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# A Novella in Technicolor: The Artistic Connections to Theme and Prose in "The Hour of the Star"

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A Novella in Technicolor:  
The Artistic Connections to Theme and Prose in *The Hour of the Star*

*"I want to write the red blur of blood with the drips and clots dripping from the inside. I want to write gold-yellow with beams of translucence."<sup>1</sup>*

Clarice Lispector

Fragmented prose from afar, Brazilian authoress Clarice Lispector's work may, to a naïve eye, seem lacking in form, color, and line; much the same criticism was given to progressive artistic movements of the early and mid-twentieth century. Works from these movements, such as Pollack's abstraction of neutral color in *No. 5, 1948* or Duchamp's Cubist experimentation (*Nude Descending a Staircase* an apt example) have emerged from the artistic annals of time recognized for their bold and deliberate use of color to express their artistic vision. Abstraction in form to deliver a deeper and more poignant message, a Post-Modernist convention, has not been restricted to painters alone; examples from literature are abundant, but perhaps most pertinent to my discussion would be *The Great Gatsby's* green light of desire, Fitzgerald's colorization of Gatsby's world creating a layering of symbolism and meaning to the work that goes beyond its 182 pages (Fitzgerald). Lispector, too, deftly and deliberately colors Macabea's world in her last published novella, *The Hour of the Star*, with meaning beyond the abstraction of her prose through the symbolic literary device of color. She is, as Rodrigo rather superciliously claims himself to be, an artist who seeks to write "in bold and severe painter's strokes" (9). With Lispector's pen, Rodrigo fulfills his assignation to be "like a painter who only paints abstract colors" (14); he explains that this is not due to a lack of artistic skill, but instead because he chooses to create a geometric abstraction of Macabea's world. In fact, I argue that the abstraction so enigmatic in Lispector's works, and especially prevalent in what Toibin declared her "mysterious swan song" (xi), allows for greater figural and metaphorical expression through her use of color. She paints at times to narrowly color Macabea with sharply pointed satire; at other moments, her brush broadly uses color to convey political and social agendas of awareness. Her painterly style of characterization effectively places her character, suffering under "an anonymous misery," in an image-rich and meaning-driven view to the reader.

In a discussion on color symbolism in literature, particularly mid-twentieth century Brazilian works, it is important to establish the limited scope of my argument. It is not my purpose to argue a comprehensive objectification or definitive definition of color symbolism in Lispector's work<sup>2</sup>. Instead, I analyze the ways with which Lispector applied prose, especially that involving color, to her canvas and the effect of the individual brushstrokes in the painting of Macabea; I argue that intellectual speculation as to the colors' meanings enhances the reader's experience with Lispector's style<sup>1</sup>. Further, I hope to show that embracing the ambiguity of color symbolism is to more fully embrace Lispector's ambiguity of prose. Her painterly style of abstracted prose closely aligns itself with the Neo-Concrete movement in Rio de Janeiro during the early 1960s. The movement, accompanied by a manifesto of the artistic tenets of Neo-Concrete thought (Frank 157-160), arose when Brazilian artists rejected the Concrete's ideal of art as geometric abstraction and nothing more (this movement closely paralleled the Dada

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<sup>1</sup> da Costa, Rodrigo, et al. 218

<sup>2</sup> Put more simply, I will not endeavor to establish that yellow, for example, definitively represents death in the novella (although that is one possible reading).

movement of the 1920s and 1930s; I reference Duchamp again, this time for his influential *Fountain*). Neo-Concretism was a precursory movement to Conceptual Art, developed during the increase of violence under the militant government Brazil endured until 1985, and sought "...an art to be experienced through the senses and that required the public's active participation" (Barnitz 217). The desire for literature to be more than propagandistic or meaningless babble, art in and of itself and nothing more, is reflected in Lispector's own work. In *Dedication by the Author* (actually Clarice Lispector), she announces that "this story takes place during a state of emergency and a public calamity" (xiv). Her plea to the reader for an answer to her "unfinished book" is a plea for her work to elicit enough emotive power in her audience to merit meaning (and perhaps external impact, even action, from the social and political powers of the day) for the novella. She, too, sought for what poet Ferreira Gullar in his *Neo-Concrete Manifesto*<sup>3</sup> declared as art: "The work is a being that, while breakable into parts for analysis, can be fully understood only through direct, phenomenological experience" (Frank 159). In much the same way, comparison between Lispector's *Hour of the Star* and the Neo-Concrete movement inform and add depth to her prose; it aids Lispector's work of art in becoming something more than the sum of its parts. I further argue that the possible literary connections to the movement more fully engage the reader in an immersive, participatory relationship with the *Hour of the Star* text, and, through Lispector's own artistic endeavors to the author-painter<sup>4</sup> herself, including her understudied and relatively unknown paintings that she created around the same time that she was writing *Hour of the Star*.

