Female Quest Toward "Água Pura" in Clarice Lispector's *Perto do Coração Selvagem*

The quests of heroes, from Gilgamesh and Odysseus, Apuleius and Augustine, to Stephen Daedalus and Carlos Castañeda, have been recorded throughout history. Joseph Campbell in his classic work The hero with a Thousand Faces *charted the journey of the hero in many cultures... But if the hero has a thousand faces, the heroine has scarcely a dozen.*

Carol Christ, 1980

While the thematic and structural importance of quest in the fiction of Clarice Lispector has received substantive critical attention,[1] Lispector's tendency to depict female rather than male protagonists on quest has all but escaped comment,[2] as if sexual identity were of little consequence in her remarkably persistent engagement with this mythic narrative. Yet feminist literary critics who have noted the relative scarcity of female-centered quest narratives prior to the last century, have also suggested that the proliferation of female protagonists on quest in female-authored literature of the contemporary period is bringing about a re-casting of the quest story itself. Because "the simple act of telling a woman's point of view is a revolutionary act," asserts Carol Christ, "... the quest motif.... appears in different form in the new literature written by women (7,9)."[3] In light of such cues, it is appropriate to reconsider the complex relationship between the quest myth and the female-centered fictions of Clarice Lispector. In her many depictions of female protagonists on quest, does Lispector simply replay, however profoundly, an age-old archetype of *busca?* Or does her specific engagement

with female perspectives involve her in gender-related revision of the quest myth itself?

It is telling that Christ describes the difference between male and female quest as one of "form", for the predominance of male questers in the patriarchal literary tradition has conditioned the very structure of this mythic paradigm. Premised on the difference, tension and attraction between a questing "subject" on the one hand, and a quested "object" on the other, the binary and hierarchical narrative structure of the quest story exhibits a marked affinity for the paired constructions of "masculinity as transcendent subjectivity" and "femininity as immanent otherness" which Simone de Beauvoir identifies as the cornerstones of patriarchal ideology.[4] In his study of the quest myth as it appears in various cultures and time periods, Joseph Campbell observes that, "Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the Totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know (1968, 116)." Whether the binary narrative structure of the quest myth is inextricable from the patriarchal ideology of gender, is a question which would take us far afield of the present article. In narrative practice, however, the congruity between the quest and patriarchal ideology has been so sweeping and persistent that patriarchal conceptions of masculinity and femininity are regarded by myth scholars such as Campbell to comprise together the structural foundations of the quest story.[5]

Given this relationship between quest and patriarchal gender, the very possibility of "female quest" is thrown into question. As Beauvoir so wryly puts it, "What would Prince Charming have for occupation if not to awaken the Sleeping Beauty (207)?" Called upon to embody "the totality of what can be known" by the masculine hero, "woman" is not favorably positioned to make her own quest for knowledge.

How, then, does an author such as Lispector produce fictions of female quest? How does she contrast or reconcile the female's conventional role as "waiter" with her new identity as "quester"? How does she imagine the "object" of the female protagonist who, in patriarchal narrative, would herself

be confined to the role of object? By what narrative twists and transgressions does she circumvent or overcome the patriarchal bias against female journey, and how is the quest story itself transformed by this process of mythic revision?

So unorthodox and multiple was Clarice Lispector's own *busca* as a writer, that responses to this question are at least as numerous as her works of fiction. The female quest undertaken by Joana in *Perto do Coração Selvagem* is a good place to begin, however, since it involves a three-step journey and, consequently, suggests three distinct "types" of female quest. In the first stage, which will be referred to as the "quest of the heroine," the quest myth may be said to be "feminized" in order to accommodate the protagonist's conventional feminine identity. In the second stage, which will be referred as "the quest of the female hero," the female protagonist is conversely "masculinized" in order to accommodate the conventional masculine-centrism of the mythic paradigm. While both of these stages depend on patriarchal notions of gender identity and, consequently, reinscribe what we have seen to be the patriarchal narrative structure of the quest myth, the third stage will entail a rejection of this binary paradigm, as the protagonist travels toward a non-gendered variety of identity in a movement which will be referred to as "feminist quest." Although the "genderless" Joana is certainly the exception rather than the rule among Lispector's numerous and often quite "feminine" female protagonists, the three-step typology suggested by her journey away from patriarchal conceptions of gender will, it is hoped, suggest directions for reading Lispector's later female-centered quest fictions.

The Quest of the Heroine

Part I of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* comprises an exploration of the "feminist side"of the patriarchal quest narrative. How does it feel to be an "Other"? And, critically, what is the "story" behind the identification of

woman with otherness?[6] Alternating between Joana's childhood and married life, the chapters from "O Pai" to "Otávio" reveal the journey by which the female protagonist relinquishes her own inclinations for subjectivity and quest, in order to play the role of the feminine other in the quest of a masculine hero.

