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Select Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Graduate Student Conference: Games, Sins & Mafia

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Select Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Graduate Student Conference

Games, Sins & Mafia



Juegos, Pecados y Mafia

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
March 16th, 2019

Organized by the Organization of Vistas of Hispanic Studies

UNLV Department of World Languages & Cultures

Edited by Jarret Keene, Assistant Professor in Residence & World Literature Coordinator,
UNLV Department of English

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PREFACE

Here in the UNLV English department we have tremendously enthusiastic World Literature instructors. They teach ENG 231 and ENG 232, World Lit I and II, respectively, which are, according to the catalogue, “Second-Year Seminar (SYS) courses that explore issues relevant to contemporary global society through the reading of original literature from antiquity to the present day.” The seminars are general-education classes designed to give UNLV sophomores a better understanding of the value of the literary traditions of diverse authors—some ancient and obscure, others alive and writing. World Lit is, frankly, taught by people who simply love literature.

Any class that covers everything from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to *Don Quixote* (texts taught in ENG 231), or sprints from Matsuo Basho to Isabel Allende (authors discussed in ENG 232), requires confident instruction from gifted scholars who love illuminating the depth and power of writings from every culture. As the coordinator for the World Literature seminars in the Department of English, I recruit and support graduate students, and undergrads, who show enthusiasm for canonical texts and for the literature of marginalized voices. When I saw the call for papers for the 2nd Annual Graduate Student Conference titled “Games, Sins & Mafia,” which was sponsored by UNLV’s World Languages department, I encouraged my best instructors, and one of my top undergraduate English majors, to submit abstracts. Their papers were accepted.

Manuel Rodriguez-Perez was the M.A. student who ran the conference in March 2019. He has gone on to pursue/complete a Ph.D. in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Kansas. In his last semester here, Manuel did a superb job curating a one-day event that fostered conversation about Latin American and Iberian literature from all centuries and genres. Indeed, the papers collected in these proceedings run the gamut from Panamanian-American poet Roberto Harrison, to Mexican author Juan Rulfo, to Brazilian novelist and short-story writer Clarice Lispector.

The conference marked a significant collaboration between grad students in World Languages and grad students in English. We hope this partnership continues to grow, because there is more work to be done in celebrating the richness of literatures from all over the world. Indeed, the next generation of academics and critics is developing right here at UNLV, and I look forward to seeing what research they conduct as they expand the canon and highlight neglected voices.

Jarret Keene
July 2019

The Darién Gap of Incantatory Poetics: Panamanian Vision and Indigenous Futurism in Roberto Harrison's *Yaviza*

Samuel Gilpin

Roberto Harrison's most recent, full-length collection *Yaviza* (Atelos, 2017) is a redolent, recurrent, and substantial mythopoetic exploration, "we are / salmons / looking for / our womb" (105), of the repercussions and continued intergenerational effects of violent, colonial legacies of trauma on hemispheric histories, cultures, and languages. At times droning, sprawling, and relentless, in a Gertrude Stein-derived, "continuous present" poetics, complete with exhaustive and expansive lines, and lacking punctuation: "one was announced as they were the time of offering / one was offering as they see it to believe the weather / one was saddled and placed as they were to believe the see"(12). And at other times, delicately light, lyrical, and meditatively concentrated: "barely visible / I see the sun / we are not two / by the wide birth / of oceans" (14). Peppared with Harrison's abstract line drawings, this collection stands out for its almost fractal-like, chaotic-yet-controlled, surrealist and cyber culture informed composition, dense with historical, linguistic, spiritual, and philosophic conceptions, where the poet and poem becomes visionary and vision in their cultural reimagining and shaping.

Harrison is a Milwaukee-based, Panamanian American poet and the author of several books, including *Counter Daemons* (Litmus, 2006), *Os* (subpress, 2006), *bicycle* (Noemi, 2015), *culebra* (Green Lantern, 2016) and *Bridge of the World* (Litmus, 2017). His work makes extensive use of computer science and programming terminology, with the poet Leslie Scalapino blurbing on a previous book: "Roberto Harrison's Daemons are loops (as in computer-generated, or installations using sound) yet

his series of continuous loops does not repeat but adds: to being ‘in the wilderness full.’ His previous poetry has explored politics, identity, especially cultural identity, landscape and travel, with a poetics rooted in sustained intensity and scope, as an exploration of his own psychology on behalf of more historical and marginalized subject matter, all operating under a clear display of mysticism, and the visionary born from influences inherited from the Beats like Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, and their forebears like Rimbaud, as well as Language writers like Clark Coolidge, Hannah Weiner, and Jackson Mac Low. Harrison has stated: “I remember thinking that these [Language] writers made English sound the way I first heard it as a Spanish speaker when I first arrived to the U.S.” (Harrison, Roberto. Interview by Garrett Caples, “Bridge of the World: An Interview With Roberto Harrison.” PoetryFoundation.org. Web. 1 July 2019.) His most recent collection, *Yaviza*, takes its name from a region in southern Panama where the northern half of the Pan-American Highway ends in the Darién Gap, a large, 60-mile stretch of undeveloped mountainous rainforest and swampland where road construction is virtually impossible. Harrison notes of the setting: “It is a place of many fishes and the homeland of the liminal...it is the crack in the egg of the world.” This liminal space between two Americas, still free from Western infrastructure and natural domination, becomes “the end of the West” (157),” the pre-Columbian, pre-European site of the incantatory present “inter-subjectivity without centers, without origins or maintainable boundaries, Panama as spiritual state is made up of all possible valences” (101). The Yaviza town and its association with the Pan-American Highway linking the Americas from Alaska to Argentina becomes the extended metaphor of the collection, as showcased in the exploratory and explanatory essay poem “tecumseh republic,” where a reimagined world of myth, animism, and sovereignty blends with a theoretical push toward an indigenous utopia centered in Panamá.

every earth

every turn

every time

spiral together, slow paced and warm.

Panamá is the only entry

and the only exit

of the Tecumseh Republic.

Panamá to and from the more northern turtle. The threshold is there...

Spanish is a wave of its oceans, with every Indian language & all languages — sensed
and beyond — natural and artificial

of the forest of the plains of the desert of the swamps of the Sea (157)

Panama, containing all things from languages of oppressor and oppressed, conquistador and indigenous, European and the many American, to landscapes of diverse wilderness swept across times and spaces, space-time, and the multi-dimensional visionary time, thus becomes heart of Tecumseh Republic. Tecumseh, being one of the most legendary and celebrated leaders in Native American history, a Shawnee warrior and chief, he envisioned an independent Native American nation east of the Mississippi River, and lead a multi-tribal confederacy in the early 19th century. His death at the Battle of the Thames in 1813 lead to the collapse of the pan-Native American alliance.

Tecumseh becomes the perfect spiritual icon to set up the new, multi-dimensional republic in Panama because of his emphasis on multi-tribal unity in resisting the encroaching Americans. The encroachment of the west is shown in the start of the second section of the poem “number name.”

