer, and then describing her readership as heterogeneous, whiteness is made a default category – white is human, black is race. This results in her *crônicas* and the events described therein to be read as default experiences of universal women, rather than a universalised white woman. Because many of Lispector's *crônicas* describe domestic spaces and interactions between herself and her domestic workers, these are read not only as default experiences, but default social roles. The fact that in many of her *crônicas*, Lispector parodies these interactions is lost not only on her readership, but apparently in academic scholarship as well.

The Spectacle

Guy Debord's 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle* relies on philosophy and Marxist critical theory in order to develop and explain his concept of the spectacle:

1. "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."
2. "The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as *instrument of unification*. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is the common ground of the deceiving gaze and of false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation" (Debord 117).
3. "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord 118).

4. “The spectacle cannot be understood as an abuse of the world of vision, as a product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is, rather, a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision which has become objectified” (Debord 118).
5. “The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. [...] In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present *model* of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle’s form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system’s conditions and goals” (Debord 118).

These are the opening pieces to Debord’s ‘The Commodity as Spectacle’ (118). The spectacle can be understood as the ideological mechanisms that dictate social consciousness through representation (the gaze) and commodities (consumer culture). When Debord states that the spectacle “is a world vision which has become objectified” (118), this can be understood as when the commodification of a standard of beauty held for women is materialized in beauty and skincare products (the fact of self-adornment as a form of art is silenced by patriarchal prescriptions of female beauty and ideals being commodified as behavioural guidelines). Because women’s bodies are objectified by the male gaze, columns and women’s pages that describe appropriate and expected behaviour for women are commodifying gendered normative guidelines as prescriptive methods of performing femininity and expectations of ‘womanhood’. The patriarchal worldview is thus maintained through the objectification of prescriptive gender guidelines to which women subscribe under a guise of self-care – thus, a spectacle.

“The spectacle... is the choice *already made*” (118) – newspapers and magazines offer products and advice and news on a worldview that is already dominant, bred from an ideology already at work in the macro-level of society. When one chooses to buy a make-up product endorsed by a model or actress, one is buying an ideological sign that is a product of a power structure, one in which – in terms of the beauty industry – an ideal is endorsed and commodified under the guise of suggestive advertising and marketing strategies. One interprets the decision to buy this product on the micro-level; one sees this decision as a personal decision, made out of personal preference and taste. The success in the macro-level’s reach of power, however, is in influencing society without society becoming aware of an external influencer in their

individual decisions. The macro-level influence becomes further entrenched the more invisible its mechanisms and intentions remain on a micro-level. This concept is still widely applicable in today's society if one considers influencer culture on social media. Influencers exist in order to sell a lifestyle; their fame is not based on any particular talent or skill, but rather on their ability to influence society through the material products they buy, the social spaces they frequent, and the size of the following their lifestyle can garner. If there were any sort of requirement to be an influencer, it would be money. Influencers advertise the lifestyles of the rich, and the commodities that characterize wealthy lifestyles. Those who become influencers are not selected based on their abilities, but rather on how they frame their lifestyle; however, their fame is still based on macro-level decisions, in which the success and fame of the companies whose products the influencers use or advertise is determined by mass appeal – in this case, followers and likes.

Debord states that when analysing the spectacle, one must make use of the “the language of the spectacular itself [moving] through the methodological terrain of the very society which expresses itself in the spectacle” (119). Much like the study of the subjective meaning of words and language must make use of the very tool it is analysing – language – an analysis of the spectacle of institutionalized white power is an analysis that relies upon established research and western systems of education that have been dominated by whitewashed narratives. The spectacle is always presented as inherently good and positive, and that which is visible is subsumed under the spectacle (Debord 119). The spectacle is an “affirmation... of social life as mere appearance’, but this affirmation is never obvious to society; the spectacle has already achieved its expectation of ‘passive acceptance’ through its domination over consumer culture, through its ‘monopoly of appearance’” (Debord 119). The spectacle occurs when social life becomes dominated and occupied by material commodities. The spectacle’s reach extends to less urban places in the form of ‘a few star commodities and by the imperialist domination imposed’ by more developed place (Debord 121). In urban, modernized places (such as cities or suburbs), commodities as necessities bombard social spaces and places. Commodity production is “alienated” from the labour forces which produce it; the necessity of the production of the commodity is framed as a necessity for job creation, and this cycle is maintained by allowing the “total commodity... to return as a fragment to the fragmented individual, absolutely separate from the productive forces operating as a whole” (Debord 121).

In Lispector’s *crônicas*, the spectacle becomes clear in Lispector’s parodying of middle-class social and domestic life. In the *crônicas* “A Quiet Woman From Minas” (12) and “God’s Sweet

Ways” (13-15), Lispector tells the story of her domestic worker Aninha. Aninha is described as “a quiet woman” (12), “ugly, mad, and gentle” (14). In “A Quiet Woman From Minas”, Aninha, “mov[ing] through the house like a silent apparition” (12), asks Clarice if she writes books, to which Clarice – quite surprised by the question – responds yes. Aninha then asks Clarice if she may borrow one of Clarice’s books to read, but Clarice states that she does not think that Aninha would enjoy her books because they are “rather complicated”. Aninha responds: “I like complicated things. I can’t stomach sugared water” (*Selected Crônicas*, 12). In “God’s Sweet Ways” (13-15), Aninha takes longer to return from doing the shopping than usual. When she does return, she is smiling to herself, appearing to be in a trance-like state. She had the money that Clarice had given her in one hand, and in the other she held a shopping bag filled with milk bottle lids, corks, and pieces of dirty paper that she collected in order to “decorate [her] room” (13-14). After stating that she had a pain at the back of her head, Clarice’s cook Jandira decides that Aninha is ‘quite mad’, and she calls an ambulance; after the doctor’s physical examination finds no issues, he states that “this is a psychiatric case if ever there was one” (14). Clarice decides that it is best to call the psychiatric hospital to get a psychiatrist to examine her, an examination that results in the diagnosis that Aninha needed to be admitted. In an attempt to find a ward that could take Aninha into their care, Clarice manages to get in a contact with a doctor “who turned out to be a distinguished academic” (14). This doctor recognizes Clarice, and begins to ask her questions about her work, showing excitement at being given the opportunity to meet her. Clarice is perturbed by this, not understanding why the doctor was showing more interest in her than in Aninha. After Aninha is taken to the Pinel Institute, Clarice spends that evening smoking ‘aggressively’, thinking about Aninha’s sweetness. There is an infantilization that takes place when Clarice speaks of Aninha – “Of course you can use milk-bottle tops to decorate a room. And why not rescue crumpled bits of paper for the same purpose?” (15). Clarice states that the water that Aninha had to drink was “anything but sugared” just as “this world is anything but sugared” (15).

