BRAZILIAN BILINGUAL BOOK CLUB
CLARICE LISPECTOR | A MAÇÃ NO ESCURO / 20TH APR, 6.30-9 PM

2017- the year of #lovetoreadBrazil

CLARICE LISPECTOR (1920-1977)

A Maçã no Escuro (1961)

translated into English as

The Apple in the Dark (1961 & 2009)

Cover of the first edition 1961

The apple in the dark by Clarice Lispector:
a woman of genius of the twentieth century literature

Is it a coincidence that Clarice Lispector’s fourth novel started its life in Torquay, Devon? An inspiring place and felicitous confluence of literary greats associated with it - Agatha Christie, Jane Austen, Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Richard Francis Burton, Ted Hughes….!
As you start reading it, there seems to be a crime in The Apple in the Dark but... expect the unexpected in this masterpiece.

You may even find various types of acts – from the very act of creation to acts ensuing from the passions of the soul to acts of re-creation – a covert philosophical theory of action, perhaps.

Unmissable symbolic clues in the novel: follow one of the trails in the quote from The Vedas (the Upanishads) at the beginning of the novel!

Experience diaphanous poetry in prose and, perhaps, listen to J. Brahms Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98 as the author did whilst writing this novel.

A (hi)story of the pilgrimage of the universal human soul.

What is the role of the images of Saints Crispin and Crispinian?

A spellbinding masterpiece, deeply introspective and thought-provoking!

Unveil a universe of mindfulness and enlightenment in true Clarice Lispector’s style!

Details of available publications:

**ENGLISH**

1961 The Apple in the Dark translated by Gregory Rabassa, Austin: University of Texas and reprinted

1967 The Apple in the Dark translated by Gregory Rabassa, New York: Knopf and reprinted in

1985 The Apple in the Dark translated by Gregory Rabassa London: Virago


**PORTUGUESE**

Various editions available

A Maçã no Escuro (1961)

**Free downloads**

https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxjYW50aW5ob2RhZ2Vpc2V8Z3g6NjgxZGFlN2VjMGQ5ZjRiNw
SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS

A maçã no escuro foi o livro mais bem estruturado que escrevi.  
[The apple in the dark is the best structured book I have ever written] 
Clarice Lispector  

A maçã no escuro translated as The Apple in the Dark contains three parts:  
Como se faz um homem [How to make a man]  
Nascimento de um herói [The birth of a hero] and  
A maçã no escuro [The Apple in the Dark].

Each part has sections or chapters, which are numbered by using the relevant numeral word and do not use the word ‘chapter’ which appears in the English translation.

In her suggestive epigraph, Clarice Lispector quotes from the Vedas (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:6:1c) with omitted sections – compare with full text below:

Creating all things, he entered into everything. Entering into all things, he became that which has shape and that which is shapeless; he became that which can be defined and that which cannot be defined; he became that which has support and that which has not support; he became that which is gross and that which is subtle. He became all things whatsoever: therefore the wise call him the Real.

“Desiring that he should become many, that he should make of himself many forms, Brahman meditated. Meditating, he created all things. Creating all things, he entered into everything. Entering into all things, he became that which has shape and that which is shapeless; he became that which can be defined and that which cannot be defined; he became that which has support and that which has not support; he became that which has support and that which has not support; he became that which is conscious and that which is not conscious; he became that which is gross and that which is subtle. He became all things whatsoever: therefore the wise call him the Real” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:6:1c).

Upanishad is defined in Encyclopaedia Britannica as

…. also spelled Upanisad, Sanskrit Upāniṣad (“Connection”), one of four genres of texts that together constitute each of the Vedas, the sacred scriptures of most Hindu traditions. Each of the four Vedas—the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda—consists of a Samhita (a “collection” of hymns or sacred formulas); a liturgical prose exposition called a Brahmana; and two appendices to the Brahmana—an Aranyaka (“Book of the Wilderness”), which contains esoteric doctrines meant to be studied by the initiated in the forest or some other remote place, and an Upanishad, which speculates about the ontological connection between humanity and the cosmos. Because the Upanishads constitute the concluding portions of the Vedas, they are
called vedanta ("the conclusion of the Vedas"), and they serve as the foundational texts in the theological discourses of many Hindu traditions that are also known as Vedanta. The Upanishads’ impact on later theological and religious expression and the abiding interest they have attracted are greater than that of any of the other Vedic texts. See more at [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Upanishad](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Upanishad)

Nothing in Clarice Lispector’s works is irrelevant, every word counts, and the section of the Upanishads bears relevance as it discusses the human experience among other themes and, indeed, is permeated with symbolism as is The Apple in the Dark.

