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Into the Roach's Mouth: Beyond the Postmodern Discourse on Silence in Clarice Lispector's The Passion According to G.H.

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Abstract

In Clarice Lispector's novel *The Passion According to G.H.* the protagonist experiences a complete break from reality when she enters her maid's room and encounters a cockroach. The entire plot is predicated on this encounter, but the existential crisis is filtered through a quest for a resounding silence – one that will liberate G.H. from the shackles of a preorganized existence. This thesis will explore Clarice Lispector's use of silence as it functions in relation to a repurposed posthuman theory. By investigating Lispector's preoccupation with the "thingness" of being, I expose the limitations of postmodern feminism and offer a way out of binary thought by moving through Lispectorian silence. To value the silence, we must first recognize the posthuman undercurrent of *The Passion According to G.H.* to cut against the traditional feminist appraisal of Lispector's text. Lispector's narrative is a work of feminism through the ways in which it confronts the uncomfortable and self-referential maze of existence to encourage a reevaluation of feminist essentialism – we can even look at the text as a work of posthuman feminism. The question then stands: How does Clarice Lispector utilize moments of silence in the novel *The Passion According to G.H.* for the sake of establishing a language beyond the binaries that drive past feminist theories and how can silence become a space of liberation if apprehending Lispector's text as a post-humanistic ethos? First, we will analyze Lispector's use of silence as language fails to capture a truth beyond the accretions of humanity. Then, we look at Lispector's use of silence as it incites questions about the figurations of what counts as a subject, moving beyond classifications of gender identity and sexuality, and incorporating the strange, the abject, the insane, the inhuman and beyond. Finally, we look at Lispector's use of silence to evaluate liminal spaces that reveal a new way of looking at the posthuman condition. Whereas many post-humanists reject the anthropomorphized being, I argue that Clarice Lispector

is intimating an interconnectedness that upholds human differences with the intention that we relinquish the categories and social forces that we use to build the human form.

Keywords: Clarice Lispector, silence, posthumanism, nomadism, feminism, subject, object, mutability

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Into the Roach's Mouth: Beyond the Postmodern Discourse on Silence in Clarice

Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.*

by

Eman Halimeh

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

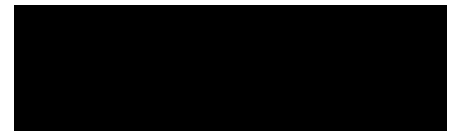
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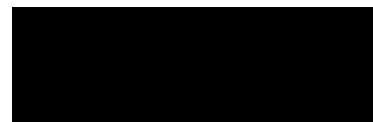
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INTO THE ROACH'S MOUTH: BEYOND THE POSTMODERN DISCOURSE ON
SILENCE IN CLARICE LISPECTOR'S *THE PASSION ACCORDING TO G.H.*

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Into the Roach's Mouth: Beyond the Postmodern Discourse on Silence in Clarice
Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.*

In Clarice Lispector's novel, *The Passion According to G.H.* the protagonist stands at the edge of a complete existential crisis, but at this precipice, there is a resounding silence: "the continual breathing of the world is what we hear and call silence" (65). G.H. comes to this conclusion while reminiscing about a transformative experience involving the remnants of a cockroach. However, this conclusion seems illogical because how can we hear the breath of the world and still call it silence? It is this type of paradoxical formulation that informs our reading of *The Passion* as we come to understand that for Lispector, silence is not always indicative of absence, and absence is not always empty.

G.H. asks for the reader's hand before proceeding; perhaps she needs stabilization in her quest for self-realization, but more likely, she is asking us to remove the shackles of a preorganized existence, to abandon our "human organization" and follow her into a void imbued with what she calls "a neutral love." She asks for our hand, knowing that the journey ahead will be arduous: "it's bad to hold my hand. It's bad to be left without air in that collapsed mine where I brought you without mercy" and though we never leave her apartment, G.H. takes us into a labyrinth of language in which the text twists and spirals through a series of self-reflexive passages (64-65). The narrator's interior monologue comes through in stutters and disrupts the readers' perception of established linguistic norms. Indeed, Lispector crafts a text that questions itself and interrupts its own stream of consciousness as G.H. contends with her experience in her former maid's room: "the whole world that was me shriveled up in fatigue, I could no longer bear on my shoulders — what? — and was succumbing to a tension that I didn't know had always been mine" (30). Though G.H. is speaking here, Lispector manipulates the syntax to

amplify this narrator's crisis, disjoining the sentence to reflect G.H.'s fragmented mental state. The speaker is talking to herself, but the effect Lispector creates is a text with multiple voices and spaces of silence between these voices. These silences are represented by the dashes that Lispector uses throughout the text, allowing her to play with the syntax and the tone of the work. Critic Tace Hedrick explores Lispector's writing style and the issues with translating her work from Portuguese to English, indicating that an essential Lispectorian rhetoric is lost in translation. Yet, he stresses a critical point when looking at Lispector's work in both English and Portuguese: "her most important writerly concerns: the connection between language and being-female" (58).

The connection between language and being female is an integral aspect across all Lispector's work. However, it is most evident through what Lispector leaves out of the text. It is this that is left out, the silence of what cannot be captured by language, that emphasizes her feminine voice. There is something to be said about these in between spaces of Lispector's fiction, and an analysis of *The Passion* is fundamental for investigating this liminality. Hedrick searches for a connection between language and being female, but Lispector cannot provide that link by way of writing because the foundation of language comes under fire as the protagonist rips away the vestiges of a socially constructed identity. The protagonist grapples with the failure of language and in doing so highlights an enigmatic relationship between sound and silence. Through G.H., Lispector interrogates this relationship and questions the legitimacy of traditional social conventions where voice equates to agency and silence equates to oppression, but Lispector pushes the idea of silence even further suggesting that it has a voice or a specific tenor, and within this echoing silence we can begin to understand Lispector's text as a way of thinking about the posthuman condition. By reading through Lispectorian silences I propose a new way of

approaching the posthuman condition, one that is asserted by theorists like Kristen Trader who argues for a repositioning of the post-human which “encompasses more than a binary counterpart or theoretical sequel to humanism” instead we need to evaluate our perception of humanity “by viewing the world as a collection of vast networks, information exchange, and distributed power in which humanity is merely a part of a much larger whole” (203).

By engaging with Lispector’s silence through this repurposed posthuman lens, *The Passion According to G.H.* challenges the structures of language, by asserting a type of writing that undermines phallogentric language. In doing so, Lispector breaks away from grammatical rules, leaving proper capitals and punctuation out of most sentences in the text, and makes a radical suggestion: “Ah, could it be that we were not originally human? and that, out of practical necessity, we became human?” (77). What I think Lispector is suggesting here is that the human developed as a response to the disorder of silence. This is not to say that humanity is in itself a repressive force, but that in the process of humanization a necessary chaos was lost and the differences that structure humanity also became weaponized as social hierarchies developed. The “human” was a practical necessity, but Lispector suggests that in our effort to civilize we lost the forces that connected all material beings: “the vital element that binds us” (66). In becoming human Lispector suggests that the “practical necessity” became the groups, factions, and boundaries erected to ensure an organized world, but men and women became defined by the conventions of society. The protagonist spends the entire book attempting to tap into what is real, but what is real cannot be captured by language, leaving humans at the mercy of a perpetual false reality defined by the words, and by extension, the various groups we create to establish order.

Even G.H. recognizes these necessary differences as part of a social order when she explains her own personal level of freedom as a woman in a restrictive society:

[P]eople refer to me as someone who does sculptures that wouldn't be bad if they were less amateurish. For a woman this reputation means a lot socially, and placed me, for others as for myself, in a region that is socially between women and men. Which granted me far more freedom to be a woman, since I didn't have to take formal care to be one (18).

