



REVISTA DE LITERATURA E CULTURA RUSSA

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Autor: Susana Fuentes

Edição: RUS Vol. 11. Nº 17

Data: Dezembro de 2020

<https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2317-4765.rus.2020.174306>



Echoes from the underground: Dostoevsky and the literary world of Clarice Lispector¹

Susana Fuentes*

Abstract: Attentive to the resonances of the “underground man” in the work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, born in Tschetschelnik, in today’s Ukraine (1920-1977), the present study aims at perceiving glimpses of these echoes as they appear in the narrator’s voice in Clarice’s novel *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), as well as images that may inform the reading of her novel *The Hour of the Star* (1977), along with her short-stories “The Buffalo” and “An Angel’s Discontent”. As we know from the material researched by her biographer Nádia Battella Gotlib, Clarice Lispector would read Dostoevsky and Hermann Hesse, namely *Steppenwolf* (1927), whose imagery for its turn we may consider in relation to Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the underground*.

Resumo: Neste estudo, deseja-se perceber ecos do “homem do subsolo” na obra da escritora brasileira Clarice Lispector (1920-1977), nascida em Tschetchelnik, na atual Ucrânia, a partir da voz de sua narradora em *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), e em imagens que possam informar leituras de *A hora de estrela* (1977), assim como nos contos “O Búfalo” e o “Mal-estar de um anjo”. Ora, segundo material reunido por sua biógrafa Nádia Battella Gotlib, entre as leituras de Clarice estava Dostoiévski, assim como Hermann Hesse de *O Lobo da Estepe* (1927), cujo imaginário por sua vez evoca *Memórias do subsolo*.

Palavras-chave: *Fiódor Dostoiévski*; Clarice Lispector; Homem do subsolo; Estudos comparados de literatura russa e brasileira

Keywords: Fyodor Dostoevsky; Clarice Lispector; Underground man; Comparative studies in Russian and Brazilian literatures

* PhD in Comparative Literature from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), where she also carried out post-doctoral research with funding from CAPES/FAPERJ, writer. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5529-6900> ; fuentes.susana@gmail.com

Considering resonances of the “underground” and keeping the perspective of Clarice Lispector’s own readings of Dostoevsky, the present study aims at perceiving glimpses of these echoes as they appear in the narrator’s voice in Clarice’s works chosen here. Namely her novel: *The Passion According to G.H.*, her short-stories “The Buffalo” and “An Angel’s Discontent”,² as well as aspects of her novel *The Hour of the Star*.

Remarkably, in the Brazilian third edition of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* (2000, “Editora 34”), with foreword and translation by Boris Schnaiderman, there is a critical text by Manuel da Costa Pinto which underlines the relation of this work to the narrator’s monologue in *The Passion According to G.H.* Also, as we know from the material researched by her biographer Nádia Battella Gotlib, still very young Clarice Lispector would read Dostoevsky and Hermann Hesse, in particular *The Steppenwolf* (1927), whose imagery for its turn may be considered in relation to Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the underground*, as we may perceive in this passage from Hesse’s novel: “I saw that Haller was a genius of suffering and that in the meaning of many sayings of Nietzsche he had created within himself with positive genius a boundless and frightful capacity for pain”.³ And we learn from the notes by the “editor” of his manuscript that Haller, this Steppenwolf, would master not only world-contempt, but also a self-contempt, being the first to whom he would direct his own hate and despise.

1 This study was presented at the International Conference “Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* in European and American Culture” (Международная конференция “Записки из подполья” в культуре Европы и Америки/ Notes écrites dans un souterrain de F.M. Dostoïevski dans la culture de l’Europe et de l’Amérique) that took place on November 13-15, 2019, at the Institute of World Literature (IMLI, Moscow).

2 “Mal-estar de um anjo” (LISPECTOR, 1999a. Our translation).

3 HESSE, 1965, p.10.

To meet the work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) through the lenses of the “underground man” has proved along those readings to be a rich ground to visit her writing, always in search for new inquiries around her work. Likewise, to perceive the traces, vestiges that contain a dialogue with Dostoevsky’s novel through the voice of Clarice’s narrators may contribute to the contemporary discussion on the continuous presence of the underground – its intersections reshaping spaces in fiction that open fissures and inform territories and new subjectivities.

