La palabra según Clarice Lispector: aproximaciones críticas

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The Word according to Clarice Lispector: critical approaches
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The Epiphanic Ritual of the Text

Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna
(English Translation by Jason R. Jolley)

This critical approach might have been called “The Cockroach.” Another possible title could be “The Murder of the Cockroach.” Or even “How to Kill Cockroaches.” Therefore, I’ll use three approaches, all of them true since none of them contradicts the other. They are three possibilities that could just as easily be a thousand and one, beginning over and over again, as in the myth of Scheherazade.

As in the myth of Scheherazade, there is a succession of texts going forth nightly, each from the early dawn of the previous one. The Passion according to G.H. also consists of the constant multiplication of a magical and fantastic story, not of mere desire, but of the “passion” that unfolds between a woman and a cockroach.

A woman and a cockroach that are the same creature. Or rather: one particular morning a woman, upon entering the room left vacant by her maid, inspects the emptiness but comes face to face with a cockroach that she has just crushed in half by frightfully closing the closet door on it. That cockroach is the woman’s double. By crushing that being, Clarice leads us into a magical, mystical and metaphysical labyrinth.

Leads us into a magical, mystical and metaphysical labyrinth. “How so?” the reader will ask, already finding this critical text to be strange, if not odd.

Strange, if not odd; this does not seem like literary criticism and this is not how one usually begins the analysis of a text.

This is not how one begins the analysis of a text, but this is how one should begin to analyze this text by Clarice because I have

1 The footnotes that accompany this article are translator’s notes, except where the translator indicates that Sant’Anna had included a reference note in the original.
already begun to imitate through the structure of what I am writing the structure of her narrative. I am copying her structure (poorly) so that without its richness it becomes clearer for the uninstructed reader.

The uninitiated reader may have noticed that I am repeating the final lines of each paragraph as I begin the next. I could continue to do this, but I don't know if I will because, as Clarice says, the "maybe," the "probability," the "error" always exists. But by doing it I am appropriating one of the author's techniques and making the narrative armor of G.H. and her narrative process visible.

Her narrative process goes like this: The text is a mass that spreads out onto the page in concentric circles. Spiraling or in spirals. Or perhaps we could say that the chapters of G.H. are links in a narrative chain where, as with this critique, each chapter begins with the words that end the previous one.

For example, the words that end the first chapter of G.H. are: "A world wholly alive has a Hellish power" (14).2

"A world wholly alive has a Hellish power" is the phrase that will open the second chapter.

The second chapter opens, as do they all, by repeating the words that close the previous one. So what?, one could ask. It matters because, by formalizing in my critique the structure of the work I am critiquing, I am engaging in an intertextual exercise and doing so, above all, in a manner suggested by Clarice herself. I am "disorganizing" my conventional critical language in order to reorganize it into another that is more difficult and original. Seeking as she does a "tracing," a "duplicate," a "parody" or, who knows, using appropriation and paraphrase to establish a link between the critical text and the critiqued text in the same way that links exist between the chapters and links exist between this book and others by the author, creating what she calls the "interchange."3 Links that, without a doubt, even in this book will be seen not just in the consonances between Clarice and the various analysts included, but also between Clarice and Clarice, or between this and other texts I have written on the author.4

But there is something else. I've broken my rhythm, apparently ceasing to repeat the last phrase to introduce another link that only those familiar with Clarice's works will perceive.

The fact is, I was already engaged in an intertextual exercise as I began this critique, paraphrasing a story by Clarice herself called "The Fifth Story," which begins like this:

"This story might have been called 'The Statues.' Another possible title might have been 'The Killing.' Or even 'How to Kill Cockroaches.' Therefore, I will tell at least three stories, all truthful because none of them belies the other. Although one single story, they might have been a thousand and one, had I been given a thousand and one nights" (276).5

Go ahead and check. Re-read the opening paragraph of this essay.

This story from The Foreign Legion employs a concentric narrative technique. It consists of five stories with the same topic — "the cockroach." They are minimalist micro-stories, just a paragraph in length, veritable synopses of what they would be if they were given fuller treatment. And the last story — the "fifth" — begins with the same phrase used in the first: "I complained of cockroaches" (276).6

This provides several lessons. To wit: The structure of this story has a lot to do with Clarice's concentric and spiraling narrative. We could say that the links that bind the five stories together illustrate connections working on two levels. Intra- and intertextual connections. The connections are intratextual when they refer to relations that are internal to the text. Intertextual connections are

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4 "This" book refers to the critical edition of Líspector's A paixão segundo G.H., edited by Benedíto Nunes. The edition features an introduction by Nunes, an annotated version of the novel in Portuguese, and several critical essays, including Sant'Anna's.

5 Quotations from the English version of the story are taken from Kenneth David Jackson's English translation.

6 Here, as on dozens of occasions, Sant'Anna italicizes words for emphasis. In general, I have followed the typographical conventions (use of italics, capitalization, quotation marks, etc.) he used in the original text in Portuguese, although I frequently alter punctuation to improve readability in English. I have also maintained Sant'Anna's use of quotations to mark words used as linguistic examples throughout.

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2 In general, when Sant'Anna quotes from Líspector's A paixão segundo G.H., I have supplied the corresponding citations from Ronald W. Sousa's English translation. I supply page numbers for all citations in excess of one or two words.

3 Sousa translates the Líspector term "interroca" as "interchange" (144-45).
those that exist between one novel and another, one story and another.

Thus, to a certain extent, the structure of "The Fifth Story" is a small-scale model of a process that is repeated throughout her entire oeuvre. The texts refer to each other in a game of mirrors and repeat some of the same thematic obsessions and structures. When it comes to "The Fifth Story" specifically, and its relationships with The Passion according to G.H., it is worth pointing out that both were published in the same year, 1964, with a common chronological root.

At this point of the analysis, constructing a critical text that represents a simulacrum of the text under analysis, it seems legitimate (and necessary) to me to employ on the analytical plane the same technique used by the narrator as far as the obsessive structures and the inter- and intratextual relationships are concerned.

Inter- and intratextual relationships are also present in the critic's work. Just as one paragraph echoes another, one novel repeats another, critical analyses can hold echoes of previous texts. In this sense, I am already looking for connections between what I have previously written about the author and what I am writing now, reaffirming significant structures.

Reaffirming the significant structures in the work allows me to provide a composite preview of the topics I propose to cover here. By doing so, I am not only echoing the process already inscribed in a previous book of mine in which I analyzed the author, but also following on this occasion a process borrowed from the novelist herself who, in the first chapter of The Passion according to G.H., presents a kind of synopsis of the themes that will be developed throughout the novel. Actually, the first chapter reads like a theoretical prologue that comes before the action despite already being part of its action.

