

Brazil's Stepford Wives:

On Fertility, Consumption, and Objectification in Clarice Lispector's *Laços de família*

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Not to be devoured is the most perfect sentiment. Not to be devoured is the secret objective of a whole existence. While she was not being devoured, her animal smile was as delicate as happiness.

– CLARICE LISPECTOR, “A MENOR MULHER DO MUNDO”

The above epigraph yields from perhaps the most comical story of Clarice Lispector's 1960 collection *Laços de família* and might serve as a brief précis for the present text. Though I hesitate to suggest that thirteen distinct stories can be synthesized into three sentences, I will venture to say that the lines encompass my reading and attempt to tie—a crucial word for the collection—the stories together. As each story delves into an inquiry of relationships within the sphere of the family and from the perspective of the female protagonist, Lispector, I argue, relays a message regarding woman's objectification and consequent consumption within that sphere. That is, in “Devaneio e embriaguez de uma rapariga,” “Uma galinha,” and “A imitação da rosa,” Lispector reveals women who, in their quest for perfection, transform into monstrous objects devoid of emotional consistency and thus ripe for society's consumption; as they gauge their worth based on others'—specifically other women's—standards, the protagonists become self-made victims cyclically trapped by their compliance with confining social roles.

According to Marta Peixoto in her *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (1994), *Laços de Família* encapsulates Lispector's most revered, analyzed, and anthologized short stories, yet the collection is nevertheless infrequently approached as a compilation of interacting texts (24). In fact, rather than a collection composed as a whole, the

stories were written during the span of nearly a decade, with six of the thirteen stories previously published in a far lesser renowned volume in 1952. By 1955, Lispector had completed at least an additional four of the *Laços* stories (Peixoto 24-25). That said, the compilation is not one of all the short stories the author had written to date. Rather, it is a selection of complementary pieces that function as threads, which, in Roberto Correa dos Santos's introductory words, are "threads of a very well woven net [that] organize themselves in each story, threads that join with those of other stories, composing a web of meanings that never cease to refer to one another (Santos 8). These meanings, furthermore, evolve in the realm of the family, which becomes the context for female development, particularly in the first half of the collection where we witness the imprisonment of middle-class married women and their socially unacceptable attempts to escape from this incarceration. Escape, however, unfolds as a farce in this context because the female protagonists are destined to reside within the cyclical pattern of first adolescent, then wife, and lastly mother, thus societal mandates prove to ultimately and inevitably shape the being of Lispector's women characters.

The desire to escape societal constructs often occurs as a moment of epiphany in Lispector's works, a moment of changing awareness. In his collection of essays *Análise estrutural de romances brasileiros* (1973), Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna indicates that all the stories in *Laços* turn on an epiphany,¹ an instant of crucial revelation that occurs amidst a mise-en-scène of trivial events or in response to a chance encounter. In this instant, Lispector's characters suddenly become conscious of repressed desires or unsuspected dimensions of their psyches. Whereas Lispector's male characters are capable of accepting their socially defined

¹ Romano de Sant'Anna is not alone in this contention, for the awareness of the epiphany is often perceived to be one of the main characteristics distinguishing Lispector. See Earl E. Fitz. *Clarice Lispector*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985; Massaud Moisés. "Clarice Lispector: Fiction and Cosmic Vision." Trans. Sarah McCabe. *Studies in Short Fiction* 8.1 (1971): 268-81.

masculinity, her females experience the reverse in accepting their roles as tender and remissive daughters, wives, and mothers. In their moments of epiphany, the female characters perceive and acknowledge both their bondage—the pejorative ties to family—and their complicity as jailers of both men and women, thus bringing to consciousness repressed trauma that has the potential to transform into subversive power. These instances are often accompanied by negativity and negative terms (crime, anger, murder, hell, crisis, and the most frequent, nausea), which translate the guilt and fear accompanying their interrogation of conventional roles for male as well as female characters (de Sant'Anna 198).

“Devaneio e embriaguez de uma rapariga,” or Hats, Women, and Insecurity

Lispector's questioning of conventional roles appears at the outset of the collection in the story “Devaneio e embriaguez de uma rapariga,” in which, as the title suggests, we are privy to the daydreams of a Portuguese wife and mother. Lispector's nameless protagonist—as if she could be any and all middle-to upper-class women—painfully recalls her inebriated state the previous night at a formal business dinner offered by “her husband's protector,” a rich businessman (35). As she remembers the “green wine from her native Portugal slowly being drained from her glass,” she also recalls that the rich businessman “had pressed his foot against hers beneath the table, and above the table his face was watching her” (31; 35-6). As if to cleanse herself of the memory, the Portuguese housewife in Rio proceeds to cleanse her house to perfection, making it “a sight worth seeing” after its “scouring with soap and water” (36).