Drawing on the one/other structure of the word pair hero/hero*ine*, he will refer to this story as the "quest of the heroine." "Woman", writes Beauvoir, "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference do her (xix)." Similarly, the "quest of the heroine" does not make sense on its own terms, but only as a sub-narrative of the hero's quest for his feminine other.

In the opening chapters of Lispector's novel, we learn that Joana has a propensity for "quest" in general and for "heroic"quest in particular. Oddly detached from the objects, people, ideas and words of which her environment is comprised, Joana betrays, already, a curiosity about the relationship between gender and language, and an intimation of the possibility of genderlessness: "'Nunca' é homem ou mulher? Por que 'nunca' não é filho nem filha? E 'sim'? (15)." If the girl fails to understand why some words are gendered while others are not, she also demonstrates "confusion" as to the "proper" gender of the word "hero," harboring an ambition which is revealed through her father's indiscretion: "Me disse que quando crescer vai ser herói...(26)"Like the cross-dressed saint for whom she is named, Joana translates her own penchant for "questioning" into a desire to play the role of the masculine hero on quest.

The conflict between Joana's heroic self-perception and patriarchal notions of propriety is most richly conveyed by the shoplifting incident, in which, redoubling the mythical overtones of her narrative, Lispector invests her young protagonist with promethean and satanic associations. The act of stealing a book, which may be read as a metaphor of Joana's ambition to appropriate the masculine-centered narrative of the hero for the purpose of

understanding and constructing her own female experience, is promethean insofar as it establishes Joana's at once secondary and subversive relationship to the "powers that be." Yet whereas Prometheu's mythic act of defiance fits neatly into the patriarchal tradition of hero's quest, the female protagonist's defiant attempt to steal onto the masculine side of the quest myth is of another order, not a mythic transgression of myth. Accordingly, the figure of St. Joan who has been translated into a female Prometheus, is once again remythologized, this time as the satanic "víbora (53)." Associating Joana with the snake who ruptured the perfect closure of God's paradise, the girl's aunt unwittingly identifies her as a threat to the "paradisiacal" circle of patriarchal mythology.

In the convent school to which she is banished, Joana learns to relinquish her mythic identities as "hero", "Prometheus," and "Satan," in favor of another, more "suitable," mythic costume: that patriarchal conceptions of femininity to which Beauvoir refers as the "myth of woman." This "educational" process begins in the chapter "O Banho", when Joana is transformed by the water of her bath:

> *A jovem sente a água pesando sobre o seu corpo, pára um instante. . . Atenta para o que está sentindo, a invasão da maré. Que houve? Torna-se uma criatura séria. . . Mal respira. . . Sobre o mesmo corpo que advinhou alegria existe água - água. Não, não. . . Agita-se, procura fugir. Tudo - diz devagar como entregando uma coisa. . . E essa palavra é paz. . . (69)*

In the view of Olga de Sá this passage represents "uma metáfora do ritual da fecundação, da iniciação para a vida, tangível agora, na alegria da puberdade (267)." Yet if this is a scene of "initiation," it is also one of violation. So unpleasant is the sensation of being "invaded" by the "tide" of her bath, that Joana puts up verbal and physical resistance. If following

such struggle she does seem to give way to the invading water, finding "peace" in the word "tudo", even this moment of acceptance contributes to the impression that the over-all experience has been one of loss, of sacrifice, for it involves an "entregando," which, upon Joana's emergence from bathtub, is revealed to comprise a surrender of identity itself: "Quando emerge da banheira é uma desconhecida que não sabe o que sentir. . . Enxuga-se sem amor, humilhada e pobre. . .(69-70)." Stripped in this way of her previously heroic sense of selfhood, Joana is well-positioned to assume the role of patriarchy's passive, otherly, and, above all, selfless, woman.

As the humiliated protagonist departs from the bathroom to "slide" through the "dark," "red" and "discreet" corridor (70), the joint connotations of birth and of menstruation signal that she is undergoing a process of rebirth, and, in particular, that she is being reborn as a woman (Sá, 268-69). From the mediative episode in which the rebirth culminates, furthermore, it is clear that Joana's new "womanhood" is defined in patriarchal terms.[7] Emerging from the corridor into her tiny bedroom, Joana's subsequent contemplation of rain and stars through a window amounts to an experience of "awakening" and "opening" milder than, but analogous to, her violations in the bath: "A chuva e as estrelas, essa mistura fria e densa me acordou, abriu as portas de meu bosque verde e sombrio, desse bosque com cheiro de abismo onde corre água (70)." Whereas Joana began by resisting the invasion of the bath water, an invasion by which she felt her very self to be corroded, she has learned to welcome the sensation of being traversed by the water which, on the basis of its function in the bath scene, we may take to be symbolic of masculine libido. Despite Lispector's odd and, as we shall see, critical transgression of the patriarchal association between water and femininity,[8] Joana's identification with passive features of nature indicates that she has accepted at last her "proper" mythic position as the immanent natural landscape through which the questing hero travels.