In like manner, I will indicate some of these topics:

1. The narrative of The Passion according to G.H as literary, psychological and mystical epiphany.

2. Epiphanic narrative as ritual. G.H and the rite of passage. The perception of narrative as an exercise in liminality. The rite of threshold and the rite of the first time.

3. Catastrophe theory applied to the narrative structure, the protagonist and the language of the text. The theme of falling. The redemption and the semantics of the passion configuring the grotesque and the sublime.

4. The code of the senses and the search for neutrality. Homeostasis: aesthetics and the excessively minimalist consciousness.

5. The oxymoron that dramatizes the absurd, the paradoxical and the dialectical. The metaphysics of two emerging from the fissure. Binarism. Error and narrative errancy. The prefixes of negation and the deheroizing of the protagonist.

This synthetic sequence of items is only a guide. A guide that falls short of my intentions. This analysis that is already under way, rather than checking off those items, will depend on emptiness, on blank spaces, things left unsaid. This analysis will unfold on blocks separated by empty spaces, like the narrator did in her novel, allowing the text itself to breathe. And these blank spaces are connections, not ruptures. It is also a way to allow the reader, just as anguished as the protagonist, to breathe. This emptiness is the way to emptyly name the chapters of the critical text and the novel.

Notice, reader, how impressions of the text being analyzed appear in the analytical text. A game between black and white is established between the two texts. The text, like a true narrative, is comprised of spacings. Of breaks. Of alternating opposites that seek to complement each other dialectically. The text on the page, then, is not just a black spot, but a white spot. The same "white mass" that emerges from the cockroach pinned to the closed door in the maid's room. The text is, contradictorily, a "black" and a "white spot" that spills out because of a murder. A massacre of being. Of being exposed to epiphany. The epiphany of writing: uncertain strokes on a white background.

And when I say "white spot" — in quotation marks, just like the author herself does to underscore certain words and expressions, I am saying the impossible. The unforeseeable. That which the logic

7 Sant'Anna references his own Analise estrutural de romances brasileiros.

8 Here Sant'Anna uses the construction "linguagem," suggesting a sort of play on words or dual interpretation of its components, "lingua"/"tongue" and "linguagem"/"language."
of the phrase cannot think. Every spot (generally) is dark. But of course within the dark recesses of its being the spot can be white. Just as Malevitch was able to create several paintings called “White on White” — in which the whiteness was a spot of white itself, the text can be that white spot on the blank page. The text can be the luminous moment of the epiphany.

The luminous moment of the epiphany. This phrase forces me to look back at my present and absent text. And here I take my intertextual relationship with Clarice’s text to a deeper level. Not just by using the first-person as she does in her fiction, creating a personal and generic “I,” but intertextually coming back to a text in which I inscribe and re-inscribe that which constitutes the phenomenon of the “epiphany” in this author’s work. Without understanding this word, we cannot penetrate luminously into her text. Therefore, considering the text as that black spot that, in the book, narrates the epiphanic clarity of the revelation and the sudden perception of the truth, let us ponder on the range of this word as it pertains to our study of this work.

The concept of the epiphany (epiphania) can be understood in a mystical-religious sense and in a literary sense. In the mystical-religious sense, the epiphany refers to the appearance of a divinity and a spiritual manifestation — and it is in this sense that the word is used to describe the appearance of Christ to the gentiles. Applied to literature, the term refers to the narration of an experience that at first appears to be simple and routine, but that ends up revealing the full force of an unusual revelation. It is the dazed perception of a reality in which the simplest objects, the most common gestures and daily situations cast a sudden light on the consciousness of the participants, and the splendor of trance bears little relation to the prosaic element in which the character is inscribed.

More specifically, in literature the epiphany is a work or part of a work in which the episode of the revelation is recounted. It is in this sense that we also use the term epiphany in the analysis of the works and of one of Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s poems — “The Machine of the World” —, which is not just a poem, but a section of one of his books comprised of two poems (“The Machine of the World” and “Church Tower Clock”) that recount a seemingly routine experience in which the poet is walking down a street in Minas Gerais at dusk when suddenly the strange machine appears before him, offering him knowledge of all things and the solution to every enigma.⁹

In Clarice, the sense of epiphany permeates all levels: revelation is that which she authentically narrates in her stories and novels. Revelations based on routine experiences: a visit to the zoo, seeing a blind man on the street, the relationship between two people in love or sightings a cockroach in a house. In the novels, this is recounted with force and breadth, as with Martin’s long trajectory in The Apple in the Dark, in the process whereby he pulls back the world’s curtains in a series of steps, acquiring language through the senses, his thoughts and oral or written words. Language, even, as the struggle against reason, anti-logical language, far from Aristotle’s “logos” and closer to the “logos” of Heraclites.

This epiphany obeys a syntagmatic sequence that coincides with the classical narrative structure divided into an exposition, a climax and a dénouement. Indeed, the narrator refers several times to a “pre-climax,” an expression that supposes the two moments that follow, the climax and the post-climax:

“All of this has given me the slight tone of preclimax” (19).
“They have just glimpsed in me my tender preclimax” (19).
“The preclimax may have been my whole existence up to now” (20).

The rigor of this triadic division also corresponds to a progression of the epiphany itself: pre-epiphany, epiphany, post-epiphany. As implied by our description here, the epiphany consists of the following three moments:

1) The person finds him or herself in an everyday situation;
2) Signs of a strange situation begin to emerge, and the situation becomes a revealing epiphany;
3) The epiphany ends, and the person returns to a modified everyday context.

This division into three parts can be read in yet another way within this narrative context:

⁹ Sant’Anna references his own work on Drummond de Andrade (1982).
1) The protagonist, G.H., awakens to yet another day of her life;
2) She comes face to face with the cockroach in the maid’s room;
3) After this incident she returns to her life, which has somehow been enriched.

This syntagmatic triad — the woman, the woman versus the cockroach and the woman after her encounter with the cockroach — encapsulates an existential and symbolic drama. An adventure like any other mystical and novelistic quest. A quest in which the protagonist is seeking something. In conventional stories this something is a treasure, a talisman, a love interest or a kingdom. “I keep looking, looking. Trying to understand. Trying to give what I have gone through to someone else, and I don’t know who, but I don’t want to be alone with that experience” (3).

In this sense, this is a story about a transformation, a metamorphosis. And the narrator uses the word metamorphosis to talk about the process and changes she undergoes:

“So as of yet my inner metamorphosis makes no sense” (59).

“And I saw, in fascination and horror, the pieces of my rotten mummy clothes fall dry to the floor. I witnessed my own metamorphosis from chrysalis to moist larva, my wings slowly drying and opening out. And a completely new belly made for the ground, a new belly was being reborn” (67).