Born in Tschetschelnik, in today’s Ukraine, Clarice moved with her family as a child to Brazil. It is interesting to note that *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964) came to light a century after Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the underground*. In Clarice’s novel we may all of a sudden recognize the sharp tone of the underground in the female character’s monologue. G.H. is her name. She enters the maid’s tiny room and begins to slide down the gaze into nothingness. She had already dismissed the maid. The room is empty. Throughout her monologue and digression, she breaks through her own husk, her own tranquil case. Well enough, people live in cases, says the underground man in Dostoevsky.

There are at least two movements turning that maid’s room into an underground space, the spot where the woman’s transformation begins. First of all, when she enters Janair’s room (that is the maid’s name she could hardly remember) and sees a drawing on the wall. She finds out something curious about the image depicted there – she realizes that the maid had been angry at her. After that, another disturbing presence reveals itself. A cockroach on the bedroom door: shutting the door, the woman crushes the cockroach in half. And glaring at that smashed body, in her digression she gets very close to this other being. Well, if the woman narrator does not turn into a cockroach, as in Kafka, she does eat the white dough that comes out of the cockroach’s shell. Until the end of the book she will tell what she has not told yet, what she has seen and cannot pretend not having seen. And the reader may perceive a kind of communion. As a matter of fact, through her thoughts,

digging further and further into nothingness, the woman turns into one same being with the insect she killed. In a Kafkaian reference that appears by means of a Dostoevskyan procedure – cruel, painful, dolorous monologue, going ahead and ahead with razor-sharp words – this woman/narrator eats the cockroach as her own husk breaks.

In that maid's room there are old suitcases with the mark G.H. covered by dust. Looking at the initials of her name under that thin dust, the woman asks herself how little by little she had transformed herself into the person who bears her name. In her own words: "All you need to do is see the initials G.H. in the leather of my luggage to know that that's me".⁴ Again we remember how people get used to live in cases, boxes, as the underground man asserts. Here, the woman does not spare herself of remarking such kind of tranquility she could live on for "having reached a certain degree of realization about what it means to be G.H., even on a luggage".⁵ But now she had given one step further, namely into that room of the absent maid who had just left. She wonders: "The room was so different from the rest of the apartment that going into it was like leaving my own home and entering another".⁶ As a matter of fact, once she gets into that space she is just one step away of opening her "most primary divine life",⁷ with the calm, "voracious ferocity of desert animals". As she announces: "My more primary struggle for more primary life was about to open with the calm, voracious ferocity of desert animals".⁸ Without knowing it, she was "going to begin to exist".⁹ In this desert room, she and the live cockroach: "That room was desert and therefore primitively alive. I had reached nothingness, and the nothingness was live and moist".¹⁰

4 LISPECTOR, 1988, p. 17.

5 Ibidem, p. 18.

6 Ibidem, p. 34.

7 Ibidem, p.52.

8 Ibidem, p.15.

9 Idem.

10 Ibidem, p.53.

Previous to that she was G.H. and she would carry those two letters, she was the way people saw her: "that morning, before I went into the maid's room, what was I? I was what other had always seen me as, and that was the way I knew myself".¹¹ And she goes further: "without reflection, I have adopted my reputation for my so-called inner life: I treat myself as others treat me, I am what others see in me."¹² But now, this annoying question: what was happening to that G.H. on the leather of the suitcase?

Entering the room, the woman had seen the drawing on the wall made with charcoal. She realizes she had been portrayed on that white wall. And looking to the thick lines, she suddenly realizes that the maid had hated her. In that room, she allows herself to feel "the sensation of that woman silent hatred".¹³ But "it was a kind of free hate, the worst kind of hate: indifferent hate".¹⁴ She is able to guess: "not a hate that individualized me but just the absence of all compassion".¹⁵

We read further: "I noticed at that point that I was irritated. The room bothered me physically, as though the sound of the scratching of dry charcoal on the dried whitewash still hung in the air".¹⁶ And, still: the room's "inaudible sound was like the sound of a needle going around on a record after the music had finished playing".¹⁷