Of note is the similarity between Joana's meditation by the window, and a convention of female-centered story to which feminist literary critics have come to refer as the "voyage in." Responding to Beauvoir's assertion that in myth woman's sole function is to wait, Marianne Hirsch argues that quiescence and anticipation do not necessarily imply passivity, but may be seen as aspects of an inward progression characteristic of feminine experience:

> *Sleep and anticipation can be seen to outline a movement . . .opposite the young man's adventurous departure, . . . a progressive withdrawal into the symbolic landscapes of the innermost self (23)*[9]

If Joana's introspective movement toward recognition of herself as "um bosque verde e sombrio" may be seen as a voyage "opposite the young man's adventurous departure," however, it does not lead her to the "symbolic landscapes of the innermost self" so much as to "the innermost self as symbolic landscape." At least in the case of this Sleeping Beauty, the "voyage in" is not an assertion of female subjectivity, but a milestone in the patriarchal suppression of the female as subject.

Trained by her experience in the convent school to receive the annihilating visitations of free-floating masculine libido, Joana is prepared to assume her role as feminine other in the story of a specific and concrete masculine hero. In his quest to know "vida e morte em idéias, isoladas do prazer e da dor, tão distantes das qualidades humanas que poderiam se confundir com o silêncio (89)," Otávio is a manifestation, if an intellectualized one, of that hero who would know "Logos" by means of the "Eros" embodied in the figure of a woman. Prior to his meeting with Joana, this figure has been Lídia, a character who prunes herself to the requirements of her feminine role with considerable self-consciousness and effect: [Lídia] sentia que [Otávio] sofria. . .e que ela só poderia ajudá-lo usando de toda a passividade que dormia em seu ser (94)." When Joana agrees to replace Lídia in this

passive, secondary role, her "quest of the heroine" manifests its structural and ideological containment within the larger patriarchal tradition of the "quest of the hero."

Serving in this way as a prescription for the association between femaleness and otherness on which patriarchal quest depends, Joana's "quest of the heroine" is not a new story, but has a handful of precedents in the quest tradition outlined by Campbell. Whereas the hero's quest for "triumphant" union with a representative of the "Queen Goddess of the World" forms part of his more general project to accede to "mastery of the universe," writes Campbell, the heroine's trajectory toward more or less forcible sexual possession by "the heavenly husband" is motivated by her desire to "*be* the mastered world" (1968,109, 119, 136, emphasis in the original). Joana's experience of sexual violation, loss of subjectivity, and rebirth as immanent otherness corresponds to this description: not a quest so much as the story of an involuntary alienation from the impulse to quest, it fits the female protagonist to be "mastered" by the masculine hero.

Even as we recognize the way in which Lispector reinscribes the patriarchal heroine's journey away from quest, however, it is important to note that she does not do so uncritically. As Joana basks in the illumination of "love" after her marriage, Lispector sees to it that she stumbles:

> *"O amor veio afirmar todas as coisas velhas de cuja existência apenas sabia sem nunca ter aceito e sentido . . . Não poderia mais negar . . . o quê? - perguntava-se suspensa (105)."*

The hesitation and suspense, the elipse and the dash, the question "o quê?," tear open a space in the supposed satisfaction of the protagonist, a sense of self-division which Beauvoir, following Sartre, would diagnose as resistance to existential inauthenticity.[10] "Otávio transformava-a em alguma coisa que não era ela mas ele mesmo (32)": capable of becoming like a

woman, Joana is incapable of the leap of (bad) faith required to *be* a woman. Despite the fact that she undergoes the narrative pattern of the heroine's quest, Joana does not journey toward feminine *identity*, but toward femininity as mask.

The subversive self-division of the protagonist, furthermore, finds a parallel in authorial duplicity. As Ana Luiza Andrade has observed, the "elasticidade"of Lispector's language allows her to reproduce conventional plots without becoming fully compromised by the ideologies inscribed therein (53). Given our attention to the mythic dimension of *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, perhaps the most compelling example of such elasticity in this novel is that which manifests itself in Lispector's manipulation of mythic symbolism. Just as Lispector mimics the binary and gendered narrative logic of the patriarchal quest myth, so she tends to employ specific mythic symbols at conventional moments and in conventional ways: the gender-defying girlchild is associated with the figure of Joan of Arc; the heretic is linked with the satanic snake; "woman" is equated with natural images of forest and woods. In the convent-school episodes of *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, however, the symbol of water is displaced from its conventional association with immanence and femininity, to become a symbol of dynamic masculinity, a purposeful sexual aggressor who prepares the coming of the heroic Otávio. By this "mis-use" of water symbolism, Lispector, like the *víbora*, plies the ruin of patriarchal myth from within.[11]

The Quest of the Female Hero

Although the purpose of the "quest of the heroine" was to quash the strong sense of selfhood Joana possessed as a child, the *effect* of that journey, as we have seen, was to send that pre-gendered subjectivity into a variety of internal exile, to cover it with the mask of femininity, to split Joana into two. As Part II of the novel opens the post-feminine chapters of Joana's life, the

first lines comprise a summons from this exiled self: "Joana lembrou-se de repente... dela mesma em pé no topo da escadaria (111)." Reminded of herself as she stood poised to descend a fearful staircase, the married Joana is recalled to the Joana who had not yet been called down into the Hades of gender, of marriage and of self-division. Her ensuing quest will express her desire for reunion with that pre-gendered subjectivity, a desire which presupposes the possibility of a whole and centered subject.

