

Between helplessness and writing: An experience of reading Clarice Lispector's fragmentary texts

Entre o desamparo e a escritura: Uma experiência de leitura de textos-fragmentos de Clarice Lispector

Entre el desamparo y la escritura: Una experiencia de lectura de textos-fragmentos de Clarice Lispector

Entre l'impuissance et l'écriture: Une expérience de lecture de textes-fragments de Clarice Lispector

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Abstract

This essay proposes bringing psychoanalysis and literature into dialogue, with reading, grounded in an ethical position of helplessness (Hilflosigkeit) before the text, serving as a point of intersection between these two fields. Through dialogue with psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic theorists, we gather fragments from Clarice Lispector's works and approach them as a space in which literature and psychoanalysis intersect. When reading a text, readers are invited to follow different paths across the page; however, they must remain open to the text and be willing to risk allowing themselves to be worked upon by it. Within the apparent silence of reading, readers engage with the text in the writer's absence, finding themselves in a state of helplessness. It is at this point that the text becomes a third space, an other, capable of awakening in readers the desire to write.

Keywords: literature, psychoanalysis, reading, writing, Clarice Lispector.

Resumo

Este ensaio propõe o trabalho conjunto da psicanálise com a literatura, utilizando a leitura – sustentada por uma posição ética de desamparo (Hilflosigkeit) diante do texto – como um gesto de interseção entre esses dois campos. Assim, no diálogo com teóricos psicanalistas e não psicanalistas, recolhemos textos-fragmentos da obra de Clarice Lispector, tomando-os como campo de atravessamento entre literatura e psicanálise. Ao ler um texto, o leitor é convidado a percorrer diferentes caminhos pela página, no entanto, é necessário que ele esteja aberto ao texto e que corra o risco de permitir que esse texto o trabalhe. Nesse aparente silêncio da leitura, o leitor trabalha a partir da ausência do escritor, encontrando-se em um estado de desamparo. É nesse momento que o texto se torna um lugar terceiro, um outro, o qual pode suscitar, no leitor, o desejo de escritura.

Palavras-chave: literatura, psicanálise, leitura, escritura, Clarice Lispector.

Resumen

Este ensayo propone un trabajo conjunto entre el psicoanálisis y la literatura, utilizando la lectura —sostenida por una posición ética de desamparo (Hilflosigkeit) frente al texto— como un gesto de intersección entre ambos campos. Así, en diálogo con teóricos psicoanalistas y no psicoanalistas, recopilamos textos-fragmentos de la obra de Clarice Lispector, tomándolos como un campo de atravesamiento entre la literatura y el psicoanálisis. Al leer un texto, el lector es invitado a recorrer distintos caminos a través de la página; sin embargo, es necesario que permanezca abierto al texto y asuma el riesgo de permitir dejarse afectar por él. En este aparente silencio de la lectura, el lector trabaja a partir de la ausencia del escritor, encontrándose en un estado de desamparo. Es en ese momento cuando el texto se convierte en un tercer lugar, en un otro, capaz de suscitar en el lector el deseo de escritura.

Palabras clave: literatura, psicoanálisis, lectura, escritura, Clarice Lispector.

Résumé

Dans cet essai, nous chercherons à envisager une possibilité permettant à la psychanalyse de travailler en collaboration avec la littérature en utilisant la lecture comme un geste qui ouvre l'espace pour l'intersection de ces deux domaines. La lecture sera soutenue par une position éthique d'impuissance (Hilflosigkeit) face au texte. En dialogue avec des théoriciens psychanalytiques et non psychanalytiques, nous lisons des fragments de texte de l'œuvre de Clarice Lispector, en les prenant comme un champ de traversée entre la littérature et la psychanalyse. En lisant un texte, le lecteur est invité à parcourir différents chemins sur la page. Cependant, il est nécessaire que le lecteur soit ouvert au texte et qu'il prenne le risque de le laisser agir sur lui. Dans ce silence apparent de la lecture, le lecteur travaille à partir de l'absence de l'écrivain, se trouvant dans un état d'impuissance. C'est à ce moment-là que le texte devient un lieu tiers, un autre, qui peut susciter chez le lecteur le désir d'écriture.

Mots-clés : littérature, psychanalyse, lecture, écriture, Clarice Lispector.

The verbs to read, to write, and to psychoanalyze, when conjugated within the open territory between psychoanalysis and literature, may take on new forms of transitivity or even bring a certain impossibility into the present. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis and an avid reader, repeatedly invited readers, as he worked to formalize his field, to assume an unprecedented position toward classic texts such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*, raising as questions not only what a text thinks, but, more importantly, how it thinks. His act of reading overflowed the boundaries of plot, locating in the themes and forms of those utterances elements that could (in)form questions transcending the specificity of the story being told.