There are many similarities to be drawn between Aninha and Macabéa in *The Hour of the Star* (1977). Like Macabéa, Aninha is described as ‘ugly’, and her timidity is infantilized through pity on the part of the narrators. Both Aninha and Macabéa live in a society where their “water is not sugared” – they do not have access to privileges or luxuries, nor do they understand the desire for such a life. Both Macabéa and Aninha are described as having no taste, and both women are undesirable to men. Despite the commentary Lispector is making on the dynamics between a ‘Madam’ (“The Quiet Woman From Minas” 12), and her domestic worker, the story

does not offer direct commentary. As a result, the social roles inscribed by Lispector as the ‘madam’ of the house and Aninhas as the ‘sweet’ (read pitiful) domestic worker read as prescriptive roles; Aninhas’ ‘madness’ is the primary story, and Lispector’s love for Aninhas is read as wholesome and inspiring to the white women and men reading her work. Furthermore, in most of the *crônicas* which speak about Lispector’s interactions with her domestic workers or her cooks, the latter is usually afflicted with an ailment, signs of madness, or supernatural qualities. In “The Clairvoyant” (12-13), Lispector tells the story of her cook, Jandira (the same cook who decides that Aninhas has gone mad), whom Lispector calls clairvoyant. In the *crônica*, one of Lispector’s sisters is visiting her, and when Jandira walks into the room, she tells Clarice’s sister that the trip Clarice’s sister is planning to take is going to go well, and that she [Clarice’s sister] is in a very happy place in her life at the moment (13). Clarice’s sister looks to Clarice with surprise, and Clarice waves this off as if it is beyond her control and says: “It so happens that she is clairvoyant” (13). Similarly, Eremita in the *cronica* “Gentle as a Fawn” (18-20) is a woman whose mind tends to drift whilst she finishes the washing, and when cleaning the kitchen. This tendency to drift is interpreted as Eremita’s profundity and depth, a depth that has resulted in a powerful sensitivity in her (20).

There is a duality evoked here that is reminiscent of the Gothic period’s ghost stories. In Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s ‘The Shadow in the Corner’ (1879), a young woman named Maria is sent to live with Mr. Bascom after her father dies; Maria is a working class woman, and Mr. Bascom is a well-educated, upper class man. When Maria complains of seeing a dark figure in the corner of her room each night, Mr. Bascom as well as the other staff members say that it is because of the trauma of losing her father that she is seeing things. The duality evoked between upper/working class and the logical/illogical is explored; Mr. Bascom refuses to believe that Maria could be seeing anything in that room, because his education has taught him that ghosts and the supernatural do not exist. He refuses to believe her in spite of his knowledge of one of his family members having committed suicide in that very room years ago. Maria’s stories of seeing a figure are dismissed as traumatic dreams, because of her working class status, and because she is a woman. The story ends with Maria hanging herself in the corner where she had been seeing the figure. Similarly, in Charles Dickens’ “The Signal-Man” (1866), the unnamed Narrator represents the educated upper-class, and the Signal-Man represents the working class. When the signal-man complains of seeing a ghost on the tracks, his visions are dismissed as a psychological breakdown due to the isolation expected from his job as a signal-man. The Narrator decides that he will take the signal-man for a psychological evaluation, but

when he arrives to fetch the signal-man, he finds that the signal-man had been hit by a train. In both stories, the working class characters are seen as illogical, and because of their class position in society, they cannot possess the rational faculties as taught to those with access to education. In Lispector's *crônicas*, Aninhas, Eremita, and Jandira are described as having a supernatural quality, one that is not necessarily understood by Clarice and people of her class (such as her sister). This commentary on class differences and inequalities is not necessarily overt, but it is nonetheless there. More overtly, in the *cronica* "Dies Irae" (*Selected Cronicas*, 7-9) Lispector's tone is angry; she states that "having maids, whom we might as well call servants, is an offence to humanity" (7). She does not explain why she feels this, she simply expresses her anger at this fact before continuing to express anger at various institutions.

In the story "A Bourgeois Ideal" (*Selected Crônicas*, 31-32), Lispector describes the ideal assistant that could help Lispector keep her desk drawers tidy. She states that her "absurd idea of luxury would be for some sort of governess-cum-secretary to take care of my external life, even to the extent of going to certain parties and receptions on my behalf" (31). She states that 'naturally', this assistant would need to 'worship' Clarice, "but with discretion, because naked worship is more than I can bear" (31). She goes on to describe further duties for this assistant; she must not look at Clarice too often, and she should engage in conversation, but she should also know when to keep quiet. She should make the lunch and dinner decisions, and she should keep Lispector's papers in order. She should reply to Lispector's publishers, and she should be able to act as a "surrogate mother" for when Clarice "want[ed] to work or go to the cinema" (31). Lispector is pointing out how the middle- and upper-classes idealize service that allows for them to engage in their own entertainment. The "bourgeois ideal" is one of gaining access to a life of success and privilege, only to delegate the responsibilities of this success to someone else. A similar theme is explored in the *crônica* "Excess and Privation" (*Selected Crônicas*, 42-43). Lispector starts the *crônica* by stating that "[t]he worst thing of all is to become suddenly tired of everything. It is rather like excess, as if one already had everything and wanted for nothing more" (42). She explains how in these moments she feels anger at what excess has done to her sense of desire. She is unable to desire anything because her needs are consistently satisfied without too much desire. She states that she knows that it is "sinful... to seek privation", but that she feels that this privation she desires will be much more satisfying than excess (43). She acknowledges that this feeling "will pass and that a vital sense of need will return" (43), but until then, she wants isolation from humanity. In both these *crônicas*, the mundane of excess can be read as the foundation of the privileged [white] existential crisis.