As in *Notes from the underground*, there is free hate, indifferent hate, and so to bring into play G.H.'s words, hate with no object. Also, there is sound. For now, a sound that is there but you cannot hear. Afterwards, there will be also groan, complain, absolute moan that serves for nothing. There is this hate just out of sheer hate, a free hate that recalls the room's

11 Ibidem, p.15-16.

12 Ibidem, p.18.

13 Ibidem, p. 32.

14 Ibidem, p. 32-33.

15 Ibidem, p. 33.

16 Ibidem, p. 35.

17 Idem.

inaudible sound that G.H. is going to hear: "It was the neutral thing-screeching that made up the matter of its silence. Charcoal and fingernails together, charcoal and fingernails, calm, compact fury".¹⁸ As well as this expression of a toothache, spoken by the Underground Hero:

His groans have become in some way nasty, disgustingly vicious, and continue for whole days and nights. And he's aware himself, you know, that his groans will not help him in the very slightest; he knows better than anyone else that he's only annoying and irritating himself and other people – in vain. [...] You dislike listening to my despicable little groans? Well, go on disliking them; I am about to deliver an even worse elaborate passage...¹⁹

Taking into account the lines that formed the drawing on the wall in Clarice's novel, in some places they were doubled, "as though one line were the mark of the other's trembling. A dry trembling by dry charcoal".²⁰ Further ahead in her monologue the woman says: "I asked myself if Janair had in fact hated me – or if it had been I who hated her, without even looking at her".²¹ In effect, the opening inaugurated in modernity by Dostoevsky's underground man is shared here with this character-narrator who speaks from a space of subjectivity, destruction, failures, unsuccessful pains, but still it is a voice that speaks. A kind of knowledge that spares no one, it shows mercy to nothing. As this woman from the underground reveals herself by means of her speech, she addresses her words to the other, painfully revealing herself at the very moment of sprouting her sentences – thick mud slowly sprouting, as we read: "thick ooze coming slowly forth".²²

And we may hear the sounds of the cockroach crackling, noises, and the woman's groan. "And all at once I groaned out loud, this time I heard my groan".²³ Spaces within the body, and

18 Idem.

19 DOSTOEVSKY, 2014, p. 16-17.

20 LISPECTOR, Op. cit., p.31.

21 Ibidem, p.35.

22 Ibidem, p. 49.

23 Ibidem, p. 50.

it is where something breaks – and hate makes its dwelling. We read: “I looked at it, at the cockroach, I hated it so much that I was changing sides, forming solidarity with it, since I couldn’t bear being alone with my own aggressiveness”.²⁴ And “I had looked upon the live cockroach and had discovered in it my deepest life identity. In a difficult demolition, hard, narrow passages were opening inside me”.²⁵

An estrangement, looking at the insect, as if for her own blood. And your own blood outside your body is still your blood, she says:

But I recognized, with a long-forgotten force of memory, that I had felt this feeling before: it was the same feeling I had when I saw my own blood outside myself, and I was shocked by it. For the blood that I saw outside myself, that blood I wondered at with such attraction: it was my own.²⁶

And she announces that her entrance into the room “had finally become complete. This room had only one way in, and it was a narrow one: through the cockroach”.²⁷

Insects, shells, rooms, stairs, in this underground world, there are significant paradigms inhabited by Clarice’s characters. To grasp the echoes of Clarice as reader of Dostoevsky may contribute to new relationships in the reception of the underground, but also may trigger her readers to be attentive to this voice that suspends, postpones, and gives no definitive answer. As Bakhtin would say, sentences that do not end with a period. Sentences that only ask and evade, while going deeper into the void. G. H. does not bear her name anymore. She has seen what no one dares to see. And she puts into words what no one dares to name. Her own body, a room full of gaps and holes as the walls and floor of the underground:

There was opening out in me, with the slowness of stone gates, there was opening out in me the wide life of silence, the very life that was to be found in the stationary sun, the

24 Idem.

25 Ibidem, p.49-50.

26 Ibidem, p.50.

27 Ibidem, p.51-52.

very one that was to be found in the motionless cockroach. [...] I closed my eyes, waiting for this strange feeling to pass, waiting for my panting to become something more than the panting in that groan that I had heard as though it were coming from the depths of a dry, deep cistern, just as the cockroach is the creature of a dry cistern.²⁸