G.H. recognizes her privilege and position as part of the Brazilian elite, but the narrator interjects a sardonic tone by referring to G.H. as an amateur. This is slightly ironic because it would seem a professional sculptor would earn more privilege than what G.H. has been granted, but here Lispector seems to be critiquing who and what society regards as deserving. Still, G.H. is highlighting the boundaries set up for people in a social order and this becomes important because later in the novel G.H. will transgress and transcend variations of these boundaries set by culture, ethnicity, gender, age, occupation, religion, human and nonhuman. Furthermore, women in Lispector's fiction often embody their occupations as a way to grapple with the failure of language as Tace Hedrick explains: "In works like her *A paixão segundo G.H.*, Lispector repeatedly links what she calls an 'inexpressivo' or inexpressive art—of writing, of painting, of sculpture—with the female. For her, this is an art which escapes the accretions of a 'humanized' language" (61). Though G.H. must contend with the difficulties of being a woman, G.H. is not someone who seems to suffer socially so initially, we stray away from the feminist reading of Lispector's text. However, the underlying problem is that G.H. is complacent in her position and ignorant of the world around her. She must strip down to the "naked thing" or the "neutral" and in doing so she becomes aware of her complacency and her "persona ... the human mask" (60). Later, after encountering the cockroach, G.H. will recognize that she was living as a perception – as an opinion or a socially acceptable entity and thus, the inexpressive art as mentioned above,

will allow her to find the specific femaleness of her materiality. She must produce “inexpressive” art that lacks flair and flourish the same way she must neglect the embellishments of being a woman.

When the novel opens, G.H. describes herself as a woman and as a member of a respectable social circle before spiraling into an introspective reverie claiming, “I’m a woman of spirit. And with a spirited body. At the breakfast table I was framed by my white robe, my clean and well-sculpted face, and a simple body. I exuded the kind of goodness that comes from indulging one’s own pleasures and those of others” (21). Again, we see Lispector paralleling G.H.’s occupation with her womanhood, but here G.H. is described as a piece of art – something that has been reproduced, sculpted, and “framed.” When G.H. claims that she indulges the pleasures of others we can’t help but think about the erotic undertone of that statement. Is this what she thinks about women, or does she believe that all bodies are sites of pleasure to be shared and indulged? She equates this indulgence to goodness, but is this Lispector’s way of undermining common assumptions of morality? Either way, G.H. values the reproduced version of the self as she describes the aesthetics of her apartment as “the elegant, ironic, and witty replica of a life that never existed anywhere: my house is a merely artistic creation” (20). Moments before making this statement she likens herself to the apartment, implying that she is but a mere replica as well, but a replica of what? G.H. never explicitly tells us, but she prefers the duplicate or the “imitation” as she describes it. She can “understand” the copy rather than the real thing. If this is the case for all humans, Lispector implies that our daily routines, the objects we interact with, the way we decorate our domestic spaces, all of this is a duplication meant to stabilize the self and give us a “human form.” There is nothing inherently wrong with finding comfort in the copy according to G.H. because knowing the “truth” would transfix us in a state

of unbalanced suspension. We enjoy the comfort of the copy rather than the discomfort of the void or the silence that is our existence.

Lispector discusses duplications of the self on a thematic level as exemplified above, but she also does this on a syntactical level as she switches between first and third-person narration, often within the same paragraph or sentence. This technique creates a disjointed effect in the chronology of events, and it allows readers to see G.H. through two perspectives at once. Lispector reveals how G.H. is split between the duplicate she can “understand” and the other version that encountered “nothing.” Right after G.H. describes her “clean and sculpted face” she proceeds to eat “delicately what was [hers]” (21). And then the account switches to third person for a brief moment before G.H. takes back the narration: “This her, G. H. in the leather of her suitcases, was I: is it I — still?” (21). The “her” is in reference to the duplicated version of G.H. while at the same time she hesitates before using the personal pronoun I. Maybe because “I” implies ownership and G.H. has just told us that her apartment (and her body in this case) does not belong to her: “The witty elegance of my house comes from everything here being in quotes. Out of honest respect for true authorship, I quote the world, I quoted it, since it was neither me nor mine” (21). At first, this lack of ownership of a home and of one’s own body seems to be adverse and damaging to true feminism, but what Lispector is attempting to explain (albeit in a convoluted manner) is that recognizing yourself between “a quotation mark to the right and to the left” opens a space for an existence beyond the human form (20). The fact that there is a possible doppelgänger of yourself is the true liberation that cannot be captured by language. It exists in the silence and within the silence true femininity exists – not one constructed by a social order. The discussion of reproduced versions of the “self” will culminate in a self-reflexive dialogue between G.H. and the silent interstices of the world because G.H. will need to

relinquish language to find what is real, even though this reality could mean becoming a thing and not a human.

Becoming a thing through this splitting of the self is represented in other Lispector works and becomes useful when assessing the argument expounded here. Critic Lucia Helena presents Lispector's tendency to write self-reflexive passages that switch between narrative point of view, attributing to what can be read as feminine writing in Lispector's fiction. In her essay "Genre and Gender in Clarice Lispector's *Imitation of the Rose*" Helena argues that "Lispector insists on an element of 'anachronism,' the subjective retroversion of [...] past memories, sometimes through stream of consciousness" (218). In Helena's analysis of "Imitation of the Rose" she describes a literary technique in which the third person narration of the text is interrupted by the subjective voice of the protagonist as an event from the past is presented and "is separated by an interval from the present with which the narrative is concerned" (219). This exact formulation occurs in *The Passion* when G.H. makes the intention to enter her former maid's room. Before proceeding she "leaned on a wall to finish her cigarette" (23). The sequence of events is narrated using the past tense, but then when G.H. throws the cigarette out the window there is an interruption as if a voice from the present is speaking:

I couldn't even guess where the cigarette had landed. The precipice had swallowed it in silence. Was I there thinking? at least I was thinking about nothing. Or maybe about whether some neighbor had seen me commit that forbidden act, which above all didn't match the polite woman I am, which made me smile (25).

As we read the passage, we get the sensation that the G.H. from the past is being watched by the G.H. from the present as she projects her perception of the event into the past. Lispector manipulates the sequence of events at the sentence level by making readers aware of the present

moment in the writing, creating a feeling of simultaneity so that the reader and the text exist within the same time frame even when the speaker narrates events from the past. This triggers a series of interpretations that hinges on the silence mentioned in this passage. The silence acts as a type of black hole that swallows the temporality of the story and spits it back out so that it feels like we are watching G.H. as she watches a duplication of herself. The version of G.H. that smiles about the “forbidden act” is the version that has already experienced the transformative event of the text. “The polite woman” then is the version that plays the part of a stereotypical female drawn up by society’s impression of how she should act. In almost the same turn of events, G.H. can be directly compared to Laura in “Imitation of the Rose” as Helena concludes: “Thus, Lispector creates an intensely introspective [...] story which presents the inner dilemma of the female protagonist while demonstrating that the ‘feminine’ condition of Laura is itself a historical product” (222). In examining Lispector’s manipulation of chronological events there is an ever-present silence upheld in Lispector’s text. It is not a silencing like that of the patriarchal order, but an “extremely busy silence” that exists in “the cockroach, the stars, and the self” (66). The implication persists, a single word cannot circumscribe the truth and multiple words cannot capture the true essence of existence, therefore the silence Lispector presents precedes the establishment of language, but the human possession of silence seems part of a distant future:

Reality precedes the voice that seeks it, but as the earth precedes the tree, but as the world precedes the man, but as the sea precedes the vision of the sea, life precedes love, the matter of the body precedes the body, and in turn language one day will have preceded the possession of silence (114).

Lispector employs the use of anaphora and parallelism to create a sense of continuity between the past, present, and future, but language will become an archaic form of communication as

silence is used to represent a reality beyond human creation. As Lispector delves deep into the silences she calls for a qualitative shift in human perspective starting from a position that is never the insulated or atomized self. By upholding the value of silence Lispector exposes problematic, structured thoughts which establish patriarchal spaces, and offers an alternative to oppressive systems by validating a type of relational ontology between all subjects – human and nonhuman.