Whiteness does not see itself as raced, and thus the issues faced by those who are raced is not something white people need to worry about. This often results in existential crises that are steeped in the struggle with the mediocrity of a life of riches and privilege which saturate their desires.

Lispector's *crônicas* are abound, and the social and political commentary in the majority of them are not as transparent as one would think. She explores the duality of pure/impure in "The White Dress" (21), and she explores the abjection of her worldview on sex through her encounter with a sex worker in "Pointless Scandal" (27-29); both stories explore themes of unlearning and abjection in a similar manner to her novel *The Passion according to G.H.* She explores the performance of whiteness in the *crônica* "Enigma" (68), and she examines the burden of reproduction as duty for women in "Annunciation" (54) by drawing parallels between Savelli's painting of the Virgin Mary when she is pregnant, holding her hand to her throat as if she feels trapped. An overt reference is made to Luke 1:26-28, when the archangel Gabriel prophesies that Mary will give birth to the Son of God. She explores rape, white masculine fragility, and the superficiality of journalistic publications, but always in a manner that is subtle, and easy to miss if one is not looking to read too critically. As she says in the *crônica* "The Case of the Gold-Fountain Pen" (*Selected Crônicas*, 17-18), "[s]ometimes there is little to be gained by probing things too deeply" (18). Leonardo (2005) argues that the concept of race is considered obsolete by scientific Marxism, because the concept "does not inhere objective status" (203). Leonardo states that the silence on the issue of race is as a result of two reasons. The first is that "a bourgeois perspective" underpins scholarship on race and racism, resulting in a scholarship that does not consider the problem of capitalism in entrenching social (including racial) norms that seek to benefit capitalism (203). The second is that most race scholars understand that issues of class will not come to an end if issues of race come to an end. Leonardo considers how white women contribute to the defence of racism as "interpellated racial subjects" (208). White women often relinquish responsibility and accountability of racism and race issues, arguing that their oppression under patriarchy means that they "share interests with other oppressed people" (Leonardo 408). If one considers the existential crises and other bourgeois suffering that Lispector writes about in her *crônicas*, it is clear to see that white women "may not know the extent of their participation in racism, but they are not dupes of it either. As investors in race, they know that their decisions matter, whether or not they understand the implications" (Leonardo 408).

A Breath of Life

Lispector's *A Breath of Life* was incomplete when she died in 1977. The published form of the novel that we have access to was published in 1978, and was organized by Lispector's close friend and assistant, Olga Borelli. The novel is predominantly written as a dialogue between a male author, simply named Author, and his literary creation, Angela Pralini. The novel begins with just prose written by the Author, ruminating on how to go about creating his character. Much like Rodrigo S.M, the narrator in *The Hour of the Star*, the Author character in *A Breath of Life* struggles with writing, and he struggles to create his character.

Does "writing" exist in and of itself? No. It is merely the reflection of a thing that questions. I work with the unexpected. I write the way I do without knowing how and why – it's the fate of my voice. The timbre of my voice is me. Writing is a query. It's this: ? (Lispector 6).

Trinh's 'The infinite play of mirrors' discusses writing as something which "reflects on other writings and, whenever awareness emerges, on itself as writing [...] writing is meshing one's writing with the machinery of endless reflexivity" (23). When the Author says that writing is a "reflection of a thing that questions" (6), she/he is reflecting upon self-reflexivity as the characters that Lispector herself are 'using' for her own self-reflexive writing, a meta-metanarrative analysis of the self, creating an image of an "infinite play of mirrors" (Trinh 22). The above quote from *A Breath of Life* starts with a question and ends with a statement in the form of a symbol – a punctuation mark – a question mark. If writing is "a query" a "reflection of a thing that *questions*", the mirror appears to function as a line of duality. The unchanging "unaltered" (Trinh 22) reflection, that which you see in the mirror. "Considered an instrument of self-knowledge, [...] it also bears a magical character that has always transcended its functional nature" (Trinh 22). The Author in *A Breath of Life* describes Angela as someone who 'has no clear image of herself', that "there [exists] a disconnection in her" (19).

The Author writes that this book may appear as if it is constructed "out of shards", but that it is in fact a book "about portraying quick flashes of my character Angela" (10). He states that although he could go into detailed descriptions of each flash of Angela, "the essence of the thing is often in the flash" (*A Breath of Life* 10). The "quick flashes of [...] Angela" are akin to Trinh's broken mirrors; "a shattered mirror still functions as a mirror; it may destroy the dual relation of I to I but leaves the infiniteness of life's reflections intact" (23). The *plural* flashes of Angela still constitute a reflection of the whole, unfragmented Angela, but it destroys the

ability to relate to oneself, ‘I to I’ – Angela cannot access that duality, that mirror line between the ‘true self’ and the ‘reflected self’, the ability to note that line between the permanence of an unempty mirror and the impermanence of the reality reflected in that mirror. Although this has often been interpreted as Lispector’s autobiographical reference to the fire that destroyed much of her writing, I would rather argue that Lispector is making a comment on how other people’s voices – and mostly men – have attempted to take the flashes of Lispector and misinterpret those flashes. Because of the ‘Hurricane Clarice’ that dominated Brazilian academic and literary circles, Angela (as Lispector) feels a disconnection from herself; her ability to relate to herself due to the shattered mirror that reflects herself back to her.