And so, we listen to the narrator's voice in Clarice's novel *The Hour of the Star*. "I use myself as a form of knowledge".²⁹ And still – "Is every story ever written in the world a history of afflictions?"³⁰ Happiness is an invention, says the male narrator in this novel. Accordingly, if the critic Mikhailovsky has thrown a light on the suffering Dostoevsky inflicts on his characters, we can also see in Clarice a specter of pain. Nádia Battella Gotlib, just mentioned before, author of the biography *Clarice, A Life that is Told*, speaks of Clarice Lispector's "ruthless and deliciously perverse literature".³¹ Let us consider what we mentioned in the beginning about Clarice as reader of Dostoevsky as well as reader of Hermann Hesse, and Hesse for his turn a reader of Dostoevsky. *The Steppenwolf* was mentioned by Clarice Lispector on the same occasion she commented on her readings of Dostoevsky's works.³² And she would draft an unfinished story after finishing Hesse's book, in whose novel we read: we "forgot that not even children are happy, but susceptible to many conflicts, many disharmonies, to all sufferings",³³ and: "Birth means break from the whole, limitation".³⁴ Similarly, in Clarice we grasp her voice in a fragment to say: "being born damaged my health".³⁵

Well, If the Underground Hero utters that you "are a perfect slave to your teeth; that if someone wishes it, your teeth will

28 Ibidem, p.50.

29 LISPECTOR, 1990, p.101 (our translation).

30 Ibidem, p.100.

31 PILAGALLO, 2012, p.28 (our translation).

32 Interview to MIS - RJ, see GOTLIB, 2013, p. 156-158.

33 HESSE, 2019, p.78 (our translation).

34 Idem.

35 LISPECTOR, 1999a, p. 78 (our translation).

stop hurting, and if no one does, they'll go on hurting for another three months",³⁶ in Clarice's *The Hour of the Star* we are presented to echoes of the toothache that, similar to *Notes from the underground*, also runs throughout this story. The narrator tells us about this Macabea, a character he tries to grasp. "My own pain. I carry the world but there is no happiness".³⁷ And this naive, totally rough immigrant woman from Northeastern Brazil, Macabea, lost in the great city of Rio de Janeiro, is pointed out by this narrator as a sort of *underground*. A question goes along with Macabea: "Does being ugly hurt?"³⁸ Macabea is not from the underground, though. We might suggest she *is* the underground itself. We can go back to Clarice's text with these adjustments of meaning. The narrator calls her an *underground* being, this narrator who accompanies her through the rudeness and depths of what should remain unseen. For she is the underground in a physical sense, this Macabea. She is mud. That amorphous thing sprouting, this being who does not know what it is *to be*. She is the terrible smell, as to recall Mikhailovsky remarks on the rags and on the palpably stinky atmosphere of the underground. Quite opposite to the Dostoevskyan hero, Macabea is just the lack of subjectivity. But her being tells us of what we despise and do not want to see. As we read – she was a wretched and didn't know it, breaking her silence just to say "I like screw and nail so much, and you?".³⁹ Her eventual boyfriend complains that it always rains every single time she appears. On the radio she has a favorite channel that begins with "Did you know that..." News out of context whose meanings Macabea would hardly grasp. So there is this ticking and ticking that goes on as the sound of a clock follows the news. Deep down she wasn't but "a little box quite out of tune".⁴⁰ Sounds that inhabit her, as we hear she saying – "I don't stop hurting", "me-it hurts all the

36 DOSTOEVSKY, Op.cit., p. 16.

37 LISPECTOR, 1990, p.25 (our translation).

38 Ibidem, p. 80.

39 Ibidem, p. 60.

40 Ibidem, p. 106.

time".⁴¹ Like her death, so close as if to say that "life eats life".⁴² That's the narrator's sentence, announcing her destiny; life "is a punch in the stomach."⁴³ In the beginning of his testimony of Macabea he had already advised: "Happiness – the craziest word, invented by the northeastern women who abound in the cities".⁴⁴ And towards the end we read – "I know nothing. There is just one thing I know – I do not have to be merciful with God, or do I?".⁴⁵ Macabea does not escape her fatal destiny, life is cruel, *life eats life*. On the dirty street stones she lays smashed by the car. An insect, a body disrupted in its shell, as her own husk breaks. The narrator notes/tells the reader he could just leave her lying on the street, but he will continue until his own breath goes on.