One day, she was there with the why of it
 no one spelled and the Sun was small.
 there are others who speak my language
 but they are gone and invisible to the unborn and to the west
 more patterns become us we move to the after years
 of the planet and someone sold the book
 for a few rocks. I cut my path with her
 through the small poisonous frogs
 that eternity left us, to save the frame. No one mentions him. (35)

Indigenous peoples’ (Shawnee, Cherokee, Osage, Kaw, among others) histories (Panamanian, Moundville, Tuskaloosa, Tecumseh), cosmologies, epistemologies (qubit, quantum), technologies, and ontologies (natural and artificial, spiritual and material) surface continually throughout the collection as an eternal recurrence, uniting the material life of things (the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, the forests, and natural world) with the Symbolist dream world of the oracle to enact “the endless disorder of origin in all directions” (102) that is the Panamanian visionary consciousness saturating the poems: “Practice dying/For the immortal state/I wander/To find home/Nittak/Ninak/Chivo” (22). Mabila, the small fortress town which became the site of Chief Tuskaloosa’s resistance to Spanish conquistador, Hernando de Soto, is “a psychic origin” (104), or nodal point, into which and out of which the operational network of vivid and visionary

consciousness collects and attracts, to transform the Mississippian, mound-building culture “Snake Mound / egg // decision tree / redundancy // cut it off” (31) and its heritage of languages, Chickasaw and Choctaw, into a space liminal and destabilized from “the West’s insane preoccupation with the binary and with conflict” (102), as brilliantly shown in the unnamed sequence after the red, yellow, and black pen drawing “ocean sea ocean”:

there is only a simple line

to this heart

as she welcomes

the bold rescue

of Tuscaloosa

metropolis

Moundville

500 years

of Mobilian Fire

trade

with the rest of us (31)

Mabila then becomes the site of an intentionally dislodged, indigenous futurism, “the animal-plant pathways of the book of the ghosts rewrite every notion of home” (167), where the

reimagining of historical time is divorced from the colonial metropole, and rooted firmly in the Americas. This is a collection bound, tethered and, ultimately, celebratory in the natural world, so that “the land is an exorcist / it extinguishes / linear history / for the new dream cycle” (18) erasing the Western conception of time as linear history, or “it is night//it will be morning” (56), to be replaced with an indigenous reclamation of simultaneous space-time. “I see my cellphone for the word and never arrive / now we live in Yaviza” (58) where past, present, and future fold into each other, undoing, or at least attempting to undo, the historical and intergenerational trauma suffered by the indigenous peoples of the Americas, as in the start of the poem, “disordered body”:

suddenly desperately awake

we dissolve the thorns

and quake off the music

from the webs

of our disease — a symbol. some provide the chaotic

allure of your mind’s unwoven reeds

forms related to the absolute end — colors, by the wind

our patches do not face your escape

as someone

eating

the sound
of our feet (95)

Roberto Harrison's latest collection continues his mythopoetic oeuvre into more theoretical spaces, while casting fresh light and interpretive possibilities on his previous work. This collection charts a spiritual heritage, sadly covered up by the continual effects of colonialism, in poems vast and sprawling, keyed into the mathematics of computer programming and meditatively dreamlike, striking in their minimalist aesthetic. It is a collection that structurally and thematically offers a third way through the binaries of the complex and minimalist, the large and small, the continual and infrequent; it is a third way to dreamlike delight.

Works Cited

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Samuel Gilpin is a poet originally from Portland, living in Las Vegas as a Black Mountain Institute Ph.D. Fellow in Poetry at UNLV. He enjoys reading mid-century Modernist poetry, self-help books, and airport novels, and occasionally suffers through writing a few lines of poetry.

**Feminine Incarceration: Examining the Feminine, Collective Memory, and Masculine
Destruction Upon the Edenic in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo***

Carly Hunter

In Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, the nonlinear narrative, the haunting female voices, and the disjunction between the physical landscape of Comala and the underworld that encapsulates the town not only guides Juan Preciado on his pilgrimage of familial discovery, but also reveals the incarcerated female within the physical, social, and spiritual world of the town. The landscape Juan Precidio comes upon early in the narrative is that of death and degradation. The once lush and edenic landscape of his mother's memories is now a literal ghost town. Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* has been subject to some literary study due to the cultural, historical, and social commentary it makes, however, by examining the text through the combination of the Gothic and the colonial, it reveals the evocative position of the feminine within the decay of the town and the culture. The Gothic is connected with the colonial through the fear of physical and psychological "othering." Much scholarship in recent years has been centered around the imperial Gothic in which Tabish Khair affirms in his text, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness*, that "...the term 'imperial Gothic' [refers] to texts that take place *outside* Britain/the United Kingdom and *in* the empire, or on its fringes..." (24). Like Khair, I seek to stabilize the constraints between the colonial, or what he calls the "imperial," and the use of Gothic conventions. However, unlike Khair's use of imperial gothic, I plan to specifically look at the self-imposed colonial through the use of the hacienda system. Rulfo's text utilizes the Colonial Gothic to display the utter social breakdown at the hands of the hegemonic, and thus the patriarchal and the civil systems. While it is evident that Rulfo's text can be read in many different ways, the Colonial Gothic allows the reader to see the social breakdown on a

micro level. With the haunting voices, dead landscape, and the liminal space of the underworld that is Comala, women play a key role as the guides to the underworld and the previous world of the town. The incarcerated female within Rulfo's text symbolizes the suppression of the landscape, and the town as a whole.

Such literary critics as Jean Franco, Perez Firmat, Lucie Armitt, and Maria Del Pilar Blanco seek to bridge the critical gap between the traditional gothic and magical realism seen in Latin American literature, however, each of these critics directly look at the connection between the colonial and post-colonial contexts in which the gothic is used to reconcile Rulfo's use of specters. Lucie Armitt affirms the connection between magical realism and the Gothic in her chapter "The Magical Realism of the Contemporary Gothic," where she states, "what we find in magical realism (particularly at the dark end of its spectrum where it meets the Gothic) is a double edged *frisson* which oscillates around the disturbing aspects of the everyday" (306). The "disturbing aspects of the everyday" that Armitt alludes to directly correlate with what Juan Precidio finds in the stories of the specters that populate the town. Although the genre conventions of the Gothic and magical realism appear to be at odds with one another, in actuality they work together in order to stabilize Rulfo's non-linear narrative. Deborah N. Cohn affirms in her chapter "Paradise Lost and Regained" that, "*Pedro Páramo* has neither a center, in the sense of traditional, linear plot, nor a single protagonist" (135). Like Cohn's assertion, Rulfo's text destabilizes the traditional linear narrative, however, the narrative finds a place in the instability in the Colonial Gothic genre, where instability is utilized to expose the inequalities between the collective and the individual within a communal system. The Gothic verges on the fantastic, where there is a key feature of the explainable that anchors the genre in the real; whereas, "For now the 'magic' has to stand in some sort of relationship to 'reality' in *the text*, and the magical elements themselves have to achieve coherence *among themselves* within the narrative" (Khair 136). Therefore, both genre conventions are secured within the real. Utilizing the

Gothic, the colonial, and the magical genres, Juan's relationship and position as living among the haunting spirits of the town situate him within a liminal space of knowledge and ignorance, and of culture and memory. As Juan enters into the underworld of Comala, the town repopulates and becomes a space for the sharing of a cultural community memory. Cohn declares that, "because of their acute consciousness of recent historical trauma and change, [...] Comala [is] strongly bound to traditions and belief systems stemming from their pasts and exhibiting a common insistence on upholding these—characteristics" (136). The "acute consciousness of recent historical trauma and change" allows a space for the women of the community to expose Juan's historical subconscious, and thus his familial connection to the land and the community. The land, the feminine, and memory are utilized and connected by the Colonial Gothic in order to reflect the inner struggle of the citizens as a whole. The conflation of the natural and the supernatural indicates Juan's entrance into the cultural memory of a land he never knew, yet inherently is connected to.