While Lispector's fiction plays with the temporality of events to underscore the problem with social constructions of femininity, her text further establishes the issues with language built on patriarchal foundations by calling for a necessary failure. To assess this problem with language we must return to the beginning of the novel when G.H. reflects on the proceedings of the previous day. She sits at the kitchen table rolling tiny balls of bread, but her thoughts are punctuated by an internal struggle: "Yesterday... I lost my human setup for hours and hours. If I have the courage, I'll let myself stay lost" (Lispector 9). While thinking back on her transformative experience, G.H. attempts to piece together the event from the prior day through a now fragmented identity: "I must try to at least give myself a prior form in order to understand what happened when I lost that form" (Lispector 16). However, her attempt at reasoning is grounded in a patriarchal system, and thus the words to explain the event fail each time G.H. works to rationalize her thoughts. Though language fails her, it is this failure that will expose G.H. to a different realm of truth one punctuated by what cannot be said as G.H. explains, "the unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve (114). This unsayable truth will force G.H. to confront what it means to be a woman in a world built on what Jacques Derrida describes as phallogocentric ideals. To contextualize this idea Tace Hedrick argues that translations of Lispector's text often erase one of her most important rhetorical strategies, that is a figuration of

abstract concepts like “the nothing.” The significance of silence and neutrality that gets lost in translation is the driving force of finding meaning in what is not there. As Hedrick articulates:

The search for the ‘entrelinha’ is also, for Lispector, the search for what it means to be female ... As she continued to write, Lispector manifested her increasing preoccupation with a writing strategy which itself would foreground a relationship with the physical world, with bodies, and with material signs of ‘femaleness.’ Writing, for her, was ‘bait’ for nothingness, for the silence of the material world, a silence she searches for most in her depictions of the female body (58).

In reading Lispector’s work as a novel that undermines patriarchal language, the existential nuances become less a symptom of an identity crisis and more the result of an awakening as Hedrick further explains, “close attention to Lispector's work in general shows us that this connection between human being and world-being, rather than an existential ‘horror,’ is the connection for which so many of her characters search” (68). Though the redoubling of sentences and questions about life pervade throughout the text, G.H. loses her identity as a response to a deeper more fulfilling understanding of the world: “My question, if there was one, was not: ‘Who am I,’ but ‘Who is around me.’” (19). Lispector purposefully ends the question with a period instead of a question mark, to underscore the interconnectedness as discussed above by Hedrick. “Who is around me” as a statement is more profound and indicative of the way Lispector views the self in relation to the material world. The speaker is also implying that the individual functions as a representation of the world and not as a solitary entity. While this rationale seems to call for an erasure of gender differences, the speaker’s quest for the “thingness” of her being will reveal a truth and a reality that does not need language to justify it

as G.H. proclaims: “[R]edemption had to be in the thing itself. And redemption in the thing itself would be putting into my mouth the white paste of the roach (105).

The moment G.H. endeavors to integrate the roach’s matter into her body it becomes the catalyst for our understanding of Lispector’s feminine writing, but not in the way we would expect. By rejecting humanization, Lispector’s protagonists are undermining the patriarchal order. Critic and translator of Lispector’s work, Johnny Lorenz writes of this same “thingness” in her novel *The Besieged City* as a way of complicating previous feminist readings. By reimagining the text’s objectification as a “paradoxical attempt at agency,” Lorenz highlights Lispector’s preoccupation with “things,” claiming the protagonist in *The Besieged City* is engaging with objects to subvert traditional forms of female subjugation: “Lucrecia’s transformation into ‘object’ is actually an escape from the patriarchal order, an escape even from her own ego; it’s a turning away from humanity—and ... it’s doomed to fail” (13). The same obsession with the “thingness” of being is exemplified in *The Passion* when G.H. finds similarities between herself and the roach, but beyond these similarities G.H. explains that the material of the world exists without the need for a vocabulary, and this is the reality she wants for herself: “The treasure of the world was a piece of metal, it was a piece of whitewash from the wall, it was a piece of matter made into roach” (88). Lispector writes about the most precise and seemingly mundane objects of the world as invaluable fragments of existence because these objects exist despite the human need to manipulate the environment. As Lorenz goes on to articulate, “... ‘things’ surround her, unspeaking and unknowable—so close and yet somehow out of reach. It’s as though language itself were responsible, at least in part, for the unbridgeable distance” (13). G.H. realizes that she is not much different than the objects that surround her as

she likens herself to the roach. Gazing at its body crushed between the wardrobe doors, she sees that the roach has an advantage because it does not need a language to exist:

The neutral roach, without a name for pain or for love. Its only differentiation in life is that it has to be either male or female. I had only thought of it as female, since things crushed at the waist are female (61).

While it seems Lispector is again objectifying women as things, there is a profound critique of social orders as Lispector engages with writing the female body as both human and thing, the latter being subjected to the accretions of an anthropomorphized world. Hence, being crushed at the waist exemplifies a tension between a woman's biological mechanisms and the restrictive forces of society constructed by a patriarchal language. To mitigate this tension, we must evaluate Lispector's use of silence through a repositioned posthuman theory.

Though Lispector writes before posthuman theory gained traction as a veritable lens for analysis, the implication of the above statement represents what is at stake for the complexity of a twenty-first century existence. The proliferation of knowledge, identity, and language is taken up by waves of rapid change faster than we can comprehend. Thus, Lispector's text reenters the literary milieu as a commentary on posthuman ideologies, but not in the way that most modern posthuman theorists reject humanism in its entirety. Lispector's novel can be interpreted as a poetically rendered, yet ironically vulnerable commentary on the ephemeral connections between language, human cognizance, and reality, but it is also an exploration of the posthuman condition. To explain, Nasrullah Mambrol writes a brief criticism about Posthuman Theory defining it as such: "Posthumanism ... emerges from a recognition that 'Man' is not the privileged and protected center, because humans are no longer – and perhaps never were – utterly distinct from animals, machines, and other forms of the 'inhuman'" (Mambrol). Some

assumptions of the posthuman condition take this to mean that there is no human and that all beings in the world are connected by a web that allows for transcendence into other beings - the human can become insect and vice versa. Although scenes from Lispector's text seem to reflect a complete rejection of the human as the nucleus of existence, when G.H. embodies the roach, she is not transforming into an actual roach, she is melding with the connective essence that binds her to the roach and the objects around them. Later in the text, G.H. details her account with the cockroach, which initiates her transformative experience, but when G.H. states "I am the roach" (43) she is not becoming the insect, she is becoming the lifeblood of the insect – the indescribable silence that connects her with the other. It is true, she shares a deep kinship with the roach, one that we will discuss in detail as part of the larger feminist argument, but it is important to first establish the distinction of posthumanism reflected in Lispector's work. Kristen Trader argues for a post humanist rhetoric that accounts for the differences between subjects and the capacity for ideological change without re-privileging the "humanist agent":

[T]he materiality of the world and our embodiment as finite beings exceed the limits of our concepts because they cannot easily be marked by language and thus rationally controlled. Acknowledging our physicality, then, invokes the unthinkable in the interest of refuting tendencies toward abstraction and universality that negate difference (207).

Lispector recognizes the intractability of language and so she "acknowledges" the physical nature of the body, but she echoes a posthuman ethos by leveling the human and the insect, allowing them to share a body, but remain separate as G.H. finds a "narrow route" through the roach. When G.H. apprehends the maid's room and finds the cockroach, she struggles with a former identity, but she states, "now from the silence into which I had finally fallen, I knew I'd

struggled” (42). Through that silence G.H. begins to acknowledge the roach and the path towards “neutrality”:

The narrow route passed through the difficult cockroach, and I’d squeezed with disgust through that body of scales and mud. And I’d ended up, I too completely filthy, emerging through the cockroach into my past that was my continuous present and my continuous future (43).