It can be said that Freud ventured into literary texts and, throughout the development of psychoanalysis, allowed himself on several occasions to be questioned by the literary object, seeking within the limits of literature the foundations for his theoretical construction. It was no coincidence that, throughout his lifetime, Freud received only one award: the Goethe Prize, a prestigious literary honor, bestowed upon him in 1930. The letter notifying him of the award, written by Alfons Paquet, reads:

With a rigorous scientific method and, at the same time, with the bold interpretation of metaphors coined by poets, your research opened a passage to the instinctual forces of the psyche and, through it, created the possibility of understanding the emergence and construction, at their roots, of many cultural forms and [also] of curing illnesses for which the medical art had hitherto possessed no key (Freud, 1930/2020, p. 307).

The award bestowed upon Freud is particularly significant, since his contribution to understanding the human psyche was not confined to the field of medical practice. Carone (2008) argues that Freud gave space to themes previously relegated to the margins of science and, particularly, medicine, turning his attention to what remains inaudible in human experience: forgetting, dreams, slips of the tongue, and associations with no apparent connection. With psychoanalysis emerged the possibility of granting legitimacy to the effects of what remains unknown: effects that bear upon the subject and the world but have been repressed by consciousness and by the rationalizing discourses of science. In this sense, psychoanalysis is interested in writers because of a form of knowledge that does not submit to hegemonic systematization, a knowledge that ultimately extends the reach of what had until then remained confined within the modes of expression of the science of its time, particularly medicine.

Indeed, Freud (1895/2016) established a connection between his psychoanalytic practice and the vast universe of literature. Within this context, he recognized the intersection between psychoanalysis and literature, including in the way he wrote his case histories.

I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained in local diagnosis and electrodiagnosis, and it still strikes me as remarkable that the case histories I write can be read like novellas and, so to speak, lack the austere

stamp of scientificity. I must console myself with the fact that responsibility for this effect must evidently be attributed to the nature of the subject matter rather than to any predilection of my own (Freud, 1895/2016, p. 231).

It is worth recalling the literary quotation that opens the foundational book of psychoanalysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (2019), first published in 1900: "*Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*," translated as: "If I cannot bend the heavenly powers, I will stir up hell." In referring to the poet Virgil and his poem the *Aeneid*, Freud (1900/2019) seems to set the tone for what psychoanalysis might become: a body of knowledge constructed also through the letter, the verse, the poem, and writers, while assigning importance to mythological and literary narratives. Although Freud (1900/2019) was also interested in systematizing the psychic apparatus, he did not bow to the heavenly powers, and psychoanalysis was therefore able to interrogate the sciences of its time.

While the importance of literature to psychoanalysis is relatively undisputed, the same cannot be said of the place of reading within this relationship. According to Chemama (2002), many analysts turn to a text as a means of applying their system, interpreting it as a neurotic symptom. An unavoidable example of this reading practice is Marie Bonaparte's classic and much-criticized work on Edgar Allan Poe, which Chemama (2002, p. 54) emphasizes is bound to the certainty of the expert, "always ready to neglect what the author may explicitly say," and even diagnoses the writer using nosological labels such as "cyclothymic" and "paranoid." An act of reading oriented by such a position would be limited to a simplified interpretation, resulting in the constant recirculation of the same questions.

This, however, is not the path followed by Freud, at least not in his reading of Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*. As Vidal (2005) points out, this work announces the emergence of a mutual affectation between psychoanalysis and literature. Although several earlier literary works had played a significant role in enriching and grounding psychoanalytic discourse, Jensen's novel marks a step toward constructing a methodology for the systematic psychoanalytic analysis of a literary work, establishing an analogy between the workings of the unconscious and the field of writing. Commenting on the work, Vidal (2005) stated:

The poet and the psychoanalyst pursue the function of a trace that, in the manner of an enigma, produces a writing that endures and can be read. Thus, the poet's writing would encounter anew the writing of the unconscious, where the trace refers back to a lost object of an initial satisfaction. Like a tracing, the intangible object leaves its mark *as it awaits a reader* [emphasis added] yet to come, who will say that it still exists (p. 65).

Considering the dream as a text that requires reading gives rise to the assumption that a form of writing operates within the unconscious, thereby providing a point of connection between the text produced by the author and the knowledge of the unconscious presumed by psychoanalysis. This led Freud (1907/2015) to ask himself: "how could the novelist have arrived at the same knowledge as the physician, or at least have acted as though he possessed it?" (p. 50).

Not far removed from the questions Freud raised in *Gradiva*, Lacan (1965/2003a) paid tribute to Marguerite Duras for *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, published a year earlier, and reversed the position, casting Duras's readers as those who are ravished. He denounced the foolishness inherent in attempts to attribute some form of neurosis to the writer. Echoing Freud, who recognized writers as valuable allies ahead of ordinary people because they have access to sources not yet explored by science, Lacan (1965/2003a) asserts that "in his own domain, the artist always precedes him, and therefore he does not have to play the psychologist when the artist blazes the trail for him" (p. 200). For Lacan, Duras anticipates his teaching: she teaches, before he does, in her books what he later articulates in his lectures.