Although the story superficially presents itself as a mere series of daydreams regarding both the absurdities of life and the protagonist's unhappiness, Lispector's subtlety renders a portrait of familial obligations gone awry as the wife and mother simultaneously questions both societal constructs and her questioning itself. Indeed, the nameless protagonist is uncertain

regarding all aspects of her life—namely, to be mother or not, to question or not, to clean or not, to be sexy or not, to feel or not. This indecisiveness is readily apparent in the opening descriptions, for despite exuding sensuality with her “red-lacquered nails,” “stretching the toes of her dainty feet,” and her “coquettish[.]” replies “with her hand on her hip,” Lispector’s lead falls “asleep with her mouth wide open, her saliva staining the pillow,” “until [later] she flop[s] over, fast asleep, to snore beside her husband” (28-30). Indeed, the incongruencies of description pervade the entirety of the story—and the collection as well—shining light on the insecurities that torment Lispector’s women. Are they to abide by societal demands (that is, the sexy housewife) or succumb to their own fatigue amidst those demands?

Lispector continues in this vein of inconsistency in regard to her protagonist’s emotions. As the Portuguese mother and wife deliberates her momentary parental and spousal liberation (the children are at their aunts’ place in Jacarepaguá and the husband en route to his office), she cannot maintain her emotions in check. Indeed, within moments she is “slightly annoyed,” remarking “How boring!” and then “curious and impatient,” then “restless and frivolous,” and then seconds later “surprised, and vaguely flattered” (28-9). Four sentences later, the protagonist is consumed by a “tenuous and ardent” anger that causes her to be “haughty and offended,” but moments later it fades, and she is again “peaceful and casual” (29-30). Unfortunately, however, “the next minute she would get up, angry,” feeling “dizzy and fragile” (30).

And so the story continues for the duration of its subsequent six pages, resulting in a character formation that reveals an intrinsic weakness capable of infecting all aspects of the protagonist’s being. Like a mutant in transformation, not only is she unaware of how she should feel but also she cannot gauge how she should act. Though she desires an escape from the rigid and confining roles of wifedom and motherhood, she is consumed by the guilt that accompanies

this desire. Indeed, the female protagonist purports to enjoy the bliss of her dreams for the day, leaving her husband to “content himself with the leftovers from lunch” while “avoid[ing] examining his suit to see whether it needed brushing,” and she claims to revel in the liberation: “She remained in bed the whole day long listening to the silence of the house without the scurrying of the kids, without her husband who would have his meals in the city today” (29).

In spite of her alleged happiness, however, the protagonist is only consistent in terms of her inner battle, a constant war in which she and her psyche are at odds. Though she craves a momentary escape from the bondage—from the ties—of family, she cannot evade the lure of society’s norms: she is obliged to fulfill her roles as wife and mother. As such, she laments her situation in a guilt-and panic-stricken paragraph:

She awoke late, the potatoes waiting to be peeled, the kids expected home that same evening from their visit to the country. ‘God, I’ve lost my self-respect, I have! My day for washing and darning socks... What a lazy bitch you’ve turned out to be!’ she scolded herself, inquisitive and pleased... shopping to be done, fish to remember, already so late on a hectic summer morning. (30)

As evident, she cannot enjoy her solitude for even a moment before she is consumed by that which society expects from her, a society that deems her entrenched in the responsibilities of cooking, washing, darning, and cleaning; therefore, she herself cannot maintain consistency in regard to her own opinion of the situation.

Accordingly, the protagonist resorts to the norms in her quest for happiness, which she imagines to be the resultant product of perfection. Her words indicate, however, that despite attempts to fool herself, she is cognizant that perfection by means of a clean house and a perfect family does not yield happiness:

What *is* wrong with me? It was unhappiness. Her toes playing with her slipper...the floor not too clean at that spot. ‘What a slovenly, lazy bitch you’ve become.’ Not tomorrow, because her legs would not be too steady, but the day after tomorrow that house of hers would be a sight worth seeing: she would give it a scouring with soap and water which would get rid of all the dirt! ‘You mark my words,’ she threatened in her rage. (36)

In her final threat, Lispector’s protagonist reveals her own insecurity, for her ire-laden exclamation is one that assumes doubt on the part of another; certainly, “you mark my words,” is indicative of her desire for documentation, as if she herself wants to be held accountable for the faulty correlation between an immaculate house and happiness.