Juan's voyage into the underworld is marked by the natural and the supernatural. Abundio, the crows, and the physical topography demonstrate Juan's descent into a space that is between the natural and supernatural worlds. Juan's approach into the supernatural is marked by the "flock of crows [that] flew across the empty sky, crying *cam, cam, cam*. After [they] crossed the ridge [they] started downhill again" (3). The memento mori of the crows flying, coupled with the deliberate topography, indicates not only the change in linear narrative style, but also the entrance into a new spiritual world of collective memory. Like the crows flying across a barren sky, the shift in atmospheric temperature further points to a change in the two worlds. Abundio states while walking down a hill into Comala with Juan: "This is nothing. Just wait, you'll be a lot hotter when you get to Comala. The town's the hottest place in the world. They say that when somebody dies in Comala, after he arrives in Hell he goes back to get his blanket" (3). The change in temperature and environment not only points to Juan's descent into another world, but it also symbolizes the

confined space of the collective burial site in the second part of the narrative. Accordingly, the shift in topography and temperature resembles the moment of Juan's death: "There wasn't any air. I had to swallow the same air I breathed out, holding it back with my hands so it wouldn't escape. I could feel it coming and going, and each time it was less and less, until it got so thin it slipped through my fingers forever" (56). The fleeting presence of fresh air and Juan's subsequent suffocation is similar to the change in temperature that Juan first experiences while entering Comala. Like Abundio's comment about the heat in Comala, Juan's experience entering into this new world is matched with the imagery of his death. Jean Franco connects Dante's descent into the rings of hell and Juan Preciado's journey to Comala's underworld in her essay, "Journey to the Land of the Dead *Rulfo's* Pedro Páramo" when she writes: "in contemporary literature, while the living continue to make Dante's journey into the underworld the frontiers have become blurred, ghostliness has invaded this side of the of the Styx, and the living seem to lack substance—to have been turned into shadows" (430). Like Franco's assertion, Juan's journey is marked by the integration of the living and the dead. It is fitting that Juan begins his journey as living, and as the landscape changes, so, too, does the blurring of the frontiers. The landscape and temperature first indicate Juan's entrance into a world that lingers between the natural and spiritual, meaning that it is outside the two worlds of human consciousness. For Juan and the reader there are two worlds: the natural world and the afterlife. However, Juan and the reader quickly realize that Comala is neither of these, but rather it exists in its own liminal space where it straddles both living and dead, spiritual and natural. While the alteration in landscape and atmospheric temperature initially demonstrate the difference between the two worlds, it is Abundio that becomes the symbolic bridge in which Juan may cross into the other world, where Abundio is the biblical figure of St. Peter, and thus the gatekeeper to the underworld, and the town of Comala itself.

Abundio's role as the gatekeeper to the underworld of Comala highlights not only the biblical overtones of the novel, but also the strict gender binaries that the novel adheres to. These gender binaries are represented in the form of the linear style and the roles the characters play within the collective history of the town. Abundio, like many of the other male characters, forces the narrative forward, while the many female characters are concerned with contributing to Juan's collective memory. Therefore, there is a shift in the narrative structure when the female specters present the history of the town. This nonlinear narrative style connects the *collective* with that of the subjective and problematic aspect of history. Through Juan's interaction with Abundio and the first female character, the confrontation between the linear and nonlinear, masculine and feminine, the real history of the town is realized and thus perpetuated in order to reveal Juan's true place within the town and their collective memory. Wendy B. Faris examines the role of the female in magical realism where she specifically utilizes the feminist theorist, Julia Kristeva. Using Kristeva, Faris states in her chapter, "Women and Women and Women' *A Feminine Element in Magical Realism*" that, "a semiotic or hidden and unconscious form of discourse that relates back to a connection to the maternal, and the spiritual, than with the symbolic kind of speech, which is allied with the father, patriarchal society, and rational thought" (171). Therefore, the female characters' non-linear narrative places them outside of patriarchal society and control. In their death and in Juan's return to the town, the women are free from the oppressive masculine control. Once Juan arrives in Comala he is greeted by a female spirit, and although she is a fleeting specter in the "silent village," she becomes one of the many women who help direct Juan on his journey to familial discovery: "When I was passing a corner I saw a woman wrapped up in a robozo, but she disappeared as if she didn't even exist [...] Suddenly she crossed the street in front of me. 'Good evening,' she said. I followed her with my eyes. 'Where does Doña Eduveges live?' I called to her" (5). The brief appearance of the female spirit sets the standard for the rest of Juan's encounters with the feminine. Just as she

appears and disappears, so, too, does the feminine narrative direction. Similar to Abundio, this first female spirit introduces Juan to the lively spirit world of Comala. However, Juan is not able to fully understand the voices. He states:

I *felt* that the village was *still alive*, and that if I didn't hear anything except the silence, that was because I wasn't used to silence, with my head still so full of noises and voices. Especially voices. And here where the air was so *dead*, they sounded even louder. I remembered what my mother told me: "You'll hear me better there, better than now. I'll be nearer to you there. (6, emphasis added)

Juan's interaction with the female specter allows him not only to fully hear the other spirits that populate the land, but she also is the one who reconnects Juan with his mother. Through this encounter, Juan begins to feel the town as it once was—as if he was a part of this town his whole life. By feeling the town as alive, he begins to enter into the collective memory of the people who have been left behind. This collective memory can only be entered through the guidance of the female spirits because it is the feminine that is innately connected to the land. Juan's entrance into the collective memory, following the first female spirit's entry, brings him closer to the figure of the mother. Therefore, this female spirit joins Juan with that of the mother, the land she is connected to, and the familial past he never knew.