The first half of the novel consists of the Author’s creating and describing of Angela and the type of person she is. Angela’s dialogue is included, but the Author’s characterisation tends to dominate as a result of the framing of himself as the central Creator of Angela. “It was God who invented me and gave His breath to me and I became a living being. And so it is that I present to myself a person. And therefore I think that I am sufficiently born to try to express myself even if with rough words. It’s my interior that speaks and sometimes without connection to my conscious mind. I speak as though someone were speaking for me. Perhaps the reader speaks for me?” (*A Breath of Life* 17). The second half of the novel focuses on the book that Angela wants to write, a book that explores “things and objects and their aura”, a task that the Author does not believe Angela is capable of doing (*A Breath of Life*, 98). Angela is intrigued by material objects, and she finds matter to be “[m]ore mysterious than the soul” (101). She names the book *The Besieged City*, which is the name of Lispector’s third novel, a novel that Lispector struggled to publish, and which has scarcely been written on (Moser, *xxi*). In *The Besieged City*, Lucrécia Neves Correia observes how the processes of industrialisation and modernisation materialize in the development of the suburb of São Geraldo into a bustling metropolis. The physical spaces described in the novel, as well as the protagonist’s interior narrative, are permeated with objects. Much of the development of the city is dependent on Lucrécia’s [white] gaze. Villares (2011) argues that,

[Lucrécia] functions as a transparent vessel for the environment undergoing urban transformation; to create a city means to create internalized images of it. [...] However, Lucrécia’s gaze does not imprint her individuality on the environment. The internalized image of the city is not personalized; Lucrécia, as a person, is deprived of individuality [...]. Nor does she cultivate her own ideas or thinking [...]. She is a mere instrument, a tool for what is happening and what she sees

around her, her relationship with her environment is – to an extent – symbiotic (Villares 229).

Lucrécia's character narrates to the reader that "São Geraldo was exploitable only with the gaze" (*The Besieged City* 17). Angela states that in her "book *The Besieged City* [she] speak[s] indirectly about the mystery of the thing. The thing is a specialized and immobilized animal" (*A Breath of Life* 101). Lispector is here drawing on the concept of "dehorsification" or *Obyezloshadenie*, a term used by Isaac Babel to describe the process in which horses were replaced by automation in the industrialisation process after World War II (Moser, Introduction vii). Angela describes "the thing" – material objects – as a "specialized and immobilized animal", referring directly to the industrialization and modernising processes. She explores the effects of industrialisation in her *crônica* (and later published as a short story) entitled "Creating Brasília" (*Selected Crônicas*, 145-149). Villares reads *The Besieged City* through the lens of Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, arguing that the objects with which Lucrécia and her mother surround themselves are "commodities [which] "appear as independent beings endowed with life"" (Marx, qtd in Villares 235). She argues that the construction of São Geraldo taking place through the act of seeing – Lucrécia constructs the city through her gaze – and this results in a lack of agency on the part of Lucrécia because she is creating the city as much as she a part of the city. Villares's argument is summarized in the following extract from her chapter:

Because Lucrécia does not see herself as separate from São Geraldo, this connection between private objects and a wider social environment is presented to the readers in an uncomplicated matter-of-fact manner. What is obviously disturbing... is the lack of agency that this situation presents. In the midst of this phantasmagoria of commodities, Lucrécia has lost her individuality and any power to act upon or transform her environment. She can only follow the flow of change in which she is immersed. The novel highlights, through the eyes of Lucrécia, a situation where people are connected but do not understand these connections and therefore cannot resist them. Lucrécia's immersion in the process of commodity fetishism is such that she herself becomes reified, transforming herself into a statue that could be publicly displayed in São Geraldo. This clearly symbolizes Lucrécia's lack of agency (*Examining Whiteness*, 235-236).

The deconstruction of *The Besieged City* through Angela's construction of the novel in *A Breath of Life* points to the dialogical character of the latter novel. Not only does the character

Angela Pralini write a book that Lispector wrote many years ago, but Angela is also the protagonist in the short story “The Departure of the Train” (1974). Furthermore, the organisation of *A Breath of Life* was done posthumously, with the influence of Lispector’s friend Olga Borelli in the final production and release of the novel.

Reading *A Breath of Life* and Angela’s objects

Just like Lucrecia, Angela in *A Breath of Life* “humanizes things” (102), and the world around her is created by her gaze (*A Breath of Life*, 103). The Author also states that he will try to understand material objects differently; he states that in the process of looking, he forgets that he is who he is, he “transform[s] all of [him]self into a single intense gaze” (103). The construction of objects taking place through the act of seeing can be understood through both frame theory (as discussed in chapter 2) and through the spectacle (as discussed earlier in this chapter). When Lucrecia, Angela, and the Author construct their reality through the act of seeing, they are relying upon their ideological frameworks to imbue the material world around them with ideas – “auras” (103) – which reflect not them, but the world to which they are subject. This is why each of the characters are described as having lost their agency. Volosinov (1973) argues that

Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but it is also itself a material segment of that very reality. Every phenomenon functioning as an ideological sign has some kind of material embodiment, whether in sound, physical mass, color [*sic*], movements of the body, or the like [...] Both the sign itself and all the effects it produces (all those actions, reactions, and new signs it elicits in the surrounding social milieu) occur in outer experience (Volosinov 11).

Angela’s objects that she describes – much like Lucrecia’s – mutually construct Angela in her construction of these objects. All ideology manifests itself in ideological signs; objects become ideological signs when their construction and existence is understood through the dominant ideology. For example, Angela describes a variety of objects in her discussion of her book, one of which is a “Trash Can” (116). She describes the luxury of owning a trash can, and how this object is an ideological sign of privilege and luxury, because those who do not have material objects cannot determine these objects’ use value by placing on the street “the things which aren’t any use” (116). Angela then ascribes dialogue to the trash-can, creating the idea of living objects. The trash can describes itself as that which is clean, but is filled “with filth and dirt”, only understood by dogs who scavenge for food. The trash can describes how it is filled with

newspaper, the *'Jornal do Brasil'* (117) and is “the receptacle of the death of things” (117). Angela also refers to “a vase with pale roses already wilting” as a “phantasmagoric thing”, one which scares her when the ghostly reflections made by the play of light creating ghostly shadows. The objects which Angela describes are personified; the trash can speaks; “The Car” “lets out a purple howl” (114); the “Iron Giraffe”, an “18-22 ton capacity” mobile crane “will have children and one day populate the earth” (115). By assigning human qualities to the objects around her, Angela constructs a phantasmagoric world in which the people who produce the commodified objects become less visible than the objects themselves; by ascribing human qualities to the objects, these objects appear to be acting as humanity itself. The influence of ideological signs (objects) in society has become so saturated that humanity and the underlying human labour force that produces these commodities ceases to exist. The influence of capitalist ideology in the west has resulted in the objectification of humanity, and the humanizing of material objects. In terms of white people who have access to financial privileges, they often do not understand that behind the material objects that signify their ideological subjectivity lies a human labour force, one which is not as whitewashed as the suburban lifestyles to which they are accustomed.