Strikingly, in Clarice's short-story "The Buffalo", there is no search for happiness, but there is a keen search for hate. In which pair of eyes, on which animal would the woman walking across the Zoo find room for hate? Which home, which cage would bring that pair of eyes she was looking for? She was looking for carnage – but none of them would teach her this taste. Not even the lions, only the warm smell in their cage reminded her of this quest. The lion licks the lioness, the two blond animals – this is love, she acknowledges, and it was not this she was looking for. Trying to get in touch with her own hate she goes further observing attentively other cages.

She watches the giraffe, with her freshness and cut hair. "With the innocence of things that are big and light without guilt".⁴⁶ That was not what she sought. "The woman in the brown coat looked away, sick, sick",⁴⁷ without finding a mirror to

41 Ibidem, p. 80.

42 Ibidem, p.104.

43 Ibidem, p.102.

44 Ibidem, p.25.

45 Ibidem, p.103.

46 LISPECTOR, 2019, p.126 (our translation).

47 Idem.

her anger in that “silent wingless bird”.⁴⁸ She wants the hidden point within herself “the worst point of her illness, the sickest point, the point of hate, she who had gone to the Zoo to get sick”.⁴⁹ She “sought out other animals, tried to learn from them how to hate”.⁵⁰ But no, not the hippopotamus, in its “humble love, content with being just flesh, carrying such sweet martyrdom in not knowing how to think”.⁵¹ No, it was spring, the monkeys were happy. “She would kill them with fifteen dry bullets”. In their cage that world that saw no danger in being naked. “God, teach me only to hate”⁵² she begs.

Leaning against the bars of a cage, for an instant it seemed to her that she was the caged one and a free coati examined her. After that, the woman moans. “The cage was always on the side where she was: she let out a moan that seemed to come from the soles of her feet”.⁵³ And now, coming from her womb, this longing for hate. Here we evoke the borders of this hate – a sort of enjoyment that shall avoid forgiveness. Even her forgiveness was born from hate and the very thought that she might never experience that hate made “her heart moan”.⁵⁴

The stitch point, as we hear the voice from the underground man:

“Well?” I’ll reply, “There is delight even in toothache.”

I had toothache for a whole month, so I know there is. In this case, of course, people don’t suffer in silence. They are angry and groan, but their groans are disingenuous; they are mixed with sarcasm – and sarcasm is the whole point. It is just those groans that express the sufferer’s delight [...]⁵⁵

To groan, to sigh, to complain, but never to forgive. Throughout the Zoo, following the lament of that woman, we listen to her

48 Idem.

49 Idem.

50 Ibidem, p.127.

51 Idem.

52 Idem.

53 Ibidem, p.130.

54 Ibidem, p.131.

55 DOSTOEVSKY, Op. cit., p.15.

thought: if that woman forgave again, “her life would be lost”.⁵⁶ Yet another moan, this time rough and brief, that lament, echoes that accompany the story. Her body moans as she makes herself small “like an old lonely killer”.⁵⁷

Finally, she finds the buffalo. That black buffalo, in his quiet anger. In this very moment, a “white thing” spreads inside her. As the cockroach’s white nothingness, experienced as rupture and communion by G.H. Now, facing the buffalo this woman feels “white as paper, weak as paper, intense as whiteness”. And a sound is heard: “Death buzzed in her ears”.⁵⁸

She will “come back out of the remote white thing where she had been”,⁵⁹ though. And she will look at the black buffalo. This black buffalo with his back turned to her, motionless. Teeth clenched, she teases him. She feels a trickle of black blood. Like the line of black blood that comes out of Macabea lying on the street after being hit by the splendid car (for each death is *The hour of the star*, one moment of glory, there Macabea reigns, alone as ever). And because sometimes “the person may need a little, little death and the person not even know that”,⁶⁰ says the narrator in *The Hour of the Star*. This is the case of Macabea. But not of the woman in the Zoo. And so we come to this instant where the buffalo finally looks at her and reaches the bars where she stands still. A buffalo and a woman. She looks into his eyes, amazed at the hate with which the tranquil-looking buffalo looks at her. And she is trapped, a slow vertigo before her body falls. Such slow vertigo that before she fell down “the woman saw the whole sky and a buffalo”.⁶¹