The role of the mother is not limited to just Dolorita, but to Dorotea, Doña Eduviges, Susana San Juan, Maria Dyada, and Damiana Cisneros. However, Dolorita and Dorotea are central to the figure of the mother for Juan. These two women are not only essential to Juan's collective memory, but they also are the figures that usher him into the underworld and the collective memory of the town. Victor Turner affirms the importance of the mother in his text, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, when he states that "an individual's link to other members of his society through the mother, and hence by extension and abstraction 'women' and 'femininity' tends to

symbolize that wider community” (136). Juan’s connection to his mother and the other maternal figures that pervade the town link him to his community, however, the larger community that Turner draws attention to within *Pedro Páramo* is the communal memory, and thus the women act as an “extension” and “abstraction” of that memory. Juan’s mother, Dolorita, is the one who raises him on the stories of the town and the people, while Dorotea is the figure who solidifies Juan’s place within the town and the collective history.

When examining the role of the mother, what is really being looked at is the connection between the mother and the landscape in which Juan finds himself. Femininity is directly connected to nature, the seasons, and changing landscapes because of women’s ability to create and sustain life. In Rulfo’s text, the landscape and the mother are one ~~in~~ and the same, where the health and fertility of the women in the town is reflected by the rich and lush landscape. Juan journeys to his maternal home after his mother’s death: “I came to Comala because I was told my father, a certain Pedro Páramo, was living here. My mother told me so, and I promised her I would come to see him as soon as she died” (1). However, it is the physical absence of his mother that reflects the mother’s inherent connection to nature and the desertion of Comala’s landscape:

Then my mother died. I should have cried out. I should have broken my hands by clasp-
 ing them together in despair. [...] The wind came in through the open doors, rustling the
 morning-glory vine. The down had begun to grow on my legs, between the veins, and my
 hands were hot and trembling when they touched my forehead. The sparrows playing. The
 wheat swayed on the hillsides. I was sorry that she couldn’t see the wind playing in the
 jasmine, that she’d closed her eyes to the sunlight. (74)

After Dolorita’s death, there is a conflation between how Juan should have reacted and the natural elements that surround him. The connection between the death of the mother and the stirring of the wind and the sparrows depict not only the dissipation of the mother’s spirit, but also how her death

affects the natural world. Furthermore, Juan's physical reaction to his mother's death, with his "hot and trembling" hands when he "touched [his] forehead" disconnect him from the natural and the spiritual, and anchor Juan in the physical—the individual experience. Thus, his individual physical reaction to his mother's death separates him from not only the mother, but also from the feminine.

In this moment, he, like the other men in the text, is outside the female experience. While Juan is "sorry that she couldn't see the wind playing in the jasmine", he will realize that, despite the death of her physical body, her spirit is very much alive and continues to be tied to the natural and spiritual worlds. Therefore, the figure of the mother, her ghost in Juan's mind, and the landscape are joined as one. It is only through the presence of the female that Juan begins to feel the edenic land his mother told him so much about: "Why does it look so dead?" "They've had bad times, señor." I expected it to look like the way it did in my mother's memories" (2). The "green plains" and white houses are not what Juan finds and, like the absence he feels from his mother, he senses the same about the town. The relationship between Dolorita and the landscape is highlighted by her physical absence. While Juan feels disconnected from his mother upon arriving in the town, the landscape feels disconnected from the lives that it once sustained. Maria Del Pilar Blanco affirms in *Ghost-Watching American Modernity*, that, "it is through haunting that the ghost town is able to speak of its life, its failure, and its unraveling of its living" (82). The communication within the ghost town of Comala bridges the living with the dead, and the figure of the mother with Juan. Accordingly, the lush land the mother leaves behind only begins to reappear through Juan's memory. The haunting female voices are able to speak and contribute to the collective memory of the area.

Like the land, the memory of the town is returning with every haunting voice that guides Juan. While Juan's journey begins with the appearance of the town as dead, it is through the voices of the actual dead that bring its once lush cultural and agricultural landscape to life. The landscape that Juan finds is one of "*desert and desertion*" where location and agency intersect (Del Pilar Blanco

82). For the spirits of Comala, agency only returns with Juan's presence because of his desire to enter into the collective memory. "The lesson alike of the classical texts and of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the deadness of the dead" Franco writes, "for they are forever halted, stilled. Theirs is the tragedy of completion" (429). However, in Rulfo's text, the tragedy is not of completion, nor is it "forever halted," but rather, they are suspended in a purgatory of a collective memory that must be perpetuated, and thus shared with Juan. The memory of the town that is inherently affixed to the land is destroyed through the man who benefitted most from the land and the people: Pedro Páramo. Through the collective memory Juan receives, the demise of the town, the land, and consequently, the individual and the collective, is destroyed by Pedro's power and loss of will. Since Pedro Páramo loses his will after Susana dies, the land and the people also lose their need to prosper:

After that the fields all went to ruin. It was a pity to see them choking up with weeds and scrub from not being ploughed. That was when people began to leave. The men went, first, to look for work [...] after that they seemed to forget all about the village and the rest of us, even about their things [...] Others stayed and waited for Pedro Páramo to die, because they said he'd promised to will them his property, and they kept on living here with that hope.

(79)

The death of the female directly correlates with that of the land, where Susana's death causes the fields to "chok[e] up with weeds." Although it is through Pedro Páramo's neglect that the land begins to deteriorate, his neglect stems from the death of the female, and therefore the figure of birth and fertility. Just as the land turns into a desert, the citizens of Comala begin to desert. The abandonment of the town not only means the disbandment of the town but also the dissipation of the collective memory each citizen brings to the fabric of their culture. Just as Dolorita left the town, the townspeople who eventually leave for more opportunity take the memories of Comala with

them. Each person who leaves takes a piece of the collective memory with them. Similar to Franco's connection between Dante's and Rulfo's texts, the purgatory of Comala's underworld leaves them in suspension until they are able to continue their oral history. Therefore, Rulfo's text dismantles and reconfigures the notion of history and communal memory, where the maternal and paternal roles are amalgamated with the civil and, thus, the collective. This fusion is physically depicted in the health and prosperity of the land and, thus, the people.

Through the oral history of the town and its people, the connection between mother, father, and civil are reflected in the landscape and memory. Del Pilar Blanco asserts, "Rulfo's novel thus begins with the promise of a return, and the reader might suppose that 'something' the landscape is awaiting might have, in fact, arrived" (83). The landscape is awaiting the arrival of Juan, where his entrance symbolizes the coming together of the mother, father, and culture. By returning to Comala, Juan brings his mother's memories and her spiritual presence, "filial fulfillment," and the history of the town he is connected to: "I came to Comala because I was told that my father, a certain Pedro Páramo was living here" (Del Pilar Blanco 83, Rulfo 1). Like that of the collective memory Juan eventually finds, the maternal and the paternal must come together in order for Juan to understand and become a part of his cultural past. While the feminine is connected to the land and, thus, the natural, the masculine is connected to the hegemonic and all that it encompasses. Although Rulfo's narrative appears to be concerned with paternal discovery and reconnection, in actuality, it is centered on the feminine and, thus, the abstract.