While Joana's quest toward the pre-feminine self implies a quest toward genderlessness, it is also a quest toward a self once labelled as "heroic." Consequently, it is not surprising that Joana's strategy to retrieve undivided subjectivity is to mimic the masculine side of the "quest of the hero" paradigm. In this stage of quest, Joana for the first time is explicity perceived as an incarnation of Saint Joan of Arc: "Joana, nome nu, Santa Joana, tão virgem (174)." As Marina Warner has observed, "Ironically, Joan [of Arc]'s life, probably one of the most heroic a woman has ever led, is a tribute to the male principle, a homage to the [masculine] sphere of action (155)." In the "quest of the female hero," Joana, like Saint Joan, rejects her patriarchally defined identity as feminine other, not with the intention of conceiving a new identity uninformed by patriarchal gender constructs, but in order to adopt the role of the masculine hero.

In the realization of this project, the feminized "homem" plays a critical role. Modeling her own identity on that of the masculine hero of patriarchal myth, Joana quests, as does he, after a feminine object. Since the culmination of the hero's quest for woman is literal or figurative sexual intercourse, Joana's continuing biological identity as a member of the female sex sets up a narrative choice: while Lispector might have opted for a lesbian relationship, instead she preserves the heterosexuality as well as the hetero-gender of the patriarchal quest myth, casting a biological male in the role of Joana's feminine other. Like the female heroine whose "quest" is conceived as a state of waiting and, ultimately, as a loss of selfhood inflicted by the aggressive sexual

visitation of some masculine hero, "o homem" anxiously awaits each visit from Joana, his "single reality," and "stops existing" each time she enters to "violate" his soul with "light" (176, 200). Harking back to the convent-room episode in which Joana's induction into patriarchal femininity was signalled by her identification with images of immanent green nature, the relationship between "o homem" and Joana may be read as direct inversion: while "[o homem escorrega] muito fundo dentro de si, [e paira] na penumbra de sua própria floresta insuspeita (176)," Joana "[cresce] . . . fina como um pinheiro, muito corajosa também. . ." and "homem assim era Joana, homem. . . (183)." Filling the role of feminine "floresta" with the meditative "homem," Lispector slides Joana away from her previous association with immanence of forest and woods, associating her more specifically with "narrow pine," and, from there, with the erect, courageous figure of "man."

Just as Joan of Arc's heroic garments are burnt away in the "purifying" flames of the patriarchal order, however, so Joana is stripped almost immediately of the masculine mask she so heretically has adopted. If we continue to read the passage which announces Joana's metamorphosis into a man, we discover an apparent contradiction: "... homem assim era Joana, homem. E assim fez-se mulher... (183)" Who, or what, is the agent of this abrupt re-transformation?

In understanding Joana's sudden return to womanhood, the pathetic and grotesque woman who keeps house for the "homem" is key. Viewed through the eyes of Joana, the "mulher" is not only repulsive per se, but, with her "orelhas grossas, tristes e pesadas, com um fundo escuro de caverna," and her "lábios úmidos, emurchecidos, grandes... (178)," evokes repulsive images of female genitalia. From one perspective, this excessively ugly figure might be seen to form part of Joana's faithful, if mis-sexed, enactment of the quest of the hero paradigm. In the patriarchal quest myth, as DuPlessis observes, the hero not only seeks the feminine other, but, in particular, seeks to "[sever]... the creative... aspects of the female from the baleful... aspects,

becoming the custodian of the 'good' and the repressor of the 'wicked' aspects of female power (133)."In light of this analysis, it is extremely appropriate that Joana not only ascends a hill to "liberate" a man who lives secluded in an ominous, tower-like house, but that the house, like the man, belongs to a monstruously female "mulher."

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that Joana feels an uncanny affinity with the ugly woman: "Joana [e] aquela mulher... O que as ligava afinal (178)?"[12] As in the female-authored English literature of the 19th century analyzed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the "saintly" female protagonist has a monstruous feminine double. Because in Lispector's novel the aggressive and masculinized woman occupies the saintly side of the pair, however, Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of the monstrous double as a locus of repressed aggression will not serve us here. The repulsive "mulher" does represent a repressed aspect of Joana, but it is her *femininity* rather than her aggression. Even at the height of her enactment of the masculine hero, that is, Joana is haunted by a sense of lingering, and grotesque, feminine otherness.

