Subtle hints of north-eastern landscape, novel set in Granja Quieta, a quiet smallholding located in a Brejo Alto [brejo de altitude - moist Atlantic forest biome] perhaps not too far from the historic city of São Luís with its rows of pink houses... & numerous archeologic sites of ancient civilizations dotted around the local chapadas and brejos.

The chandelier, an aesthetic embryo of Clarice Lispector’s future oeuvre... or even possibly an arts manifesto: expressed both overtly in the clay figurines & covertly in the masterly use of language, which could be promptly metamorphosed into paintings, sculptures... or installations.

A most enthralling story of the writing of the novel too:
A young diplomat’s wife completes the novel in Naples in 1944 in the midst of the ravages of WWII whilst experiencing some of the horrors by assisting wounded members of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB)….

The unique challenging account of the nefarious effects of incest, rape, grooming, mind control and ruthless power remains as freshly relevant and timeless as it was in mid-1940s. No wonder the novel dumbfounded everyone much as Virgínia was stifled in Daniel’s contrivance – the Society of the Shadows…

A highly symbolic web of memories present in the very title ‘The Chandelier’ - a secreted clue at the beginning of the novel in the phrase: ‘A grande aranha escandescia’ [The large spider blazed/burned] …

Somehow vivid memories handed down perhaps through family stories evoke the Ukrainian ‘павук’, word which means both spider\(^2\) and chandelier.

The manufacture of chandeliers became true art form from 17th century onwards in the part of Ukraine where the author’s forebears used to live, an essential part of all Synagogues representing a vast and significant art heritage!

A poignant tale of a sister fatally trapped in her brother’s and ancestral spider web… & a ‘Jungian shadow’ spookily linked to the 1977 The Hour of the Star.

\(^1\) The historic city centred was designated as UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997

\(^2\)Spiders have been highly symbolic in Ukraine since the times of pagan gods (Dazhboh)… with layers of magical symbolism: spider as the centre of world and its maker & as the sun since the web resembles sun rays & simultaneously symbol of the goddess moon as she weaves the web and the fate of all people!

Superstition stretches to date: ‘reading’ the spiders in one’s home, their colour and movement gives you daily forecasts better than any horoscope!

DETAILS OF AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS:

ENGLISH


PORTUGUESE

1946 O Lustre various editions available

Free downloads (various) e.g.
SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS

O lustre was written sometime from 1942/3 and completed in Naples in 1944 as Clarice Lispector accompanied her diplomat husband to his post in Italy in the midst of the ravages of WWII. This was her second novel and it would be published in 1946 by Editora Agir, a publishing house and bookshop launched by Alceu Amoroso Lima (1893–1983, who used penname Tristão de Ataíde), a literary critic, author, Catholic thinker and lecturer, created in 1944 and sold to Ediouro in 2002. O lustre has been published in the AGIR Classics series by the current owner. In the same year, Clarice Lispector was awarded the Graça Aranha Foundation Prize for her first novel Perto do Coração Selvagem (Near to the Wild Heart).

Wilson Martins (1921-2010) in his first edition of the monumental intellectual history of Brazil, seven-volume História da inteligência brasileira (1976-9), refers to the earliest appraisal of the young writer, Clarice Lispector, and her unique talent in an article published on 15th January 1944 by Sérgio Milliet da Costa e Silva (1898—1966) who thus hails the discovery of the new author ‘with an odd name and rather unpleasant, a pen name, no doubt’ stating that ‘the work emerges in our literary world as the most serious attempt to write an introspective novel’ as the author is able ‘to go deeply into the psychological complexity of the modern soul’. Milliet would point out ‘that her use of language is exceptionally lyrical’ and she was
able ‘to follow the most unexpected short-cuts, to use the most novel solutions, and without falling into Hermeticism or the modernist fashions’. Sérgio Milliet was an author, poet, literary critic, painter and translator, and served as the director of the Mário de Andrade Library in São Paulo.

One of Clarice Lispector’s manuscripts, reproduced in Nádia Battella Gotlib's 2015 Clarice Fotobiografia, carefully sets out how the author plans the characters Virgínia and Daniel, who ought to be carefully constructed as well as the rigours of the controlled language she would use. Typed originally with various handwritten additions, the manuscript reveals how punctiliously she built her characters, how much awareness she had concerning the removal excesses in the use of language and, importantly, the need to balance all of that with an appropriate tone of the discourse. Clearly, she revisited the initial typewritten outline by jotting down additional notes and crossing out what was not needed, adding doodles.
The novel contains fascinating references to the Brazilian northeast – which represent a total departure from what was named as ‘regionalist’ novel, i.e., works which aimed at capturing the local spirit and colour including using local varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, which then prevailed in writings of various Brazilian authors.

