

Fragments of Self: Forging a Transliteration of Forgetting in Clarice Lispector's, *A Paixão Segundo G.H.*

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— — — — — estou procurando, estou procurando. Estou tentando entender. Tentando dar a alguém o que vivi e não sei a quem, mas não quero ficar com o que vivi. Não sei o que fazer do que vivi, tenho medo dessa desorganização profunda. Não confio no que me aconteceu. Aconteceu-me alguma coisa que eu, pelo fato de não a saber como viver, vivi uma outra? A isso quereria chamar desorganização, e teria a segurança de me aventurar, porque saberia depois para onde voltar: para a organização anterior. A isso prefiro chamar desorganização pois não quero me confirmar no que vivi — na confirmação de mim eu perderia o mundo como eu o tinha, e sei que não tenho capacidade para outro. (*A Paixão Segundo G.H.*)

I keep looking, looking. Trying to understand. Trying to give what I have gone through to someone else, and I don't know who [sic], but I don't want to be alone with that experience. I don't know what to do with it. I'm terrified of that profound disorganization. I'm not sure I even believe in what happened to me. Did something happen, and did I, because I didn't know how to experience it, end up experiencing something else instead? It's that something that I'd like to call disorganization, and then I'd have the confidence to venture forth because I would know where to come back to: to the prior organization. I prefer to call it disorganization because I don't want to ground myself in what I experienced — in that grounding I would lose the world as it was for me before, and I know that I don't have the capacity for another one. (*The Passion According to G.H.*)

These passages, the original Portuguese and the English translation, foreground some of the defining features of *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* and provide fruitful points of departure. One: the dashes (in the original Portuguese) mark the fragmentary remnants of self left over from a profoundly disorganizing experience. Two: the gap between the Portuguese “o que vivi” and the English “experience,” questionable translation aside, indexes what is at stake in transferring an event into the memorial regions that constitute experience. Three: the stumbling blocks of language interfere with the evocation of what happened. Using these problems as points of departure accords an opportunity to rethink the constitution of memory as a special kind of forgetting and, by extension, occasions a reconsideration of how thought and language may be more faithful to life and experience.

What I am proposing is simple, if counter-intuitive: when one has an experience that cannot be interpreted or represented within any familiar system of knowledge, two things occur. Immediately an awareness pressed between memory and forgetting emerges. On the one hand, G.H. has a desire to remember what just

happened (which requires forgetting everything she previously knew). In order to be faithful to her experience she must find an expressive form capable of accommodating it. On the other hand she has a concordant desire to forget absolutely the experience she just had, which amounts to an absolute remembering and return to the comfort of her prior life. Both options reveal intimate and immanent connections among memory, time, and narrative or, in terms more appropriate to my study: forgetting and expression. And, if words (as servants of the familiar and inadequate epistemes) fail to accommodate what has been lived, one of three things may occur. One: the experience is lost irretrievably. Two: (what amounts to the same thing) the experience is articulated through ill-fitting words that must transmogrify the experience in order to enclose it within available systems of knowledge. Three: a new mode of expression, whose form is consonant with the experience, must be forged.¹

Forged. In the double sense of the term: made and faked—this is the uncharted path that G.H. chooses. What we read is G.H.’s attempt to navigate the sharky waters of these options. Whether she succeeds may be a matter of how we understand her experience because, as we will see, the story does not end at the final page. It returns us to the beginning to begin again.

I. Dashes mark the fragments of self: what is left there

In its most pared down elements, *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* is about an upper class woman, G.H., who eats a little bit of cockroach ooze. It is this act that profoundly disorganizes her. Why? Disgust factor aside, the scholarship on this text has focused on how this act evokes the sacred and the profane, mysticism and sacrament,² history and pre-history, the clean and the dirty, the dry and the wet,³ birth⁴ and death, the woman and the maid. For my purposes, what is important is that this act is not represented in the narrative.