Revisiting these moments in the history of psychoanalysis opens a debate about what kind of act of reading might be of interest to a psychoanalyst, while also situating the psychoanalytic field as susceptible to the same mysteries that haunt literature. Beginning with its creator, psychoanalysis opened a new field of discursivity that both influences and is influenced by interpretations of human production. In approaching these two fields, Rosenbaum (2000) emphasizes that it is essential to proceed delicately and cautiously so as not to compromise literature, or psychoanalysis, by understanding the literary too quickly or violently dissecting it out of curiosity, thereby producing a form of wild psychoanalysis of the text. The author mentions the poem "Mosca azul" ["The Blue Fly"], in which Assis (1986) recounts a poleá's fascination with a "blue fly, wings of gold and garnet, / Daughter of China or Hindustan / That among the leaves sprang from a crimson rose / On a certain summer night" (p. 487). Fascination reduces the fly to a mere collection of data and information: "he dissected it so thoroughly, and with such skill, that it, / Broken, dull, / disgusting, vile, / Succumbed; and with it faded away / That fantastic and subtle vision" (Assis, 1986, p. 487).

To silence the fly, to silence the text, "this is the height of the aberration psychoanalysis can commit when it attempts to explain, to master literature," writes Felman (2020, p. 263). By leaning over the text and suppressing its reserve of silence, that within the word which does not know how to speak, psychoanalysis itself paradoxically represses the unconscious it purports to "explain." In doing so, it annihilates the silence inherent in the word as a literary vehicle and its capacity to express the unsayable:

[...] it is to exclude and, specifically, to exclude the unconscious [...] this, then, is precisely what psychoanalysis does whenever it yields to the temptation of diagnosis, to the temptation to indicate, show, or locate madness precisely within

literature, believing that it has reached the point of “explaining” the very symptom of the literary phenomenon. Psychoanalysis diagnoses literature only in order to justify itself, to secure its control over meaning, to disavow its own reading (Felman, 2020, p. 265).

To embrace a form of reading that is less assertive and more allusive, less immobilizing and more fluid, less focused on semantic direction and more concerned with signifiante and the materiality of the letter is one possible way of putting the preposition with to work between psychoanalysis and literature, without subordinating either field to the other. According to Castello Branco (2020), in the introduction to the translation of *La folie et la chose littéraire*, this is also Shoshana Felman’s proposal: “another turn of interpretation” – a word present in both literature and psychoanalysis.

Drawing on Lacan, Felman proposed thinking of interpretation as allusion, removing it from the domain of assertive formulations that seek to assign a fixed meaning to the text. Interpretation may instead be understood as an allusion, a form of disturbance, a delicate and subtle unsettling in the face of the irreducibility of the literary thing. From this perspective, interpretation ceases to be immobilizing, fixing a single meaning, and becomes fluid, making room for a multiplicity of possible meanings. For Castello Branco (2020, p. 24), Felman helps propose “a literary (or literal) reading that respects the text’s ‘resistance’ and understands that ‘reading’ is broader than ‘interpreting.’ It is therefore an operation that cannot be reduced to assigning meaning to the text.”

According to Castello Branco (2020, p. 24), this perspective of “another turn of interpretation” is also related to a certain ethics of reading emphasized by Lacan. One of Lacan’s recommendations to analysts is that they should not be too quick to offer interpretations to patients. Language is polysemous and open to multiple interpretations, and reading that respects this complex nature of language entails resisting the attempt to reduce the text to a single, fixed meaning. As Barthes (2013) writes:

Literature sets forms of knowledge in motion; it fixes none of them, fetishizes none of them; it gives them an indirect place, and this indirectness is precious. On the one hand, it allows possible forms of knowledge to be designated – unsuspected, unrealized: literature works in the interstices of science; it is always either behind or ahead of it (p. 19).

Thus, positioning literature as temporally anticipatory in relation to the sciences or to psychoanalysis requires reflection on the position of reading that a psychoanalyst might seek to occupy. In this essay, we seek to interrogate the reader’s position alongside psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic theorists, as well as Clarice Lispector and selected fragments from her work. In the company of these writers, we aim to undertake, as an experimental endeavor of delicately fishing for words and fragments, “the word fishing for what is not merely word, but lies more between the lines” (Lispector, 2018, p. 367). Our aim is to establish certain coordinates for locating an act of reading that opens a path for psychoanalysis to work in the company of literature. We will take reading as a third strand with which to weave the braid we envision between psychoanalysis and literature, understanding it as an act that makes possible the opening of a third space of tensions and reverberations between these two fields, allowing a certain helplessness to rest there as an ethical position for the reader.