Indeed, a clean house is but one element in the protagonist’s evaluation of her self-worth. Generally speaking, Lispector’s female protagonists tend to gauge their own worth based on others’ standards and, in particular, the standards of other females. The protagonist of “Devaneio e embriaguez de uma rapariga” is a case in point. Thus, another common thread enters the fray of the author’s collection via the protagonist’s conceptualization of the other female in the restaurant, “that female whom she had instantly detested the moment she had entered the room” (33). The explanation for the animosity is evident within the subterfuge of a paragraph-long description of the woman, in which Lispector’s protagonist refers to the woman’s hat seven times; with each passing comment, her envy becomes more readily evident.

The woman is initially “all dolled up in a hat and jewelry, glittering like a false coin, all coy and refined” (33). The next exclamation is complimentary: “What a fine hat she was wearing!” (33). In a matter of a few sentences, however, the tone is evidently distinct: “[...] and that fine hat stuck on head,” and it becomes even more hostile as the protagonist refers to the

female as “that pious ninny so pleased with herself in that hat,” who was “playing the grand lady in her hat,” but despite “all her fine hats, she was nothing more than a fishwife trying to pass herself off as a duchess” (33). The protagonist’s underlying issue becomes rather evident, however, in the next paragraph, for she confesses her own shame for gracing a fine establishment sans hat: “Oh, how humiliated she felt at having come to the bar without a hat, and her head now felt bare” (34). Accordingly, her preoccupation with the other female’s hat is not merely an indication that she covets the hat itself; it indicates, on the contrary, that the mere absence of her own hat is enough to spark her own insecurities. Upon realizing that a proper upper-class woman—according to societal constructs—should don a hat for entry into the bar, the female protagonist becomes so consumed by her lack of hat that the scene unfolds rather comically, ending with a first-person denial of any semblance of envy: “And if you think I envy you with your flat chest, let me assure you that I don’t give a damn for you and your hats. Shameless sluts like you are only asking for a good hard slap on the face” (34).

The protagonist’s rubric for perfection, furthermore, is inherently aligned with fertility and societal perceptions regarding the matter, evident in her closing insult to the female in the restaurant: “you with your flat chest.” Another common thread in Lispector’s stories regards reproductive abilities and, in particular, pregnancy itself is often a theme. Accordingly, the female protagonist in the present text has a near obsession with fertility as a scale of one’s worth, and she insists that she despises “the barren people in that restaurant” (33). Indeed, for her, the pinnacle of insults resides in the realm of reproductive abilities, and she against asserts her disgust, though this time counterpoising it with a defense of her own self-worth: “How she despised the barren people in that restaurant, while she was plump and heavy and generous to the full” (33). The female is a victim of society’s antiquated mentality, but she nevertheless absorbs

and projects the same mentality upon other women: she is a warden, enacting the same incarcerations upon other women as those that have been enacted upon her, thus she is equally culpable in the cycles of female bondage. As she lusts after the other female's hat, she insults her "slim waistline," concluding as a result, "I'll bet she couldn't even bear her man a child" (33). The conclusion is evidently pejorative yet unfounded, and the message is clear: infertility is the equivalent of a weak and worthless woman, whereas fertility yields strength and power, as indicated in the closing paragraph: "Ah, she was feeling so well, so strong, as if she still had milk in those firm breasts" (36).

In effect, Lispector sketches a caricature of a woman who, in her quest for perfection in society's terms, morphs into an irrational object incapable of rational and consistent thought or emotion. Accordingly, she is entrapped in the whirlpool of this mentality, and all attempts at escape are to no avail; by the story's end, it is apparent that she is consumed by requisites that are impossible to fulfill, though nevertheless imposing the same requisites upon other women.