If hate is also the motto to *The Passion according to G.H.* and to “The Buffalo”, in the short-story “An Angel’s Discontent”

56 LISPECTOR, 2019, p.131.

57 Idem.

58 Ibidem, p.133.

59 Ibidem, p.134.

60 Ibidem, p.102.

61 Ibidem, p. 135.

there is this irritation and uneasiness, this time in the meeting with the other. As in *Notes from the underground*, there is this challenge of walking on the street without giving passage, disputing spaces shoulder to shoulder. In this short-story there is this woman who feels paralyzed when forced in the role of an angel. She walks across the streets of Rio running from the rain until she finds a taxi that stops for her. It turns into a shell, a house on wheels under the storm, as we read: "And after a while I was the hostess of my taxi".⁶² And this woman tells us: "After cleaning my house, I leaned very comfortably against this space that was mine, and from my Ark watched the end of world".⁶³ However, an old lady arrives, a lady with a great package who wants to share the cab. She allows her to enter the car and soon our woman regrets doing so, though. The old lady calls her "angel". And she feels imprisoned by that imposed title. This feeling triggers her inner voice which reveals her discomfort and hate. Sentence after sentence, each thought removes the wound that was already there only to sprout another.

Following a rhythm of its own, close to the evasiveness of the narrative voice, as Bakhtin points out, referring to the *underground man*, each new comment may upset the reader confident on what was already told. Is it a matter of being insulted and injured, or rather of *feeling* offended and insulted? Evasiveness and new questions guide the reader by means of fragments, layers in collision with what was already told. This voice that addresses someone else, this movement towards the other, building a new self at each sentence. As we read in *The Passion according to G.H.*: "every moment of finding is the losing of oneself. Perhaps what happened to me is an understanding [...] And all sudden understanding is in the last analysis the revelation of a clear nonunderstanding".⁶⁴

Hence, let us consider this evasiveness or escape or loophole as it is presented by Bakhtin:

62 LISPECTOR, 1999a, p.33 (our translation).

63 Idem.

64 LISPECTOR, 2014, p. 8.

What, then, is this loophole of consciousness and of the word? A loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words. If a word retains such a loophole this must inevitably be reflected in its structure. This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact it: is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period.⁶⁵

As it happens in the unexpected meeting of Dostoevsky's Underground Hero and Liza within his room, just to mention few lines of the whole scene with its shifting and various tensions:

What was I ashamed of? I don't know, but ashamed I was. It had also entered my agitated head that the roles had now been finally reversed, that it was she who was now the heroine, and I the very same crushed and humiliated creature that she had been when she was there with me that night, four days ago... And all this occurred to me in those few minutes when I was lying face down on the sofa!⁶⁶

Still, beginning with:

[...]She clasped me to her, embraced me and froze, as it were, in this embrace.

But, all the same, the trouble was that the hysteria had to pass. And so (I am writing the foul truth), lying firmly face down on the sofa, with my face pressed into my cheap leather cushion, I began, by degrees and from afar, involuntarily but irresistibly, to feel that it would now be awkward for me to lift my head and look Liza straight in the eye.⁶⁷

In a way of counteracting this dialogue in the word that does not end, counterpointing the reading of Dostoevsky and Clarice in the *great time* in Bakhtin's sense, we may start building a gallery of resonances. In this so-called resonance gallery, as proposed, we could gather an infinity of perceptions: walls covered by thick lines, by the cruel exposure, evasiveness, and

65 BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 233.

66 DOSTOEVSKY, Op. cit., p. 110.

67 Ibidem, p. 109-110.

the sounds of a razor blade, of a moan, of a toothache, of leaking on the floor, dirty, dust, mice, cockroach, the screech of the dry charcoal, noises that inhabit the underground double in different works. Thinking of the Bakhtin's idea of *great time* where each work also dialogues with the other, the uncovering of the underground man's echoes in Clarice's work may invite to revisit her work in dispute for passages, rooms, cages, cases and the disruptive tensions that inhabit it – the maid's bedroom, the taxi, the crash of those cases and of those bodies. G.H. cracking her own shield; the angel losing its wings and quarreling for the right to be the hostess in her taxi, her roof under the storm. Her body breaks also, for she premeditatedly forgets the smashed wings on the car and gets out with a dragon tail instead.