The tenacity of Joana's femininity, far from pointing to an essential link between femaleness and femininity, is a symptom of Lispector's sensitivity to the *de facto* intransigence of the patriarchal order. Of critical significance is Joana's observation that her own love affair with the "homem" depends on the grotesque woman's performance of certain material tasks: "o quarto onde o homem dormia e recebia Joana, aquele quarto com as cortinas, quase sem poeira, [a mulher] o arranjara certamente (178)." The "homem," for all his willingness to enact on a mythical level the role of the feminine other, is not about to assume the material duties with which, on the level of socio-economic substructure, that role is conventionally associated. As these tasks fall to the "mulher," it becomes clear that, even in the supposedly sex-blind territory of the quest of the female hero, the patriarchal association between biological

sex and socially constructed gender is still very much at play. Or, to rephrase in contemporary terminology, Joana is that "token" woman whose construction of herself as masculine contributes to the feminization and oppression of other women.

Joana's strong sense of identification with the "mulher," meanwhile, is more than a sign of sore social conscience: in keeping with the fact that tokenism sometimes backfires even on those women who at first appear to benefit from it, the doubling between Joana and the "mulher" is a premonition of the female protagonist's imminent reentrapment in patriarchal femininity. As the story of Joana's relationship with the "homem" develops, the protagonist's *heroic* courage is increasingly reinterpreted as *maternal* courage, her link with her lover becoming less one of female hero and male other, and more one of mother and son. Allowing the "homem" to burrow against her body like "uma ameba, um protozoário procurando cegamente o núcleo, o centro vivo, ... como uma criança (182)," Joana lulls him with stories. If in the patriarchal order the *writing* of stories is conventionally associated with masculinity, the act of *telling* stories to *children* is, of course, suggestive of the maternal mode of femininity. Furthermore, the content of the stories told by Joana - "nasceu um menino chamado um nome (177)" - prophesies the way in which the "homem" will be reborn out of the substance of Joana's body and into the world. Described by Lispector as a space of "recolhimento (169)," of "luz fechada (183)," the womb-like bedroom has served as a double for Joana's motherly body, as an accomplice with her in the task of incubating the "homem." Inexplicable on a purely thematic level, the sudden departure of the "homem" in the chapter entitled "A Partida dos Homens" makes sense if we consider this incubational connotation of his relationship with Joana: the moment of "partida" is the moment of parturition, the moment when the child leaves the mother's body to initiate its own journey in the world. Departing from Joana in this way for territories unknown, the "homem" "corrects" the male/female inversion by which their

story has been characterized, reassuming the role of the masculine quester and reimposing the role of immanent body on Joana.

By means of this "correctional" re-inversion, the "quest of the female hero," like the "quest of the heroine," terminates on the protagonist's (re)assumption of patriarchal femininity. Deprived of the possibility of continuing her heroic quest up the hill, Joana takes up as in the convent the conventional woman's position by the window, embarking once again on the heroine's obediently introspective "voyage in": "Despia a roupa que vestira para ir ver o homem. . . Aproximou-se da janela. . . Perscrutou-se, . . . atenta como se tivesse avançado demais. . . (201-202)"

In the painting of the ship on water which hangs above the bed of the "homem," Lispector furnishes a symbolical gloss on Joana's incapacity to maintain the "roupa" of the hero. Precisely because Joana's "quest of the female hero" has been such a "perfect" (in)version of the masculine hero's quest, preserving intact the patriarchal ideology of gender according to which females are barred from the exercise of subjectivity, the protagonist has been doomed from the start to return to the position of feminine other. Consequently, it is appropriate that a parodically "perfect" representation of sea journey hangs above the bed in which Joana has lost the struggle for sexual supremacy over the "homem." In the "quest of the heroine," the perverse masculinization of water was a sign of the disruptive sexual inversion which was to come in the next phase of female quest; in the painting of the ship on water which appears in the "quest of the female hero," by contrast, water is restored to its passive position beneath a voyaging ship, thereby signalling the full restoration of patriarchal myth. Joana's attempt to cross-dress her way into masculine privilege has manifested itself as a faithful, as an all-too-faithful, reproduction of the patriarchal story of the masculine hero.

Feminist Quest

As the inward meditation begun in "A Partida dos Homens" extends into the chapter "A Viagem," it develops into a journey much different from the heroine's "voyage in" with which it shared an initial resemblance. Reaching once again for that sense of undivided selfhood she associates with childhood, Joana remembers:

> *Que foi que perdi? . . . Talvez tivesse aprendido a falar, só isso. Mas as palavras sobrenadavam no seu mar, indissolúvel, duras. Antes era o mar puro . . . Havia de reunir-se a si mesma um dia, sem as palavras duras e solitárias . . . (202-204)*

Returning to the symbol of water, Lispector now uses it to evoke a time prior to Joana's entrapment in, and division by, the "indissoluble," "hard" and "solitary" material of "words." Spurred to renewed quest by this memory of a time when the water of self flowed unobstructed by the reification of individual words or names,[13] Joana will reject in particular that pair of words which name patriarchal gender identity, undertaking a journey beyond "masculinity" and "femininity" alike in the chapter "A Viagem."[14]