Reading Clarice

The association between Clarice Lispector’s work and psychoanalysis is nothing new. Her complex characters (G.H. and Janair, Ângela Pralini and the Author, Macabéa and Rodrigo S.M., Joana, among many others) have been investigated through psychoanalysis in conjunction with other fields of knowledge that place language at the core of their work. Working at the interface between psychoanalysis and literature, Rosenbaum (2000) argues that Clarice Lispector invented a form of writing in which language took precedence over theme, in which the word acquired the power to evoke the world rather than merely represent it, creating a new way of saying and turning the act of narration into an existential problem. According to the literary critic Nunes (2015), Clarice Lispector calls for readers to be shipwrecked in the act of reading; thus, a simple dive or immersion would not suffice for a body of work that moves between silence and fusion in search of an impossible voice. To move forward and be shipwrecked before “the most unintelligible of nonhuman existences,” as Clarice writes in the chronicle entitled “Ritual – trecho” [“Ritual – Excerpt”], published on July 27, 1968 (Lispector, 1984/2020b, p. 148). In the merciless ocean of language, we are all adrift, moving toward the unintelligible and returning with the salty, “dripping” hair of a shipwreck survivor, knowing that we have faced “a danger as old as humankind [...] that awakens her from her most dormant age-old slumbers” (Lispector, 1984/2020b, p. 150); “There could only be an encounter between their mysteries if one surrendered to the other: the surrender of two unknowable worlds, made with the trust with which two forms of understanding would surrender to one another” (Lispector, 1984/2020b, p. 148).

According to Wisnik (2018, p. 286), in “Diagramas para uma trilogia de Clarice” [“Diagrams for a Clarice Trilogy”], readers entering Clarice’s work must do so unarmed and unprepared: “for her, if the reader comes, let them come unarmed – for if they do not, they will be.” In seeking the hard core of literature, the it, readers are secretly armed only to be subsequently disarmed; in a single stroke, what was presumed to be known is stripped away, revealing the nakedness of

writing. Readers must allow themselves to enter an experience in which not knowing is the only possible mode of approach, since, according to the author, "Clarice's writing harbors a critical consciousness inherent to it, one that works close to language through a relentless program of nakedness and disarmament" (Wisnik, 2018, p. 286).

In this context, Wisnik (2018) refers to Penna's (2010) text "O Nu de Clarice Lispector" ["The Nakedness of Clarice Lispector"]. According to Penna (2010), Clarice inaugurates "a specifically literary and artistic program of erasing the specific work of literature and art, in a form of writing that weaves itself while concealing itself as such, constructing a naked, defictionalized experience that not only does not call itself art but explicitly rejects that name" (pp. 74–75). The literary act is thereby placed under tension, approaching a form of literal writing, as expressed by Llansol (2011) in her diary *Um falcão no punho* [A Falcon in the Fist], on October 2, 1981: "[...] there is no literature. when one writes, the only thing that matters is knowing what reality one enters, and whether there is an adequate technique for opening a path for others" (p. 52).

According to Castello Branco (2011), it can be said that there are women writers who do not make literature. Within this pantheon of writers who apprehend the word as a "volatile thing in the air" (Lispector, 1977/2020d, p. 144), literature is set aside, and from this emerges the concept of *écriture*, which, as Barthes (2015) writes, is the "science of the pleasures of language" (p. 11). These authors, capable of dissolving the literary itself into a pure breath, disregard the possibility of constructing a single meaning, thereby opening up the possibility of creating multiple meanings in multiple directions. The concept of literature thus becomes insufficient to "contain this passage of writing that ultimately flows into *écriture*" (Castello Branco, 2011, p. 72). Thus, with regard to the signifier literature, laden with traditional meanings ideologically attached to a centered canon and to an aesthetics bound to a priori truths, *écriture* is preferred. Clarice Lispector is one of these writers who, in writing, seeks to pass beyond literature through themes that imposed themselves upon her, leaving her no choice but to undertake the writing of that secret mission that is life.

It is words that prevent me from telling the truth. There simply are no words. What I do not know how to say is more important than what I say [...] I have always wanted, through the word, to reach something [emphasis added] that would at once be without currency and that would exist and convey tranquility or simply the profound truth existing in human beings and in things. More and more, I write with fewer words. My best book will happen when I no longer write at all (Lispector, as cited in Borelli, 1981, p. 85).

What cannot be expressed in words is more significant than what appears articulated in the writing of a book. There is a longing for a form of communication that transcends conventional forms of language in the search for a truth existing both in human beings and in things. Thus, one comes to recognize that it is only through the failure of the voice that one can truly hear one's own silence and the silence of others as a possible language.

[...] I can only attain the impersonality of muteness if I have first constructed an entire voice. It is precisely through the failure of the voice that, for the first time, one comes to hear one's own muteness and that of others, and to accept it as a possible language. Only then is my nature accepted, accepted with its astonished torment, where pain is not something that happens to us but what we are. And our condition is accepted as the only possible one, since it is the one that exists, and no other. And since living it is our passion. The human condition is the Passion of Christ (Lispector, 2018, p. 594).