The binary forces of feminine and masculine are at the center of the destruction of the town, where femininity and the women of the town are tied to fertility and life, and where masculinity is bound to the destructive degradation of the town socially and organically. The feminine and masculine forces in Rulfo's text are conflicting in their purpose and representation within the civil. The women are the givers of life in the town, while the men are the ones who are at the source of

the town's downfall. Pedro Páramo is not only at the source of the town's downfall, he is also its creator. In her chapter, "Desert Mournings," Del Pilar Blanco states that "at the opening of the novel, Abundio informs Juan Precidio that Páramo is also his father, thus revealing to Juan and the reader that Páramo is/was author of Comala in more ways than one" (83). This notion of authorship in Rulfo's text is significant in understanding the role of the feminine because it is the incarcerated female who breaks out of her symbolic chains in order to claim the authorship of the town's history.

While the men of the town, and specifically Páramo, are the figures who created and destroyed the town, the women are the ones who seek to create a true oral history of the town. Like the integration of the natural and the supernatural, the synthesis of the masculine, the feminine, and the landscape reflects the social unfolding of the town and people. Therefore, the social unfolding is built upon the hacienda system of the Media Luna where Pedro is the figurehead. The landscape reflects this conflict because, in the end, Pedro Páramo ruined the town through his greed and pride, and the women are left in the dilapidated structures of the town surrounded by the possessions of the ones who escaped the oppression:

"I'm Eduviges Dyada, Come in." It looked as if she'd been waiting for me. She said everything was ready, and I followed her through a long row of dark rooms. They seemed empty at first, but when I got used to the darkness and the narrow thread of light that followed us, I could see shadows on both sides. I thought we must be walking through a passageway between piles of bundles. [...] "I always keep the junk out of it, in case somebody comes back. (7)

Although the others have escaped the complete destruction of the town, women like Dyada and Donis's sister are left with the constant presence of the memory of the town and all that it used to be. As Juan walks through Dyada's house he is enveloped by darkness. The "long row of dark rooms" that he passes symbolizes the many people who have come before him, and as he walks, the

“narrow thread of light that followed” represents the thread of oral history that he is acquiring. By Dyada asserting that she keeps the possessions for those who may come back, Rulfo is stabilizing the narrative in memory and what is to come in the narrative development.

By the end of the novel, Juan’s death and communal burial connects the notions of waiting for the return of the people and the awakening of the many people buried with Juan. Therefore, the darkness and the trail of light that ~~is~~ are present foreshadow Juan’s eventual death and his induction into the community. Furthermore, the state of Dyada’s house also reflects her imprisonment in the past and, thus, in the memory of Comala and its inhabitants. Unlike Juan, who seeks to learn and join the oral history of the town, Dyada is trapped under the weight of these memories. It is only through the feminine figure Dyada that Juan begins to realize the destruction the town has endured. This collapse, as Dyada’s house shows, is a result of Pedro Páramo and, thus, the hegemonic system. The ruination of the town is not only reflected in the desert landscape, but also in the living women who have continued to occupy Comala after everyone has either died or left the town altogether. Rulfo juxtaposes the dead landscape with the living women of the town, which signifies the social breakdown that continues to affect the living.

While traveling through the town Juan not only comes across Dyada, but he also meets and stays with Donis and his sister/wife. As soon as Juan comes across the couple, the state of their relationship is reflected in their dilapidated house:

I went in. It was a house with half of the roof fallen in, roof-tiles scattered over the floor, the roof on the floor. And in the other half a man and a woman. “Are you dead?” I asked them. The woman laughed. The man looked at me solemnly. “He’s drunk,” he said. “No, he’s just frightened,” the woman said. (45)

Just as Dyada’s house reflects her incarceration of the past through the dark, narrow hallways, Donis and his sister’s house reflects the utter breakdown of the self and the town as a whole. As the

narrative develops, Juan discovers that the couple is actually brother and sister, and the sister is forced into hiding in order to avoid the social criticism:

He isn't my husband, he's my brother...although he doesn't want anybody to know it. [...] I hardly know anybody. I never go out. I've been here forever, right here where you see me... No, that's not true. Just since he made me *his* woman. Since then I've stayed inside, so *they* won't see me. (49)

Her affirmation that Donis is not her husband, but rather her brother, not only places Juan within the community of the town, but it also connects the familial with the foundering of the town. Also, the fact that the brother doesn't want anybody to know about their relationship further connects the world of the living with the dead because there is no one left alive in the town except Dyada. Just as Juan oscillates between the natural and supernatural worlds, so, too, does the couple. By stating that they do not want anyone to know about their incestuous relationship, "anyone" refers to the ghosts that inhabit the land. Similar to Dyada and the items that clutter her house, the couple's awareness of the underworld that coincides with their own, and the ghosts that reside therein, indicate the continuation of the community and, thus, the communal history.

Throughout Rulfo's text, the incarceration of the living female is juxtaposed with the imprisonment of female specters. The incarceration of the female is physical and symbolic. Dyada and Donis' sister/wife are physically trapped in their houses while also being symbolically imprisoned in the collective memory of Comala. Similarly, the female specters that inhabit the land are symbolically incarcerated in the memory of the masculine forces that controlled them, and the community as a whole. Both representations of femininity are trapped under the wake of Pedro Páramo's destruction. The female ghosts of the town reveal the haunting nature of how social corrosion from power ensues, and how this erosion has lasting effects. Therefore, the incarceration of the female, physically, socially, and spiritually, reflects the internment of the town by Pedro

Páramo. Juan's journey through the town physically and spiritually reveals his liminal place between the natural and supernatural worlds. While the dilapidated houses of Dyada and the couple represent the rise and fall of the town, the physical structure also serves as a tangible reminder of a broken system. While the Media Luna allowed the town to thrive, it also gave Pedro Páramo his power, and thus it became the demise of the people and the land. Rulfo's text utilizes the once lush landscape to reflect the utter social demise of Comala. Juan's pilgrimage through the underworld ends with his familial discovery and his death. Like the others who have come before him, Juan must remain in the underworld in order to complete the collective memory of Comala. The incarcerated female is ultimately freed once Juan is buried among his community. Like the ghosts he meets along the way, Juan must become one with the land in order to fully enter into the community. Therefore, the land, and thus the Media Luna, is affixed to the ones who have tended to it. While it appears that Juan has arrived at a barren and desolate landscape, what he finds is that the richness of the land and the people are thriving beyond the surface. With this revelation, it is no wonder why the text's namesake never appears: Pedro Páramo represents the destruction of the town, while Juan Precidio is the perpetuation of it.

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The Postmodern Interstice of Juan Rulfo and William Faulkner

By Jenessa Kenway

The wasteland of the modern era is cluttered with the spiritual ruins of the past, before humanity was stripped of the comfort of unshakeable absolutes upon which lives would be based. With economic lust and industrial speed, new monuments of prosperity were built on top of the crumbling foundations without bothering to sift through the rubble for any remnants of value. The novels *Pedro Paramo* by Juan Rulfo and *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner take place within the amorphous gap between the old and the new. Rulfo and Faulkner collect and paste shadows and scraps of the past together, constructing a vivid, cubist literary perspective that comments profoundly on the lack of metaphysical certainty pervading the postmodern era that, above all, portrays the fragmented subconscious through which we perceive reality.