Because the movement toward genderlessness renders obsolete the hero/woman structure of the patriarchal quest myth, the final chapter of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* necessarily forges a new form of quest as it moves out into what DuPlessis would call the space "beyond the ending" of patriarchal narrative. On the basis of definitions of feminism provided by DuPlessis and Julia Kristeva, we will refer to this journey toward protean subjectivity and mythic transformation as "feminist quest." If Lispector's insistence on the essential freedom of the human subject is more Sartrian than Kristevan, her depiction of a voyage in which Joana sheds the masks of patriarchal gender in order to create a new is a vivid instance of Kristeva's conception of

feminism as a process by which gender identity is deconstructed in favor of more dynamic varieties of selfhood.[15] Furthermore, because the telling of such a story involves a fundamental recasting of narrative, Lispector may be counted among those writers who practice what DuPlessis refers to as feminist mythopoesis (34, 105-141): the critique and transformative re-creation of those mythic narratives which have served to convey the oppressive ideology of the patriarchal sex-gender system.

This narrative transformation begins with the collapse of the distinction between inward and outward voyage. Consisting of the purposeful flow of meditations undertaken by Joana as she stands on board as outbound ship, the protagonist's movement in "A Viagem" is neither reducible to the heroine's voyage in nor to the hero's voyage out, but combines and surpasses them both. Although Joana, like the feminine Sleeping Beauty, is penetrated to the innermost regions of her being, this penetration is not accomplished for the purposes of an external Prince, but by, and for, the protagonist's own subjectivity. Although Joana, like the masculine hero, sets out on a boat, the waves through which she travels are not confined to the space outside of the voyager and her ship but swell from the depths of her own memory as she seeks to reinstate a time when the distincions between inward and outward, subject and object, and masculine and feminine, were easily dissolved in the oceanic breadth and movement of the pre-gendered self.

As Joana "[deixa escorrer] as primeiras vagas" of her journey (211), the double meaning of the word "vaga" is an indication that the protagonist's voyage toward seamless selfhood will entail an encounter with nothingness. Recognizing the deceit inherent in her attempts to play the roles of "herói" and "mulher", Joana has longed to be one with the originative self anterior to and responsible for the creation of such façades. Yet boring inward through the masks of socially imposed identity, Joana discovers instead that this "tenro ser de luz e de ar que tentava viver dentro dela (205)" is not a "self" at all, but an absence of self: "Não era obrigada a seguir o próprio começo... Doía

ou alegrava? No entanto sentia que essa estranha liberdade. . . era o que iluminava sua matéria (210)." A poetic intuition of what Sartre would call the "nothingness" by which "being" is animated, this "liberty"which "iluminates material" is for Lispector, as for Sartre, manifested in the self-conscious aimlessness of individual human consciousness.[16]

"Doía ou alegrava?"In continuing affinity with the Sartrian vision, the intuition of self-nothingness is welcome insofar as it allows the protagonist to recognize and to assume the existential responsibility for self-creation. Empowered by the knowledge of nothingness to assert the inessentiality of patriarchal gender - "Como poderia ser herói? . . . Não era mulher . . . (215)" -, Joana exults in the newfound multiplicity of her own potential, approaching, at last, that oneness with "pure water" toward which she has quested:

> *Um dia virá em que todo meu movimento será criação, nascimento. . . a um gesto meu minhas vagas se levantarão poderosas, água pura submergindo a dúvida. . . estarei criando instante por instante. . . me ultrapassarei em ondas. . . (216)*

Whereas patriarchal myth disempowers the symbol of water, associating it with passive feminine immanence, Lispector slides water away from the poles of patriarchal sexual identity, imagining it as a symbol of the protagonist's capacity to assume a multiplicity of identities, to become a succession of "ondas," according to free and spontaneous choices through time.

This dynamic self-multiplicity comprises, paradoxically, the seamless variety of selfhood for which Joana has quested. Just as the distinct words which comprise the epiphanic final paragraph of the novel flow together in a linguistic rush, so the waves of self surge and break in such rapid succession that they come to comprise a state of self-oneness:

> *. . . erguerei dentro de mim o que sou um dia . . . não haverá nenhum espaço dentro de mim para notar sequer que estarei criando instante por instante, não instante por instante: sempre fundido. . . serei brutal e malfeita como uma pedra . . . (216)*

Reaching through self-process toward self-wholeness, Joana attains that state of existential authenticity which Sartre would refer to as "presence to [her]self": "a way . . . of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity (77)." Because the moment of "self wholeness"is the moment of self-creation, the moment prior to the separation of created mask from creative self, the moment prior to the reification of mask as self, it is through perpetual self-creation, through the continuous displacement of one self by another, that Joana can maintain the experience of self-unity.