In fact, locating the act in the narrative is impossible. In a sense, the act permeates the text: it happened before the story, there are references to it throughout, and there is a certain moment in the story when it happens—but the act itself is not represented in words. As G.H. approaches the cockroach she knows she must eat it: “For redemption must be in the thing itself. And redemption in the thing itself would be my putting into my own mouth the white paste from the cockroach” (157).⁵ But she faints on her way. Or, more precisely, she realizes that she did not actually faint, she has a dizzy spell that makes her “lose track of the moments, of time” (159). But she knows, “even before thinking, that, while...[she] had been gone in the dizzy spell, ‘something had happened’” (158) [“alguma coisa se tinha feito” (166)]. There are quotes around “something had happened”; her conscious self is quoting the experience of her semi-conscious self. This is why there is no memory properly speaking. One could liken the form of this experience to trauma,⁶ but the limits of

that concept become immediately apparent: the fragments of self that remain after eating the cockroach paste express a truth of being, a seizure of being to be embraced; it is disorganizing, not disabling. It is because this experience is on the edge of consciousness that it immediately slides toward forgetting; but the fear, contrary to a traumatic experience, is that it would be gone forever, that it wouldn't leave any trace. Any attempt to render this experience in memory inevitably subjects it to the ordering principles of an existing interpretive system; how then to express it? G.H. expresses the double bind in this way: "What I have seen is unorganizable. But if I really want to, right now, I can still translate it into terms that would be more like ours, into human terms, and I can still put aside those hours of yesterday. If I still want to, I can ask myself in another way, a way that is within our language, what happened to me" (60).⁷

It is all in the marks. The quotation marks that cite and translate this experience are an echo of an earlier confession in the story. G.H. confesses that she always has one quotation mark to her left and another to her right. This citation of self, or self as citation is replaced by "what happened." As she tells the story she realizes that her old self-constitution is gone, yet she cannot tell what her new self will be. For the duration of the story, then, she is essentially a quotation without content. G.H. expresses it this way: "But—I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can be given me only through the failure of my language. Only when the construct falters do I reach what it could not accomplish" (170). With the failure of language what we are left with is punctuation. Certainly the quotation marks strive to claim a space of articulation for the experience, but it is in the ubiquitous dashes, which are largely left out of the English translation, that the meaning lies. Punctuation marks are routinely not transferred when a text is translated; this is especially true when a writer uses unconventional punctuation practices. The editorial decisions of the translator or publisher routinely "regularize" such unconventional punctuation.⁸ In this work, curiously, the most common choice is to translate the dashes as quotation marks (or sometimes as ellipses, and at a few crucial times not at all). Punctuation, of course, usually goes unnoticed, as good punctuation should. But, formally, whether the reader consciously notes it or not, the substitution of quotation marks for the dashes in this text misleads the reader into aligning "what happened" with the (Deleuzian-esque, if you will) schizo mono-dialogue that punctuates the text. In the English translation, but not in the Portuguese, the text includes what appears to be quoted dialogue. Although G.H. addresses a *tu* throughout the Portuguese edition, there are no quotation marks cordoning off these addresses. To make matters worse, the most important dashes are simply eliminated in the English version: the six dashes that open the text and the six that come at the end.

Why does this matter? The effects of Lispector's unconventional punctuation are threefold: first, they force an encounter with the text, which breaks the stagnant

habitudes of reading and literary consumption. In this way, they interrupt ossified memory forms, which often leave deposits, like sediments, that become habits (for example, the habit of living in citation, in pre-existing forms, as G.H. has confessed to doing). Second, they break dominant codes of meaning. This is crucial to the project of this text. The six dashes opening the text express a profound interruption, a rupturing of self, a loss of self (“— — — — — estou procurando, estou procurando”). These dashes cut, slice, and tear into a space reserved for words. And just as the last sentence of each chapter becomes the first sentence of the next chapter, the six dashes at the end of the text return us to the beginning, which becomes a new beginning, beginning anew.

Third, reading the punctuation that breaks into and beyond textual form is an attempt to regurgitate the forgotten nutrients that infuse the story in its composition. The decomposition and re-composition of form creates a new sense of and for experience, a new experience of the world, a new world-forming sense. This is expressed through G.H.’s occupation: she is a sculptor.⁹ Her eyes and hands are attuned to form; her life is pitched to the laws of organization.¹⁰ She says, “My old constructs had consisted in continually trying to transform the atonal into tone, in dividing the infinite into a series of finites, and in not comprehending that the finite is not a quantity, it is a quality” (134).¹¹ At the same time, punctuation is not a sign, it does not signify in the semiotic sense. It cannot be understood as content because it has no real meaning, no referent. A sculptor, of course, deals with a material medium and the limits of extension; however, the substance she is reckoning with now is not perceptible. Space does not permit an elaboration of this here, but this could be elaborated in relation to the idea of transubstantiation, which would directly address the question of an imperceptible substance and perceptible form. Reading punctuation is thus not proper to content or form; it exists on the margins of both. Further, it is aligned with forgetting. I will expand upon this below.