There is an undercurrent of dark humor that ebbs and flows throughout *Hour of the Star*; indeed, from the story's conception, Lispector plays upon the travesty of predestined good fortune. In a TV interview, Lispector reported:

"I went to a fortune-teller who told me about all kinds of good things that were about to happen to me, and on the way home in the taxi I thought it'd be really funny if a taxi hit me and ran me over and I died after hearing all those good things" (ix).

Lispector's thirst for satire is sated by her use of color in her prose; by using the possible symbolic double meanings behind deliberately chosen colors, she sometimes ironically and often jadedly exposes Macabea's misery and the vices of the mocked poor. A discussion on the satirical use of color in this novella necessitates a statement on the use of color in literature, and the symbolic nature of color in general. Color has been used to establish symbolic meaning from antiquity<sup>5</sup> (Skard; Gage). However, the symbolic nature of color and the subjectivity of color

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<sup>3</sup> Frank's *Manifestos & Polemics in Latin American Modern Art* is a most excellent compilation of Neo-Concrete literature; additional analysis of the Manifesto is found in Martins' *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil, 1949-1979*.

<sup>4</sup> Other author-painters have included E.E. Cummings, William S. Burroughs, Victor Hugo (who said he "took to the brush chiefly during periods of writer's block" [Friedman and Wronoski 66]), Sylvia Plath, and Kurt Vonnegut (who told a friend that when his "writing wound down, his art [gave] him a new life" [Friedman and Wronoski 134]). As Friedman and Wronoski state in their "Afterword" from *The Writer's Brush: An Exhibition of Artwork by Writers*, "The literary artist has almost always started as a visual artist, and often resorts to the earlier method when words fail her, fatigue sets in, or other dreams beset her. The visual artist hypertrophies his first voice, and very often fails to adequately develop his second. In rare cases, like ambidexterity, a facility develops equally for both" (154).

<sup>5</sup> Reds have been associated with unquenchable passion, the fires of hell, and the material world (Gage 202), as in Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement* or red-ochre pigments on the walls of Qafzeh Cave depicting the carnal fires of human nature (Hovers, Erella, et al. 491-494). Greens have been used to symbolize God's covenantal integrity (the

determination has created a plethora of alternative meanings.<sup>6</sup> As I move forward in discussing Lispector's satirical use of color, I will explore these possibly doubled color meanings. Once again, I acknowledge that a definitive and objective study of color and its meanings is not my purpose, nor do I, due to cultural variances and subjectivity of life experiences, believe it to be possible. Instead, as I extrapolate upon Lispector's possible intentions for using specific colors in her prose, I will demonstrate that Lispector was more than a writer: her paintings attest to Lispector being an artist with both word and paint, and this artistic sensibility (that is, the awareness of color and its ability to define the subject of a work of art) carries forward into her characterization of Macabea, and elicits a unique relationship between author, reader, and narrator that goes beyond the printed page.

Lispector's *Dedication by the Author* contains the supernatural creatures of dark imaginings and the musical prodigies whose art inspired her own; however, the most important dedicatory inscription to my discussion is "the very crimson color scarlet like my blood" (xiii). The "crimson color's" presence in the novel is extant; from Macabea's habitual comfort of painting "her fingernails a tacky red" (27) to "Madame Carlota's bright red mouth" (63), the color, commonly associated with passion, commercial materialism, and energy bleeds through Lispector's prose, "the blood red and rich" (70). Red connoting passion, energy, and a certain vitality of life (Gage 207) is a possible reading of Lispector's color use; Macabea's new red lipstick that is smeared heavily, clown-like, onto her narrow face, is her attempt to bring Monroe-esque vitality, passion, and energy into her life. However, Lispector's dark humor may have been served by its red counterpart. The crimson shade can also imply danger, violence, and the loss of vitality—blood seeping out of Macabea's crushed body a fitting, if macabre, example—and Lispector's prose reflects this possible double meaning. "The bloodred dawn" did indeed "give new meaning to [Macabea's] withered life" (23); the "bloodred" dawn is a predicator of her violent end. This satirical use of color is seen, almost laughingly, through Madame Carlota's dismissive mention of her previous client when Macabea enters her home: "I just frankly told that girl right before you that she's going to get run over, she even cried a lot, did you see her red eyes" (68)? The cruel juxtaposition of a "sentence to life" (70) for Macabea and a sentence to death for the girl with red eyes is rich with satirical irony; it will be Macabea, before the literary hour is out, who will lie upon the ground covered in the violent and dangerous red. Red mocks Macabea in the fortune teller's rooms as the red and gold heart of Christ hangs above the farcical card reading. Red, with the meanings already discussed, paired with the gold—satirically used here, not as authentic wealth or substance, but as gilded dross or fool's gold meant to dazzle the eyes and leave empty the yearning heart—creates a parody of all that the heart of Christ symbolizes for the vaguely religious Macabea. This farce is carried further with Carlota's repeated injunction of Jesus's ability to save ("not even the police can outclass Jesus" says more about Carlota's class than His), and His support of her debauched prostitution ring. Lispector satirizes the sanctimonious Carlota and the ignorant religiosity of Macabea by