An enormous difference between the self-professedly atheistic doctrine of Sartre and the feminist vision of Lispector, however, is that, for Lispector, this dynamic state of "presence to self is divine. Punctuated with calls to "Deus," the flow of consciousness rendered in "A Viagem" reproaches the deity it evokes: "Deus por que não existes dentro de mim? Por que me fizeste separada de ti (213)?" While at first glance this complaint might be interpreted as the conventional feminine mystic's masochistic desire to lose herself in communion with a masculine deity (Beauvoir, 743 - 53), in fact it announces the protagonist's intention to appropriate back into the space of herself the divine creativity which patriarchal religion inauthentically has projected onto an external and masculine "God."[17] That the attainment of dynamic selfhood, a state characterized by the free and perpetual exercise of creativity, is also the attainment of this self divinity, is confirmed by the image of self-apotheosis which surges in the final lines of the novel: "Então nada impedirá meu caminho até a morte-sem-medo, de qualquer luta ou descanso me levantarei forte e bela como um cavalo novo (216)." In

traditional mythology, as Campbell points out, the horse functions as a symbol of God, and, specifically, as a symbol of God as masculine patriarch (1976, 206 - 209). Appropriating this image as a symbol of a female protagonist who has achieved a state of genderless selfhood, Lispector not only renders the apotheosis of her protagonist, but also redefines the concept of "God." Whereas in patriarchal myth "God" is "Logos" and "Logos" is a closed system comprised of the subordination of "the Feminine" by "the Masculine", in the mythical landscape of Lispector God is the fruitful absence of which human consciousness consists, and by which being is animated in free and creative movement.

Having unearthed the subversively sacred vision which serves as the lifeblood of *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, we may better understand the abruptness with which the novel breaks off. Taking Alan Dundes' notion of myth as "sacred narrative" as our working definition, it is clear that non-closure is an integral to the quest narrated by Lispector, as is closure in the case of patriarchal quest. While the patriarchal quest of the hero mirrors its gendered and monistic version of God by means of a gendered and closed narrative structure, Joana's quest beyond the margins of patriarchal narrative witholds closure and definite meaning in order to image the fruitful absence which it takes to be the essence of the divine.

To appreciate the feminist significance of Joana's quest to be reunited with the divine creative power at the heart of herself, it is useful to refer to DuPlessis' distinction between "archetypal" and "prototypal" narratives (133 - 34). While "archetype" refers to a closed narrative structure which represents itself as universal, eternal, and invariant, "prototype" indicates a narrative which, by its deliberate lack of closure, invites, even insists on, its own revision. A clear example of archetypal myth, the closed circle of the "quest of the hero" narrates, and imposes, the search for and discovery of the patriarchal concept of god. The open-ended quest portrayed in *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, by contrast, is the non-authoritarian and collaborative

narrative of prototype: prying open the patriarchal structure of the hero's myth in order to spill the newly fluid substance of language toward an indeterminate future, Lispector leaves the reader with a textual "blank canvas," with an invitation to, and locus for, the exercise of freedom, creativity, selfhood, and, in the Claricean vision, divinity. In this way, Clarice Lispector's first novel comprises a forceful expression of that literary feminism which rejects the "hard, indissoluble words" of patriarchal gender, in favor of new, and shared, beginnings.

NOTES

[1] In what has become one of the canonical works of criticism on Lispector, Benedito Nunes observes, "Do primeiro ao último romance de Clarice Lispector, a ação propriamente dita se desenvolve na forma de uma errância, ao mesmo tempo interior e exterior das personagens. . . [que] corresponde, implícita ou explicitamente, a uma busca ética ou espiritual (151 - 52)." More recently, Daphne Patai's analysis of quest in A Paixão Segundo G.H. has implications for Lispector's other novels as well (esp. 80, 89)

[2] Although the majority of Lispector's protagonists are female, this fact rarely has been taken into account by these critics interested in Lispector's repeated rendition of the quest plot. A notable exception is Peixoto's discussion of female *bildungsroman* in *Laços de Família*.

[3] Similar conclusions are to be found in the work of Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Annis Pratt.

[4] As Beauvoir herself points out (esp. XV-XXXIV), the analysis of female oppression outlined in *The second sex* is premised on the ethical theory of human subjectivity developed by Sartre. Because the work of Lispector also is characterized by a marked affinity with Sartrian existentialism (Nunes, esp. 95-155), Beauvoir's writings are an excellent basis for feminist work on Lispector.

[5] To cite a scholar more specifically concerned with the relationship between mythic narratives and literature, an "unspoiled or redeemed female" is identified by Northrop Frye as the object of the "Eros quest" which gives onto the "Logos vision from the mountaintop"(1970, 264). See also Frye, 1957, 304. Among feminist critics, DuPlessis

(133) and Judith Little (16 - 17) address most explicity and persuasively the way in which the patriarchal ideology of gender adheres in the very narrative structure of the "quest of the hero."