This novel took ten years to complete. In the 1950, Clarice Lispector came to the United Kingdom accompanying her husband, Maury Gurgel Valente (1921-94), who was a diplomat and had been participated in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Round in Torquay in 1950 (six months).

Clarice Lispector was not at all comfortable with discharging the usual social duties of diplomat’s wife so she withdrew and started drafting the first sections of her novel The Apple in the Dark during those six months in Torquay. At the same time she was penning a series of short stories, Laços de família (Family Ties) which would be published in 1960. In one of her accounts, she tells us that it was the second time that she was writing two books at the same time.

She briefly returned to Brazil and would write columns for the women’s section of a newspaper. Her second son Paulo was born in 1953. She would continue writing the novel and short stories in Washington, D.C., as her husband was a serving diplomat there.

Another interesting detail is the fact that the author listened particularly to the Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98 by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) published in 1866, the last of his symphonies. Clarice Lispector often refers overtly or covertly to music in her writings including Gregorian chant and various other genres. She listened to the Symphony No. 4 exhaustively during the writing process.

J. Brahms began composing his last symphonic masterpiece at a mountain retreat in 1884, about a year after completing the Third Symphony, often described as his magnum opus, composed specifically for the Meiningen Court Orchestra, led by Hans von Bülow (1830-1894). It is a serious and tragic symphony of the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1914).

She completed A maçã no escuro in 1956 and is said to have confided in her friend and fellow writer Fernando Sabino (1923-2004), who also acted as her agent, stating, ‘I have learned much with it, I was amazed at the surprises it gave me – but it has also caused huge suffering’. The novel was not published immediately and went through various revisions. It is interesting to note that
when Clarice Lispector recorded an interview in October 1976 for the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Sound and Image, she referred to the first part of the novel under the heading of ‘Como nasce o mundo’ [literally, ‘How the world is born’]. In that interview, she also draws analogies between the writing of this novel and Água Viva (1973).

Fernando Sabino read A maçã no escuro annotating and making suggestions, which Clarice accepted. She sent the manuscripts to her friend and fellow author Érico Veríssimo (1905-1975), who was a godfather to her son, and to Fernando Sabino. To publish it became very challenging and publishing houses seemed reluctant to publish it.

Sérgio Millet (1898-1966) had hailed Clarice Lispector as an outstanding novelist from the publication of her first novel Perto do coração selvagem in 1943, translated into English as Near to the Wild Heart, an intertextual reference to James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916). Millet stated that her novel had guaranteed an absolute elevated place in literature, hitherto unknown, in Brazilian literature (c.f. Martins, W. in História da Inteligência Brasileira (1933-1960) Volume VII pages 212-2013 et passim.).

It is also relevant to be reminded that Clarice Lispector’s works came to be classified as the third generation of the Brazilian Modernism and hailed as unique from mid 1940s. She pioneered a style that removed itself from the traditional North-eastern - sertão type of novels. Another major contemporary author, João Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967), would resume the north-eastern genre adopting some of stream of consciousness techniques along with a Joycean neologism creation verve particularly in his 1956 Grande Sertão: Veredas along with references to Euclides da Cunha’s 1902 Os Sertões.

Clarice had two other novels published O lustre in 1946 and A cidade sitiada in 1949 and was puzzled by the challenges she was facing. She even cogitated whether she should pay for the publication herself.

In 1961, the Livraria Francisco Alves (bookshop and publishers founded in 1854) finally published A maçã no escuro (see the first cover at the top of this post). It became an immediate success and gained much accolade from the contemporary authors and critics. It was awarded the Carmen Dolores Barbosa Literary Prize as the best 1961 book. The prize was of Cr$ 25.000 (twenty-five thousand cruzeiros) for the best creation of the year and the award ceremony was at no. 51, Rua General Jardim in São Paulo and, curiously, Clarice Lispector stated that she only received 20 thousand cruzeiros from the hands of President of the Republic at the time, Jânio Quadros (1917-1992).

A maçã no escuro could be categorized in the same style of her major 1964 novel A paixão segundo G.H., which our Book Club greatly enjoyed reading in its first year in February 2015.
The novel was translated into English by Gregory Rabassa (1922-2016) in 1961 and published by the University of Texas and reprinted in 1967, 1985, 1986 and 2009. With the exception of the 2009 reprint, all have a foreword by translator.