The setting and landscape which Clarice Lispector chose is certainly fascinating as she seems to have been absorbing and decanting descriptions of the Brazilian sertões, cerrado, caatinga and agreste in the Brazilian classics and through first hand experience. It is Euclides da Cunha who describes the land, geography, and the climate of Brazil and the northeast in his seminal 1902 Os Sertões: campanha de Canudos (see the postings of our Book Club for details – our book club discussed it in 2015 and a special iterant edition in March 2017). Ahead of her time, Clarice locates the smallholding Granja Quieta in the town of Brejo Alto. The choice of the sites is most relevant.

The term brejo alto or brejo de altitude has a great many variants such as brejo, mata brejeira, florestas da serra, brejo interiorano and even ‘the Hanging Gardens of the Sertão’, islands of moist forests, biomes, at height of over 500 m in the plateaus and chapadas of the north-east, a sort of natural paradise in a semi-arid location. The brejos have a higher rainfall than other areas with its own micro-climate. Also, one can find trees from Amazonas in the biomes in the Northeast, but they are part of the Atlantic Forest. Nights can be cold in such places as well. There are some 43 brejos mainly in Planalto (plateau) da Borborema, Chapada do Araripe, Depressão Sertaneja Meridional, Serra da Ibiapaba e Maciço de Baturité with the largest number in Serra da Borborema. Equally interesting is the town of Brejo da Madre de Deus, in the state of Pernambuco in which a pre-historic necropolis dating back some ten thousand years was found, an archeologic site near the Furna do Estrago. There are rock inscriptions in the area, evidence that the people were hunter-gatherers, anthropophagi; a flute made from a tibia was also found there indicating that music-making was part of the ancient civilization. A furna is a geological crate lake or cave. Many towns and cities carry the word brejo.
Equally fascinating is the train journey included in the novel. Clarice Lispector and her family lived in Recife and travelled using the Brazilian Great Western Railway. The rail network in 19th and 20th century Brazil also features in the 1937 novel Pureza by José Lins do Rego (see post of our Brazilian bilingual book club for more details about the station Pureza and the Great Western railway, May 2017).

The reference to clay figurines - bonecos de barro - is most interesting because of clear link to the art of sculpture, which appears in various guises in her works, and also because of the tradition of making them in the northeast of Brazil, each representing the folklore and often telling a story as a nativity scene, a festival, saints and various other local traditions.

There is an even more riveting aspect which is worthy of note. In 1960, Clarice Lispector published a separate section Os bonecos de barro from the novel O lustre in the magazine O Nordeste (Ano XIII, nº 2, julho de 1960, Recife-PE), which is illustrated by some unidentified artist. A reproduction of the separate article was made by the Oficina do Livro Rubens Borba de Moraes, São Paulo (May 2003), a collaboration of João Antônio Bührer and his ‘Arquivos Implacáveis’. According to the
authors of the reproduction, the illustrations could be by poet, visual artist and journalist Ladjane Bandeira (1927-1999), who was a co-director of the magazine with Esmaragdo Marroquim (1912-1977). Other names who could have illustrated it were Manuel Bandeira, José Cláudio and Karl Plattner.

This section of the novel appears in countless sites linked the craft making of bonecos de barro and blogs in Brazil and Clarice Lispector's name features as pride of place. This also means that scores of readers are familiar with at least one section of the novel – it does not have formal chapters and some of the paragraphs are extremely long, poetry in prose.

Another key element is the very famous cockroach (1946/1982: 96, 189) which becomes one of the main ‘characters’ in The Passion According to G.H. in 1964.

There are numerous symbolic animals, namely, spider, caramujo (clam, conch), snake, scarab, birds, insects. The main, it could be argued is the spider in the context of this novel given the associations with the chandelier, which the Ukrainian павук, word which means both spider and chandelier. Equally the words люстро – which means mirror (mirrors feature in the novel too) and sun symbolically and люстри-павуки - chandeliers (from люстра short form of люстри-павуки).

Spiders appear as reference to chandelier twice and one as reference to the black spiders of Daniel’s eyes (1946/1982: 12, 68, 232). The last reference to the chandelier is its image as a ‘hairless’/implume (spider) and a huge upside-down flickering goblet of water. Needless to say this reinforces the idea of chiaroscuro which appears throughout the novel from the start as ‘A grande aranha escandescia’ - The large spider blazed/burned [N.K].