[6] Shifting the focus of the quest myth from the masculine to the feminine perspective, the "quest of the heroine" is a clear example of that variety of narrative revision to which DuPlessis refers as "displacement": "Narrative displacement. . . offers the possibility of speech to the female in the case, giving voice to the muted (p. 108)." In keeping with the present argument that "the quest of the heroine" fails to challenge the structural premises of the patriarchal quest myth, Du Plessis distinguishes between the thematic revisions involved in narrative displacement, and the structural transformations involved in the more profound process of narrative "delegitimation": "The [writer's] attitude toward the tale as given determines whether there will be a displacement of attention to the other side of the story, a delegitimation of the known tale, a critique even unto sequences and priorities of narrative (p. 108)."

[7] Further evidence to this efect is the fact that Joana's "rebirth" into womanhood in actually an inverse passage toward pre-birth: ". . . desliza pelo corredor - a longa garganta vermelha e escura e discreta *por onde afundará no bojo, no tudo* . . . Na cama [do quarto] . . . *aconchega-se como no ventre perdido* e esquece (70, emphasis added)." As the protagonist returns to a state prior to consciousness, the movement from heroic childhood toward womanhood is not a movement forward, but a retreat, a retreat not only from the exterior world but from subjectivity itself.

[8] As Ana Luiza Andrade observes, a similar symbolical inversion is implied in *Uma Aprendizagem ou o Livro dos Prazeres*, when Lori, after drinking the water of the ocean"como o líquido espesso de um homem,"wonders to herself: "Como explicar que o mar era o seu berço materno mas que o cheiro era todo masculino? (Lispector, 1982, 85, 121)" In the case of *Aprendizagem*, where intercourse between protagonist and sea is not inflicted but chosen, Lori ventures the following response: "Talvez se tratasse da fusão perfeita (121)."Whether of how such an explanation serves in *Aprendizagem* is beyond the scope of this essay; in the case of Joana's experience in "O Banho," however, in which intercourse with the water is experienced as rape and humiliation, the masculinization of water does not result in the "fusion" of "androgyny," but in the near erasure of the "feminine" connotations of water, in the *appropriation* of this symbol by and for patriarchal masculinity. Neverthless, as the present essay will demonstrate, even this appropriation forms part of Lispector's progressive destabilization and transcendence of patriarchal gender. In arriving at this conclusion, I am indebted to questions posed by Edward Ahearn in a conversation at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, November, 1988.

[9] *The Voyage In*, a collection of essays on the meaning of inward journey in female-centered fictions, includes Peixoto's article on *Laços de Família* as well as the Hirsch article cited here. Especially given the inverse direction of Joana's "rebirth" as a woman (see note 7), the journey undergone by this protagonist in Part I of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* would seem to exemplify this paradigm of "movement. . . opposite the young man's adventurous departure."

[10] See note 4.

[11] See note 8.

[12] In full citation, this passage links Joana with the "esposa" of the professor as well as with the "mulher" of the "homem." As Joana's simultaneous repulsion for and identification with the professor's wife in an early episode of the novel suggests (see 54 - 65), the "esposa," like the "mulher," embodies the patriarchal femininity against which Joana resists and yet within which she continues at this stage to feel entrapped.

[13] This development would seem to bear out Hirsch's argument that the "voyage in" has the *potential* to deliver the female protagonist to an intuiton (if not an experience) of self as a subject. See my discussion, p. 9.

[14] This use of water as a symbol of the genderlessness toward which Joana quests in "A Viagem" is foreshadowed in an episode of intercourse between protagonist and sea which precedes the "educational" events in the convent school. As Joana and the sea pass dynamically between the masculine and feminine poles of patriarchal gender, "trading" positions between themselves so continuously that neither of them ever assumes even momentarily one position or the other, Lispector provides a vision of childhood as a time of genderlessness, and of ocean water as symbolic of this time. See 38 - 41.

[15] In addition to Kristeva, see Moi, 11 - 13.

[16] The ensuing analysis will rely heavily on Lispector's well-documented affinity with Sartrian existencialism, and on the feminist implications of such an outlook as developed by Beauvoir (see my note 4). Although a story such as "Amor" in *Laços de Família* suggests that Lispector was familiar with certain of Sartre's writings, I follow Benedito Nunes' example in stressing that, particularly in the case of a writer as self-professedly non-intellectual as Lispector, "affinity" is not meant to imply a relationship of "influence" or even familiarity, but, instead, a case of remarkably and perhaps quite unselfconsciously overlapping visions.

[17] Whereas Sartre outlines a similar project, in his writing the human reappropriation of the creative power which has been absorbed in the fabrication and maintenance of an alien deity is explicity equated with the destruction of the concept of "God" (see Hazel Barnes' introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, p. XXXI). Because Sartre's analysis of

and response to religious alienation follow closely the ideas of Marx, contemporary reading of Marx as a thinker who humanized rather than rejected the notion of God (despite his own intentions to the contrary) are useful in understanding Lispector's view of the human creator as divine. See for example Richard Comstock.

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