In passing through the roach G.H. is encountering the same material that constitutes the foundation of the world. If we think of this in terms of posthumanism, we can see Lispector making profound suggestions about the human, the body and soul. She will insist on this metaphor of soiling the body to transcend the boundaries of her former existence and she will revert to an examination of animals that resists humanization as Ava Kofman explains, “In the pity and terror of these animals, in their pathetic innocence, she approximates a vision of what human consciousness might look like from above, from the point of view of something else” (106). The vision of human consciousness in this case is not seen from above, but from within and then through an unwavering temporal flow that traces the history of G.H. from past, present, and future. Lispector invalidates time’s linearity at the thematic level, but she also establishes this same “continuous” impression by using the last sentence of each chapter as the beginning of the next chapter so that every ending can represent a beginning and every beginning can be an ending. Though Lispector plays with the concept of time and space, these ideas are always preceded by some type of silence that allows G.H. to recognize “the thing” posited in Kofman’s analysis. Lispector’s silence is an all-encompassing energy that we pass through, but it also passes through us as G.H. begins to realize in the maid’s room. We will come back to the silence of the maid’s room, but first, Lispector presents an essential facet that pushes back against

traditional interpretations of silence as an empty void. For Lispector silence has a life force that feeds back into itself and through all material entities: “Opening in me, with the slowness of stone doors, opening in me was the wide life of silence, the same that was in the fixed sun, the same that was in the immobilized roach” (38). With this silence G.H. will attempt to explain the unexplainable knowing that words will fail, but this failure is one of potentiality. Words may not be able to capture “the thing” G.H. seeks but Lispector insists on writing because, “reality is the raw material, language is the way [we] go in search of it” (114). Finally, by way of the maid’s room, Lispector’s engagement with silence urges readers to evaluate the present, rejecting institutions and individuals who valorize the past and speak from a position of omniscience so as to be erected as sovereign subjects. As Aimee Rowe and Sheena Malhotra explicate in their essay, “Still the Silence: Feminist Reflections at the Edges of Sound,” “silence is a space of fluidity, non-linearity, and as a sacred, internal space that provides a refuge—especially for nondominant peoples. Silence is a process that allows one to go within before one has to speak or act” (2). On the surface Lispector writes about silence as a metaphysical force, one that cannot be seen, but is felt through its exchange within a network of beings. On a deeper level, silence is a political apparatus that has been used as an oppressive force, a silence that is forced upon the individual to take away their agency. Lispector’s text then subverts the silencing effects of a social order to open a space for transcendence beyond language. In his essay “A Discourse of Silence: The Postmodernism of Clarice Lispector” theorist Earl Fitz describes Lispector’s use of silence as the foundation for characters who “go in search of an authenticity of being” stating that, “In undertaking these quests they find themselves mysteriously impelled by the anarchy of language toward a Nirvanalike state of inner awareness beyond knowledge and toward the silence that lies forever beyond the speech act” (422). Thinking through Lispectorian silence

encourages readers to be grounded in the here and now of an accountable position that is never based on the individual self, rather it is always relational to a multiplicity of others – human and nonhuman.

Though silence represents the disorder of existence as Fitz articulates, readers of *Lispector* must also contend with the diminishment of significant feminine language distinctions that are lost when translated from Portuguese to English, but Lispector's commentary on the female body is still upheld in the content of the novel – in particular, through suggestive images, grammatical errors, and self-referential lyrical prose. Hedrick believes that specific translations of *The Passion According to G.H.* domesticate the strangeness of Lispector's Portuguese for the sake of readability and conventionality he argues: “the habit in English of erasing the gender of nonhuman creatures by designating them as “it” constitutes a subtle erasure of the importance in this novel of the way in which G.H. perceives and thinks about the cockroach's, and her own, female fertility” (72). As G.H. relinquishes the makings of her prior life she enters the depth of a silence that sparks the dissolution of her ‘self’ through a transcendental encounter with beings beyond the human. When Clarice Lispector invites us to read about G.H.’s experience we must abandon our own “forms” – the ones constructed by societal standards and thus, Lispector prefaces the novel with a request: “I would be happy if [this book] were only read by people whose souls are already formed” (5). When first approaching the text, it would be easy to read this statement as a condescension since the common religious implication implies that a soul does not need to be “formed” because it is the immaterial essence of a human being. But the statement can be read through what posthuman theorist Rosi Braidotti calls feminist materialism in that the soul Lispector refers to is one that has undergone a series of nomadic becomings. Braidotti asserts that, “nomadic becoming is neither reproduction nor just imitation, but rather

emphatic proximity, [and] intensive interconnectedness” (27). The soul that is formed then is one that shares an intense relationship with the material bodies around it – one that transcends the social constructions which form our identities. When G.H. first encounters the roach, she hears the invitation of an open silence: “the first true silence began to whisper” (42). To hear the silence and to embody it will mark true liberation because as Lispector suggests, “life...makes itself with silence” (60). If life is made from silence, then finding her way back to the “first whisper” will allow G.H. to transcend the inauthenticity of identity and the language used to describe the self. Earl Fitz explains how Lispector’s use of silence is an integral aspect of postmodernism when authors were preoccupied with exploring self-reflexive literature – fiction that is interested in the act of writing itself. About Lispector’s fiction he states, “For the Brazilian writer silence becomes a metaphor for noncommunication, for the failure of language, just as it is for other, better-known postmodernists” (422). However, I contest that silence does not always indicate “noncommunication,” in fact the silence that Lispector illustrates in *The Passion* shows a communication with the world that does not need language to define it. The communication is inherent, it is within and exists beyond the linearity of time. G.H. reveals this silent communication when the narrator shifts to second-person point of view, drawing us directly into a shared memory:

The memory that’s just now come alive, of what the two of us had lived without being aware of it... let’s go toward ourselves. Instead of surpassing ourselves... each word was as light and empty as a butterfly: the word from inside fluttering out to meet the mouth, the words were said but we didn’t even hear them... But we actually were speaking and how! speaking the nothing. Yet everything shimmered as when heavy tears stick in the eyes; that is why everything shimmered (76-77).

G.H. impels us to look within ourselves for a way to understand what lies beyond language. We have no recollection of the memory that G.H. is unraveling here, but by breaking the fourth wall Lispector creates an eerie sensation of recognition. G.H. does not go into specifics about the memory, but the simile comparing words to butterflies creates an evanescent yet tangible image. Insects, words, and humans are one in this image as words “flutter out to meet the mouth” (76). Lispector gives readers an alternative to language by suggesting that we can still speak without the use of words and in this netting of interconnectedness, we engage with one another without consciously making the effort to do so. We leave behind the “stuff” that we perform as humans but become more human than ever in this “shimmering” universe Lispector creates.

Lispector is not suggesting that we are no longer human as most posthuman theories suggest but “that as finite beings we are openly (inter)connected to larger systems and relationships in which we are always doing and/or being done” (Trader 203). G.H. draws us into the scene above by indicating that we experience a particular type of silence with her. One that she describes as a loving and calm experience where “nothing happened” but the nothing is the beauty of the memory. She calls the nothing an “interval” of love: “I didn’t know that love was happening much more exactly when the thing we were calling love wasn’t there” (76). In this poignant scene so much is happening even as G.H. reiterates that nothing happened. The ambiguity is frustrating, and the paradoxical sentences are complicated, but isn’t this what G.H. warns readers about as she explains or perhaps, un-explains her existential crisis in the maid’s room? To realize that the mundane routine of existence is not something that we inherently possess but rather it is a mechanism adopted to create some semblance of stability - this is maddening. But there are “intervals” as Lispector suggests when we do not require language to stabilize our existence. We exist in the most vibrant ways when it seems like nothing is happening. When you wake at three

A.M. and the world is dark and the streets are silent, no speech act is required in that moment, but you can feel the silence because you are alive. Irving Goh examines this moment of living by highlighting Lispector's metaphor of the night, "G. H. learns after her lapse in learning to live freely that night is where one is in communication with the other only via the touch of (hollow) air: night is the world where 'it is moist [and] plants are born,' where the 'soft anxiousness' of one living being 'is transmitted through the air's hollowness' to another" (118-119). Goh takes Lispector's *Passion* and analyzes the effect of living "neutrality" through blindness. He argues that in relinquishing one's own subjectivity they reject their human vision in favor of blindness. In dismantling vision, Goh argues that G.H. begins to "live freely" by embracing a "world of quintessentially invisible things" (119). Though blindness and silence are fundamentally different, Lispector seems to be paralleling the two concepts to underscore the possibility of engaging with one another beyond human bindings. These human bindings being the thoughts and feelings that motivate our existence. Lispector suggests that we exist in a vacuum of fear, anxiety, pleasure, ecstasy, boredom and grief, but we must engage in moments of silence or blindness to begin to transcend the boundaries carved out by humanity as G.H. suggests: "It is as if hundreds of thousands of years from now we are finally no longer what we feel and think: we shall have something that more closely resembles a "mood" than an idea (111). These moments of silence are spaces of expansion and potential, rather than areas of oppression. They are intervals as Lispector suggests – "intervals of love" (112).