Gregory Rabassa was a prominent translator of Spanish mainly and also Portuguese, born in the United States of a Cuban family. Rabassa sometimes translated without having read the book beforehand, taking liberties with the text, which attracted a great deal of criticism. Later in life, he would write a memoir of his experiences as a translator, If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents, A Memoir (2006). He also translated books by the Brazilian authors Machado de Assis (2), Osman Lins (1), Jorge Amado (1) and Dalton Trevisan (1).


**SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

**CLARICE LISPECTOR** (10 Dec 1920 – 9 Dec 1977)

Statue of Clarice Lispector in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil

Demetrio Albuquerque, photo by A. Júnior
Clarice Lispector has been granted the accolade of the most notable Brazilian woman writer. Her oeuvre offers a multiplicity of legacies, many of which have yet to be unveiled. Without any doubt, she is one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. Her standing equals that of Virginia Wolf, Katherine Mansfield, Franz Kafka and many other men and women of genius.

Furthermore, her life story is truly fascinating and illustrative of the history of countless immigrants in Brazil, who eventually become Brazilian nationals: mothers and fathers with their children born abroad or in Brazil, who have been coming to Brazil to find shelter from multiple world wars, persecutions and other international cataclysms especially from 19th century onwards. These immigrants have come and contributed to forging a new life for their families and making invaluable contributions to wealth of Brazilian culture, life and institutions.

Haia Lispector, the third child of Pinkouss and Mania Lispector was born on 10th December 1920 in the town of Chechelnyk, in the Vynnytsia Oblast, Ukraine (which had come into Russian rule at the time). Her father changed the names of the family: Haia became Clarice, parents, became Marieta and Pedro Lispector. Her family fled the persecutions in their homeland and arrived in Maceió, Brazil when she two months old in 1921 and, then moved to Recife in 1924, where her mother’s sister, Zaina lived with her husband José Rabin, a prosperous local businessman. She spent her childhood in Recife at Maciel Pinheiro Square and attended João Barbalho Primary School and, subsequently, the traditional Ginásio Pernambucano (founded in 1825). She also studied piano, Yiddish and Hebrew from 1930.

At an early age, she began to write. Once after going to the theatre, she wrote a short three-act play Pobre menina rica (Poor Rich Girl). She would go to a friend’s father’s bookshop to borrow books (her family could not afford them!) where she discovered Reinações de Narizinho ('Reignings’ of Little Nose Girl) by Monteiro Lobato. She began to write stories at this early age, which from the outset portray feelings and sensations.

Her mother died in 1930 and, in 1933, her father moved with the family to Rio de Janeiro, where Clarice continued her studies at the Silvio Leite High School. She read a great deal from the usual romantics such as M. Delly that teenage girls read by also Machado de Assis, José de Alencar, Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, Rachel de Queiros, Júlio Dinis, Eça de Queirós, Fiodor Dostoyevsky to mention but a few. A bit later, she discovered Katherine Mansfield’s works at a small private lending library at Rua Rodrigo Silva.

As she prepared herself at Colégio Andrews (1938) to read law, she would also make ends meet by providing private tuition in Math and Portuguese. She learned how to type and studied English at the Sociedade Brasileira de Cultura Inglesa. In 1939, she started her Law studies at the Rio de Janeiro Federal University (at the time, the National University) and worked – translating scientific texts for a lab and as a secretary for a law firm. Her father
died in 1940. And in 1941 she became an editor of Agência Nacional working with author Lúcio Cardoso, who would become one of her best friends. Whilst at university she began to write her first novel *Perto do Coração Selvagem* (Near the Wild Heart). In 1943, she worked as editor for *A Noite* and *Diário da Tarde*, writing a ladies’ column signed by Ilka Soares as ghost writer. In that year, she became a Brazilian citizen and married the diplomat Mauri Gurgel Valente.

The following year she accompanied her husband to his post in Naples and provided assistance to the hospital for Brazilian soldiers. And she began to write *O Lustre* (The Chandelier), her first novel, published and awarded the Graça Aranha Literature Prize. *O Lustre* was in published in 1946. She lived in Bern and also visited Spain. In 1949, she was in France and Italy and met the Italian modernist poet G. Ungaretti and G. de Chirico. Her first son, Pedro was born in Bern in September and she continued writing with her little son on her lap until she returned with her husband to Rio de Janeiro. There, she mingled with her fellow writers and friends (Fernando Sabino and others).