For psychoanalysis, helplessness, beyond being an experience arising from the immaturity of human beings at birth, is constitutive of the subject in their relationship with language and its vicissitudes. This singular and inescapable condition is presented as the experience of a passion, the Passion of Christ. The subject not only finds himself without help (*Hilflosigkeit*) in the world as a being of language but also remains helpless within the very domain of language. In the fragment cited above, there is a painful passage through the defictionalization of language, bringing it close to Llansol (2011), who writes in her diary on May 30, 1979: "[...] I divest myself of literature and move to the margins of language [...] reflecting that I had to lose myself from literature in order to tell how I crossed through language, wishing to save myself through it" (p. 12).

In *Um sopro de vida* [A Breath of Life], we read: "I do not make literature: I merely live as time flows. The inevitable result of my living is the act of writing" (Lispector, 1977/2020d, p. 15). Pessanha (2019) had already identified this perspective on writing in Clarice's work. In a letter to the author dated March 5, 1972, after reading *Objeto gritante* [Screaming Object], which was subsequently published under the title *Água viva*, he writes about a movement of "distancing from the artistic universe," identifying the presence of an "a-literary" and "nonfictional" form of writing in which Clarice appears to seek to reject the artifices of art:

I had the impression that you wanted to write spontaneously, playfully, a-literarily. Is that right? It seems that, after rejecting the artifices and stratagems of reason (or perhaps better – the rationalizations), you now seem to want to reject the artifices of art. And to strip yourself bare, to be yourself, less disguised in your own eyes and in the eyes of the reader. Hence the lack of inhibition with which you reveal yourself in your everyday life (mental and circumstantial), unconcerned with juxtaposing passages from different levels and unafraid of the trivial [...] To speak of God and of anything at all, without

selecting a theme, without laboring over form. Without being a “writer.” To be merely a woman-who-writes-what-she-(pre) thinks-or-thinks-while-feeling? (Pessanha, 2019, p. 134).

Pessanha (2019) observes a constant movement in Clarice’s writing, one that proceeds from everyday life to fiction and returns to everyday life to begin a new cycle. This method of writing is present in Clarice’s work from the outset, changing and becoming increasingly radical over time. In this sense, the critic draws attention to the question of Clarice’s defictionalization, referring to her “temporary rejection” of the work of fiction. Pessanha (2019) also identifies a gradual shift in Clarice, a process of intellectualization, perceiving in her characters a change in their position toward the word – a trajectory that ultimately enables her to enter into dialogue and to speak for herself, thinking freely, without artifact or artifice: “is that, then, what partly explains this scream of the object?” Pessanha asks; “If so – it is wonderful that it screams, and loudly” (Pessanha, 2019, p. 135).

The scream – what communicates that which precedes speech and demands a *Nebenmensch*,¹ another person nearby – underscores the idea of language as a precarious instrument, shaped upon helplessness, through which human beings attempt to make up for a lack that can never be fully filled, “for language happens only when we are outside it, suspended in the shock of there being a world. The word is then the continuation of the shudder in this fleeting guest that we are, the continuation of a song of wonder and gratitude” (Pessanha, 2018, p. 22). Through language, one can mask the precariousness of language itself, make promises, even though language falsifies.

But if I screamed even once, perhaps I would never be able to stop. If I screamed, no one could do anything more for me; whereas, if I never reveal my need, no one will be frightened by me and they will help me without knowing; but only as long as I frighten no one by stepping outside the rules. But if they know, they become frightened, we who keep the scream as an inviolable secret. If I sound the alarm that I am alive, in muteness and hardness they will drag me away, for they drag away those who step outside the possible world, the exceptional being is dragged away, the screaming being (Lispector, 1964/2020c, p. 61).

Within the scream sustained by literary creation, Clarice is dragged outside Literature, making writing possible, that “animal we should necessarily encounter along the way” (Llansol, 1996, as cited in Castello Branco, 2011, p. 66). This writing-animal, constituted by “fleeting signs,” shelters what remains, the hole in the symbolic, moving beyond the imposture of language and finding a place within a reader. “Literature,” Lacan (2003b, p. 16) states in “Lituraterre,” “is an accommodation of remains.” Remains that set us to work, to dream...

The writing of reading

Clarice’s chronicle “Frase misteriosa, sonho estranho” [“Mysterious Phrase, Strange Dream”], published in *Jornal do Brasil*, emerged almost as a form of dream-work involving a dream that a reader had addressed to her. The author recounts the path toward the genesis of a phrase that had previously occurred to her: “I wanted to give you bread for your hunger, but you wanted gold. Yet your hunger is as great as your soul, which you diminished to the stature of the other” (Lispector, 2018, p. 111). Within this writing, Clarice raises a question that seems especially valuable when one seeks to produce a shift in the preposition that usually articulates psychoanalysis and literature: and. Clarice writes: “Why these words that I myself have not lived?” (Lispector, 2018, p. 111).