"Uma galinha," or Literally Devoured

Though the protagonist is not a human being in the following story, she is representative of all women who try and fail to avoid consumption, in this case literal consumption; she is a chicken, and the story goes by the same name—"Uma galinha." Indeed, the story tells the tale of a chicken, who, ready to be devoured for a Sunday supper, escapes the pot but is nevertheless hunted and again captured. In a twist of fate, she successfully postpones death by means of laying an egg. Lispector's protagonist in "Uma galinha" is one of the most objectified of the collection as a whole, perhaps due to her status as "nothing, [...] simply a chicken" who "looked at no one and no one paid any attention to her" (51, 48). Indeed, she is immediately denied any subjectivity and depleted of identity, as indicated by her invisibility to the family, who "in

consternation saw *their lunch* outlined against a chimney” (50, my emphasis). The chicken is not a living entity. She is rather an objectified being, waiting to be consumed. Moreover, after her escape, her only advantage is that she lives sans identity, merely a replica of one of many: “Her only advantage was that there were so many chickens that when one died, another automatically appeared, so similar in appearance that it might well be the same chicken” (50). Indeed, even moments before her death, “hers was a chicken head, identical to that drawn at the beginning of time,” and as such, she is denied her own identity (50).

These declarations affirm that her personal conceptualization of identity must be placed on the back-burner in her quest to evade consumption. But according to the family, she is merely a body without agency; her value stems from her physical character as she is about to be chosen for Sunday lunch, evident in the statement “[e]ven when they had chosen the chicken, feeling the intimacy of her body with indifference, they could not tell if she were plump or thin” (49). Though the family feels it befitting to judge the chicken—after all, a woman—based upon her body, they never would “have guessed that the chicken felt anxious,” suggesting their lack of empathy for the chicken, who is, after all, another being. To them, however, she is merely an object that exists only to be consumed.

Lispector contrasts between the hunter (man) and the hunted (woman) in this brief story of four pages. My reading extracts a definite delineation of gender roles in the account, one that exists to enhance the objectification of the female protagonist. After the chicken’s escape—the moment in which she asserts her autonomy and is given attention as an individual entity—the “master of the house” must catch the lunch to feed the family, for he is “a natural hunter” (50). The author describes the male as athletic and aware of his manly responsibilities as he reminds “himself of the twofold necessity of sporadically engaging in sport and of getting the family

some lunch,” further emphasizing his virility and resolve as he “leaps and bounds,” “appearing resplendent in a pair of swimming trunks,” and bravely “scal[ing] the roof” in order to catch “the prey” (50). On the contrary, Lispector presents the chicken—the female—as “hesitant and tremulous,” “running and panting, dumb and intent,” “stupid, timid, and free” (50). The female is not only objectified as a mere body but rather as a weak, inherently deficient body consumed by the negative adjectives that are employed to describe her, and she finally remains an object to be devoured.

Yet she postpones her consumption by unwittingly taking part in that which she does best as a woman: she reproduces. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, fertility and reproduction are constant themes in Lispector’s works, and the present story is no exception. As such, the female protagonist can only save herself by reverting to a purely biological role, and “[p]ositively flustered, the chicken laid an egg” (51). Because she is “destined for motherhood” and “had shown all signs of being instinctively maternal,” she avoids her destiny of sufficing as a mere object for consumption (51). Those who surround her—the father, mother, and daughter—applaud her fertility, and she is subsequently deemed worthy of life, a subject bestowed an identity and therefore causing her former hunter to declare “with a certain brusqueness, ‘If you have this chicken killed, I will never again eat a fowl as long as I live,’” (51). As evident, Lispector demonstrates that the chicken’s value corresponds with her ability to reproduce, for it is only after laying the egg that the family perceives her worth. Instead of being hunted for consumption, the “chicken became the queen of the household” (52).

Despite her newfound life, the chicken is torn between societal demands regarding motherhood or liberation. Like the female protagonist of the previous story, she cannot choose between the conventional role of staying in the house to nurture her offspring or to rebel in hopes

of independence, as she has done in her “great escape,” when she “had stood out against the sky on the roof edge ready to cry out” (52). She too becomes devoid of emotional consistency because of the guilt that accompanies her desires for liberation, and, in fact, she is depleted of all emotion, “neither gentle nor cross, neither happy nor sad; she was nothing, she was simply a chicken—a fact that did not suggest any particular feeling” (51).