And thus, as she undergoes the epiphanic metamorphosis, she states: “I had now abandoned myself — I could almost see, there at the start of the path I had just traveled, the body I had left behind” (88). What is happening is that the protagonist is also developing, metamorphosing herself as she assumes her ritual nature.

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Her ritual nature reinforces the epiphany. Ritual is a solemn sequence, that priestly narrative, that slow march that repeats itself, in circles or in a spiral, bringing heights and depths together in a single desire and aspiration.

In Clarice the text is a ritual. That is why her characters are ritualistic. That is why the narrative is the memory of an encounter with epiphanic revelation.

Ritual assumes transformation, metamorphosis: water into wine (or the woman into the cockroach). Ritual brings together the heights and the depths, the sublime and the grotesque, the sacred and the profane, and it eliminates times and spaces.

This author is aware of ritual. Ritual appears implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly when she doesn’t mention it, but enacts it. Explicitly when, in the midst of her journey of consciousness, she offers theories on the nature of ritual itself.

She is thus able to declare:

“I can reorganize myself through the ritual” (91).

Or she can emphatically state:

“[R]itual is the very life of the nucleus carrying itself out, the ritual is not outside it: the ritual is inherent. […] Ritual is the mark of God. […] And every child is born with the same ritual there” (107-08).

Or, even more sharply, she can pronounce:

“But you are afraid, I know that you were always afraid of rituals. But when one is tortured until she becomes a nucleus, then one changes demonically to wanting to serve ritual, even if the ritual is an act of self-consumption — just as for there to be incense one must burn incense” (107).

In this sense, this literary work, having, on the one hand, situated itself explicitly and implicitly in the domain or ritualization and, on the other, being the space of the progressive epiphany, can also be analyzed from the anthropological perspective. Genep studies the ways in which societies organize their rituals. Rituals that signal the metamorphosis of individuals. Their passage from one condition to another. Those moments are signaled by the so-called rites of passage. These rites can be conceived as a sequencing (or narrative) that is also triadic, very reminiscent of what we said earlier about the three phases of the epiphany:

1. Preliminal rituals (= pre-epiphany = pre-climax)
2. Liminal rituals (= epiphany = climax)
3. Postliminal rituals (= post-epiphany = post-climax)

10 Sant’Anna references Genep’s Os ritos de passagem (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978). I have supplied the English translations of phrases and passages cited by Sant’Anna as found in the English translation by Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee.
lay somewhere. Where was my greater destiny? one that wasn't just the plot of my life. The tragedy — which is the greater adventure — had never taken place in me. My personal destiny was all I knew” (17-18).

A very simple occurrence sets into motion the protagonist's immersion into the universe of difference: she decides to straighten up the house. But in an odd way: “Maybe I’d start by organizing the back of the apartment: the maid’s room [...]” (26). And for her, who had confessed that “ordering” was her only true calling (25), entering that room sets off an irreversible process of knowledge of mystery, of enigma, of darkness, of the other, of that which is most abject — the cockroach, as a symbol to be decoded-possessed-devoured.

Despite being in her own home, she is expelled from the realm of familiarity. She is rediscovering everything: “The room was so different from the rest of the apartment that it was going to be like leaving my home and entering another. The room was the opposite of what I had created in my home [...]” (34). It is there that she discovers not just the suitcases engraved with her initials, G.H., but also a drawing on the wall. A primitive etching, a cave drawing, depicting a scene prior to her own existence: a man, a woman and a dog drawn in charcoal on the wall of the maid’s room.

She is in the uterus (or cave) of history, the place where time begins again.

A second instance of the ritual, or the protagonist's adventure, occurs when the cockroach begins to emerge from the dark reaches of the closet and, as if playing the role of the frightening antagonist, is crushed by the door slammed by the panicked G.H.

The cockroach is caught by surprise between two spaces. Half of it is inside the closet and half of it is outside. It will soon discharge its white mass, it will show its eyes and antenna in sheer perplexity, which is also the perplexity of its executioner, who has become just as much a victim.

In reality, the woman is also releasing the white mass of her epiphany and astonishment. She remains paralyzed there as if imprisoned, with “nausea” and “disgust.” The cockroach is more than a cockroach. The room is more than a room. The closet is more than a closet. That explains why she so clearly states: “The narrow passage had been the daunting cockroach, and I had
slipped with disgust through that body of scales and ooze. And I had ended up, all impure myself, embarking, through it, upon my past, which was my continuous present and my continuous future [...]“ (57).

And there they are, the woman and the cockroach: “whatever is caved in at the middle must be female” (85). Middle. Waist. Cut. Line. Separation. Half and half. Two faces. Two halves. Death and rebirth. Ritual and epiphany.

Is it possible that this crossover space might be a reproduction of the threshold rite?

Thresholds and portals are decorated, when not perfumed, at least with blood and other symbols of purification. In Babylon, the “guardians of the threshold” were mythological figures, zoomorphic beings, reminiscent of winged dragons, sphinxes and other monsters. In effect, in Thebes, the Sphinx stood at the entrance to the city. To venture beyond it, to walk past its enigma, was like facing down a thief. It was a rite of passage, which only Oedipus, among others, underwent.

Is it possible that our medieval cathedrals retain something of this rite? Why do we encounter so many monsters posing as caryatids on gothic temples warning us about hell? Perhaps these temples are concrete representations of the difference, of the separation between the sacred and the profane worlds, the heights and the depths, the human and the divine.

And Clarice brings her cockroach into proximity with these symbols. First, by clearly stating: “Sticking forward, erect in the air, a caryatid. But a living caryatid” (46). She also endows the cockroach with other traits that confirm its mythological force: “It was a cockroach as old as salamanders, and chimeras, and griffins and leviathans” (47).

Coinciding with these observations regarding threshold rites is another made by Gennep. He writes of the separation between “personal territory” and the “entrance into neutral territory.” It even seems that we are re-reading Clarice herself, since it was her that at a certain point had said that one must leave the “psychological stage” to penetrate a universe that she repeatedly calls “the neutral” (17), where one’s senses are overcome and where the neutral takes on the meaning of “sainthood” (“The saint scorches himself until he reaches love for the neutral”) (162).

But in addition to this there is a ritualistic illustration upon the threshold, the crossover point and the line, the division that separates the two worlds: “Several rites of frontier crossing have been studied by Trumbull, who cites the following example: when General Grant came to Asyut, a frontier point in upper Egypt, a bull was sacrificed as he disembarked. The head was placed on one side of the gangplank, and the body on the other, so that Grant had to pass between them as he stepped over the spilled blood. The rite of passing between the parts of an object that has been halved, or between two branches, or under something, is one which must, in a certain number of cases, be interpreted as a direct rite of passage by means of which a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one” (Gennep 19).