Exploring the innovative literary cubism of Rulfo and Faulkner reveals a postmodern interstice – an amorphous gap between the old and the new – in which the two works operate. This liminal space is emblematic of the gap between beats of the heart, language and experience, words and deeds, life and death, past and present. It is the “crack between the adobe bricks” that catches the “dancing laurel leaf” (22). It is a space in which anything is possible: Time is suspended, the dead speak, and thought becomes tangible. The application of cubism captures the ruptured, multifarious vision of occupying multiple states of being, time, and location. In this space, this “simultaneous time, which is a no time,” the two authors weave the threads of memory and the mechanics of the mind into the grim reality of fictional characters set in a fractured world, until distinguishing between perception and reality becomes impossible.

The historical settings in the two novels coincide with major social upheavals occurring at the time of their creation. In the case of Faulkner, the First World War and the Great Depression

and, for Rulfo, the collapse of the Caciquismo system and the Cristero Wars. It is clear the two authors were deeply affected by these events and were driven to comment on the feeling of social disintegration that resulted. They express this social fragmentation by rejecting the traditional, single, omniscient narrator, and transforming it into a kaleidoscopic perspective. In Faulkner's book this takes place with each chapter being told from inside the mind of one of the 15 characters, which is designated at the beginning of each entry. Rulfo's approach novel is similar to this except that he prefers to deny the reader even the smallest comfort of providing the name of the speaker up front, and forces us to hunt through the context for their identity. Requiring readers to search functions as an implied metaphor for the way we must all endeavor to find our own identity in life.

The look and feel of a cubist painting is an apt analogy for the style in which the two novels are written. The fragmented angles and simultaneous perspectives correspond with the fragmented narrative and distortion of time and space that occur within the two books. But, more than just the visual similarity, the reference to Cubism is significant as Cubism itself involves another collapse of social convention: the academic, illusionist style. The obvious reference to Cubism, an artistic style that rejects illusion, corresponds with Faulkner and Rulfo's rejection of masking internal spiritual decay, represented by the sublime surface of classical mimetic painting that, at times, expresses a perfection out of sync with the rending of the social subconscious from historical trauma. It is the same sensibility that Cubist painters were responding to with their shift away from realism. How could art and writing continue to portray reality as usual after the atrocities of the events shrouding that period? Even images of violence seemed somehow to fail to capture the depth of the psychic fissure.

The loss of spiritual certainty is embedded within the communication process: It is the gap that separates actual experiences from the verbal or written imitation of them. The paradox is that words are assigned to convey vitally important life experiences but must invariably fall short of the

real thing, yet we are left with no other alternative. If we cannot trust words to accurately express meaning, then we may be led to implicitly distrust words, especially words that attempt to convey abstract ideas that cannot be made tangible.

Faulkner uses the character Addie Bundren to express this distrust of language. Narrated entirely from the grave, Addie's monologue is fused with metaphysical uncertainty, enacting a dramatic separation of word from body that matches Addie's innate distrust of the gap between language and experience. Addie wryly laments, "Words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (171). She thinks that words such as "motherhood," "love," and "fear," diminish the actual experience and had to be "invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the [experience] didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (172). She proceeds to test her theory by mocking "high dead words" (175) like "sin" and "love" by having an affair with the town pastor, thereby proving to herself that deeds are equally as impotent as words. Pastor Whitfield, a figure that should back up spiritual language, instead participates in the act of "sin", assisting in the deconstruction of linguistic meaning.

Addie continues breaking down language. Lying in bed at night, repeating her husband's name in the darkness, the word melts into an image: "I would think about his name until...I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life" (173). Her husband's name is systematically repeated until it is unrecognizable. The liquefied identity is poured into a jar as pure nothingness. Detached from the body, the familiar name becomes an abstract substance. Picasso's *Still Life with Bottle of Rum* or Georges Braque's *Still Life on Table* resonate with Addie's repetitive process of fracturing and melting language. Scattered letters and repeated shapes churn, caught in the process of language giving way to form.

Rulfo uses the character of a Catholic priest named Father Renteria similarly to illustrate a lack of trust, a loss of faith, in words. A funeral takes place for the death of Pedro Paramo's son, Miguel, who committed many crimes including killing the priest's brother and raping his niece. At first, Renteria refuses to give him God's blessing, which would allow his soul to enter heaven; however, with a little pressure and a "handful of gold coins," (50) the cash-poor priest acquiesces, and sprinkling the holy water, declares, quote "Oh, God, have mercy on this your servant." He retracts this benediction later, in private prayer, explaining to God, with a helpless shrug, that Miguel "can afford to buy salvation....for my part I hope you damn him to hell" (50). But the damage is already done. The words are meaningless. The principles sacrificed to fix the altar (and dining room table) strike the spiritual core of Comala, causing a wound from which the language of decay spreads. By hypocritically bestowing sacred phrases upon an "evil," unworthy candidate, Renteria has as much as raped his niece himself. Or in the eloquent words of Addie, Renteria's words "are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds that are just the gaps in people's lacks" (174). His avarice and financial excuses—combined with his "not-deeds"—slowly wear holes into his faith. The gap between words and deeds is stretched ever farther as they are systematically stripped of meaning by weak individuals and the institutions they represent, simultaneously undermining language and spirituality.

At the heart of the postmodern interstice, within the fragmented style and language gap of Rulfo and Faulkner's prose, resides the restless stream of consciousness. The literary rendering of the stream of consciousness serves multiple purposes. It is, foremost, the basis for the form of the two novels as the fragmented narrative is patterned after the manner in which memory and the stream of consciousness function. Linked with the distrust of language, the entrance into the minds of the characters demonstrates the impossible desire to circumvent language entirely and have readers directly experience the thoughts of the characters. Like precursors to virtual reality

technology, Faulkner and Rulfo force the reader to think, see, hear, feel and, essentially, merge with the characters. For example, in Faulkner's novel, in the passage leading up to Dewey Dell's declaration of being a "wet-wild-seed," (64) the reader is not merely reading an account of her inner-turmoil over her pregnancy but coalescing with the quote "sweet-hot-moaning-breath-in-darkness" (63) that is Dewey Dell's quote "process of coming unalone".

In Rulfo, the reader is as confused as the character, Abundio, while both experience and commit the drunken murder of Don Pedro. By means of this cerebral link, the events in the novels crossing between past and present are resurrected with each new reading in the mind of the reader. This is especially true in the case of Rulfo (and to a lesser extent with Faulkner) as Rulfo places the reader inside the minds of numerous dead people – a powerful allusion to the manner in which the past continues to effect the present, although it usually transpires in a more subtle, less spectral manner.

