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Closer to the Wild Heart: Essays on Clarice Lispector  
(review)

Tace Hedrick

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Este é um livro ousado e inovador que servirá de alicerce para os futuros estudos gays no Brasil. Os ensaios do livro são comoventes como também demonstram um apurado enfoque crítico. Às vezes o livro traz informações importantes como os momentos distintos nos quais os estudos gays se iniciaram nas universidades norte-americanas e o número de membros da associação brasileira de gays, lésbicas e travestis, ABGLT, no ensaio “Escritor gay.” A ênfase do discurso dos afetos na crítica literária se faz notória em “O homem que amava rapazes,” belo ensaio sobre o filme de Luchino Visconti, *Morte em Veneza*, baseado na novela homônima de Thomas Mann, e que inspirou o título do livro de Denilson Lopes. Este ensaio revela a importância da magia do cinema na vida e no trabalho de Denilson. Assim, na conclusão o crítico diz: “O rosto de Tazio imobilizado no vídeo. Levanto da poltrona. Desejo tocá-lo. Não consigo evitar as lágrimas. Desligo a televisão. Tela escura. Sozinho em casa.”

O livro oferece definições importantes para tópicos de estética tais como o conceito de *camp* em “Terceiro manifesto camp.” Denilson demonstra ter uma visão única original da história da homotextualidade na literatura do Brasil em “Uma história brasileira.” Ele também enfoca a magia das divas de Hollywood, vinculando a literatura ao cinema na sua leitura do romance de Caio Fernando Abreu (1948–1996), *Onde estará Dulce Veiga? Um romance gay*, no ensaio “Onde estará o meu amor?” Denilson conclui o livro expondo idéias sobre o seu possível novo interesse de pesquisa, que é desenvolver a relação entre os conceitos do sublime e do banal.

Inovador, corajoso e bem escrito, *O homem que amava rapazes e outros ensaios* merece ser lido e relido porque mostra a relação de um dos críticos mais instigantes do panorama cultural do Brasil atual.

Antonio Eduardo de Oliveira

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte

**Alonso, Cláudia Pazos and Claire Williams, eds.** *Closer to the Wild Heart:*

*Essays on Clarice Lispector.* Oxford, UK: European Humanities Research Centre of the University of Oxford, 2002. xv + 242 pp. Bibliography. Index.

The Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s (1920–1977) work—which, as this collection’s editors put it, “changed the course of Brazilian literature forever” (1)—has undergone several distinct moments of critical reception and interpretation. This collection is organized into three areas which reflect the more coherent, and to my mind more interesting, critiques of Lispector’s work since the 1980s: Part I includes essays on “Autobiography and Identity,” Part II on “Gender, Class, Race, and Nation,” and part III on “Critical Reception.”

In spite of a few uneven pieces, I found this volume particularly valuable, especially because at least four of its best pieces (and other essays besides) look first to connections between Lispector’s journalism, her self-representations, and her

fiction, and second to the ways that reading her journalism alongside her fiction deepens our understanding of and appreciation for the strategies of “undecidability” she deployed. So, for example, Anna Klobucka’s “Clarice Lispector by Clarice Lispector” examines Lispector’s habit of recirculating her writing from her journalism—her *crônicas*—to her works of fiction and back again. This circular writing practice, creating as it did a “slippery dialectic of disguises and disclosure,” served, calculated or not, to mark even her most seemingly “personal” writing with a deep sense of open-endedness in relation to questions of (who) the authorial self (is). As I note, this piece marks a thematic thread through many of the essays here—that of the seeming openness, simplicity, and autobiographical nature of her writing combined with its undoubted ambiguity, complexity and outright fictionalizing of her own life.

Given Lispector’s concentration in her writing on the figures of women, whether or not she could be called a feminist has been the cause of some critical discussion. Luiza Lobo’s “Feminism or the Ambiguities of the Feminine in Clarice Lispector” notes a “lack of direct involvement with feminist movements, especially in the 70s.” However, through a study of her *crônicas*, Lobo argues that Lispector created a new kind of woman-centered public writing. In Brazil, dominated as the writing of the *crônica* was by male writers, Lobo maintains that Lispector used her *crônicas*, and their largely female audience, to build a relationship with her readers by employing a female and “utterly personal, autobiographical, confessional narrator” (98). Thus, Lispector presented a sensitive, intuitive, “non-intellectual” public voice that—precisely because of its underlying undecidability of interpretation could appear unthreateningly feminine while also disrupting and even critiquing masculine privilege in the public sphere.