G.H. is like a cockroach: a subject-object cut in half. She knows she is on the frontier point, which is why she remarks: “Perhaps I already knew that, from those gates onward, there would be no difference between me and the cockroach. Either in my eyes or in the eyes of him who is God” (73).

In the midst of this epiphanic process, within the space where knowledge is ritualized through humiliating and immobilizing trials, knowledge of oneself through the other (G.H. through the cockroach) can also be understood to the extent that (anthropologically) we conceive of the cockroach as a totemic animal. And as a totemic animal (or insect, it makes no difference) it has a dual function.

It is the subject-object of cult, of approximation and seduction. But it is simultaneously the concrete and symbolic being that will be devoured by the believer, by the initiate, by she who partakes of its flesh and blood. Thus, the fusion of one with the other takes place through “comensuality,” a word also used by the narrator in a context in which an approach is made between herself and the cockroach, not just through the other senses, but by the mouth itself. The oozing white mass is a variation of the “Host,” another word used in the text, indicating the ritual’s cannibalistic character. The

11 The word used in the original is “hóstia,” meaning the wafer used in the Catholic sacrament of communion. The other word referenced by Sant’Anna, “comensualidade,” does not in fact appear in the Portuguese version of Lispector’s novel.
"white mass" that the entranced narrator puts into her mouth is the blood and the body of the sacrificed entity. This gesture provides G.H.'s "redemption." It is a gesture of abasement and humiliation, comparable to kissing a leper. "But kissing a leper isn't even goodness. [...] The saint's greatest benefit is to himself" (162). And besides, "the law is that cockroaches will be loved and eaten only by other cockroaches" (163).

If this is not an "agape" in the Christian ritualistic tradition, it is at least a scene of cannibalistic love. The occurrence of cannibalism requires two complementary motions: identification and incorporation; that is how the other is orally introjected. And identification and incorporation both take place in the ambiguous confrontation: G.H. and the cockroach.

"And I was completely new, like a new initiate," the narrator-protagonist says, revealing her awareness of the process (95). "I knew that going in was no sin. But it is perilous, like dying" (73). Thus, as she is experiencing the climax of the epiphany and liminality, metaphors for birth and death start to appear: "ovaries," "abortion," "pregnancy," "mother," "daughter," etc.

Given that the atmosphere is tinged with the primitive celebration of ancestral rites, it is no surprise that the text begins to semantically reinforce this imagery with references such as "cavern," "desert," and "cave drawing." There is a return to the most ancient moment in man's history, the era when man and animal (woman and cockroach) lived in the crudeness of the essence.

But the text has, on the other hand, a specific chronology. An everyday, novelistic chronology that suddenly takes on a mythical and symbolic character. The protagonist begins to straighten up the house in the morning. Around eleven o'clock something begins to change: "It is 11:00 a.m. in Brazil. It is now. That means exactly now. Now is time swollen as far as it can be swollen. [...] Time quivers like a stationary balloon. The air, fertile and panting. Until, with a national anthem, the tolling of 11:30 cuts the balloon's restraining ropes. And suddenly we'll all reach noon" (72).

The first great flight occurs at midday. Midday. Again the line that separates the two parts of the sign woman/cockroach. Duplicity. Unicity. As Chevalier and Cheerbrant remind us, noon and midnight are magical hours, crossover spaces like the summer and winter solstices. At midday the shadows vanish. In tantric esotericism, which bears some relation to Clarice's text, these times are moments of absolute rest and beatitude. The "spiritual sun" mixes with the physical sun. This is why esoteric thought will develop a number of oxymorons related to these times: the luminous midnight and the dark midday. Oxymorons that, as we will observe later, serve as scaffolding for the narrator's consciousness.

It would not be inappropriate to see a certain connection between the chapter in which, upon looking away from the room and spotting the adjacent favela, the narrator beholds fantastic visions beyond the everyday context and what is known as the revelation of the "machine of the world," which has appeared in Western literature from the Middle Ages to our time. In effect, she unveils "the empire of the present" (97). She is transported by time, envisioning the Dardanelles and Assyrian merchants; she travels to the past and the future ("Perhaps I had excavated the future") (98). And she begins to "see." And that verb becomes significant to her revelation:

"I saw like someone who is never going to tell. I saw with the lack of commitment of someone who is not even going to tell herself. I saw very like someone who will never need to understand what she saw" (98).

The narrator calls what happens a "visual meditation" (104), a "hallucinatory" scene on the frontier of time and space. At midday. The protagonist is crossing "El Khala, nothing," the "Tanesruft, the country of fear," the "Tinirli, land beyond the pasture regions" (102).

Is the narrative's ritual aspect exhausted here? No. Another door to the labyrinth is opened. Because the character's quest is also another theme belonging to mysticism and anthropology, the theme of "the first time." There is a recurring claim that the experiences that are occurring are always happening as if it were "the first time."

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12 Although Freud developed the concept of "introjection," it was first introduced by Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, who defined it as "taking into the ego parts of the outside world and making them the object of unconscious fantasies" (Clark).

13 Sant'Anna references Chevalier and Cheerbrant.
A "first time" that repeats cyclically, concentrically, reaffirming a spiraling structure. Spiraling upward in the mythical and mystical sense. As if the circles that structure Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise comprised a pattern that could, in some way, be repeated here.

More than an exercise of the "eternal return," the inscription of the "first time" is the constant reaffirmation of an "interchange" between life-and-death, an exemplification of a constant re-initiation, a journey to the "nucleus" of things. It is also a structure typical of rites of passage. As Gennep points out, "[R]ites of passage do not appear in their complete form, are not greatly emphasized or do not even exist except at the time of the first transition from one social category to another" (175).

Thus, the "first pregnancy," the "birth of a first child," the "first haircut," the "first tooth," the "first solid food," the "first engagement," the "first coitus," etc., all have an initiatory function, for the individual and for the community. And this is seen very clearly in Clarice's writings. A reading of her other novels and short stories makes abundantly clear how this topic circulates in and between her works. In the case of The Passion according to G.H., this is more obvious, and even the concentric structure of the chapters, each repeating the last phrase of the previous one, is a reminder of the re-initiation of writing and of experience.

This is evidenced in expressions such as:

"If I knew the loneliness of those first steps. It was as though I had died and was taking my first steps alone into another life" (55-56).

"As though at last I was for the first time in balance with Nature" (45).

What else could we say about this from our perspective that privileges the phenomenon of the epiphany and the rite of passage?

The phenomenon of the epiphany and the rite of passage can be read in another, even more enriching way.