Distilling the words of the phrase, Clarice traces a possible common denominator: a dream narrated in a letter by a reader, Azaléa, who later became her friend. The dream describes several people searching for gold in an immense plot of churned-up earth. The gold was visible in heaps gleaming before people who, frantically, plunged their faces into the soil to gather it. Amid the strangeness of this scene, the reader-friend encounters a familiar face, that of her favorite writer, whom she had known since her school years: Clarice Lispector. In the dream, unlike the others, who found gold, Clarice found nothing but “handfuls of hair, dark, dirty, horrible” (Lispector, 2018, p. 111). Finding nothing, the writer “looked back desperately, searching for me [the reader/friend], showing me the result of her search [...] neither golden hair nor gold” (Lispector, 2018, p. 111). At that moment, Azaléa reaches out her hand to Clarice – “Strange, because at every moment I felt distressed, desperate, and ill, as though I myself were Clarice Lispector” (Lispector, 2018, p. 112). The dreamer then removes the writer from that place where, according to Azaléa, she did not belong, though not without encountering Clarice’s resistance: with each step, she looked back at the mud “as though her last hope were kept there” (Lispector, 2018, p. 112). Empty-handed, Clarice wept intensely because she had found nothing, because she was returning with empty hands: “empty, Azaléa!” she lamented. At the end of the dream, Clarice meets a friend; entirely golden, he leads her to

¹ *Nebenmensch*, translated as “neighbor,” is the one who enables the infant’s introduction into the realm of communication; it is an Other who will carry out the specific action. This is not a similar other, but rather someone who possesses a distinguishing feature, having already been subjected to the symbolic order, to language (Lacan, 1959-1960/2008).

a place where the two merge into an immense, gleaming brightness. The search comes to an end, the dream ends, and Clarice, faced with the dream-text that reaches her by letter, addresses it to psychoanalysis in search of an interpretation.

I was impressed by the dream and know only that it is symbolic. I will ask a sorcerer friend of mine – a psychoanalyst – what interpretation he would give to the gold, and also to my phrase about gold and bread. And then, filled with joy, I remembered that bread possesses the richness of wheat (Lispector, 2018, p. 113).

These words, even if we ourselves have not lived them, provide support for thinking about the act of reading within the field opened between psychoanalysis and literature, as an act that may be engendered through a bond mobilized by the preposition with. Choosing a dream as the catalyst for this shift in prepositions is not trivial. Within the scope of this essay, the dream figures less because of its potential for interpretation than because of the line of thought it enables.

In dreams, space and time intertwine and become confused. According to Garcia-Roza (2008), the dream is considered a form of psychic writing, composed of original pictographic elements that follow no pre-existing code. From a Freudian perspective, the dream consists of images that refer to signs and establish connections among them. Despite its nature as a psychic text, it is composed of images rather than words. The acoustic/visual images that appear in dreams help compose their enigma; however, conscious or preconscious logic cannot be applied to the reading of this text, since the dream consists of an accumulation of seemingly meaningless images, distorted and encoded by conscious censorship.

The dream follows a mode of elaboration similar to that of enigmatic letters or, more precisely, the rebus. As in an ideogram, dream images do not refer to the things they supposedly represent but rather refer to one another, producing a meaning that does not necessarily have anything to do with those things (Garcia-Roza, 2008, p. 65).

Like parapraxes, jokes, and symptoms, dreams are known to be formations of the unconscious. The writing of certain authors, as in the case of Clarice Lispector, approaches this oneiric dimension, devoid of clearly defined structure and form and exploring ideogrammatic elements. The author discusses this in “Literatura de vanguarda no Brasil” [“Avant-Garde Literature in Brazil”] (Lispector, 2018, p. 175), a text in which she seeks to articulate her literary writing-creation with a dreamlike logic. Her writing seeks to name that which comes into the world before the tacit agreements of language have been established: “[...] this expression ‘form-content’ has always deeply displeased me – just as I am troubled by the division ‘body-soul,’ ‘matter-energy,’ etc. Without ever dwelling much on the matter, I rejected it almost instinctively” (Lispector, 2018, p. 175).

The reading of this dream that interests us – and what we propose to do in thinking psychoanalysis with literature – is not its interpretation, but rather the writing practice that the author elicited in the reader. Writing generating writing. The images evoked in the reader’s dream bring forth scenes from Clarice Lispector’s work with regard to the creation of the “possibility of writing fiction from the spatialized temporalization of the almost nothing of everyday life,” as Santiago (1997) writes. An egg on the breakfast table; a man killed by the police; a dead reddish rat on a sidewalk in Copacabana are among the examples that lead us to think that Clarice Lispector’s work may enter into a fruitful conversation with psychoanalysis, since both bring language forth in its “de-automatizing, disalienating, unexpected condition, which disrupts the status quo of language and challenges that which stubbornly seeks to settle into place” (Rosenbaum, 2011, p. 2). In its delicate search for the thing itself, Lispector’s writing invites us to look at what remains indeterminate, even beneath the surface of everyday things.