In “Woman-Thing” (106), Angela states that she too is an object, one that “sees other objects... an object that uses other objects” (106). She describes her face as a visible object, one which is constructed and commodified through the act of seeing. She expresses envy for “those beautiful Arab women who have the wisdom to hide their noses and mouths with a veil” (106). Angela believes that without worrying about external gazes, she can simply look out upon the world, with only her eyes visible, these eyes “reflect other objects”, removing the element of her objectification. In his discussion of Marx’s theory of reification and thingification, Tairako (2018) states that reification occurs when objects are personified, and when humans are objectified, or “thingified” (2). “Thingification as the coalescence of social determinations... constitutes a base for fetishism in the everyday representations of a bourgeois society and, therefore, in the bourgeois economy” (Tairako 2). Tairako does however distinguish between thingification and fetishism by highlighting the fact that fetishism is a form of consciousness distortion, whereas thingification “reverse[s] [the] reality of the economic system” (2). “Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws” (Volosinov 13). Foucault argues that the “conception of power” ought to be studied “as a domain of strategic relations focusing

on the behavior [*sic*] of the other or others” (88). Thus, ideological power can be maintained through ideological manipulation of the consciousness, and this is done through the manipulation of material objects. By making capital and the world of objects hyper-visible, one erases not only the social issues that function within these systems (gender, race, sexuality, for example), but one erases the narrative that there exist any problems beyond consumption, or one’s ability to consume.

By trying to enforce this ideal image of Lispector as the perfect and most unique Brazilian writer, she is objectified and commodified as a writer based on the profundity of her work that seems to remain elusive despite a large body of research that exists on her work. However, if one reads into the social commentary Lispector makes, it becomes clear to see that many of the disruptions she experiences and describe are ruptures in the social world that has been constructed for her. Lispector is made into an ideological sign that is representative of the ideology of universality, in which her history and experiences are commodified as reasons to look beyond issues of race and gender. In *A Breath of Life*, the Author is very concerned with Angela becoming aware of his presence. He states that “[s]he must not detect my existence, almost as we can’t detect the existence of God” (Lispector 98). If one considers the creation of Angela as society’s creation of Clarice Lispector as a uniquely Brazilian writer, then society’s attempt at claiming her is one that must take place without Lispector’s detecting it. Whiteness functions in the same way. For whiteness to maintain its power, it must maintain its invisibility in the hegemony to which a world is subject.

A Breath of Life as autobiography

As an autobiographical novel, *A Breath of Life* does refer to many facts about Lispector’s life that suggest that the novel has moments of autobiography. Sutton (2014) states that *A Breath of Life* as autobiographical because it was left unfinished when Lispector died. Sutton states that an “unfinished text lay[s] bare the connection between literature and life, because the abandonment of a text before its completion... points out circumstances outside the narrative” (148). Lispector’s novel *A Breath of Life* makes reference to nearly all Lispector’s previous work in some form. Consider the following extract:

Years ago I also described an armoire. Then came the description of an age-old clock called Sveglia: an electronic clock that haunted me and would haunt any living person. Then it was the telephone’s turn. In “The Egg and the Hen” I speak

of an industrial crane. It's a timid approach of mine to subverting the living world and the threatening world of the dead (101-102).

The 'armoire' which she describes refers to *The Passion according to G.H.* (1964). The clock named Sveglia refers to the short story "Report on the Thing" (1951) (in which the narrator is concerned with an electronic clock) in which she makes an analogy between the construct of time as a trap, or a curse; one is dependent on this material object to convey a construct of time, and time is something by which we dictate every human activity (*The Complete Stories*, 471-479). The reference to the telephone is a reference to the *crônica* "Correct Assumptions" (*Selected Crônicas*, 188) in which she considers what would happen if the telephone systems broke down. The "Egg and the Hen" a short story published in the collection *The Foreign Legion* (*Complete Stories*, 276) explores the question of what came first, the egg or the hen? On a more apparent level, *A Breath of Life* is autobiographical in that both Angela and Lispector are dying at the time of the novel being written. Angela struggles to belong in any world, feeling as though she is "a foreigner in any part of the world" (*A Breath of Life*, 48). Angela's dialogue is also interspersed with the Author's dialogue, just like any discourse produced on Lispector's work is interrupted by the influence of male academics and male translators. Sutton (2014) argues that the Lispector's career is characterized by a "conflict of wanting to be known and wanting to be left alone" (187), and this desire is seen quite pertinently in *A Breath of Life* in how Lispector's identity is weaved into the dialogue and narrative. The fact that the novel was published after Lispector's death further entrenches one of the primary themes Lispector explored in her work, that of authorial control. "Authorship in this instance is partial and nebulous, as Lispector wrote the words but left them to be organized into their final sequence at a later time" (Sutton 187).

