

Chapter 10

There Was No Escape Epiphany: Subversion and Symbolic in Clarice Lispector's "Love"

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ABSTRACT

Clarice Lispector is one of the most prominent figures of literary modernism in Latin America. Her oeuvre explores themes of existentialism, narratives of silence, and various ideas of freedom. Her self-reflexive style of writing and experimentation with the Portuguese language reflects her attempt to invoke alternate meanings through her narrative. The characters' identities in her short stories through their exploratory nature give rise to a great deal of identity and gender play. They provoke possibilities and prospects to create new gender roles and subversive practices by the manifestations of thoughts and actions in various ways. This chapter examines her use of the epiphany in her short story "Love" from the collection of short stories entitled Family Ties. The focus rests on the symbolic violence that ensues from this deviation through thought (language) and action as a response to subversion under patriarchy. The theoretical approach reads against the grain in the light of Viktor Shlovsky's "defamiliarization" and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus and field.

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INTRODUCTION

Clarice Lispector is one among the major modernist literary figures in South America. Her fiction has actively engaged in the process of reconfiguration and manipulation of the Portuguese language in twentieth century Brazil. This reconfiguration of language is intimately connected to complex relationship between identity and language. She is known for her creative use of language, depicting the implications of language, and articulating multiple meanings. Lispector's literary practices reflect the inexpressible notion of self and being and the isolation that a human being faces within various societal structures. She depicts subversion of identity by depicting the limits of the language used itself. Her writing embodies the stream of consciousness mode of narrative and explores the boundaries of Portuguese language, thus contributing to the modernist movement of Brazil. The female characters in her short stories are portrayed strongly, and their thoughts are described in immense depth through her language. This paper's focus rests on the analysis of Lispector's narratives to explore the link between language and a form of symbolic violence, namely epiphanic violence in her texts. This paper analyses her short story titled 'Amor' or 'Love' from her collection entitled *Family Ties*. It defines violence in the context of her text and then addresses how she has used language to convey this violence by analyzing her use of epiphany to express this symbolic violence.

The existing scholarship on Lispector's literature identifies the silence that pervades her stories, existentialism faced by women, and Lispector's skepticism towards language due to its inability to convey and articulate meaning. Martha Peixoto's text *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector's Fiction* presents a critical introduction. Of how one of Lispector's main innovations is her inscription of the female who is sensitive to the struggles of power. Peixoto claims that in Lispector's fiction the female is an active participant in the power struggle (Peixoto, 1994). She disagrees with Helene Cixous's approach, which involves aspects of American and French feminism. In readings of representative moments in Lispector's fiction, Peixoto explores the nexus of "gender, violence, and narrative" that looks at Lispector's "repositioning of the female, which she adopts a gendered approach rather than a feminist one" (Peixoto, 1994, p.39). She shows how in the "perplexing moments" of Lispector's narratives, in which the "distinctions of autobiography and fiction are a blur, the structures in the narrative are ambiguously gendered which results in the victimization of characters" (Peixoto, 1994, p.82). She also talks about how Lispector uses violence in her characters and stories and the impact that this violence has on the psyche of her characters. Through the use of violence, both physical and symbolic, the reader is made to connect and sympathize with the characters that are in a struggle to conform to rigorous patriarchal structures. This alienation suffered by Lispector's characters is

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