The chicken’s relationship with the other females in the story, albeit on a different realm due to context, is noteworthy, specifically her relationship with the daughter of the house, who in “utter dismay” witnesses the laying of the egg and shrieks, “‘Mummy! Mummy! Don’t kill the chicken, she’d laid an egg! The chicken loves us!’” (51). Though the female protagonist does not gauge her self-worth based on the standards of the daughter, it seems that the daughter appreciates that society’s cycles might indeed come to affect her in a similar fashion. That is, the daughter is able to prematurely sympathize with the chicken’s predicament and its relation to her own future as a female with potential for society’s consumption, albeit on a figurative level. The chicken, however, cannot escape the cycles of consumption, and “one day they killed her and ate her, and the years rolled on” (52). Thus, though the chicken has some semblance of autonomy upon laying the egg, she opts for nurture instead of escape, thus losing her life at the story’s end; she too, then, becomes culpable for her willing compliance to be confined within societal constructs, a culpability that results in her ultimate consumption.

“A imitação da rosa,” or Neurosis and Unhappiness

Whereas “Uma galinha” is subtle—to a certain extent—and metaphorical in its conveyance of society’s consumption of the objectified female, Lispector’s fourth story in the collection, “A imitação da rosa,” is perhaps the most blatant in its depiction of a female protagonist that becomes a victim in her quest to attain societal perfection. Laura, a neurotic

perfectionist, is portrayed in the hours preceding her first social engagement after release from the hospital, presumably for psychological concerns. However, her neurosis creeps back when, wanting to send a bouquet of roses to the hostess (her friend Carlota), she is plagued by a seemingly endless period of self-doubt regarding the roses: should she send them or not? The roses symbolize perfection for Laura, and she is torn between maintaining perfection in her house or ridding herself of what she knows will ultimately manifest itself in the form of neurosis.

For this female protagonist, perfection is a manner of maintaining societal appearances, and one appearance that must not be flawed is her unconditional devotion to her husband Armando. Laura is entrenched in the conventional roles of society, and she believes that she must “attend her husband while he dress[es],” and that later she must sit on the bus, “looking like a wife, [...] her arm in his” (53). Indeed, her dedication is such that through the entirety of the story, her consistent focus regards the ironing of Armando’s shirts, as if by means of ironing she can eventually iron the wrinkles out of her life in order to yield perfection. In one of the multiple references to ironing, Lispector writes, “[s]he had ironed, for example, Armando’s shirts; she had always enjoyed ironing and, modesty aside, she pressed clothes to perfection,” a statement that in revealing her obsession also points to her incessant quest to attain flawlessness, a feat that in its impossibility can only lead to neurosis. In a last declaration that seals Laura’s devotion, the author indicates that even her hair is for her husband: “[...] she was chestnut-haired. Chestnut-haired as she obscurely felt a wife ought to be. To have black or blonde hair was an exaggeration, which, in her desire to make the right choice, she has never wanted” (61).

Moreover, Laura’s guilt regarding her inability to fulfill societal conventions—that is, her time in the hospital—compels her to lavish unnecessary attention on the minute details of their relationship, including Armando’s behavior in public. Because she is so consumed by

appearances, she does not want the public to perceive Armando as overly preoccupied for his wife; she wants to “play an insignificant role with gratitude,” and she is thus content that Armando is “oblivious of his wife’s presence, [and can] converse with another man about the latest news in the headlines” (54). Indeed, Laura’s guilt is taken to the next level with her doctor’s suggestion that she drink a glass of milk daily so as to alleviate her anxiety. Instead of merely acquiescing the doctor’s demands with the knowledge that the milk is beneficial for her health, she instead treats the act as a form of repentance for her sickness: “She made straight for the kitchen and, as if she had guiltily betrayed Armando and their devoted friends through her neglect, standing by the refrigerator she took the first sips with anxious pauses, concentrating upon each sip as if she were compensating everyone and showing her repentance” (55). The act unfolds as a means of self-penitence for what she perceives to be neglect of her conventional social roles of wife and friend.

It is precisely Laura’s limited role as simply wife and friend that produces much of her anguish, for once again Lispector underscores society’s reverence of fertility, a supposed attribute that the protagonist lacks—she thus cannot fulfill the role of mother. Despite all her absurd efforts to achieve perfection, Laura cannot control this element of her being, and it appears to be a primary factor in her neurosis. Her concern for appearances yet again reveals itself in the form of concern that society might potentially “see” her inability to have children: “Perhaps someone might have seen in that ever so tiny hint of surprise in the depths of her eyes, perhaps someone might have seen in that ever so tiny hint of sorrow the lack of children she never had” (54).