I am referring to the application of catastrophe theory. This theory, which comes from mathematics but is also applicable to physics, geology and even to linguistics, is helpful in clarifying aspects of Clarice's writings and is also relevant to the theorization of epiphany and ritual in which we are engaged. The theory is of interest because it studies abrupt movements within systems, the ways in which certain systems, whether organic, mechanical or social, enter into crisis, suffer collapse or undergo sudden modifications. It is a method of establishing the profiles of the "tsunamis" and "earthquakes" in systems or, as used by John Lowe, a way to study the collapse of Mayan culture.14

Clearly, there is a difference between the apocalypse and the collapse that occurs in organic, physical or social systems. In the case of a biological catastrophe, when death occurs, it cannot be reestablished. The same is true of certain machines that cannot always be repaired. However, societies don't always die out completely. There may be an apocalypse, but there is a new genesis. A re-initiation. A re-initiation that also affects a narrative structure, like the one we are analyzing, after the catastrophe or "fall," as the author prefers to call it.

Perhaps catastrophe theory could be (cautiously) applied to art history. Perhaps it would help us to better understand the deaths and transformations of styles. Perhaps art itself could be understood after the gale, the earthquake and the eruption that was Romanticism's Strung und Drang. In the same way, we could study what was called Modernism's "rupture," Futurist and Dadaist "anti-art" as "catastrophic" movements needed to revitalize the system.15

Curiously, the study of Modernism's "rupture" has usually been predicated on an opposition to the term "tradition," as if these two terms were two trays of a scale representing history's continuously recreated dialectic.

In general terms, in a more internal-sense related to Clarice's book, we could say that what I have been calling epiphany and liminality are inscribed within the domain of catastrophe. Catastrophe where the protagonist disintegrates, turns inside out,
reveals her contradictory nature and lives an existential nausea and
disgust. It is the moment in which everything and its reverse — or
nothing — are experienced, of multiplicity and its reverse — or
neutrality.

And reaffirming in paraphrased fashion my critical text and
the concentric structure of the analyzed text, a return to the triadic
structure I have referred to previously in order to expand upon it.
And thus we would have:

1. pre-catastrophe (= pre-epiphany, preliminary rituals):
   corresponding to that which the author calls “prior organization” (3);
2. catastrophe (= epiphany, liminal rituals): corresponding to
   the “profound disorganization” (3);
3. post-catastrophe (= post-epiphany, postliminal rituals): the
   emergence of a new organization of the system.

The Passion according to G.H. begins with a reference to the
duality between organization/disorganization. The narrator is
going to recount something that happened to her the previous day
that she has found disturbing ever since. With this occurrence she
lost her “balance,” she lost the “third leg,” which was her support
(4). She confesses that she had to learn about “no longer fitting into a
system,” “to have to run the holy risk of chance” (5). And to replace
“fate with probability” (5).

Thus, G.H., who by profession is a sculptor (which is revealing,
since it tells us she was accustomed to giving shape and sense to
volumes and masses), perceives that she is facing the chaos, the
collapse, the catastrophe of her own consciousness.

Earlier she had told herself:
“Never a liked putting things in their places. I think it’s my
only true calling” (25).

“Ordering is finding the best form. If I had been a domestic
like that, I wouldn’t even have needed my dilettantish sculpture”
(25).

And straightening up is the reason she enters the maid’s room.
That is where the catastrophe, the total disorganization of her being,
takes place. She is suddenly overcome with sensations of “horror,”
“terror,” “dying.” The narrative begins to be marked by words such
as “tragedy,” “hell” and “fall.” She then records the “collapse of
my culture and my humanity,” the sensation that she is “sinking
centuries and centuries” and that she is giving up her “last human

remnants” in that desert in which everything turns to nothing and
moves toward neutrality (95, 49, 87).

That catastrophe has a structural connection with a classical and
mythological narrative topos: the fall of the hero, the fall into a hole,
from a cliff, into the hells of dark places filled with theriomorphic
figures. This also happens to Alice in Lewis Carroll’s novel, who
falls into a hole that reveals portals to a magical world; it happens
to Jonah, who is taken into the belly of a whale, and to Joseph, who
is placed into a hole by his brothers only to emerge into the glory of
Egypt’s royal court.

Catastrophes are also related to the grotesque. Firstly because,
as Wolfgang Kayser points out, the grotesque is characterized by
a violent change within the system that provokes uncertainty and
instability. In the grotesque there is a breach in the moral order
and in the physical universe. Moreover, in the grotesque the world
reveals its “strangeness” and nothing can be trusted. And as a game
involving the absurd it opens up spaces for demonic aspects, the
presence of fissures, the cracks through which the devil enters.

And part of this narrative, through its catastrophic and
grotesque perspective, is dedicated to approximations to the ritual
of the black sabbath, the black mass. Here the emphasis on duality
is reaffirmed through oxymorons because this catastrophe creates a
new world, this sabbath brings the narrator the “joy of Hell”:

“I had come into the Sabbath orgy. I know how what is done
in the darkness of the mountains during the nights of orgy. I know! I
know with horror; things are enjoyed. The thing of which things are
made is delighted in — that is the brute joy of black magic. It was
that neutrality that I experienced — neutrality was my true cultural
broth. I kept going on, and I was feeling the ‘joy of Hell’” (94).

This is why, as paradoxical as it may sound, this narrative is
at once grotesque and sublime. It is the sublime that, whether
present or absent, gives meaning to the grotesque. The grotesque
is constructed in relation to the sublime. It is because of an ancient
theoretical error that we study them separately.

It was not only the heroes that experienced a “fall” that were led
to the sublime (Dante, Jonah, Joseph or Christ himself), but insects

16 Sant’Anna references the English version of Kayser.
(like that cockroach) are also the zoomorphoses of the sublime. In the lower grotesque we find snakes and all types of creeping and crawling animals; the toads gazing at the stars and the rats aspiring to transform themselves into bats or angels. And in this narrative, G.H. presents in the figure of the cockroach that emerges from the dark reaches of the closet the grotesque that emerges and wants to undergo a metamorphosis via epiphany, liminality and the rite of passage. And that cockroach preserves the paradigm of the grotesque when the narrator likens its appearance to that of the "lobster," the "beetle" and even that of the crocodile, going so far as to say: "I have only loathing for crocodiles' crawling because I am not a crocodile" (105, 108).

When I relate the grotesque to the sublime I do so not only by connecting it structurally to the luminous verticality of the epiphany and the tension of the liminal space and ritual, but also to emphasize another aspect of the narrative, which is precisely its vocation for the sublime. Essayists such as Benedicto Nunes have already underscored certain similarities between the thought of Tao-Teh-Ching, Saint John of the Cross and certain passages of the text we are analyzing. The book's title is not exactly innocent in this regard. It is reminiscent of a passion according to Saint Matthew, according to Saint John, etc. And references to Christ are clearly present. Words such as "faith," "passion," "miracle," "saints," "punishment," "redemption," "condemnation," "transcendence," "sacrifice," as well as expressions like "forbidden fruit," "via crucis," not to mention the definitions of God, the references to Hell, to the lives of saints — all of this, at the basic level of content analysis, dramatizes the vocation of the sublime antagonized by the grotesque.