II. In the gap between “o que vivi” and “experience”

In addition to the failure to translate Lispector’s unconventional use of punctuation, there is another issue of translation that deserves our attention. As I mentioned at the outset, what appears in Portuguese as “o que vivi” is translated into English as “experience.” It is not that this translation is wrong per se; rather, what we lose with “experience” is its rootedness in life (*viver*). The phrase “o que vivi” retains a connection with what has been lived, or what was lived through that is not conveyed in the English word “experience.” However, the gap between “o que vivi” and “experience” provides a felicitous opportunity to consider what comes between life (“o que vivi”) and experience.¹² Here it is the cockroach: *barata*, a near anagram of *aborta*. And indeed, some critics have read this story as a comment upon the abortion that Lispector had (G.H. also refers to an abortion she had).¹³ The imagery and emphasis on life in the text support this reading.¹⁴ However, it is important to

keep in mind that the primary intertext is Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The vermin (*ungeziefer*) in that text is a more generic bug that is rendered in the English word "cockroach" or the Portuguese "*barata*." But what all these words—*ungeziefer*, cockroach, *barata*—have in common is their uncleanness; they are unfit for sacrifice. And yet, sacrifice is precisely what happens. First the sacrifice of the cockroach: she kills it, smashing it (or half of it) in the wardrobe. Then, she eats the impure white ooze of the cockroach. G.H. says, "Then—then, through the door of condemnation, I ate life and was eaten by life. I understood that my kingdom is of this world. And I understood it through the Hellish side of me. For within myself I saw what Hell is like" (112).

There are two important things here: first, that the sacrifice, the making sacred (sacrifice: also a practice of offering food), is accomplished through profanation—by going through Hell to reach an earthly divine¹⁵ (this can also be read through the allusion of the title to the Passion of Christ). And secondly, this is achieved through an abortion of self. Between experience and life is forgetting. It is instructive here to turn to another German writer. In his essay, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," Nietzsche famously describes a human who meditates on the happiness of cows:

But he also wondered about himself and how he was unable to learn to forget and always clung to what was past; no matter how far or how fast he runs, that chain runs with him. It is cause for wonder: the moment, here in a flash, gone in a flash, before it nothing, after it nothing, does, after all, return as a ghost once more and disturbs the peace of a later moment. (87)

He concludes that not only does happiness depend upon forgetting but "all action requires a forgetting" (89). G.H.'s dilemma picks up where Nietzsche left off: from her we see that not only is forgetting a byproduct of action, but also that the experience coded as (a) forgetting completely transforms life. Thus, in a sense it is not that the gap (in the translation) is between experience and life; rather, the gap is in the experience embedded within life: experience punctures, punctuates life itself.

III. The stumbling blocks of language

In this sense, then, forgetting functions in a way analogous to Barthes's punctum. In Barthes's words, the punctum

exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many points. This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call punctum; for punctum is also: sting, speck, cut,

little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). (26)

These descriptions of the punctum as “an unexpected flash” recall Nietzsche’s description of the past that is “here in a flash, gone in a flash” and, of course, Benjamin’s description of the past in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” Notably, Benjamin’s flash also resonates with memory:

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. [...] To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. (255)

Here the flash is like the punctuation of history. It is no accident that Adorno says, “History has left its residue in punctuation marks, and it is history, far more than meaning or grammatical function, that looks out at us, rigidified and trembling slightly, from every mark of punctuation” (92). From this we can conclude that the so many marks, points, and wounds that infuse the punctum, the flash, and the punctuation marks throw history at us but, like a curve ball, we are bound to miss it. And yet, it is precisely this missing that punctuation embeds as interference with the continuity and unity of time, story, and memory. This interference is an act of cutting through stagnant forms of rigidified memory. This is the movement of forgetting.