Spiders have been highly symbolic in Ukraine since the times of pagan gods, the deity Dazhboh and representations in the Trypillian civilization (some 7 thousand years) incorporated into the local traditions with layers of magical symbolism. A spider has a twofold symbolism - as the centre of world and its maker and as the sun since the web resembles sun rays and simultaneously (as Janus face) the symbol of the
goddess moon- she weaves the web and the fate of all people! There are elaborate wheat straw Christmas decorations which replicate chandeliers and brought into the homes much as the holy in the UK for the twelve days of Christmas. One model is a six-pointed star, very traditional in the part where the author’s family used to live. The decorations are said to bring happiness, see for example https://rukotvory.com.ua/info/pavuk-na-schastya/

There are various legends dating back to time immemorial. To this date, there is a strong tradition of placing a golden spider is placed on a silver web as decoration for Christmas trees, which actually travelled with the Ukrainians to many countries in the world. And a more daily superstition stretches to date: ‘reading’ the spiders in one’s home, their colour and movement gives you daily forecasts better than any horoscope! Spiders should not be killed. Some argue that these traditions may have migrated from ancient Persian or other civilizations to Europe in the various moments of people through the centuries.

In Clarice Lispector, it seems that somehow vivid memories handed down perhaps through family stories evoke the Ukrainian павук or люстро-павук, word which means both spider and chandelier. Additionally, there is yet another facet to it. The manufacture of chandeliers became true art form with baroque influences in metal casting, often with various animals shaped into the objects from 17th century onwards in the part of Ukraine where the author’s forebears used to live; an essential part of all Synagogues representing a vast and significant art heritage (e.g. Pavlo Zholtovs'ky (1904-1986) art historian, museum expert, comprehensively recorded art forms in Ukraine including Jewish art, his biography 2013 Umbra Vitae).

Reference to music and opera is equally essential in all works by Clarice Lispector – she often made philosophical remarks regarding the essence of language and music. The reference to the celebrated operetta The Merry Widow (Die lustige Witwe) by the Austro-Hungarian Franz Lehár (1870-1948) based on the 1861
comedy play, *L'attaché d'ambassade* (*The Embassy Attaché*) by Henri Meilhac (1830-1897), with the story about a rich widow and her countrymen's attempt to keep her money in the principality by finding her the right husband. The reference does seem to have another concealed link to her own life as the wife of a diplomat.

It is also worth reminding oneself that there is a gypsy who is a fortune teller in *O Lustre*, which is featured in 1997 *The Hour of the Star* as well. There are numerous parallels between the themes of both works.

Clarice Lispector concluded the novel in Naples. She served as a Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) volunteer nurse when she travelled with her husband Maury Gurgel Valente (1921-), a diplomat who was serving in Rome at the time. The FEB site has various details of the role of FEB and authors and artists who served along with the forces and photographic archives and maps as the map below showing the itinerary of the forces in Italy (in Portuguese [http://www.homensdeguerra.com.br/](http://www.homensdeguerra.com.br/)).

*O Lustre* has been continually in print in Brazil from its original publication and through 1960s onwards by various publishing houses. And the section on the clay figurines appears countless times in many publications (digital and hard copies). Needless to say, there is clear evidence that *O Lustre* continued to be read and appreciated.

Translated sections into English appeared in the works of Hélène Cixous (1937-) and particularly in her *Three steps on the ladder of writing* (1993). Cixous published *L’heure de Clarice Lispector, précédé de Vivre l’Orange (Des femmes)* in 1989. She renders the first sentence with the adjective ‘fluid’ as in the original, which in the full 2018 translation into English became a verb. Curiously, Hélène Cixous refers to the novel throughout her work as ‘*O Lustro*’.

*O Lustre* has now appeared in a full translation into English as *The Chandelier* by Benjamin Moser and Magdalena Edwards and was published by New Directions in the United States in April 2018. The publication of the translation gained financial support from the Brazilian National Library and the Ministry of Culture,
acknowledged in the publication. It is a hard cover with a dustjacket with a photograph by Jason Fulford and design by O.O.P.S.