And there is a detail to underscore here. The language used to convey the religious content follows a hieratical structure. Hieratical in the sense of sacred, elevated, but above all in relation to the connotation that hieratical shares with hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphic is the sacred writing of the priests, which is opposed to the more popular and profane demotic script. "Hieroglyph" is a word that the narrator uses several times. Using it to reaffirm the hieratical nature of the text but also to invoke ideas such as enigma, mystery, allowing critics to make connections between the hieroglyph and dreams, in the Freudian tradition. It is perhaps as hieratical text and hieroglyph that the text's introductory note, which states as follows, should be read: "But I would be happy if it were read only by people whose outlook is fully formed. People who know that an approach — to anything whatsoever — must be carried out gradually and laboriously, that it must traverse even the very opposite of what is being approached" (v).

This is a language-subject, divinized by the ritual that develops. It is not a language-object, mere content revealing banalities. In this sense it is a language-ritual. That explains its circular, closed nature and the fact that its composition has the tone of "oratorio" — a term that reappears here and there giving the epiphany added solemnity. Like an oratorio with its counterpoints and fugues, with various themes spinning and spiraling upward, calling to mind the volutes of baroque cathedrals pointing toward the infinite. Cathedrals that combine the grotesque and the sublime in a single dialectic and oxymoron. And yet all of this flows from something quite small that happens between a woman and a cockroach in an apartment:

"But the vastness grew within the small room, the mute oratorio opened it out in vibrations that reached the crack in the ceiling. The oratorio wasn't a prayer; it didn't ask for anything. Passions in the form of an oratorio" (74).

Passions in the form of an oratorio can be studied in a different way. Through, for example, the game established between the numbers three, two and one. In this case, the metaphysical semantics of the text are crossed with mathematical values.

I have already noted that there exists in the text, especially at the beginning, an insistence on the number three, established by the metaphor of the "third leg," which represents balance and the pre-epiphany. I then showed how entrance into liminality implies the fragility of standing on two feet. The number two, exemplified by the duality woman-cockroach, carries with it a line, a separation represented metaphorically by the door that cuts in half and crushes the protagonist, allowing her catastrophic consciousness to spill out.

Let us now read closely one of the book's paragraphs that will allow us to feel how the narrator metaphorically develops
the numerical theme throughout her text. And it is a text, I would emphasize, that emerges in the midst of her fall, during one of the sharpest moments of the revelation:

"I went into what exists between the number one and the number two, how I say the mysterious, fiery line, how it is a surreptitious line. Between two musical notes there exists another note, between two facts there exists another fact, between two grains of sand, no matter how close together they are, there exists an interval of space, there exists a sensing between sensing — in the interstices of primordial matter there is the mysterious, fiery line that is the world's breathing, and the world's continual breathing is what we hear and call silence" (90).

What we have here is a theory of the interstice, the interval, the slit, the crack between the number one and the number two, between subject and object, between two unities. And the narrative will be precisely the discovery of that spellbinding void in the discontinuity of the house itself, when one enters the void that is the room and that cockroach, which is something between one musical note and another, between one fact and another, between two grains of sand, emerges through a crack from the depths of the closet.

As Oscar Handlin observes in *Truth in History*, the number three, despite its seductive nature, does not have the mathematical significance of the numbers one or two. In these, the concept of the number is exhausted. We could say that the infinite is created with the appearance of the number two. Both discontinuity and continuity are based on the two founding unities 1 and 2. And it is with these two primordial unities that narratives and history are written. They also give birth to the frightening binary expression of computers. The infinite can be calculated with these two initial digits. They can be used to reach figures that are quantitatively unfathomable by the creeping reason of that cockroach known as man.

It can be said, then, that the first two terms, the initial two letters/words are the beginning of an infinite narrative sequence. Upon reaching her second night, Scheherazade had guaranteed her safety forever. Her task was to make it to the second night from which all of the others would flow as a consequence. This explains why the number one thousand and one (1001) nights can be read as a lengthening of the interval between the first unit (1) and the second (1), with the two intervening zeros representing something like periodic decimals extending life, time and the survival of love by alternating between the two digits of day and night.

Those two digits (the woman and the cockroach) share a relationship as binary complements. They constitute the seed out of which grow a series of ramifications, bifurcations and dualities that carry the entire narrative: organization/disorganization, fear/hope, good/evil, lose/win, lose/find, enter/exit, integrate/disintegrate, to arrange/to mess up, truth/lies, seeing/not seeing, love/lack, hell/paradise, failure/success, silence/noise, now/eternity, etc.

But these are not simply irreconcilably opposed pairs. They are crossroads, veritable "crossover places" of the narrative of consciousness. Actually, we could say that these oppositions are not just a seed but the blooming of a "decision tree," as mathematicians say. Or, in the language of Clarice, an "indecision" tree.

Therefore, let us imagine, following Francisco Antônio Dória's explanation of what constitutes binary systems, that when a person faces a "decision tree" he is at a "crossroads." "The individual can take the road to the right or to the left. He takes the one on the right. Later on, he encounters another crossroads. This time, he takes the road on the left and, after a while, finds himself at a third crossroads and decides to go right, etc., until he reaches the place he is seeking. How could we represent the route that is followed? We could say thus: he starts out from this point, then turns to the right, then to the left and so forth, until reaching the destination. But these directions can be abbreviated using numbers from the binary system: if we write a "0" each time he turns right and a "1" each time he turns left, the route followed would correspond to a number within the system, such as 1011000... Even if we were to imagine a route with an infinite number of bifurcations, we could show how each possible
permutation is a number that can be represented by a number in the binary system and how any natural number will correspond to a possible route.”

From a stylistic and narrative-structure perspective, this structure finds a parallel in the structure of The Passion according to G.H. Each of the protagonist’s steps is a choice between dualities. Beginning with the original/originating option of entering the room, “entering” the closet, “entering” the cockroach, everything points to an unredeemable “detour” that leads to the luminous blooming of the epiphany’s tree. And if I were to study this more profoundly and at greater length, it would be sufficient to appeal to the meanings of the word “root,” which is so often disseminated, planted and rooted in the narrative. And if necessary, I could complement that analysis with the metaphors of the “fruit of good and of evil,” which sometimes appear together in the same paragraph where the “root” of the options is found and, finally, I could clear away the leaves covering all of the reader’s knowledge concerning the metaphor of the “tree of life” that is found in the folklore of many cultures and is present in this narrative’s subsoil as well (64).