In 1951, she spent six months in Torquay in England, where she drafted her first notes for *Maçã no Escuro* (Apple in the Dark). She had a miscarriage then, and the Brazilian Vice-Consul, the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto, offered her the necessary assistance. She returned to Brazil. In 1952, she published six short stories in Cadernos de cultura and a chronicle *Entre Mulheres* (Among Women) under the pen name Teresa Quadros at the request of her friend and fellow author Rubem Braga.

Next, she travelled to Washington with her husband where second son, Paulo, was born. In 1953, she met the acclaimed Brazilian writer Erico Veríssimo and his wife Mafalda and they became very good friends. In the same year, she was also delighted that her book *Perto do coração selvagem* was published in a French translation by Plon with a cover by Henri Matisse.

She divorced in 1959 and returned to live in Rio de Janeiro with her children. She was a very caring mother. To complement her income, she wrote a column under the pen name Helen Palmer (‘Feira de Utilidades’, in *Correio da Manhã*, 1959–60).

In 1962 she was awarded the Carmen Dolores Prize for her novel *A Maçã no Escuro*. She gave a lecture on Contemporary Brazilian Literature in Austin, Texas, USA in 1963. In 1964, she published a collection of short stories *A legião estrangeira* and her novel *A Paixão Segundo G. H.* and moved to her new flat and began to receive international acclaim. In 1965, a selection of excerpts from *Perto do coração selvagem* made by Fauzi Arap, is presented at La Maison du Théâtre, Paris, featuring José Wilker, Glauce Rocha and others.

After this, she dedicated herself to her children as her son Peter needed special care (schizophrenia). She lived a life of much financial hardship despite the publication of various books and translations. In 1966, disaster struck as she fell asleep with a cigarette that caused a fire in her flat, she had very serious burns, which left her scarred.
Subsequently, she would write a weekly column for *Jornal do Brasil* (1967-1973), publishing short stories, children stories and much more. Gradually, she came to be regarded as the great writer that she was. She passed away in Rio de Janeiro in December 1977.

*For further details:* The Instituto Moreira Salles has created an excellent comprehensive site for Clarice Lispector at [https://claricelispectorims.com.br/].

Paulo Gurgel Valente, the youngest son of the author, started to deposit her manuscripts at the Instituto Moreira Salles (IMS) in 2004. The first set contained the original manuscripts of *A hora da estrela* (1977) and *Um sopro de vida* (1978), which were typed manuscripts in bound format with signed notes and amendments. In addition, the first lot also included the short story ‘A bela e a fera’ (1979); her letters and 896 books on a wide range of topics from magic tricks to astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, psychology and literature. Further comprehensive details, available at the IMS site: Suzana Amaral (1932 - ), *A Hora da Estrela (Hour of the Star)*, [http://claricelispectorims.com.br/Facts](http://claricelispectorims.com.br/Facts)


The Quebecois author Claire Varin that has nurtured a passion for Portuguese, and discovered Clarice Lispector writing her doctoral thesis on Clarice Lispector. She visited Brazil six times and her research resulted in two books *Rencontres Brésiliennes* (1987, revised & enlarged edition 2007) and *Langues de Feu!,* (1990, translated into Portuguese: *Línguas de Fogo*, 2002). She also produced an interesting video on Clarice Lispector ([http://clairevarin.com/](http://clairevarin.com/))

Clarice Lispector gave a single TV interview in February 1977 (TV Cultura, São Paulo [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aP4qgyu2o0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aP4qgyu2o0))

In 1994, Jesse Larsen and Erica Bauermeister included *The Hour of the Star* in her *500 Great Books by Women*, stating, ‘In less than one hundred pages, Clarice Lispector tells a brilliantly multi-faceted and searing story.’


A number of biographies have been written about Clarice Lispector, listed here in chronological order:

A relevant 2010 review by Benjamin Abdala Junior, Professor of comparative literature at the São Paulo University in which he compares and finds confluences with Nádia B Gotlib’s biography is worth reading - ‘Biografia de Clarice, por Benjamin Moser: coincidências e equivocos’ in Estudos Avançados vol.24 no.70 São Paulo 2010 versão impressa ISSN 0103-4014 downloadable from http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0103-40142010000300020

The current publisher lists her works at: http://www.rocco.com.br/especial/claricelispector/

Attendance is free, but booking is essential:
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