Her work is notoriously difficult to write about in any language. It is as if the more analysts, critics, and admirers try to explain and understand and disseminate her work, the further one is pushed away from a conclusive literary framework within which to place her. Despite extensive bodies of literary analysis and critique on her work in Portuguese, French, and English, her work remains elusive. This is largely because of a failure to consider the clear social commentary that exists in Lispector's work. Hélène Cixous writes that Clarice Lispector "was what Kafka would have been had he been a woman, or if Rilke had been a Jewish-Brazilian born in the Ukraine. If Rimbaud had been a mother, if he had reached the age of fifty. If Heidegger could have ceased being German" (Cixous, 1991). In the introduction to Benjamin Moser's translation of *The Hour of the Star* (2014), Colm Tóibín describes Clarice as someone

who possessed “the ability to write as though no one had ever written before’ (Lispector *viii*). In a letter written in response to Moser’s request that he write a prologue for the 2014 English translation of *Um sopro de vida (A Breath of Life)*, Pedro Almodóvar expresses his feelings of inadequacy in writing a prologue to “accompany a text of such magnitude” (Lispector *xii*). Of her work, he writes “[e]ach phrase accumulates such a quantity of meanings; it is so dense, rotund, and rich that I halt before it as before a wall” (Lispector *xii*). The work of Clarice Lispector is composed of many different threads, and any endeavour to unravel these threads requires a distrust of language, and disillusionment with meaning, as well as the nature of literary creation. Clarice’s work tends to refuse (sometimes with intent) the reductionism inherent in both formal and informal interpretative approaches, and this tendency is one that has been read in a universalizing manner, one that ironicizes – thingifies and reifies – Lispector as a commodity of Brazilian nationalism and Brazilian culture.

I will add one final point about the consequences of focalizing Lispector as a universal writer, that of a failure to acknowledge and discuss overt racism. Giroux (1997) states:

...the emergence of mass visual productions... requires new ways of seeing and making visible the racial structuring of white experience. The electronic media... has become a powerful pedagogical force, veritable teaching machines in shaping the social imaginary of students regarding how they view themselves, others, and the larger society. Central to the formative influence of the media is a representational politics of race in which the portrayal of black people abstracts them from their real histories while reinforcing... stereotypes (Giroux 295).

The *crônica* entitled ‘A Gentle Fawn’ discussed earlier in this chapter is named ‘The Servant’ when it was published as a short story (*Complete Stories*, 390). The short story ‘The Smallest Women in the World’ (165) relies on overtly racist descriptions of ‘the smallest pygmies in the world’ (165). The story is of a French explorer named Marcel Pretre who “discovers” a “pygmy tribe” called the Likoualas “in the depths of equatorial Africa” (165). There Pretre meets a woman who is “eighteen inches tall”, “black, silent” (165). He later describes her as “dark as a monkey” when he speaks to the press of his “discoveries”. Africa (figured as homogenous continent of one single space and culture) is a space of ‘disease’, contaminated water, famine, and “roving beasts” (166). Pretre describes how the Likoualas are attacked and eaten by “the savage Bantus” (166). Pretre feels overwhelmed by his discovery of the smallest woman in the world, because not even the richest men in the world had ever seen this woman, whom he names Little Flower (167). When Little Flower’s picture appears in newspapers in Brazil,

Lispector's story explores the reactions of a variety of families to the image of Little Flower. One woman looks away, as she felt inexplicable pain at the sight of this woman (167); another woman is overwhelmed by love for the woman, a love that "disturbed [her] for a day" (167); in other homes, children are curious about the size of the woman, and most express the desire to own Little Flower as a toy, or as something to be used as a prank to scare their friends (168). Another woman is reminded of a story she was told by her cook about the young girls at an orphanage where the cook used to work. The young girls – "having no dolls to play with and maternity already pulsating terribly in the hearts of those orphans" – decide to hide the fact of a young girl's death from the nuns (168). The young girls keep the dead girl's corpse as a doll to play with, to reprimand, and to love. All the family's contemplate what it would be like to own the small woman, either as a toy, as a servant, or as a rare commodity to be seen by the public. The story ends with an old woman – "shutting the newspaper decisively" – stating that all she will say is this: "...God knows what He's doing" (*Complete Stories*, 172).

This is the only story of Lispector's that figures a black protagonist, and it is clear that she is ignorant about the experiences of black Brazilians, and black people from Africa. Little Flower is described as a pre-human configuration, animalized, and unevolved. Lispector's position of power as a white woman in society is made clear by her figurations of black women as domestic workers, and in this case, as primitive, underdeveloped, animalized women who is 'discovered' by a European man. In writing this story, "Lispector as author, is in an ambiguous position as critic/accomplice of racist ideology that holds Africa to be the land of cannibals and pygmies, the reserve of primitive freedom from the ills of Western society..." (Sisnett 989, qtd in Platt 52). The Brazilian families that respond to Little Flower's image in the newspaper are not raced, and therefore are assumed to be white families. Lispector's writing in this part of the story contains less stereotypes because it is the world that she is familiar with (Platt 54). The objectification of Little Flower by the families speak to a lack of understanding of the historical context within which they interpret and read Little Flower. Platt (1992) states that "Lispector's vision is racist through a lack of history and her gender portrayals are informed by critical social/feminist commentary only when they focus on Euro-Brazilian middle class women" (54-55). When Lispector is commodified as the pinnacle of uniquely Brazilian writing, the term 'Brazilian' is reduced to include only white, middle-class men and women. Lispector as a 'universal writer' suggests to white, middle-class readers that her writing represents the world, and thus a story like "The Smallest Woman in the World" is read as representative of Africa,

and not read as stereotyped or racist in any manner. Thus, whiteness maintains its privileges and its justifications of racism under the project of universalising the work of Clarice Lispector.

Conclusion

Whiteness as an invisible and thus influential force in the literature of Lispector is clear. However, the invisibility of whiteness in society, as Frankenberg (2001) argues, is a determination that stems from a certain “naivety” (82). Whiteness is a category that is marked by it being “not-Other” (Frankenberg 75), and is not as invisible as it appears. “The secret of whiteness’ is that whiteness exists and is defined by its difference, ‘a rule or norm established only after the phenomena that it came to define as inadequate or abnormal’” (Montag 291). When referring to whiteness’s invisibility, however, I am referring to the mechanisms which allow for the maintenance and perpetuation of whiteness as powerful global order. The influence of whiteness on the political, economics, media, education, and social life is still vast, and the dismantling thereof will require first an examination of all those moments of under-examined whiteness before one can begin to formulate strategies to disentangle white hegemony from all other spheres of society. Consider the following passage from Frantz Fanon’s essay ‘Concerning Violence’ (1963):

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The settler’s town is a strongly-built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly-lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settler’s feet are never visible except perhaps in the sea; but there you’re never close enough to see them. His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even, with no holes or stones. The settler’s town is a well-fed town, an easy-going town; its belly is always full of good things. The settler’s town is a town of white people, of foreigners (30).