Benjamin Moser (1976-) is a writer, editor, critic and translator, born in Houston (USA) and lives in the Netherlands. His site tells us that ‘he worked at Foreign Affairs magazine and Alfred A. Knopf in New York before becoming an editor at the Harvill Press in London. He was the New Books columnist for Harper’s Magazine before becoming a Contributing Editor on visual art and a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books. His work has appeared in many publications in the United States and abroad, including Condé Nast Traveler, Newsweek, and The American Scholar’. In 2009, he published WHY THIS WORLD A Biography of Clarice Lispector (OUP).

Magdalena Edwards is a writer, translator, and actor based in Los Angeles, California. Her work has appeared in the Paris Review Daily, the Boston Review, the Millions, El Mercurio, and the Los Angeles Review of Books, as well as in Cosmopolitanisms (NYU Press 2017) and Psychogeographical Romance (Essay Press 2015). Her translations include the work of Chilean poets Nicanor Parra and Raúl Zurita, Chilean author and cultural critic Oscar Contardo, Brazilian writer and theorist Silviano Santiago, and Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's second novel The Chandelier (New Directions 2018). She is working on a translation of Chilean surrealist Juan Emar's posthumously published novel AMOR, as well as a collection of poems translated from Brazilian Portuguese.

Magdalena Edwards performed The Body Speaks: On Clarice Lispector's The Chandelier at the conference After Clarice: Lispector’s Legacy organized by Adriana X. Jacobs (Oriental Studies, Oxford) and Claire Williams (Modern Languages, Oxford) in November 2017 (https://afterclarice.wordpress.com/)

**SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

**CLARICE LISPECTOR**

(10 Dec 1920 – 9 Dec 1977)
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 Woolf, 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 (1882-1948). 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 who teenage girls read but also classics such as Machado de Assis, José de Alencar, Júlio Dinis, Eça de Queirós, Fiodor Dostoyevsky and 20th century Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, Rachel de Queiros, to mention but a few. Her book collection (now at the Instituto Moreira Salles) contains many books on art too. 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 (192-1968), 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 her 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 Rome and provided assistance to the hospital for Brazilian FEB soldiers in Naples as a voluntary nurse. She began to write *O Lustre* (*The Chandelier*) in Rio and completed it in Naples in 1944, published in 1946. In the same year, her first novel was awarded the Graça Aranha Literature Prize. She lived in Bern and visited Spain and other countries. In 1949, she was in France and Italy and met the Italian modernist poet Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970) and Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), who painted her portrait (oil).
Her first son, Pedro was born in Bern in September and she continued writing with her little son on her lap until she would return with her husband to Rio de Janeiro. There, she mingled with her fellow writers and friends (Fernando Sabino and others).

In 1951, Clarice Lispector 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 (1920-1999), 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 (1913-1990).

Next, she travelled to Washington with her husband where her second son, Paulo, was born. In 1953, she met the acclaimed Brazilian writer Érico Veríssimo (1905-1975) and his wife Mafalda; 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 (1869-1954).
She divorced in 1959 as life of the wife of a diplomat presents various challenges at any time 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 the newspaper *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. International acclaim was finally forthcoming. In 1965, a selection of excerpts from *Perto do coração selvagem* by the playwright and actor Fauzi Arap (1938-2013), was presented at La Maison du Théâtre, Paris, featuring Glauce Rocha, Dirce Migliaccio and the beginner José Wilker. This was a first adaptation of her work to the theatre.

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:

Our Book Club has read and discussed:

❖ The Passion according to G.H. in February 2015 – the post is no longer available but will appear in a book for Year one of the Brazilian Bilingual Book Club.
❖ The Hour of the Star in January 2016 and our CineClub showed Suzana Amaral’s film. Please see the post for The Hour of the Star at http://londres.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us/book_club.xml
❖ The Apple in the Dark in April 2017
❖ Suzana Amaral (1932 - ), A Hora da Estrela (Hour of the Star)

Other sources:

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.

Visit CASA RUI BARBOSA for Clarice LISPector’s archives:

CLAIRE VARIN – 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

**CLARICE LISPECTOR GAVE A SINGLE TV INTERVIEW** in February 1977 (TV Cultura, São Paulo)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aP4gyyU2oQ

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 scaring 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 Nadia 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/10.1590/0103-40142010000300020

ROCCO is the current publisher of Clarice Lispector’s works in Brazil:
http://www.rocco.com.br/especial/claricelispector/


About Brejo de altitude see:

CAVALCANTE, Arnóbio. *Jardins suspensos no sertão*. Scientific American:
http://www2.uol.com.br/sciam/reportagens/jardins_suspensos_no_sertao.html

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Attendance is free, but booking is essential:
nadia.kerecuk@itamaraty.gov.br

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