What is therefore required is a host capable of receiving the remains awakened by these dream-texts in their attempt to reach the unattainable, the unknown, and the inexplicable. This host is called, herein, the reader. Barthes (2005) positions the reader as the one who keeps the text alive:

The pleasure of the Text is realized more profoundly [and it is then that one can truly say that there is Text:] when the “literary” text [the Book] transmigrates into our lives, when another writing [the writing of the Other] comes to write fragments of our own everydayness, in short, when a *co-existence* [emphasis added] is produced (pp. xiv–xv).

We may recall Azaléa herein, who, in co-existence with Clarice’s writing, dreams. Her dream produces a remainder, an other-remainder that moves from dream into writing. Thus, the gesture of inscribing the word on paper – in Clarice’s case, in her weekly column for *Jornal do Brasil* – gave rise, at the other end, to a reader who innocently encountered within herself the remains expelled by the writer. At that moment, the text breathes and makes possible a “friendship-text” between reader and writer. Pessanha (2018, p. 8) writes that this is a friendship forged through a similar wound, a way of reading the text that the author calls “Dionysian reading” (Pessanha, 2018, p. 11). In it, readers lend their own wound and pain in order to understand the writer. Unlike what identification would produce, understanding herein takes on the tone of hospitality, of the reader’s receptiveness toward the text.

What the author intended to communicate while writing no longer matters; what matters is the capacity to impart to “the work that powerful impetus and stimulating openness that invite the reader to continue its creation,” as Perrone-Moisés

(1990, p. 109) emphasizes. What becomes important in this moment of reading and recreating the text is a certain invitation issued by the work so that readers may now continue its creation, be illuminated by the text, and write.

Barthes (2012, p. 39) describes reading as an adventure that may lead to the desire for writing, noting that the desire at stake is not the desire to write like the author, but to share the desire to write that the author experienced during the act of writing, “or again: we desire the desire the author had for the reader while writing; we desire the love-me that exists in all writing.” From this perspective, for Barthes (2012), reading is a production, a form of work that:

Is returned as production, as promise, as desire for production, and the chain of desires begins to unfold, each reading valued according to the writing it generates, ad infinitum [...] It is not the “person” of the other that I need; it is the space: the possibility of a dialectic of desire, of an unpredictability of enjoyment: that the dice have not yet been cast, that there be play (p. 9).

In Barthes (2012), reading comes to be understood not only as a form of distraction but also as active work requiring effort, engagement, and desire on the part of the reader, since, in reading a text, readers are challenged to involve their bodies in the weave of the work, like a vortex, because it is within them that these units of the text exist. When reading a text, readers are called upon to move slowly and curiously along the different paths across the flat surface of the page, moving through letters and resting at commas; yet they must remain open to the text and risk allowing it to work within them, thereby making possible an experience: a becoming of writing.

For Cixous (2022, p. 77), great works constitute a form of learning that places readers back in the school of the world, in a kind of “reeducation of the soul.” Her reflections echo what this essay seeks to consider, namely, reading as a crucial element in the equation structuring a research method when the paths of inquiry derive from the articulation between psychoanalysis and literature.

Seeing the soul of a face becomes possible whenever we manage to love beyond desire, on the other side of love. This rarely happens to us: in our time, we are very cold and very thirsty, heavy and restless. We wait. We want to have waited for it. We do not know how to wait for the other: our waiting attacks. We are hurried, we exert pressure, and things flee (Cixous, 2022, p. 71).

It is a matter of reading slowly and delicately what the text offers, allowing literary provinces to open within the text itself, as Pessanha (2018) puts it, without seeking the objectification of the object under study or its explanation by an expert. The place made possible by reading is the place of yes, of the reader’s delicate deepening into the writer, allowing the former to spread across the page.

In this context, the epiphanic experience undergone by the character G.H. upon encountering a cockroach in *The Passion According to G.H.* allowed Cixous (2022, p. 129) to formulate a reflection that seems to open a path toward with as the preposition articulating literature with psychoanalysis: “the most difficult thing to do, the text teaches us, is to attain the utmost proximity while avoiding the trap of projection, of identification. The other must remain utterly strange even within the greatest proximity.”

One must remain strange in reading, preserving the delicate layer of air necessary to keep from suffocating between text and reading, between psychoanalysis and literature. In the opening of *Livro de asas: para Maria Gabriela Llansol* [Book of Wings: For Maria Gabriela Llansol], Castello Branco and Andrade (2007), in defining the legente, a figure in Llansol’s work, write:

Reading. Legência. A delicate task, we know, because it is indeed a matter of reading, but of reading from a certain position: that of the person who is a legente only because they have allowed themselves to be illuminated by the text; because they are being lifted by the text. Wings. It is a matter of the *person who becomes a writer outside the authorial instance* [emphasis added] and, under the aegis of textuality, recognizes herself as naked libido, finds herself textualizing, that is, making love infinite (p. 10).