Fanon is here speaking of a colonial Africa, where white settlers stole the land and spaces already belonging to black locals. However, because the moment that marks the end of the ‘official’ colonial period is nearly invisible, one can read the above quote in a contemporary context as well. The “consolidation and maintenance of [whiteness as a] colonial power” (López 3) has produced very little scholarship, and the extent to which a colonial legacy is maintained through institutionalized norms of whiteness has resulted in a failure to recognize the colonial nostalgia that permeates discourse, spaces, places, and social and collective

consciousness. The town described by Fanon fits perfectly as a description of a white suburb in any area that contains white people in the world.

Giroux (1997) discusses how particular films from the 1990s use racist language, engage racist stereotypes, and use racist representations of black people (295). He states that “[a]s important as these critiques are to any antiracist discourse or pedagogy, they are limited theoretically because they do not make problematic how “whiteness” as a racial identity and social construction is taught, learned, experienced, and identified in certain forms of knowledge, values, and privileges” (296). This misunderstanding of how racism functions beyond the spectacular forms (such as segregation or mass persecution) is one that permeates the narratives of white liberals. White liberals, because they have been able to acknowledge some form of whiteness in themselves and recognize the roots of their privilege to an extent, often resort to self-defensive language when presented with the facts of structural and institutional racism, often resorting to a defence of “what they perceive as their moral reputations” (DiAngelo 64). White liberals still possess agency over how and to what extent they fight racism. White liberals attempt to absolve themselves of any accountability in the name of their humanist morality. Being able to choose cultivates indifference amongst white liberals, as the internal guilt and suffering garnered by their confrontation with their privilege is seen as piety enough for their role as white people in the maintenance of white privilege.

At a 2016 conference at the Library of Congress, Benjamin Moser discusses Clarice’s *Complete Stories* (translated by Katrina Dodson) in conversation with Vivaldo Santos. Moser talks about Clarice’s nice clothes and make-up, and how in her writing, she strips all this away. “She just strips it all away, and shows us what’s really happening. [...] It’s just a way of, it’s, she thinks, I think she thinks the hair and makeup and things like this are really important to people. She’s not, she thinks that it’s important to have a face to present to the world” (Moser). This is a male interpretation of Clarice’s reasoning for making herself “publicly presentable”. There are myriad reasons why women wear make-up, from enjoyment, creativity, adornment, social and cultural influence, adherence to norms, disruptions of norms. However, there are also women who do not like to wear make-up, but will still put on make-up when going out in public. This is not because they think it is important to “have a face to present to the world”, but because if a young woman goes into any public and work environment without make-up, she will always be criticized for it – she looks tired, or she does not care about her appearance, she is neglecting herself, she does not take herself seriously. Even if a woman dresses in expensive and high-end fashion couture, if she does not wear make-up and wears her hair

naturally, she must be neglecting herself, or she does not care. I am not arguing with the fact that Lispector may have worn make-up for exactly this reason as Moser states, but she was well aware of the fact that if she did not present well, she would not be taken seriously, because in a man's world, a woman without make-up is simply a woman who either does not care about her appearance, or she is a young girl, and therefore less worthy of being taken seriously or acknowledged altogether. Women who do not wear make-up and are still taken seriously are women who have established themselves in their field already (and only in some fields – women in corporate industries who have spent years working to establish themselves and reach higher positions will be harshly criticised if they suddenly stopped wearing make-up), or women over a certain age, when make-up is no longer deemed necessary.

The women's pages that Lispector wrote are often used to justify the argument that Lispector genuinely cared about normative 'woman's issues', and perhaps she did to some extent. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Lispector parodies the ideological signs which come to represent the white beauty industry. The issue of translation surfaces here. Lispector's entire literary oeuvre as it is being translated (and re-translated in many instances) is a project supervised by Moser, a male translator. The English-speaking world's reception of Clarice Lispector is entirely guided and supervised by a man. And although I am not discrediting Moser's position, nor do I argue against his project, I think it is important to at least note the irony in the fact that Lispector's work comments on the male authorial voice trying to insert itself in a female narrative and erase the 'woman' out of his 'woman character'. In *A Breath of Life*, the Author stops Angela from speaking about menstruation, despite her desperate desire to do so, because the Author deems such a discussion as "foolish" (40). The censorship of the female body is fundamental in male-normative writing of women, and an inability to understand the female experience also leads to a misunderstanding in interpretation of not only the work, but Lispector herself.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the novel *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964). The character of the sculptor G.H. confronts her whiteness and her position as a white woman in Brazil's racial democracy when she encounters a cockroach in the cupboard of her former domestic worker Janair's room. The corridor that leads to Janair's room serves a metaphorical border, one which separates the moist, luscious, and shadowed descriptions of G.H.'s apartment with the dry, open, and sunlit descriptions of Janair's room, evoking the metaphor of the dry, poor Northeast, and the wet, wealthy south of Brazil (in the novel's case, Rio de Janeiro). G.H.'s confrontation with her whiteness manifests as disillusionment, abjection, and catharsis. Her initial reaction is