However, from a stylistic point of view, it would be sufficient to point out that we find on the surface of this text a “discrete” sequence of numbers/signs. A series of meanings stemming from the original trunk of options. Thus, not only do the chapters comprise a narrative tree with one growing forth from the other, but the paragraphs themselves are extensions of one another, as if each sprouted new meanings. Or, returning to the geological metaphor, which is also relevant, as if there were slippage between the signifiers on the text’s crust, marking the semantic-catastrophic mutations of the epiphany.

Thus, there is slippage from “fear” to “hope,” from “failure” to “silence,” from “lack” to “love,” from “madness” to “condemnation.” And these geo-vocabulary slides occur to such an extent that the terms are brought into a neutral kind of synonymy:

“From now on I could call anything the name I invented for it: in the dry room one could do that, for any name would do since none would do. Within the dry vault sounds, everything could be called anything, because everything would be changed into the same resonating muteness” (88).

Finally, to close this section or these theoretical ramifications, it is important to remember that the issue of the void between the 1 and the 2, the discovery of the interstice between two notes and the metaphysics of binary thought relate to the concept of the “error.” A concept that is very much identified with literature, as well as with mathematics and philosophy.

As Francisco Antônio Dória also points out, “systematic errors of calculation are a requirement of the structure of the process of its discontinuity.” He adds that: “Errors are always caused by the intromission of the real world into the closed off and coherent world of theory.”

What does all this have to do with our analysis?

It becomes clear enough when we read Clarice’s statement that, “The error is the error of my unalterable work methods” (104). Or, when she provides a more extensive and thoughtful theorization of the topic:

“And I must not forget, at the start of the work, to be prepared to make mistakes. Not forget that mistakes had often proved to be my path. Every time what I thought or felt didn’t work out […] a space would somehow open up, and if I had had the courage before I would have gone in through it. But I had always been afraid of delirium and error. My error, however, had to be the path of truth: for only when I err do I get away from what I know and what I understand. If ‘truth’ were where I can understand […] it would end up being but a small truth, my-sized” (101).

This is why we can speak not just of “errors” but also of an epiphanic errancy. A movement by difference, by fault or breach. A way of covering the distance between the 1 and the 2, between all of the opposites that make up the oxymoronic structure of this narrative/consciousness-in-progress.

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19 Sant’Anna references Katz et al., but no page number is provided. The English translation is my own.

20 Sant’Anna cites page 163 of the work mentioned in the previous note. The English translation is again my own.
The opposites that make up the oxymoronic structure of this narrative/consciousness-in-progress can be analyzed on the basis of the minimal level of the phrase, of the structure of the protagonist or on the narrative’s broader planes.

And if I have written of oxymorons throughout this analysis it is because they structure Clarice’s text. An oxymoron is an (apparently) contradictory statement. As in the example from Cicero: "eloquent silence." The oxymoron is armed with dualities and antitheses. As Joseph Shipley points out, oxymorons are manifest through synecosis, antithesis, enantiosis, antistoichion and synaesthesia.\(^{21}\) In another type of reading it would be interesting to illustrate the differences between these various kinds of oxymorons. Here, however, I am only interested in the basic structure of these violent oppositions. Oppositions that reveal the rupture and the effort of absurd connections. To be exact, oxymorons are sutures between language and thought. Catastrophic sutures. They are the marks left by a scar, a reminder of the injury to the skin left exposed to the phrase.

These are just a few of the innumerable examples to be found in the text:

"Don’t let me make alone this already-made decision” (89).
"And my mute raucousness was by then the raucousness [...]” (86).
"I can only achieve the depersonality of silence if I have first built an entire voice” (169).
"However, I have experienced this reality with a sense of the unreality of reality” (92).
"And Hell is not the torture of pain! it is the torture of a certain joy” (94).
"If I had not needed so much of myself to form my life, I would have had life!” (136).
"[I]t has been my own errant life that has proclaimed me the right to one” (146).

\(^{21}\) Sant’Anna does not provide a citation for the source of this conceptualization, but it corresponds to pages 417-18 of Shipley.

“I had always had a sort of love for tedium. And a continual hatred of it” (134).
“The opacity reverberated in my eyes” (130).
"[I]t was fear of my lack of fear” (87).
"I was now worse than my very self!” (120).
"Living isn’t livable” (13).
"Nothingness is everything, neutrality is the essence of life, neutrality is violent.”\(^{22}\)
"Hell is the pain like pleasure” (113).
"[...] a horrible, happy indisposition” (78).

How can the presence of these logically absurd statements in the author’s expression be explained?

The oxymorons correspond to other oxymorons and paradoxes throughout the text. For example, its story is built upon the foundation of a deconstruction. The novel (or novella) begins with a catastrophe. It is a work on language that bases itself on the negation of conventional language. That is why the author declares halfway through the text that:

"I know — through my own personal witness — that at the outset of this search of mine I hadn’t the slightest idea what kind of language would slowly be revealed to me until I could one day reach Constantinople” (100).

In another section in which she rediscovers how to speak with God, she observes:

"[T]o speak to God, I must put together unconnected syllables” (154).

It is clear, then, that the oxymoron is found at the three levels of the text’s structural analysis: narration, characters and language. At the character level, for example, we see the confrontation between the woman and the cockroach — forms in apparent conflict, but that find solidarity as the narrative unfolds. And, finally, at the linguistic level the structure of oxymorons and paradoxes is repeated in phrases that are at times logically and grammatically "catastrophic" because they subvert the traditional linguistic order. For example:

\(^{22}\) The exact phrase provided here by Sant’Anna is not present in The Passion according to G.H. but appears, rather, to be a paraphrase of similar ideas expressed in many parts of the novel. The translation is therefore my own.
"I want what I love you" (31).
"It was finally now" (72).
"Just as we die without knowing where we go" (73).

These phrases are nevertheless filled with the narrative’s logic/ilogic, and they are understood in the course of the story by the reader, who, by now, has spent plenty of time in the author’s strange universe.

Thus, to summarize, we could say that The Passion according to C.H. is an anti-novel with anti-characters, written in an anti-language. And that is what gives it its vitality.

The negation effect, the name by which this method of thought and style could be called, can also be found existing microscopically at the margins of some words via the use of the prefixes “de-” and “un-/in-“ where ideas appear suggesting a level of negation, while simultaneously reaffirming something. It is as if the author were engaged in an absurdly dialectical journey of discovery, like Columbus, from the East to the West, despite the logic of the maps.

"[...] only perdition guiding me, only error guiding me" (129-30).