In confronting the cockroach G.H. feels “on the verge of dying,” that her “ghostly step would be irreversible,” and that she was leaving her “earthly beauty” and “human salvation behind...” (75). She offers up an impure prayer:

But I give it up with Hellish relief. What has come out of the cockroach’s belly is not something that can be transcended – oh, I don’t mean it is the opposite of beauty, “opposite to beauty” doesn’t even make sense – what has come out of the cockroach is: “today,” blessed be the fruit of your womb – I want nowness without decorating it with a future that will redeem it or with a hope – up to now what hope wanted in me was merely to sidestep nowness. (75)

The attempts that G.H. makes to express this nowness, this instant of forgetting, pushes beyond the bounds of conventional syntax, disordering the familiar and dead forms that sentences “before” took. She says of the cockroach: “its existence existed me” (“a existência dela me existia—“); and in a plea to God to give her what he has done she says, “I want what I love you” (“Eu quero o que eu Te amo”) (131, 138). These phrases exist on the edge of sense.¹⁶ As such they express

what Maurice Blanchot has called the “limit-experience,” a brush with the border between language and impossibility, a point that only literature is capable of inaugurating. The movements intrinsic to the limit-experience—detour and interruption, movements that also structure the movement of G.H.’s journey—are the movements of forgetting. This experience of forgetting cannot be accommodated by existing forms; thus, they break out of the rigidity of syntactical ordering and this rupture continues in the breaking through the rules of standard punctuation.

The punctuation that trips us as we navigate the uncertain terrain of G.H.’s experience draws our attention to what is otherwise forgotten; it places a demand on us for a creation, which is never a (re)presentation of “what happened.” The punctuation interferes, disturbs, pierces, cuts, stings. As a “little hole” it is also like the lens of the camera. The question, however, remains: how can this little hole reframe one’s perception of the world after “something happens”? If the experience destroys all previous interpretive frames, a destruction aided by the force of forgetting, the new frame must necessarily be made of something new. What new vision or mode of perception is forged in this creation? How can this frame accommodate language without betraying what happened?

G.H.’s labor is one that strives to forge a form adequate to her experience. Recall the opening passage where she asks, “Did something happen, and did I, because I didn’t know how to experience it, end up experiencing something else instead?” (3). She says a few pages later, “I also don’t know what form to give to what happened to me. And for me nothing exists unless I give it a form [...] A form gives contours to chaos, gives a construct to amorphous substance...” (6).¹⁷

G.H. is struggling with the force of absolute forgetting—a forgetting more powerful than the memory that maintains the comfort of her (previous) conventional life. This forgetting would radically do away with memory in all its stale forms (habit, tradition, everyday life) as well as its role in all systems of knowledge that previously cited and formed her life ahead of her. She says, “For all the while that I am struggling to know, my new ignorance, which is forgetting, has become sacred. [...] Although for the first time I feel that my forgetting is, in the last analysis, of a piece with the world” (8). She is caught in the crossfire of a life steeped in the comforts of familiarity and the uncertainties in the abyss of forgetting, which is the *nowness* in which she finds herself. She cannot possibly know what will come out of this *nowness*. But she does know that she does not know what the world is, what it can be. She has experienced it but she has yet to forge ahead.

But if she fails we fail with her. From the beginning she displaces the “project” onto us. This displacement is completed by the end of the story only to return us to the beginning. Let us consider the address to the prospective reader (“A Possiveis Leitores”) at the beginning of the book:

A Possíveis Leitores

Este livro é como um livro qualquer. Mas eu ficaria contente se fosse lido apenas por pessoas de alma já formada. Aquelas que sabem que a aproximação, do que quer que seja, se faz gradualmente e penosamente — atravessando inclusive o oposto daquilo que se vai aproximar. Aquelas pessoas que, só elas, entenderão bem devagar que este livro nada tira de ninguém. A mim, por exemplo, o personagem G.H. foi dando pouco a pouco uma alegria difícil; mas chama-se alegria.¹⁸

We are told that the book “nada tira de ninguém,” it exacts or takes nothing of or from anyone. Rather, the hope imparted to the reader is that he or she recognize that his or her fully formed soul does not have to stagnate. G.H. also believed that her soul was fully formed—this is in fact the very problem that G.H. has to surpass. We should therefore read this address as one that advises us not to fear the approach to the other side of being (“atravessando inclusive o oposto daquilo que se vai aproximar”).

This advice is echoed in the epigraph, “A complete life may be one ending in so full identification with the nonself that there is no self to die.”¹⁹ The quote is attributed to Bernard Berenson who was a preeminent American art historian. Implicitly it describes the entry into the nonself that art may permit. We should remember that art occupies a significant place in G.H. It is expressed in the mural G.H. finds by surprise in the maid’s room—a drawing that “was not a decoration, it was writing” (32). And G.H.’s profession as a sculptor is also significant. Taken together the epigraph also becomes instructive: an encouragement to traverse being beyond language through the privileged sphere of art.