In Clarice's novel *A Breath of Life*, the male author (also a character in the novel) declares that he treats his characters as well as possible, then immediately reveals: "I live as raw flesh, so I try so hard to give my characters thick skin. Only I cannot stand it and then I make them cry for nothing".⁶⁸ Taking notice of these side cuts and layers, let us think of the words of Mikhailovsky on Dostoevsky's underground man: he tries to "dig it in as deep as possible and he displays that background in all its dirt and abomination. A cruel denudation takes place", presenting "all the sinuosity's of the lust of evil".⁶⁹ And Mikhailovsky goes on: "This in itself already gives the impression of something oppressive, fetid, moldy; you are indeed, truly in the underground",⁷⁰ you will be likely to meet a leper in his filthy rags. As the underground man proclaims, in his mouse-hole: "There, in its nasty, stinking hole under the floorboards, our mouse – wounded, crushed and derided – immediately sinks into a cold, poisonous and above all everlasting resentment."⁷¹

68 LISPECTOR, 1999b, p. 17.

69 MIKHAILOVSKY, 2013, p. 434 (our translation).

70 Idem.

71 DOSTOEVSKY, Op.cit., p.13.

Slices, layers, a relation in language towards the different voices Bakhtin detects. And back to the evasiveness that Dostoevsky imprints on this speech of the underground man, the ground sways, there are many voices around each apparition: tensions, struggles, oppositions.

As Mikhail Bakhtin remarks, even the slightest allusion to the other's sentence marks on the discourse a dialogical twist that no theme centered merely on the object can impress. Significantly, we may perceive in the way Clarice builds her character how they reveal themselves in inner dialogues, uttering a speech that is full of voices: silences, refusals, objects that are plenty of remarks about them.

And Bakhtin evokes the underground man: "I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man. I am an unpleasant man", to say that thus begins the confession, as he tells:

The ellipsis and the abrupt change of tone after it are significant. The hero began in a somewhat plaintive tone "I am a sick man," but was immediately enraged by that tone: it looked as if he were complaining and needed sympathy, as if he were seeking that sympathy in another person, as if he needed another person!⁷²

Thus, in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* we read, as he begins his notes on "Dialogue in Dostoevsky":

A character's self-consciousness in Dostoevsky is thoroughly dialogized: in its every aspect it is turned outward, intensely addressing itself, another, a third person. Outside this living addressivity toward itself and toward the other it does not exist, even for itself.⁷³

Notably, we may say that the characters in Clarice as well as Dostoevsky are built on this infinite appeal, this living addressivity. Towards an infinite digging of what must be there still to find out. In Clarice Lispector, this is also how the self-awareness of the speaker comes out. We can indeed bring this analysis to her work, as Bakhtin writes, still:

In this sense it could be said that the person in Dostoevsky is the subject of an address. One cannot talk about him; one

72 BAKHTIN, Op.cit., p.228

73 Ibidem, p.251.

can only address oneself to him. Those “depths of the human soul,” whose representation Dostoevsky considered the main task of his realism “in a higher sense,” are revealed only in an intense act of address.⁷⁴

And also:

In Dostoevsky almost no word is without its intense side-ward glance at someone else’s word. At the same time there are almost no objectified words in Dostoevsky, since the speech of his characters is constructed in a way that deprives it of all objectification.⁷⁵

Here too, it is impressive how these words could be said of Clarice’s literary world, in the ways she portrays the inner man. Bakhtin underlines that the ways Dostoevsky portrays this inner man and his soul was possible only by portraying his communion with another: “only in communion, in the interaction of one person with another, can the ‘man in man’ be revealed, for others as well as for oneself ”.⁷⁶ And he writes, likewise:

[...] one can approach him and reveal him – or more precisely, force him to reveal himself: only by addressing him dialogically. [...]