Lastly, the stream-of-consciousness format of the novels explores the paradox that is reality. Reality is defined as that which is believed to exist apart from the imagination, to be of a permanent nature, and to exist in spite of individual perceptions of it. Faulkner and Rulfo confront the notion of solid, independent reality, providing an indeterminate reality composed entirely of fragmented strings of perceptual experiences. This concept is highlighted in the thoughts of Vardaman, as he pets Jewel's horse in the darkness:

It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components — snufflings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammonia hair, an illusion of coordinated whole...an *is*, different from my *is*...I see him dissolve... and float upon the dark in fading solution; *all one yet neither; all either yet none.* (56-57)

The experience of the horse is fractured into smells, heat, and breath, each facet experienced individually and simultaneously as though we're looking at the animal through a kaleidoscope. The different attributes cascade across the sensory experience as we attempt to experience the whole through the various parts vying for attention. This experiential vision of reality breaks down into the multiplicitous, cubist composition that attempts to capture all angles of a subject at once: "all one yet neither; all either yet none." (57). Reality breaks down into variegated, perceptual essence.

In Rulfo the experience of reality is similarly fractured. Encountering Doña Eduvigis for the first time, Juan Preciado notes that "her mouth was filled with teeth and a tongue that worked as she spoke, her eyes were the eyes of people who inhabit the earth" (15), providing an oddly fractured, semi-violent portrait that brings to mind Willem De Kooning's abstract expressionist portraits of women. Abstract expressionism is where cubism eventually goes. The description gestures toward multiple sets of eyes and people together, suggesting a compacted portrait of moments in time across a lifetime, smashed all together in chaotic prism.

The phantasmal blend of the past and present applies both to the characters and the town of Comala itself. Finding the "house by the bridge", Juan Preciado lifts his "hand to knock, but there was nothing there. My hand met only empty space, as if the wind had blown open the door" (10). The house of Eduvigis Dyada is both there and not there, allowing characters to interact with the ghostly structures of the past. Time fluctuates; past and present exist simultaneously. Furthermore, the past resounds with a force that silences consciousness in the present. In the profound vacuum, the still cry of the murdered Toribio Aldrete echoes in between the heart beats of Juan Preciado (71), drowning out thoughts of the present. The past is pockmarked with small holes through which the past leaks through, just like the photograph of Juan Preciado's mother, carried in his pocket, that is riddled with pinpricks – a hole in her heart large enough to stick a "middle finger through" (10). Within the mind of each character the reader experiences a different reality. While that reality may

be based upon delusion and fantasy within the confines of that persona, each version constitutes the “true” reality from that perspective.

The character Darl, in Faulkner, functions as nexus point for multiple realities. He alone possesses the capacity to question reality, including that of his own existence: “When you are emptied for sleep, you are not... I don’t know if I am or not” (80). Perhaps the strain of this uncertainty is the cause of his psychotic break. Or his enhanced perspective allows him to see the absurdity of the family’s death march to Jefferson in way the others cannot, leading them to deem him insane. Ultimately, Faulkner provides the gleam of insanity as yet another perspective upon reality that is simply misunderstood. Perhaps the laughter of Darl speaks to the insanity of the Great Depression as whole families packed up the dead-relics of their former life, carting it around with them as they attempted to start a new life.

In Rulfo’s novel, each character’s delusional reality is a “rock” in the precariously stacked pile that is Mexico’s postmodern political system. When, at the end, Pedro “collapse[s] like a pile of rocks,” it seems Rulfo is inferring that the system needs revision, and part of the solution may lie in acknowledging the inequities woven into the perceptual panorama of reality.

Rulfo and Faulkner explore interlocking disparities — the gap between language and actuality, the link between past, present and future, ambiguous absolutes, radically differing perceptions — which all, somehow, co-exist to form the mosaic of *reality*. By entering the half-light of the postmodern interstice, and examining the many disparate metaphysical threads that commingle there, we are able to view overlapping realities. These stories distill the complex process of perceiving reality, offering powerful, verbal images that convey the cubist visual experience. These stories point to the myriad small gaps in our lives where we stumble upon the ghosts of the past. Like the pocket photograph of Preciado’s mother, there are holes in the past that the present

can stick a “middle finger through” (10). The present is rife with pinprick spaces, tiny gaps, in which memories surface, and all of us carry the past tucked into small holes in our hearts.

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I am Barata: Transformation and Identity in Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.* and *The Hour of the Star*

Alexander Valle

“I do not want beauty, I want identity. Beauty would be an accretion, and now I shall have to dispense with it. The world does not have the intention of beauty, and that once would have shocked me: in the world no aesthetic plane exists, not even the aesthetic plane of goodness, and that once would have shocked me. The thing is much more than that. The God is greater than goodness with its beauty” (Lispector 167).

This paper begins with an epigraph detailing beauty because, for Clarice Lispector, there is no such thing as beauty. Clarice Lispector was a Ukrainian-born, Jewish Brazilian writer of the 20th Century who lived in turbulent times. Because Brazil has seen great social inequality and oppression, particularly the city of Rio de Janeiro, it is no wonder that the question of identity is a central theme in all of Lispector's works. For the privileged person with abundant resources and the modern commodities that characterize American society, identity is essential. It is something that must be understood for oneself: Each person should be confident in their own identity, and a person should be able to discern identity as a cultural concept, and that this understanding, in either case, is informed by that person's educational level. However, for the disparaged person, that one who has no certainty as to whether tomorrow they will have a job, food on the table, or life at all, identity is inconsequential. Survival takes precedence over everything else. Survival itself is the identity. In *The Passion According to G.H.*, and *The Hour of the Star*, novels that were written in the middle and end of her career, respectively, Clarice Lispector ruminates on the disparity that comes from poverty, the difference in thinking when one comes from a higher social place than another, and asks, what exactly is one's “I”?

In the opening pages of *The Passion According to G.H.*, Lispector informs the reader that she used to be a person with a third leg. It was as though she were a stool, the three legs able to support her weight entirely, she had no need to be weary of falling. However, she has lost this third leg. There is a suspension of disbelief. Did Lispector always have a third leg, or did she find one and then lose it? Without that third leg, Lispector is only able to stand with two, which is what leads to her death in the novel. Since she is liable to fall, she has to fall. To set up the premise of what is to come, (the confrontation with the Other), Lispector, as if addressing the reader, writes, “that morning, before entering the Maid’s room, what was I? I knew what others had always seen me be, and that was how I knew myself. I don’t know how to say what I was. But at least I want to remember: what was I doing” (16). Already the question of self comes up. We as readers understand that the character of this story, G.H., is unfulfilled, and is nothing more than a reflection of the upper echelon of society that she languidly inhabits.