Literature, as an art of language, is not enough. We must go beyond even the words. In order to look forward to the difficult pleasure of losing one’s stale, rigid form of being in order to gain another, fuller expression of being, we must break from the language that makes us cling to our quotation marks. This breakthrough is expressed as the final rupture in the text, the final punctum. The last words that G.H. gives us are as follows:

O mundo independia de mim —esta era a confiança a que eu tinha chegado: o mundo independia de mim, e não estou entendendo o que eu estou dizendo, nunca! nunca mais compreenderei o que eu disser. Pois como poderia eu dizer sem que a palavra mentisse por mim? como poderei dizer senão timidamente assim: a vida se me é. A vida se me é, e eu não entendo o que digo. E então adoro. — — — — —
— (179)²⁰

Beyond the mimetic tendency that language sometimes tries to assume, this expression is at the limit of language. In order to be true to what she has just lived she must be wary of the falseness that her previous form of being used. Or, if she

uses the same words she must use them in a new way, a new form: “a vida se me é.” Although the English technically renders this phrase accurately (“life is itself for me”), and we perceive some of its strangeness, the syntax of the Portuguese is more unusual. The syntax is beginning to mould itself around her experience as she resists the repressive organizing principles of the old memory-knowledge systems. The dashes (shamefully withheld from the English translation) strike out ahead of her. They also return us to the beginning, which began with six dashes. The challenge is to follow her. To likewise being anew. G.H. is reaching out, offering a hand to guide the timorous reader and hoping that her experience prepares us for the gift of passing through disorganization to the other side of being. Perhaps reading can be a profoundly disorganizing, ecstatic experience, but the demand is for life and for that, paradoxically, what is called for is a closing and forgetting of the book in order to create a new expressive mode for life.

Notes

¹ “I can’t put the system into words, but I lived in a system. It was as though I organized myself around the fact of having a stomachache because, if I no longer had it, I would also lose the marvelous hope of one day getting rid of the stomachache: my old life was necessary to me because it was precisely its error that made me take up imagining a hope that, without the life that I led, I wouldn’t have known” (153).

² See Kenneth Krabbenhoft, “From Mysticism to Sacrament in ‘*A Paixão Segundo G.H.*,’” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 32.1 (1995): 51-60. Krabbenhoft argues that there are two subtexts: one is the mystical tradition and the other, which runs contrarily, is the sacramental tradition. Despite the persuasiveness of his argument, and despite the fact that these may be subtexts, I would argue that this is a profoundly un-Christian text, as evidenced by the blasphemous innuendo of the title (which can be read as pluralizing the Passion of Christ, making it accessible and constitutive of everyone; G.H.: *gênero humano*), the valorization of the profane [“what has come out of the cockroach is: ‘today,’ blessed be the fruit of your womb...” (75)], and the perception of a modality contrary to that which is called Christian-human feeling: “But my most archaic and demonic of thirsts had led me, subterraneously, to collapse all constructs. Sinful thirst was guiding me—and I know now that tasting the taste of that almost-nothingness is the god’s secret joy. It is a nothingness that is God—and that has no taste. But it is the most primary of pleasures. And only it—at last, at last!— is the pole opposite to the pole of Christian-human feeling. Through the pole of the first demonic pleasure I perceived, at a great distance and for the first time... that there really was an opposite pole” (95). The use of Christian terminology is thus mobilized toward another form of expression, one in which meaning itself, and the meaning of the divine and the profane, are immanent to life itself.

³ See Sonange Ribeiro de Oliveira, “The Dry and the Wet: Cultural Configurations in Clarice Lispector’s Novels,” *Nottingham Modern Languages Publication Archive* (1999): 116-32.

⁴ See Paola Bono, “The Abjection of the Female Body: Hell as a Metaphor for Birth,” Seminar English Department, Monash University, 2005 <<http://www.arts.monash.edu/cclcs/research/papers/abjection.pdf>>.

⁵ “É que a redenção devia ser na própria coisa. E a redenção na própria coisa seria botar na boca a massa branca da barata” (164).

⁶ Claire Williams makes this argument in “*The Passion According to G.H.* by Clarice Lispector,” *Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

⁷ “*O que vi não é organizável. Mas se eu realmente quiseser, agora mesmo, ainda poderei traduzir o que eu soube em termos mais nossos, em termos humanos, e ainda poderei deixar despercebidas as horas de ontem. Se eu ainda quiseser poderei, dentro de nossa linguagem, me perguntar de outro modo o que me aconteceu*” (68).