Earl Fitz depicts Lispector as a type of "anti-novelist" describing her work as self-aware and "self-activating" clarifying that there are two approaches when engaging with Lispector's work: "For some, Clarice's novels are formless and vexingly opaque while for others they are the quintessential examples of how language really is, how it really works, and how it relates to the

human experience” (190). My argument has been partial to the latter because language is at times a disaster and a testament to oppressive ideologies. Language is passed down and ultimately, we communicate with words that have long been utilized to silence marginalized groups. Women in particular hope to liberate themselves from inequity yet find themselves perpetuating the same patriarchal language they disavow, but language becomes a way of reaching the silence. It is the failure of the former that allows for the revelation of the latter as G.H. explains the necessity of both language and silence:

I have to the extent I designate — and this is the splendor of having a language. But I have much more to the extent I cannot designate. Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it — and the way I do not find it. But it is from searching and not finding that what I did not know was born, and which I instantly recognize. Language is my human effort (114).

G.H. does not shy away from silence, nor does she feel oppressed by it, rather the silence of what cannot be said is the terrifying and destabilizing liberation that G.H. needs: “The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language” (114). G.H. will continually reference the “unsayable” or the “nothing” or “muteness” throughout the text to help us understand her experience with the cockroach in the maid’s room, but if language must fail how can the story be told? This is where Lispector takes us – into the volatile chasm between reality and spirituality, urging readers to deconstruct the tangled statements G.H. creates to realize that the world is alive with a pulsating energy – an energy that reverberates like a “high mute voice” (30). The energy between each person and thing is a note so loud that humans cannot hear it, but this does not mean that the sound is not there. This is integral to our understanding of feminine writing because Lispector does not diminish or privilege any gender over the other, what she

recognizes is the transformative capability of introspection and a thread that runs through multiple aspects of existence. The implication is that one group does not have to be silenced for the other to rise, but that silence allows for an intimate and cathartic familiarity with one's own self. Lispector is expounding a profound designation of the human experience, one that both upholds and contradicts posthuman theory as G.H. explains, "I feel that 'not human' is a great reality, and that it does not mean 'unhuman,' to the contrary: the not-human is the radiating center of a neutral love in Hertzian waves" (111). This image is complicated but silence and sound, according to Lispector, both share an energy that "radiates." The distinction between not-human and unhuman is ambiguous at first, but Lispector asks the reader to engage in conceptual play by imagining a love that does not need the superfluous flow of words to be felt. It is a neutral love emanating in waves – sound waves to be exact. Here we can see Lispector exploring ideas beyond the abstractions of language and metaphysical concepts to ground her insight using acoustics and neuroscience. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, "Humans can detect sounds in a frequency range from about 20 Hz to 20 kHz. (Human infants can actually hear frequencies slightly higher than 20 kHz but lose some high-frequency sensitivity as they mature...)" (Purves). Lispector approaches a posthuman existence by suggesting that what humans perceive as silence can still be heard by the "not-human" as proven by Hertzian waves. Ultimately, just because something exists outside of the human auditory field does not mean the sound does not exist. Lispector's exploration of silence then incites questions about the "mutable subject" as posited in Braidotti's version of posthuman theory, and the figurations of what counts as a subject. This goes beyond classifications of gender identity and sexuality, rather it incorporates the strange, the abject, the insane, the inhuman and beyond.

To speak to this point, Victoria Saramago discusses the interrelated relationship between objects in her book, *Fictional Environments, Mimesis, Deforestation, and Development in Latin America*, where an analysis of Lispector's *The Besieged City* parallels the larger context of human and non-human agency. She asserts that, "the agency assigned to diverse categories of nonhumans is also part of Lispector's broader experiment in destabilizing human exceptionalism" (149). In Lispector's fiction objects share the same level of intense scrutiny that is afforded to the human subjects in the text. A novel like *The Passion* emphasizes Saramago's evaluation of a character's gaze and the destabilization of hierarchical relations between human and non-human actors (151). While Lispector creates a narrative of multiple voices, the only subjective presence is that of G.H. as she interacts with nonhuman agents in the text. She does not only interact with them, but objects move through G.H. and share the same agency – if not more agency than their human counterparts as Saramago explains, "[objects] are the subjects of sentences where there is very little space to frame them within human perception" (151). We take this evaluation with our previous discussion on stylistic choices at the sentence level when Lispector switches between narrative point of view, but here we must look at the moment G.H. describes her introspective thoughts only to be overtaken by the third person narrator:

I can still find an answer that would let me recover. Recovery would be knowing that: G. H. was a woman who lived well, lived well, lived well, lived on the uppermost layer of the sands of the world, and the sands had never caved in beneath her feet: the coordination was such that, as the sands moved, her feet moved along with them, and so everything stayed firm and compact. G. H. lived on the top floor of a superstructure, and, though built in the air, it was a solid building, she herself in the air, as bees weave life in the air. And that had been happening for centuries, with the necessary or occasional

changes, and it worked. It worked — at least nothing spoke and nobody spoke, nobody said no; so it worked (44).

Before the interjection of the third person narrator here, G.H. seems to completely lose her faculties claiming that what she saw was not “organizable” but that if she wanted to, she could still find a way to translate what happened into “human terms.” When we think G.H. will finally describe the transformative event in a language we can understand, she hands the story over to a third person narrator who spends two pages describing the apartment building as a “superstructure” ending in its collapse. We can read this as an extended metaphor depicting the end of civilization, but we cannot ignore the space carved out solely for the nonhuman actors in this passage. In saying that G.H. lived well Lispector does not afford this privilege to any human faculty of her life, but she lived well due to the solid stability of her home, even though it is one made of “sand.” Though Lispector indicates that G.H. “lived upon the sands of the world,” the building is depicted as a firm yet flexible entity that stabilizes G.H. and provides her with the organization of a human existence. This formulation is integral to our understanding of Lispector’s vision since in the passage above the buildings seem to spring forth of their own accord, not as a response to a human need. Lispector states that the formation of these structures happened for centuries, indicating an objective persistence that exists in spite of and not because of the human occupants in the building. The beehive analogy further destabilizes human exceptionalism by facilitating the life force of the building through the “bees that weave.” Again, a particular silence resounds, but this silence emerges from the lack of human voices, “nobody spoke, and nobody said no.” Though this type of silence is slightly different, the building being written as an autonomous structure suggests a continuous life force that exists without language. “It worked” because in Lispector’s subversion of objects and subjects, human chatter does not

erect buildings and thus the superstructure withstands. Lispector says that the building had grown from an accumulation of centuries, but in the paragraph that ensues, the centuries give way to a human presence, people sleeping, men working, children laughing, and a priest. Thus, without warning the building collapses. Lispector is working with profound notions about time, materiality, and nonhuman agency as Saramago points out, “[the objects’] numerous moments of independence make them more than mere objects that assist and enhance human action. Instead, they have a certain resistance ... that leads them to challenge human characters rather than be challenged by them” (154).