Marta Peixoto’s “‘Fatos são pedras duras’: Urban Poverty in Clarice Lispector” takes up the vexed question of social justice in Lispector’s work through the medium both of *crônica* and fiction. Peixoto notes that, in the Rio de Janeiro of the late 60s through early 70s when Lispector was writing as a *cronista*, one could not help but at least notice the extreme poverty that was (and still is today) “an inescapable part of the urban landscape” (107). Although Lispector presents herself as incapable of socially engaged writing, Peixoto traces a recurrent motif of urban poverty throughout Lispector’s *crônicas*, several of which take on the relationship between women and their maids. From here, she connects Lispector’s newspaper writings with two of Lispector’s fictional characters: Janair, the black maid in *A paixão segundo G.H.*, and of course Macabéa, the starving typist of *A hora da estrela*. Noting that Lispector again and again tackled the subject of the impoverished other in her writing, Peixoto shows how Lispector’s writing struggled with “various forms of enmeshment, with positive and negative investments” (123), not just in what she felt were inadequate writing strategies but in her encounters with the poor, and dark, Others of her life in Brazil. Finally, Nádia Battella Gotlib’s “Readers of Clarice, Who are You?” brings together many of the concerns of this collection; beginning with a brief overview of the critical

reception of Lispector's work, she continues on to suggest that the reader of Lispector's work is perforce "caught" in the indeterminacy of her writing. Highlighting readers' letters to Lispector in response to her various *crônicas*, as well as Lispector's (sometimes vexed) replies, Gotlib underscores once again Lispector's writerly strategies of ambiguity—and her own enmeshment, as Peixoto terms it—with her various presentations of "self," other, and author.

As a Lispector scholar and reader, I find the collection quite valuable; given the relative paucity of work in English on Clarice Lispector, Pazo's and Williams's collection of English-language writing on this author is welcome, not just for its mere presence, but especially for its attention to newer critical thinking on race, gender, and nation. Most especially welcome is the turn indicated in this volume toward an examination of the several kinds of writing in which Lispector engaged—letters, *crônicas*, semi-autobiography, fiction—a turn that indicates a more comprehensive way of thinking both about her fiction and about her life-work as a whole.

Tace Hedrick  
University of Florida

**Barbosa, Maria José Somerlate, org.** *Passo e Compasso: Nos ritmos do envelhecer*. Coleção Memória das Letras 17. Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2003. 317 pp.

The unifying thread in this collection of nineteen essays by eighteen authors is the subject of aging (*velhice, terceira idade*) and the aging/aged (*idosos, velhos*) in the Lusophone literary world. The initial "Apresentação" by Prof. Barbosa (who also authored two of the essays) describes the tripartite arrangement of the collection: The first section—subtitled "Passos"—includes four essays (by Ivete Lara Camargo Walty, Lúcia Sá, Zilá Bernd, and Maria Nazareth Soares Fonseca) dealing with the role of the elderly as emblematic figures and/or storytellers (*griots*) in various works of African and Brazilian literature (including a pair based on Amerindian themes). Individual authors treated in this subdivision are Agostinho Neto, Costa Andrade, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, Suleiman Cassano, Mia Couto, João Ubaldo Ribeiro, Gonçalves Dias, Darcy Ribeiro, and several narrators of oral tales among Amazonian *ribeirinhos* and Amerindians of the Cinta Larga community.

The second group of essays—subtitled "Compassos"—consists of eight pieces (by Carmen Lucia Tindó Ribeiro Secco, Regina Zilberman, Maria Angélica Lopes, Maria da Glória Bordini, Margo Milleret, Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez, Angélica Soares, and Prof. Barbosa) treating the broad theme of literary representations of sexuality/eroticism, the aging human body *per se*, and the roles of older men and women in selected works and authors of Brazilian, Portuguese, and African literature. Among the individual authors treated in this section are