"Depersonalization as the great objectification of oneself" (168).
"The gradual deheroization of oneself [...]" (168).
"To desist is life’s most sacred choice" (170).
"Will I have the courage to use an unprotected heart [...]? " (7).

The use of the prefixes “in-“ and “un-“ to suggest the idea of reversal or negation is just as insistent. Words such as “uninterrupted,” “unreachable,” “unexpected,” “immobilized,” “inseparable,” “insipid,” “inexpressible,” “inexorable,” “impossible,” “indiffERENCE,” “impalpable,” “unsayable,” “irresolvable,” etc., abound in the text.

At times the negation effect is concentrated intensively in a single paragraph:

"And if we have presentiments it is because we feel that we are being alarmingly used by God, we feel alarmingly that we are being used with an intense and uninterrupted pleasure — moreover, up to now our salvation has been one of being at least so used, we are not useless, we have been made intense use of by God; body and soul and life are for that: for someone’s interchange and ecstasy. Disquieted, we feel that we are being used every minute — but that awakens in us the disquieting desire to use as well" (145).

This intensive “use” (to borrow the author’s semantics) of negation reaches a level of identification with the dialectic of negation of negation. In other words, a process by which a “minus” plus another “minus” equals a “plus,” just like in mathematics. A double negation that becomes an affirmation. It is thus that the anti-narrative becomes a narrative, that the anti-protagonist becomes a protagonist and the anti-tongue becomes a tongue.

And thus we approach the end of this critical trajectory. But not before first pointing out the following: the trajectory of the protagonist, in her backward development, can be interpreted in two ways. First as a process of “deheroization” and, secondly, as identifying with the “neutral life,” which is related to the concept of homeostasis.

Significantly, “deheroization” is a word that the author invented herself. The prefix “de-” does not cancel the sense of the word “hero,” but only modifies it. It is another one of the protagonist’s “labors.” What she seeks in the spaces of liminality and catastrophe is revitalization through oxymoronic dialectic. This is why the narrator states:

rendered as “unreachable” and “ininterrupção” and “ininterrupto” both translated as “uninterrupted”). “Indeterminável,” another word cited by Sant’Anna here, does not in fact appear in Lispector’s novel in Portuguese.

26 Sant’Anna italicizes a number of words that illustrate his emphasis on the prefix “in-.” In Sousa’s translation, some of these are rendered in ways that preserve the similar prefixes “un-” and “dis-,” which I have also italicized. Pairs whose translation effaces the effect Sant’Anna is analyzing include: “iniquitante”/“alarmingly” and “inútil”/“useless.”

27 Sant’Anna again evokes the double meaning of “lingua” as tongue and language here: “esta anti-língua(agem) [...]” See also note 8.
"The gradual deheroiization of myself is the true labor that is performed under merely apparent labor [...]" (168).

"Deheroiization is the grand failure of a life. Not everyone can fail because it is such hard work, one must first climb painfully up to get to the height to fall from [...]" (169).

And just as heroes "fall" into the depths of Hell, G.H. "falls" metamorphosing into the cockroach, ambiguously living the grotesque and the sublime. That is where what the author calls "depersonalization" occurs: "Depersonalization as the great objectification of oneself" (168).

Indeed, that process of "deheroization" and "depersonalization" is slow and gradual. Technically, she goes through what literary and anthropological analyses call the code of the senses. In other words: the mythological and conventional trajectory of the hero depends on his ability to decode messages that are sent to him through the senses: sight, touch, taste, etc. His possibilities for success against the enemy dragons derive from his ability to comprehend implicit messages. The story of all heroes is, therefore, the story of their perceptions and their subsequent ability to react to them.

In the case of our anti-hero, the task is the opposite. Her senses are heightened at the beginning, but she realizes that she will only be able to reach the center of her perception if she does not allow herself to be deceived by them. So, at the beginning, she crosses those senses, mixing them together to create a synesthesia (which is one of the forms used in oxymorons) and, later, seeks the "neutrality" of those same senses as a way in which to overcome them. And the word "neutral" is repeated as an "atonal" word along with others such as "tasteless," "inexpressive," "silence," all of which reveal a vocation for a minimal life, "the living thing without name or taste or smell was disgusting. Insipidity: taste was no longer anything more than an aftertaste: my own aftertaste" (78). It is when this zero-degree life manifests itself that she realizes that "up to then my corrupted senses were mute to the taste of things" (95).

Significantly, there is a connection between this search for homeostasis and the Nirvana principle that Freud analyzes. And, reactivating the technique of intertextuality that I cited at the beginning of this essay, I quote one of my own works in which I treated this matter in a manner that is quite relevant to Clarice's project: "Aspiring to that degree of inactivity, to that state of rest, to that perfect sleep, the Nirvana principle presents itself as a twin brother of death itself, but it is also life, and life without the threat of death. This is what Norman Brown, from the perspective of biology, calls 'homeostasis': the aspiration of an organism to reach a state of inactivity, to eliminate all tension and achieve a perfectly balanced metabolism. This stage would be the ultimate objective of he who consciously or unconsciously submits to the 'compulsive repetition' by experiencing the 'pleasure principle' via poetic activity."

This can be seen to occur in the text even from an aesthetic point of view, since in one of the central chapters the narrator expounds on the minimalistic nature of her own writing style. She confirms that she is seeking "negative modes" in art, the "atonal," the "inexpressive." But she is doing so through an oxymoronic structure in which she is seeking "exasperated atonality" and "inexpressive happiness," because she knows that "only something with weight can fly" (135).

There is a minimalism to this work. But it is an excessive minimalism.

An excessive and exuberant minimalism. Exuberance of the excess of inner life. Inner life that always follows the rhythm of catastrophic consciousness. Catastrophically and epiphanically restored. Restored by the dialectical tension between the number one and the number two (the woman and the cockroach), discharged to the third leg of common sense. Common sense that the critic is unable to abandon. Therefore, unable to contain himself within the purity of the number two, he seizes upon syntagmatic triads and other, related models to expose the inner rite of passage and their deheroiization of G.H.

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In this sense, every analysis is an irreversible oxymoron that combines success and failure. Complete success would be the total paraphrase of the original text in a minimalistic game of mirrors. Without excesses. Perfect.

28 Sant'Anna indicates that the quotation is from page 253 of his work on Drummond de Andrade. The English translation is my own.
However, since every analysis is also a gesture of love, I can conclude by saying that this critical approach could have been called "The Cockroach." Another possible title could be "The Murder of the Cockroach." Or even "How to Kill Cockroaches." So I have used several approaches, all true since none of them is unfaithful to the critique. They are several possibilities that could just as easily be a thousand and one, beginning over and over again, as in the myth of Scheherazade.

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