A person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is – and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well.⁷⁷

Correspondingly, one object addresses the other, in its interaction with all that has been said about it. Let us take into account the spaces as well as the sounds that spread resonances along the different acts of readings. All these noises: listening to pipes, drops, the tick tacking of the clock on the radio, murmurs, a high note of a violin string, the toothache, buzzing and the air in the tubes of the house. Listening to the crack on the moment of the assassination of the cockroach. Even if the sound has no name, you hear it. In the gesture of shutting the door against half of its body, the cockroach’s body. And it still

74 Idem.

75 Ibidem, p.203.

76 Ibidem, p.251-252.

77 Ibidem, p. 252.

lives. And there is this inaudible sound of the charcoal trembling with hate against the wall.

Hence, the wall, the rooms: and all those spaces and passages. Here and there the world of cases and valises, and initials of names. Opening and slamming doors, life and pain in the little room. These bodies struggling to get through obstacles. The underground man disputing the streets. A quarrel for each millimeter of distance, each shoulder and step, while digging holes, going to the outer space. And revealing an inner space. Let us even take back to Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, this wolf of the Steppes figure who would leave nothing behind but his manuscript. He must be still alive, "and somewhere wearily goes up and down the stairs of strange houses, stares somewhere at clean-scoured parquet floors",⁷⁸ says the narrator of the preface, nephew of Haller's landlady, who presents to us Haller's manuscript and who tries to record his recollections of him. The spaces where he used to talk to Haller were mainly the steps of a staircase or in the street: "[...] we often talked when we met on the stairs or in the street".⁷⁹ As well as during their first conversation:

Then one evening I came home... and found Haller seated on the landing between the first and second floors. He was sitting on the top step and he moved to one side to let me pass. I asked him if he was all right and offered to take him to the top.⁸⁰

Now, sympathetic to Haller, he tells us about this "wolf of the Steppes that had lost its way and strayed into the towns and the life of the herd [...] his shy loneliness, his savagery, his restlessness, his homesickness, his homelessness".⁸¹

Rooms, suitcases, staircases, passages, shells, cabs. With Hermann Hesse we have this *Steppenwolf* sitting on the stairs, and looking at someone else's room, as we are presented to the multiple souls of a wolf, and to rooms that are left empty. In

78 HESSE, 1965, p.17.

79 Ibidem, p. 14.

80 Ibidem, p.12.

81 Ibidem, p. 15.

The Passion according to G.H. we come across the case, the shell, the crust that breaks into a void. As in *The Hour of the Star*, we experience the collision of the car, Macabea's body lying on the stones, being subject to the other's gaze. Beating bodies. Something always breaks and crushes, the tension among characters shows it, and we may recall the Underground Hero talking of creatures as if each one could be smashed. As on his encounter with Liza: "It was she who was now the heroine, and I the very same crushed and humiliated creature that she had been when she was there with me that night, four days ago..."⁸²

Actually, in this living dialogue each moment breathes – fragments, vestiges in the great time throughout the centuries. Carrying and triggering new gazes at an object, objects that are never alone or out of what has been said of them, as Bakhtin points out. Thus, reading Clarice under the light of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the underground*, becomes an increasingly experience of dialogue and hearing of reverberations triggered in the act of reading. It is interesting to note that throughout this study, her mode of writing, increasingly dialogical, turns more and more evident. And a dialogue with the underground leads us to Clarice as a reader of Dostoevsky and in dialogue with Hesse, Kafka, Camus, Nietzsche, all in this underground lineage.

Clarice as a writer and as a reader – talking to other readers. But readers who dare to merge into reading in the utmost darkness – as one of her narrators-characters outlines. There may be an infinite dialogue between Clarice's work and Dostoevsky. Perceiving such relationships in her work may play a part in the studies of reception of the *underground man*, and also may stimulate new readings on Clarice's reception in Brazil.

82 DOSTOEVSKY, Op.cit., p.110.

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Recebido em: 30/08/2020

Aceito em: 18/11/2020

Publicado em dezembro de 2020