With her maid having quit her position the day before, and G.H. uninterested in doing any art work, she commits herself to an arrangement. First, she will clean the maid’s room, then the kitchen and living room, where she will conclude her day with as much ennui, or as much contentment, as one can have with a life such as hers. However, her day does not reach beyond the room of the maid, for it is here that she encounters the cockroach. From the moment G.H. opens the door, looking in at the arrangement of the furniture, the shadows on the wall, and the condition of the wardrobe, she is stricken with fear. G.H. is ensnared by something she cannot place her finger on, all she knows is that this room invites death. Eventually, G.H. enters the room and approaches the ill-maintained wardrobe. She believes that it can be restored, so she opens the door of the wardrobe and examines the inside, where the cockroach has always been waiting for her. It is here that Lispector elucidates why the cockroach is so vile. In great detail, Lispector describes the composition of the cockroach, carefully accentuating every detail of this abject being. Lispector

remarks that “a cockroach is so old that it was immemorial. What I had always found repulsive in roaches is that they were obsolete yet still here” (40).

In Portuguese, the word for cockroach is *barata*, and in this story of G.H. and the immortal *Barata*, Lispector likens the cockroach to God Himself, and believes that God precedes time and history, God always was there. He possesses infinite meaning, so much that He is meaningless within the limited minds of humans. For the *barata*, the same can be said in the manner in which it lives its life, that is to say, it lives in the infinite. It has been there before humans were, undergoing no evolutionary change, the *barata* simply exists as repugnance, an abhorrent creature that serves no purpose other than being unclean and hated. In her fright at the sight of the cockroach, G.H. traps the cockroach in between the door and the wall of the wardrobe. Her first strike is insufficient in killing the cockroach, and a second attempt is required. The *barata* shares its fate with G.H., who, as the reader will see later in the novel, also requires a second confrontation in order to arrive at her death. G.H. slams the door again and the cockroach dies. Its white matter seeps out of its body to G.H.'s horror. Shaken and terrorized, G.H. remarks how “all of a sudden I moaned out loud, this time I heard my moan. Because rising to my surface like pus was my truest matter--and with fright and loathing I was feeling that ‘I-being’ was coming from a source far prior to the human source and, with horror, much greater than the human” (Lispector 52). The cockroach's white matter exits its body physically, while G.H.'s matter begins to leave metaphysically. Lispector the author takes command of the voice of G.H. and expresses her conflict. She is about to sin, to destroy herself and whatever perceptions people and had of her. Lispector writes, “I opened my mouth astonished: it was to ask for a help. Why? Why didn't I want to become as unclean as the roach? What ideal was fastening me to the sentiment of an idea? Why shouldn't I become unclean, exactly as I was discovering my whole self to be? What was I afraid of? Becoming unclean with what? Becoming unclean with joy” (70). The biblical unclean can be that which God has commanded to be nonfood,

for it tarnishes the soul, it is not sanitary for God's chosen creature to consume. Yet, Lispector-G.H. want to do the deed, they are curious to know why it is unclean. In *The Hour of the Star*, near the conclusion of the novel, Lispector writes: "But I was like a person, who, having been born blind and not having anyone around who could see, that person could not even form a question about vision: she wouldn't know that seeing existed" (139). If G.H. is unaware of the unclean, can she still commit sin?

The answer to this question is not a word, but an act of deliverance, the cessation of one's life as a way to enter life. G.H. states that her "life was as continuous as death. Life is so continuous that we divide it into stages and we call one of them death. I had always been in life, and it matters little that it wasn't I properly speaking, not what I'd usually call I. I was always in life" (Lispector 60). The decision cannot be put off any longer. G.H. is aware that it is time for her to die, lamenting how "now 'refusal of roaches' were merely words, and I also knew that in the hour of my death I too would not be translatable by word" (Lispector 75). G.H. puts the white matter of the cockroach in her mouth and she becomes the barata. Her first confrontation was the sight of the barata in the wardrobe, but similar to how the cockroach required a second hit in order to die, so, too, did G.H. need to do a second action, with a greater degree of force.

G.H. is dying as the pus of the barata is dispersing in her mouth, and she notes that "it's very difficult to taste. Up till then I had been so engrossed by sentimentalization that, experiencing the taste of the real identity, it seemed as tasteless as the taste a raindrop has in your mouth. It's horribly insipid" (Lispector 104). The taste of the barata can otherwise be described as the Neutral, which for Lispector is a combination of the Demonic and the Sacred. G.H. is both committing the ultimate sin and displaying ultimate reverence for God in the act of eating the white matter of the barata. The matter is unclean, but G.H. is not, for her own white matter becomes the white matter of the barata, which then means that she has attained a state of immemorial being. G.H. states that "the whole

most unreachable part of my soul and which does not belong to me--is the one that touches my border with whatever is no longer I, and to which I give myself" (128). The process of losing oneself, the dissemination of an infinite white-matter in the body of a person that is conceived through the perceptions of others, is a process that lasts what feels like days for G.H.

Transformation is a process without time. With the experience of the barata nearly over, G.H. remarks, "I spitting out myself, without ever feeling the point of feeling that I had finally spit out my whole soul" (Lispector 175). In *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, a collection of seminars by French Feminist writer Hélène Cixous, Cixous poses the question, "Where does the other begin? Is it possible to have a relationship with something *truly* other, something so strange that it remains so? The question can be asked otherwise. For example, what does the sentence 'if you eat this fruit you will die' mean for eve who is in a place where there is no death" (Cixous 30)? The line between G.H. and barata and God is displaced to the point of eradication. For Lispector, there no longer is such a thing as an "I", there is only an occupation of space, a present place. G.H. states "I too have no name, and that is my name. And because I depersonalize myself to the point of not having my name, I reply whenever someone says: I" (185). Compared to *The Hour of the Star*, which concludes with the protagonist, Macabéa, an extremely poor and decrepit woman who lives in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, being ran over by a beautiful Mercedes that continues to drive while she lies dying on the ground, G.H.'s transformation occurs through metaphysical loss. "Meanwhile, Macabéa, lying on the ground, seemed to become more and more transformed into a Macabéa, as if she were arriving at herself" (81), as Lispector notes, dies a physical death but arrives at her true self in those final moments.

Cixous, once again in *Readings*, states that "one falls from innocence into knowledge, which contrary to what one might believe, is not progress. It is not regression either, but loss. It is the loss of the possibility of another, nonsymbolic, nonintellectual knowledge" (57). Both characters had to

lose their innocence in order to gain the knowledge of identity. The transformation of oneself is not a pleasant process, it is an action of destruction, of complete death. The privileged class seek to find their identity but are unable to do so because they lack the means to sacrifice, while the disadvantaged class lack the means for survival but have all the resources to discover themselves. They are always on the verge of their death. Lispector asks the reader a final question in *The Hour of the Star*: “What was the truth about my Macabéa? It is enough to discover the truth that she no longer exists: the moment has passed. I ask myself: what is she? Reply: she is not” (84). It is precisely because Macabéa is not that G.H. is not that the barata is not. For the Lispectorian “I”, one cannot be a *self*, only an *other*. One has to remain outside of existence in order to maintain existence, whether that is identity for others, or class for others. “A word cannot be displaced without destroying something” (149), Cixous states in *Readings*. Similarly, the word “I” cannot be displaced without destroying “I”.

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