one of disillusionment with society and the powers in which she vested her trust. Her confrontation with her whiteness also makes her aware of her gender, and she realizes for the first time that she too is a woman, and therefore oppressed in terms of her gender, despite her belief that her negation of her femininity has made her more distinguished amongst the male circles that dominate the art world. She begins to rely on religious metaphors, comparing her own internal crisis to a form of suffering, akin to Jesus's suffering before his crucifixion. She draws parallels between the Stations of the Cross and the Passion. Her confrontation turns to one of abjection (Kristeva, 1982), where she becomes overwhelmed with this disruption of her national identity. G.H. is made aware of herself as the other, and this realization results in her encounter with what she calls a 'horrible truth' (*The Passion according to G.H.*, 51). Through the abjection, G.H. struggles with the religious duality of purity/impurity as outlined in Leviticus 11. The forbidden nature of that which is deemed impure relies on what Plumwood defines as "radical exclusion" or "hyperseparation" of white people from anything that does not influence and maintain their systemic privileges, including awareness of the existence of a systemic privilege. When G.H. decides to eat of the white substance that oozes from the cockroach, she is filled with despair, followed by indifference, followed by the feeling of empowerment and cleansing by this act. The cleansing leads to her confrontation becoming an apocalyptic catharsis. This catharsis is explored through the Stations of the Cross in the Christian Bible, as well as through comparing her rebirth to the Apocalypse of John (The Book of Revelation). G.H. chooses to forget about the knowledge she has learned in this confrontation, choosing to live a life of ignorance in order to preserve her life and access to her racial privilege.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the novel *The Hour of the Star* (1977), and how the narrator Rodrigo S.M. tries and fails to write alterity in his character Macabéa. Macabéa is universalized as a northeastern girl, and her individuality is largely stripped by Rodrigo's characterisation of her. Rodrigo's lack of understanding of both the historical context from which Macabéa's life develops as well as the experience of poverty results in a mis-representation of the Northeast, of the working class in Brazil, and of a young woman named Macabéa. Using Goffman's frame theory, one can see how ideology functions as a frame (or lens, as Stockwell argues) through which society is interpreted. Rodrigo S.M. is a healthy, middle-class, white man who has access to a room of his own from where he can write his stories. Macabéa is described as constantly in ill-health, timid in both her physique and her personality. Although Macabéa is white, her sickly appearance and her social and physical poverty render her an un-ideal portrait of whiteness. Within paradigms of white normative beauty, Macabéa falls short, her 'ugliness' a

physical stigma that keeps her removed from the world of commodified white beauty. DiAngelo discusses how poor white people (in America) tend to share a close proximity with people of colour, and this proximity evokes one of the few terms in which whiteness is racialized – “white trash” (53). By looking at the position of power occupied by the author/narrator, one can see how Rodrigo’s ideological frames determine how he writes Macabéa, constructing her through racialized categories as learned through the frames constructed by his position in society. Rodrigo expresses guilt for the position he holds in society, although never enough to change his privileges. Much like G.H.’s character, Rodrigo does have a moment of guilt, and much like G.H., he feels compelled to write about it, to cleanse himself of his guilt through the process of writing. Rodrigo *chooses* to write Macabéa’s death at the end of the novel, thus making him feel better about himself and the process through which he went in writing Macabéa.

In Chapter 3, I discussed Lispector’s *crônicas* and her novel *A Breath of Life* (1978), the latter published posthumously. In this chapter, I discussed how the claim to the heterogeneity of Lispector’s readership of her *crônicas* and women’s pages fails to acknowledge that ‘heterogeneity’ here refers to heterogeneity of white women. I also looked at how the novel *A Breath of Life* can be read as autobiographical, but that such a reading fails to acknowledge the dialogical nature of the novel. An autobiographical reading also fails to interpret the reliance on racial stereotypes in the short story “The Smallest Woman in the World”. What becomes clear in Lispector’s *crônicas* is the tendency to infantilize the black women she encounters or that she writes. Lispector pities her domestic worker Aninhas because Aninhas believes that bottle lids and scrap paper are tools for decoration. Lispector class privilege results in an inability for her to understand aesthetic and adornment beyond what she has been fed and taught to find visually pleasing by mass media. Similarly, when Aninhas asks Lispector if she can read one of Lispector’s books, Lispector is ‘embarrassed’ (*Selected Crônicas*, 12) to tell Aninhas directly that her books would be too difficult for Aninhas to read. This embarrassment stems from Lispector’s knowledge that Aninhas does not have access the type of education one would need to read Lispector’s books, let alone understand. Lispector may pity Aninhas, but it is only from a position of privilege and excess, a position that can only understand privation as a form of suffering. The infantilization that can be found in descriptions of Lispector’s marginalized or black characters is indicative of the lack of understanding of the cultural, historical, and social contexts of anyone that is not white and middle-class. Her domestic workers are always loved with an overwhelming tenderness, or pitied for what appears as a

‘difficult life’ that the narrator/Lispector deems as a sad and pitiful environment or background. Whiteness is “learned through the representation of racialized identities” (Giroux 296), much like the representations evident in Lispector’s work. In *A Breath of Life*, the dialogical creates a metanarrative in which the many voices of Angela, the Author, Lispector, and Lucrecia converge.

Lispector’s work epitomizes the lifestyles of middle-class white women in 20th century Brazil. Her novels explore social issues in subtle, covert manners, relying on the self-reflexive techniques of metafictional writing. Because her work relies heavily on introspection, the social commentary that exists in her work has typically been overlooked or missed. An emphasis on Lispector’s work as existential not only leads to a lack of understanding of the issues of race and gender that are explored in her work, but this results in a general misunderstanding of her work altogether. This research project and thesis saw nearly an entire year of trying to locate the core of her existentialism, trying to find the threads that link to Camus, and Pessoa, and to Hesse. Even when focalizing the issues surrounding gender that are more overt in her work, there remained a gap in the understanding of what exactly Lispector was trying to say. Without the examination of race, and without an examination of her work within the context of Brazil’s social and political climate, her work always eludes formal analysis and interpretation. The failure to address issues of race in Lispector’s work in Brazil is directly tied to the Brazilian racial democracy project. However, the English scholarship that exists on Lispector tends towards the same discourse that excludes the topic of race. The English scholarship on Lispector’s work with the most clout is the scholarship that ignores the issues of race altogether. Those that do read the social commentary in her work discuss race as a cultural paradigm, or a cultural identity, and the word ‘race’ is rarely used. The fact that non-Brazilians also avoid a reading of Lispector’s race issues and racism is indicative of the institutionalization of whiteness and the reach of its power. Whiteness and its systems maintain universal power in the behaviours and discourse of white people globally. If whiteness is to be dismantled from the systemic power it maintains, scholarship needs to focalize issues of race in a much more visceral and clear manner by white people.

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