The commentary regarding her infertility is subdued, however, and is only mentioned once again in the context of a repeated conversation that she has with Armando. Though he likes

her “low thick hips” and questions her dislike for them with “[w]hat good would it do me to be married to a ballerina?”, she cannot simply accept the compliment because she believes that the width of her hips “resulted from ovarian insufficiency,” an explanation absurd as her preoccupation (60). Her infertility unfolds as a deficiency within society’s designation of perfection, and it consumes her to such an extent that she overcompensates in other aspects of her life, resulting in what contemporary terminology has named obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Perfection, then, is the guiding light in Laura’s misguided life; she, like the nameless female protagonist from the first story, mistakenly believes that perfection will lead to happiness. She has a “punctilious liking for organization,” “perfect writing,” “an obsession for personal hygiene,” and “a certain horror of disorder,” all characteristics that have accompanied her since childhood (54-5). Laura becomes aware, however, that her obsessive tendencies are burdensome and annoying, and curiously enough, she becomes obsessive in her desire to disguise and diminish that very tendency, “exercis[ing] care not to plague others with her former obsession for detail” (57). Lispector notes again that the protagonist is “obliged to take care in order not to annoy the others with details,” and she even takes care in regard to her interaction with the hired help, “careful not to bother the maid, who at times suppressed her impatience and became somewhat rude—the fault was really hers because she did not always command respect” (60).

Laura’s wish—to please, to fulfill appearances, to attain perfection—consumes her to such an extent that she blames herself for others’ shortcomings. Her desire to disguise her illness—both past and present—manifests itself as an obsession, thus exacerbating the very illness that she is attempting to hide: “It was necessary never to cause them alarm, especially with everything being so fresh in their minds. And, above all, to spare everyone the least anxiety

or doubt” (64). In sparing others, however, she fails to spare herself and thus becomes a willing victim to society’s consumption.

Indeed, Laura is consumed by society’s emphasis on appearances, and they are most important to her in the realm of her friendship with Carlota, to whom she wants to send the perfect roses precisely for appearance’s sake: Carlota “would think it ‘refined’” (63). The roses represent an impersonal yet perfect gift, “a bouquet of perfect roses” that have potential to increase her worth in Carlota’s eyes (62). Just as the protagonist from the first story becomes obsessed with the woman in the hat, Laura too gauges her worth based on her conceptualization of Carlota’s standards despite their inherent personality differences. Whereas Laura is “a little slow,” “ever cautious,” and an “impersonal perfectionist,” Carlota is the diametric opposite—“ambitious,” “authoritarian,” and practicing “practical goodness” despite her “natural abruptness” (55-6). Carlota represents precisely what Laura envisions as perfection and is therefore precisely what produces her envy. Accordingly, Laura becomes so consumed by the thought of sending the perfect flowers that she, like the females of the first two stories, becomes devoid of all emotional consistency as she moves back and forth in her indecisiveness: she is so consumed by choosing the decision that will best reflect her in society that she fails to recognize her own needs.

“A menor mulher do mundo,” or Happiness is Scratching in Public

Personal needs, nevertheless, unfold in Lispector’s stories as those components of happiness that her female protagonists ultimately neglect. Of the collection’s stories, all but one—“A menor mulher do mundo”—portray females who, in their pursuit to fulfill societal expectations, conclude that happiness can only be attained by denying themselves as they succumb to the conventional roles that society designates, specifically wife and mother. The

protagonist of the story “A menor mulher do mundo,” however, attains happiness by means of her deviation from society’s norms, going so far as to “scratch [...] herself where one never scratches oneself” in the midst of a public setting (90).

Whereas the other women concern themselves with the pursuit of perfection, Pequena Flor, despite being objectified as a “unique thing” by the French explorer and the readers of newspapers that tell her tale, finds happiness because she is concerned not with appearances but rather with herself, with smiling, with the pursuit of love: “And suddenly she was smiling. It was a smile that only someone who does not speak can smile. A smile that the uncomfortable explorer did not succeed in classifying. And she went on enjoying her own gentle smile, she who was not being devoured” (94). And, as she smiles, she escapes society’s cycles, avoiding consumption only to be a willing accomplice in her own happiness. Lispector includes this protagonist—outwardly the most colonized, the most objectified, and the most simplified of *Laços de família*—as exemplification of escape *par excellence*, a woman measuring forty-five centimeters who realizes that escape from societal conventions requires an internal feat of happiness rather than an outward show of mere appearance.

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