When the narration switches back to the first-person point of view the words to describe the apartment change – the “superstructure” is once again a penthouse in which G.H. resides. The luxurious penthouse in the center of Rio de Janeiro is the physical setting for the narrative where the encounter with the cockroach occurs at the back of the apartment in the maid’s room – cut off from the rest of the dwelling. G.H. describes the apartment as if unfurling the most intimate parts of her body: “Like me, the apartment has moist shadows and lights, nothing here is abrupt; one room precedes and promises the next” (Lispector 20). The simile is suggestive as G.H. describes the building with almost erotic connotations moving slowly from room to room in the same way an individual’s body unfolds under sensual touch, except adjectives like “moist” imply a feminine body woven into the apartment’s apparatuses. The detailed layout of the apartment is integral to the creation of silence in Lispector’s text as the space is endowed with depth and the intensity of an “Egyptian ruin” (25). Upon entering the maid’s room with the intention of cleaning out six months’ worth of detritus, G.H. is shocked to find a stark empty room reverberating with light where time seems to stop and echoes with an endless present. This room is different from the rest of the apartment first because G.H. describes it as dry, “In my

fresh, damp and cozy home, the maid without telling me had opened a dry emptiness” (26). The erotic overtones here are palpable as G.H. describes the “dry” maid’s room as an intrusion upon her “moist” feminine body. There is a clear masculinity surrounding the maid’s room when G.H. begins focusing on the architectural structure of the room. She is troubled by the lack of objects that she expected before entering the room and thus describes an emptiness that seems to refract and reflect the windows of the neighboring buildings, “because of the created void... the room seemed to be on a level incomparably higher than the apartment itself. Like a minaret” (26). In comparing the room to a minaret Lispector implants a clear phallic symbol as the tower is erected according to G.H. as somehow within her space but virtually estranged from it she says, “It appeared fundamentally fragile as if the room-minaret were not implanted in either the apartment or the building” (27). What is intriguing about Lispector’s feminine writing emerges from the gender blending that her language engages. We think Lispector is abiding by typical tropes with the phallic symbol of the minaret, but she subverts our notion of the male female dichotomy by having the maid view G.H. as a male. In the room three charcoal figures are drawn on the wall a man, a woman, and a dog to which G.H. states, “I looked at the mural where I was likely depicted . . . I, the Man (28). Now, it is unclear if it is the maid or G.H. herself sees an affinity with the portrait of the man, but the implication is clear – masculinity is but another human construct as G.H. proclaims, “was it unavoidable that she saw me as she was? abstracting from that body of mine on the wall everything that wasn’t essential, and also seeing only my outline” (28). Lispector is suggesting that the room itself (not just the encounter with the cockroach) is a break from the organized human form G.H. had created for herself, “[the room] was a violation of my quotation marks, the quotation marks that made me a citation of myself” (29). Though we begin to see G.H. question her existence, she experiences an intense rage and

detestation of the room, and she commits to washing it with “bucket upon bucket of water that the hard air would swallow” (30). As G.H. finds a violence welling up within her, Lispector reverts to phallic language by saying that the “hard air” will be cleansed with the water until “a moistness was finally born in that desert, destroying the minaret that haughtily overlooked a horizon of rooftops” (30). By depicting the minaret as a phallic symbol Lispector is creating a dual appraisal of religion and masculinity. The implication being that religion is not withstanding patriarchal forces, but it is created by the foundation of phallic language. The image of a minaret brings forth a paradoxical metaphor by highlighting the “inexplicable rage” that G.H. feels at the sight of the room in which she wanted to “kill something” meanwhile the minaret enforces a solitary type of spirituality as a *muezzin* is the only person who can enter the topmost part of the tower calling people to prayer, but the vantage point provides the view of a “limitless expanse” as G.H. describes it. This is the only way G.H. can begin to perceive her experience in the maid’s room. She must separate herself from the flurry of society and move towards a silence at the top of the metaphorical tower, but she must also open herself up to the world, rescinding any notion of her “self” as separate from anyone or anything. Much like the all-encompassing call to pray from the minaret, G.H. must begin to see herself as unified with every entity, blurring any marker of difference (class, race, gender, animal, inorganic and nonhuman).

In her book *Metamorphoses*, Rosi Braidotti describes G.H. as a “mystic on top of some sacred mountain, [gazing] into the depth and soon starts seeing: she experiences the interconnectedness of beings: buildings are bodies, both are made of living matter (163). In this environment G.H. experiences complete depersonalization and the breakdown of her socialized identity. The maid’s room is the site of multiple threshold crossings as variables of difference overlap and push G.H. towards the collapse of herself. Through G.H.’s transformative

experience, Lispector opens the possibility for constructing a world that rejects anthropocentrism and embraces the value of all subjects within an inextricable system of existence.

Though Lispector opens the text amid G.H.'s existential crisis, her transformation is not a sudden break of sanity, rather it presents itself as a series of passages that culminates in the tasting of a cockroach's matter. These passages lead to what Braidotti describes as a "becoming." In crossing the first threshold of becoming, G.H. must contend with her position as an upper-class woman with the privilege of a Eurocentric appearance. She must do this by confronting a silence that is weaponized against her through her maid's refusal to speak. As she enters the maid's room G.H. transcends the boundaries that separate her from the maid. She crosses both class and ethnic margins, and she is blinded by the unexpected "whiteness" of the room, "I'd expected to find darkneses, I'd been prepared to throw open the window and clean out the dank darkness with fresh air" (26). Lispector sets up a classic binary between light and dark equating darkness with grime and negativity, but she undermines this comparison by exposing G.H. to an uncomfortable silence, one that is used against her to topple her sense of privilege. G.H. is confronted with her own biases and must sit with the difficult realization that she had pre-judged the maid: "In a way my discomfort was amusing: it had never occurred to me that, in Janair's muteness, there might have been a reprimand of my life, which her silence might have called 'a wanton life?'" (28). Janair's silence is a manifestation of her cultural difference, and it is a nuanced form of resistance that allows her to navigate spaces in which she seems powerless. In Suzanna Chan's essay "Alive...Again" a discussion of G.H.'s racism is used to analyze the transgression of boundaries:

Janair drew the dusty charcoal lines that limn G.H. and become her passage across the boundaries that prevented her from seeing another woman...she remains what Toni

Morrison (1992) identifies in U.S. literature as a spectral 'Africanist' presence aiding the white protagonist's subjectivity. If she prompts G.H.'s horrifying awareness of her own racism, Janair enjoys no exploration for her capacity for subjectivity or sublime experience.

Jainar's character works in two ways, first by revealing G.H.'s oppressive, biased, and highly individualized nature as revealed when G.H. explains, "For years I had only been judged by my peers and by my own milieu that was, as a whole, made of myself and for myself. Janair was the first truly outside person of whose gaze I was becoming aware" (28). Though we don't learn much else about G.H. Lispector is making it clear that G.H. was conditioned by the social forces around her. So much so that she become obsessed with the "arrangement" of her entire livelihood, necessitating the transformation she will undergo in the maid's room. This transformation is marked by an all-encompassing silence one that is used against her in this particular case. Janair's silence then allows G.H. to recognize that she has misrepresented her and thus, she must view herself through the same prism of silence. As Malhotra quotes anthropologist Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "the suspension of language is the precondition to knowing the other, a paradoxical voyage through which one arrives only to realize that she has never taken a step" (7). To fully grasp one's own materiality and relationship to others, a departure from language opens the in-between spaces where conventional representations of the human are subverted. This is particularly important in the case of female subjectivity because silence provides for a way out of phallogocentric structures, encouraging the embodiment of a complex chemistry of corporeal, spiritual, collective, and symbolic energies. Clarice Lispector presents moments of silence as liminal spaces to counteract the restrictive and highly coded social forces that repress women. These repressive forces are complicated by the oppressive figure of G.H.

herself to further illustrate Lispector's view on binary constructions. In this case, subjugation can be enacted by both men and women, revealing a profound type of feminism, one that I think targets women who recognize patriarchal foundations and yet build their privilege upon these structures. Though Lispector is writing from the 1960s she is intimating a concept that is highly prevalent today. Thus, the maid's room represents uncharted territory, a liminal space, and a point of intense transformation one that will require G.H. to contend with the discomfort of her complete depersonalization.