The authors bequeath a valuable perspective on the reader as someone who lies beyond the active mastery of the text; someone who makes herself available for an encounter with letters while preserving a certain passivity. This passivity toward the text allows writing to pass through the reader, permeating their existence “while it, writing – a feminine word – passes through us: through knots of the real” (Castello Branco & Andrade, 2007, p. 10).

Thus, the word (re)born in a third moment, through an act of reading-writing, placing within a possible frame that which has been illuminated, becomes an event that takes up residence in the body of a new ally. When “we seek to read as one who becomes a descendant of the author of the text,” according to Llansol (2011, p. 61), what can be understood as a living space sustained by the text becomes perceptible. Because it is alive, this space moves, “for it is not only writing that is permeated by the torment of helplessness; reading too is a work of disaster – the fall of the star, absolute passivity, vacancy” (Castello Branco, 2019, p. 33).

Sousa (1999), in the essay “O inconsciente e as condições de uma autoria” [“The Unconscious and the Conditions of Authorship”], argues that genuine work of reading is required to withstand the imbalance and the threat of falling and loss that certain works provoke in readers. It is in such moments, which almost demand taking the author by the hand, that we may perhaps find a place for ourselves within these works. In this imbalance that leaves us helpless and makes us seek a hand, one can recognize Clarice's warning that only those initiated in soul should read her, “people whose souls are already formed” (Lispector, 1964/2020c). Readers who understand that the thing can only be approached slowly, gradually, painfully, and unarmed; those who understand that reading a work takes nothing away from anyone or, as Blanchot (2011) writes, is “a pure yes expanding into the immediate” (p. 213). It therefore seems to us that there is a figure of the reader in Clarice's work. A figure that points toward a possibility of reading regardless of whether a text is considered “bad” or “good”: “a small group will see that this ‘liking’ is superficial and will enter into what I truly write, which is neither ‘bad’ nor ‘good’” (Lispector, 1977/2020d, p. 20).

In one of her chronicles, entitled “Outra carta” [“Another Letter”], published on February 24, 1968, when Clarice was still becoming accustomed to her new role as a columnist, she addresses her relationship with readers and the intimacy she shares through her writing. Upon receiving a letter from a reader, Clarice reflects on the paradoxical position into which she places herself by writing while not wanting to betray herself. She notes that, although her novels and short stories are not autobiographical, she later discovers through those who read them that she has revealed herself, bringing the act of writing close to confession: “I later learn from those who read them that I have betrayed myself” (Lispector, 2018, p. 80).

Yet, paradoxically, side by side with the desire to defend my own intimacy, there is an intense desire to confess myself in public and not to a priest. The desire, at last, to say what we all know and yet keep secret, as though it were forbidden to tell children that Santa Claus does not exist, even though we know that they know he does not exist (Lispector, 2018, p. 80).

Clarice reflects on the writer-reader relationship, emphasizing that readers are often a reflection of the writer. “The reader as a character is a curious, strange character. At the same time as being entirely individual and having reactions of their own, they are so terribly bound to the writer that, in truth, they, the reader, are the writer” (Lispector, 2018, p. 80). “This I that is you” (Cixous, 2022, p. 121) may be understood as a particle that brings reading closer to the familiar strangeness present in the reader-writer relationship: “Who are you who are strangely me?” (Cixous, 2022, p. 121), or, in Clarice's words, repeated once again, “why these words that I myself have not lived?” (Lispector, 2018, p. 111).

Final considerations

These reflections helped pave a proposed path toward a de-automatizing reading of the literary text. What matters in such a reading are the traces that flare up through the act of reading: in the case of this essay, through the reading of fragments from Clarice Lispector's work. We sought to think through the act of reading as one that engenders a bond mobilized by the preposition with within this open field between psychoanalysis and literature. Through the dream of Clarice Lispector's reader-friend and the author's search for meaning in that dream, it became possible to explore a position of reading while recognizing how the processes at play affect us when we open the pages of a book.

Knowing that every conclusion is provisional and necessarily partial, we do not propose to conclude, but rather to release this writing so that it may resonate in the continuation of thought. We believe that the reflections developed herein on reading, by foregrounding a position toward the literary text, help delineate a method, a path, that unfolds through literature with psychoanalysis, in an interspace of knowledges. We do not seek to exhaust Clarice Lispector's work, since, along the path pursued herein, it is important to indicate that reading certain authors requires a form of reading sustained by helplessness, by knowledge in failure, in order to make the with possible. In the apparent silence of reading, readers turn toward the writer's absence, which vibrates in a state of pure helplessness, in a free becoming that opens its wings across the page, becoming entwined with this third place that, like an other, comes to constitute a reader transformed by the experience of the text: “You who read me, help me to be born” (Lispector, 1973/2020e, p. 29).

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