⁸ Tace Hedrick, “‘Mae e para isso’: Gender, Writing, and English-Language Translation in Clarice Lispector,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 41:2 (2005): 56-83. Hedrick quotes several of Lispector’s translators who complain about the “ungrammatical” quality of her writing, her “violations of ... syntax,” her “deliberately careless [way] with grammar...” and her “distaste for conventions, rules, and orderly classification” (58).

⁹ “Or because I have had the experience of patiently clearing away material to find gradually its immanent sculpture; or because, again from the sculpture, I have suffered the enforced objectivity of struggling with something that was other than myself” (18).

¹⁰ “I didn’t want to open my eyes again, I didn’t want to keep on seeing. The rules and laws, it was important not to forget them, you have to remember that without the rules and laws there would also be no order, it was important for me not to forget them and, in order to defend myself, to defend them” (51).

¹¹ “*Minhas antigas construções haviam consistido em continuamente tentar transformar o atonal em tonal, em dividir o infinito numa série de finitos, e sem perceber que finito não é quantidade, é qualidade*” (141).

¹² Lispector is, of course, all about the in-between. In a sense, the entire story is told without words, between the lines. As she cautions us in *The Foreign Legion*: “Since one feels obliged to write, let it be without obscuring the space between the lines with words.” Clarice Lispector. *The Foreign Legion*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: New Directions Books, 1986) 14.

¹³ Paola Bono makes this point and cites Rosi Braidotti as one who also supports this view.

¹⁴ Importantly, although creation is nearly sacred, there is no sentimental view of motherhood here—indeed, reading this story as one in which abortion is a central force would have to contend with the symbolism of the “third leg” that G.H. “loses,” and that it is this loss that allows her unprecedented mobility and the capacity to realize a renewed form of life.

¹⁵ “For me the divine is the real” (162).

¹⁶ “Finally, finally, my husk had really broken, and I was, without limit. By not being, I was. To the edge of what I wasn’t, I was. What I am not, I am. Everything will be within me, if I am not; for ‘I’ is merely one of the world’s instantaneous spasms. My life doesn’t have a merely human sense, it is much greater – it is so much greater that, in relation to human sense, it is senseless. Of the general organization that was greater than I, I had till now perceived only the fragments. But now I was much less than human... and I would realize my specifically human destiny only if I gave myself over, just as I was doing, to what was not me, to what was still inhuman” (172-73).

¹⁷ “Now that I have to save tomorrow, that I have to have a form because I don’t sense that I have the strength to stay disorganized, now that, fatefully, I shall have to frame that monstrous, infinite flesh and cut it into pieces that something the size of my mouth can take in...now that I shall fatefully succumb to the necessity of form from my fear of being undelimited—then let me at least have the courage to let that form form by itself, like a crust that hardens on its own, a fiery nebula that cools into earth” (7).

¹⁸ “To Potential Readers: This is a book just like any other book. But I would be happy if it were read only by people whose outlook is fully formed. People who know that an approach—to anything whatsoever—must be carried out gradually and laboriously, that it must traverse even the very opposite of what is being approached. They and they alone will, slowly, come to understand that this book exacts nothing of anyone. Over time, the character G.H. came to give *me*, for example, a very

difficult pleasure; but it *is* called pleasure [emphasis in original English; in Portuguese the entire address is in italics].”

¹⁹ In English in the original.

²⁰ “The world interdepended with me—that was the confidence I had reached: the world interdepended with me, and I am not understanding what I say, never! Never again shall I understand what I say. For how will I be able to speak without the word lying for me? how will I be able to speak except timidly, like this: life is itself for me. Life is itself for me, and I don’t understand what I am saying. And, therefore, I adore... [Note the translator’s modification in punctuation from the original to the English. We should also take note of the decision to translate *independia* as interdepended. The word “*independer*” exists in Portuguese, it means “not to depend on” or “to become independent of” (“*independer de algo*”). The word “interdepended,” however, does not exist in English. Although the spirit of the translation—the making strange of language or the estrangement from language—is certainly consistent with the sentiment being expressed, it falsely suggests an interdependence G.H. feels with the world. A more accurate translation might be something like “the world became independent of me” suggesting both the nothingness G.H. experiences as well as the feeling of needing to begin again without the world, or with a new one].”

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