G.H.'s position as a wealthy artist places her within the center of social institutions erected as monuments of power, but after G.H. encounters the life-altering force of the cockroach she must break down her privileges and destroy these monuments to transcend the limitations of her comfortable existence, thus G.H.'s characterization allows Lispector to lay the foundation for what Rosi Braidotti calls "nomadic consciousness." According to Columbia University Press, "nomadic theory outlines a sustainable modern subjectivity as one in flux, never opposed to a dominant hierarchy yet intrinsically other, always in the process of becoming, and perpetually engaged in dynamic power relations both creative and restrictive" (1). The silences that pervade Lispector's text offer multiple pathways to interrogate these power relations and open a space for interpreting femininity beyond binary constructions. Silence also forces G.H. to confront her own subjectivity as a woman which in turn creates fissures within the stability of her conventional language. Tace Hedrick explains how Clarice Lispector's feminine writing is discussed as, "a 'deployment' of essentialism in a literal sense of the word...an unfolding, a spreading out of a feminine space, where female is neither a rhetorical strategy nor a social construct" (42). Hedrick establishes Lispector's work within the frameworks of essentialist feminism, arguing that her consistent engagement with the female body, specifically through her

focus on the maternal and fertility, transcends a language that defines the feminine body. However, I argue that the silences produced from the collapse of language reveal an interconnectedness between all subjects establishing a relationship that surpasses the need for linguistic definitions of the body. The collapse of language, therefore, rejects a rigid dichotomy between male and female categories as Earl Fitz suggests in his essay “The Erotics of Being: Self, Other, and Language:”

... while there is no doubt that [Lispector’s] texts derive their basic power primarily from the various images of women that they generate, a close comparative reading of her work suggests that Lispector ... is advancing a new concept of human identity, one that is grounded in what we now understand as a distinctly poststructural sense of language (Sexuality and Being).

This text along with much of Lispector’s other fiction upholds femininity and shared characteristics between women, but the constant doubling back and self-referential sentences reveal characters that are not fully fleshed out. This is because Lispector does not make the human characters sovereign beings in her narratives, rather it is the character’s interaction with nonhuman material that underscores the incapability of language and ultimately, a feminine language emerges, but the “possible language” (113) that G.H. hopes to find is not one comprised of words, but as Fitz argues, is an “erotic interaction between language and being” (Sexuality and Being).

In quintessential Lispectorian style a paradox emerges as G.H. describes the necessity of her civilized self because it establishes a point from which to fall: “It is exactly through the failure of the voice that one comes to hear for the first time one’s own muteness and that of others and of things and accepts it as the possible language” (113). Lispector’s narrative style

tends to be complex, but here she is writing about a concept that is common to most. Through adolescence we are often told that failure is the path to success and the same concept is echoed in Lispector's attitude towards the failure of language. Despite the flawed nature of language, Lispector values the process of writing without ever reaching an ultimate conclusion. The "possible language" is the communication between people and things that does not need words to be understood. Lispector suggests that we then recognize the fleeting nature of words. Languages are notoriously unreliable in that they are always a reflection of a humanized culture, subject to biases and manipulation but silence or muteness in this case, is presented as a possible unadulterated language.

Nowhere in the novel is there a greater sense of a possible unadulterated language than when we encounter the cockroach in the maid's room. This is an infamous scene that has been analyzed through multiple lenses by Lispector theoreticians and critics. While each analyst focuses on a different aspect of the interaction with the cockroach, Lispector's narrative style does not allow for a single interpretation to circumscribe the relationship between G.H. and the roach and I think this is the point. Lispector endows the scene first with violence, hatred, and repulsion, but ends with a deep maternal love emanating from the cockroach to G.H. and back. The connection between G.H. and the roach is presented as a thread of silence that spans the centuries before stretching to the future generation of the roach and G.H.'s daughters, "The narrow route passed through the difficult cockroach ... emerging through the cockroach into my past that was my continuous present and my continuous future — and that today and always is on the wall, and my fifteen million daughters, from then up to myself, were there too" (43). G.H. speaks of herself as a roachlike entity as she likens herself to a creature that can lay many eggs, spawning the "fifteen million" daughters mentioned above, but it is integral that she sees all her

future children as female. As we discussed before, the progression of time seems to be annulled throwing readers into an atemporal space between what we know as the past, present, and future. The cockroach is an ancient time machine that opens G.H.'s world to a "fourth dimension" a spatial existence that reveals itself in other Lispector works like *Água Viva* as Elizabeth Friis indicates, "the challenge is to suspend the passing of time understood as before and after. This is not feasible, yet the text may approach something similar for instance by denying itself a before and an after – a plot, a narration, a linear organization of its own temporality (38). This suspension of time is refracted through Lispector's use of silence as even at the outset of the story, for the first twenty pages, Lispector gives no information to build a plot – no names, no setting, physical features, or accompanying characters, instead Lispector establishes a psychological state through a world of paradoxes that reach a critical point when G.H. stares at the roach. This moment presents a threshold crossing that is punctuated by insect analogies indicating a blurred line between the human, animal, and inorganic other. G.H. encounters the presence of the cockroach in the wardrobe and in a moment of fear, slams the wardrobe closed, crushing the roach between the door, "it was then — it was then that as if from a tube the matter began slowly oozing out of the roach that had been crushed (40). The existential horror that she experiences from this moment does not stem from the revolting nature of the roach, but rather some deep affinity G.H. shares with the insect, "I'd looked at the living roach and was discovering inside it the identity of my deepest life" (43). As G.H. surrenders her social status, and any symbol of power, she undertakes the complete dehumanization of herself. G.H. notes that the "force passed through" her after gazing upon the cockroach and in meeting the roach's eye the realization of where her body stands in society returned in an explosive comprehension.

Knowing that she must soil her body with the roach takes G.H. back to the silence before language and humanization corrupted the world (66).

In finding a parallel with the roach, G.H. must contend with the roach's gaze. The silence of the roach becomes a neutral gaze that pushes the boundaries of language and understanding for G.H.: "The roach was touching all of me with its black, faceted, shiny and neutral gaze" (58). The neutrality of the roach is that of an existence without linguistic norms. The roach survives without the need for expression or a vocabulary – it persists without feeling alienated by its difference. Humans on the other hand live in a perpetual state of estrangement because we create social orders, class hierarchies and cultural differences demarcated by the language we speak. The fundamental problem is that humans are highly individualistic, seeing themselves as somehow different from all other species. Through careful exploration of silence, G.H. breaks down the barriers between herself and the world relinquishing any notion of a singular body, "I, neutral cockroach body, I with a life that at last doesn't escape me because I finally see it outside of myself — I am the roach, I am my leg, I am my hair, I am the section of whitest light on the plaster of the wall — I am every hellish piece of me" (Lispector 43). G.H. experiences the depths of her materiality through the desire of a life which, flowing through her, does not belong to her alone. She is the embodiment of a subject in flux because she comes to see her "self" expanded, sharing the same life force as the entities around her. Seduced by the silence she realizes that time, history, and the roach's essence flow through her:

"How luxurious this silence is. It's built up of centuries. It's a silence of a roach that's looking. The world looks at itself in me. Everything looks at everything, everything lives the other; in this desert things know things. Things know things so much that that's ...forgiveness" (43).

G. H.'s experience will consist in realizing first the proximity and then the commonality of being between her and the living matter that is the roach. She steps beyond the boundaries of language to inhabit both the roach and the life forces around her as she speaks of an abyss after looking into the roach's eyes, "I, who used to live on words ... what an abyss between the word and what it was trying to do, what an abyss between the word love and the love that doesn't even have a human meaning" (44). Beyond the boundaries of language is the abyss of silence that resounds when we realize that language is only masking a form of existence that is not subject to bias and human inheritance. The silence of the abyss is also the silence of the roach. In the silence of the roach, we understand the intractability of language, but this silence is of a subterranean existence that G.H. sees as a life without human embellishment. The silence that emanates from the roach is "luxurious" in the sense that it is an objective stare – the roach does not see the G.H. with initials engraved on a leather suitcase, rather the roach sees G.H. as just another life force in the environment. The cockroach feels its surroundings with its whole body as it crawls with "a belly made for the ground" (48) and to the cockroach, G.H.'s presence is unassuming and unadorned by the apparels of her human form. The full body of the roach can pass through and share its organic existence with that of G.H. as long as G.H. relinquishes the resonance of her human language.

If we go back to the moments leading up to G.H.'s great realization of self, we can now see how silence is dynamic depending on the context Lispector employs it but somehow everything leads back to the concept of silence. In the beginning of the text G.H. examines a photograph of herself with an inexpressive look upon her face. In examining the photo, she is surprised to find "The Mystery," noting, "the surprise crept up gently, I'm only realizing now that it was the surprise that was creeping up upon me: for in those beaming eyes there was a

silence that I'd only seen in lakes, and that I'd only heard in silence itself" (Lispector 43). In seeing silence in her eyes, G.H. uncovers the knowledge that she had only been living through organizations of herself, pieces fashioned together that seemed sophisticated, erudite, and civilized, but in recognizing the silence, she peels back the layers of inauthenticity she had built as a cover. Through the silence, she exposes herself as woman with no single, stable place but rather, looking at herself in the photo shows that she is indefinable, multifaceted, and beyond any ordered system of representation. In the photo G.H. recognizes a possible version of herself, one that does not require language to exist – she exists within a perpetual joy that withstands the passing of time. This is the silence that she recognizes in the photo and in the roach and in the space between “two notes of music” (65).

As G.H. attempts to narrate her experience, the reveries of photographs and silences may seem like the ramblings of a woman gone mad, but silence is the catalyst in understanding the transformation she has undergone. In recalling her face in photos, the revelation about silence does more than just reveal an inauthentic self, it exposes an ancient and primordial connection with the world, one that G.H. comes to understand after tasting the roach's matter, breaking down the boundaries that G.H. has set up for herself. Not only does G.H. recognize the limitation of social categories, but she also begins to see the boundaries of history. She sees herself occupied within one chronological time period with the past and future as two opposing forces delimited by historical markers and calendar dates, but the silence she recognizes in the photo disrupts her perception of time: “I noted with light ironic dread what that smiling, darkened face revealed to me: a silence. A silence and a destiny that escaped me, I, hieroglyphic fragment of an empire dead or alive (17). Through the silence G.H. recognizes herself as a small part of a material universe, and the pronoun “I” is but a symbol coding G.H. into existence and

immediately subjecting her to a gendered identity. The silence in the photo urges G.H. to abandon all human subjectivity, to transcend the limitations of language, and to fully embrace the flesh. This silence exists between the connective webs that bind matter together. Silence in fact is the connective web as G.H. proclaims:

“A note exists between two notes of music, between two facts exists a fact, between two grains of sand no matter how close together there exists an interval of space, a sense that exists between senses — in the interstices of primordial matter is the line of mystery and fire that is the breathing of the world, and the continual breathing of the world is what we hear and call silence (Lispector 65).

Lispector utilizes silence here as a way of thinking about liminality and its potential for inciting change. We define our position in relation to others, consciously and unconsciously creating boundaries and limitations to establish a locus of fixity in an expansive space, but between each boundary there is a “line of mystery” as Lispector intimates. Of course, this is the epiphanic juncture that G.H. encounters in the maid’s room, itself a liminal space of silence and potentiality. The implication being that with every dualistic force there is a liminal space that exists...we can see this as a potential third space of opportunity. Liminality can be theorized through the evaluation of exalted ideas like the space between life and death, but liminality is also a space of tension between humans and nonhumans or the moment between one decision and another. In the essay “A Utopia of the In-Between” Robert Tally examines the use of liminality in literary studies claiming that, “what we think of as liminality is far from the closed space of a delimited territory but is itself an in-between space of potentiality” (Utopia). As G.H. stands at the edge of the maid’s room she transforms the boundary of the doorway into a threshold as Tally suggests, “a boundary or border might become a threshold, but only when it is

transgressed” (Utopia). This site of transgression occurs through the disorder of uncertainty, “a point of entry into another zone” as G.H. leaves the assemblage of her organized life the one she arranged to push back against the anxiety of disarray: “I always liked to arrange things. I guess it’s my only real vocation. By putting things in order, I create and understand at the same time” (23). By crossing the boundary between her space and the maid’s, G.H. enters a liminal space of existence, one that she will go on to claim as the nothing: “That room that was deserted and for that reason primally alive. I had reached the nothing, and the nothing was living and moist” (40). The nothing is a feminine energy but one that transcends all variables of difference as Lispector crafts passages that shuttle readers between past and present. She uses the silence to open the depths of ancient matter that exist within all of us and exists in the future of us. Like the moment a woman becomes pregnant with her daughter, she also carries the future generations in her embryo’s womb. Lispector writes, “Every woman is the woman of all women, every man is the man of all men, and each of them could appear wherever man is judged” (113). Lispector’s silences are not empty, but they are weighted with the capacity of sexual difference and deep indissoluble connections to all matter.

After recognizing this deep and intense connection with all matter in the universe, G.H. comes to transcend her human form living as one with the creatures, the soil, and the white oozing matter of the roach. This seems like the logical conclusion to a profound existential crisis of this magnitude, but Lispector’s fiction does not allow for neat endings. G.H. does not become the roach, as a posthuman text would indicate, and she does not fully embrace a life of meditative silence, rather she picks out a dress and decides to go clubbing:

I shall go, not tomorrow, but this very day, out to eat and dance at the “Top-Bambino,” I furiously need to have some fun and diverge myself. Yes, I’ll definitely wear my new

blue dress that flatters me and gives me color ... I'll eat crevettes, tonight, tonight will be my normal life resumed, the life of my common joy, for the rest of my days I'll need my light, sweet and good-humored vulgarity, I need to forget, like everyone" (104).

Does this type of conclusion enrage us? Were we hoping that Lispector would give us a way out of a superficial existence? G.H. is no different than the rest of us driven by a faulty language, motivated by fleeting moments of pleasure, arranging ourselves to fit the social orders that pervade, but G.H. asks for our hand once more. She urges us to look at her experience and recognize the silence but not as a means of isolation, though it would be easy to read this story and reject the "accretions" of being human, but as a way of living harmoniously within and among all material of the world:

I know that believing in all this will be, at first, your great solitude. But the moment will come when you will give me your hand, no longer out of solitude, but as I am doing now: out of love. Like me, you will no longer fear adding yourself to the extreme energetic sweetness of the God. Solitude is having only the human destiny. And solitude is not needing. Not needing leaves a man very alone, all alone. Ah, needing does not isolate the person, the thing needs the thing (110).

Towards the end of the novel the speaker seems to give up on complete dehumanization, the implication being that we do not have to reject our humanity in order to transcend our individualistic flaws. The silence, the nothing, the mute and inexpressive thing that G.H. searches for throughout the novel has no definitive form because it can be found everywhere even within the self as G.H. says, our neediness is our destiny and this destiny "is to join as drops of mercury join other drops of mercury, even if, like each drop of mercury, it has in itself an entirely complete and round existence" (110). For now, Lispector will not provide the direct

pathway towards complete preeminence, but she does make a clear conclusion – humans have free will: “The mystery of human destiny is that we are inevitable, but we have the freedom to carry out or not our inevitability” (80).

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