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Vienna Genesis' illuminated manuscript an apt example of color symbolism in the literature, however illustrated, of the 6<sup>th</sup> century), nature's vitality, and fertility (Gage 98).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, red, while associated with sin and materialism, can also be construed as the color of passion, which does not automatically carry a negative denotation, and represents consumer desire (again, not automatically malicious or degenerative in purpose) in modernist cultures<sup>6</sup>. Green, naturally occurring and studied for its ability to decrease blood pressure and stress (Birren), can also mean jealousy (think of the pop culture phenomenon of The Wicked Witch of the West who jealously coveted *ruby* slippers), greed, as in the reading of *Gatsby's* obsession with Daisy's green light, and illness.

recruiting the use of colors traditionally used in paintings of Jesus's triumphal return to the "saints" who profess his name, or in his suffering for the sins so eagerly committed by the Northeastern Madame. The satire of color use here draws parallels to the oft-mocking nature of Neo-Concretist artwork, established to ironically create meaning from art deemed by the Concretists to be meaningless.

Gold gilds more than the ironic poster of the heart of Jesus in the text; Rodrigo plays upon gold's homonymous nature as he describes a possible Midas touch: "I'm not going to adorn the word because if I touch the girl's bread the bread will turn to gold—and the girl... wouldn't be able to bite it, dying of hunger" (7). Gold coins, gold leaf, gold spun into golden thread—the wealth of the world, which could buy the girl's bread (the lack of gold in her world is the cause of her suffering), is, satirically, the reason she dies. It is as though Macabea cannot afford color—most certainly not gold—in her life, but that even if, and when, she receives it, the luxury of color will not stop her inevitable death. Rodrigo knows the futility of his labors as he says, "I'll try to wrest gold from charcoal" (8). However confident in his work he may be, he recognizes that he cannot pull value from nothing, or wrestle treasure from trash. This theme of farcical gilding is seen in Olimpico's "tooth of shimmering gold" (37). The fact that he pulled a healthy and sound tooth to make room for the worthless and flashier counterfeit is evidence of Olimpico's character, and, further, the satirical role of gold in the novella. Macabea searches for an element of splendor in her life (Rodrigo recognizes that he "can't find [one] in [her] existence" [31]), but she is looking for fool's gold; artificial gilding is all she will be able to find, lacking in substance, value, and character. Gold, the color of wealth, becomes another mocking and unrealizable goal in Macabea's life. The Neo-Concretist works of Helio Oiticica come to mind when discussing Lispector's use of warm colors to further enhance the dark humor and satirical meaning of her work; his color palette of choice was of warmth—oranges, yellows, browns, and reds—and his purpose was "to escape the constraints of painting while remaining in dialogue with it' by utilizing color in new ways" (Amor 25). He along with other Neo-Concretists have been linked with the anti-art movement of the twentieth century; this movement sought, using irony and satirically placed artistic elements, to convey the artist's vision of artwork imbued with meaning once again (I reference Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, Mona Lisa's painted mustache an example of satirical devices in art to prove further his art's meaning—or lack of). Perhaps Lispector drew from these sources while satirically using warm color to characterize, and further expose, Macabea.

Gold's color cousin, yellow, adds its possible double meanings to the satirical nature of Lispector's work. Macabea's world is replete with yellow, which traditionally connotes light, action, and a sense of optimism (Gage 202). This possible symbolic reading is derived from the "yellow plastic material on the chairs and sofas" (63) in Madame Carlota's apartment; However, yellow as well has possible symbolic double meanings: cowardice (traditionally, to run coward is to be called "yellow" or a "yellow-bellied coward"), deceit, and illness ("Yellow flags" were posted above quarantined homes during epidemics). In particular, yellow connoting dishonesty and a certain degree of caution adds notes of satire to Macabea's visit. She sits on yellow plastic, dishonesty atop artificiality, and awaits an appointment for a service notoriously deceitful. The nature of a fortune-teller is that of yellow deceit, and the dark humor of Macabea's visit is

heightened by her yellow surroundings<sup>7</sup>. Satirized yellow<sup>8</sup> shades Macabea's life with the dark humor Lispector herself found in false hope abruptly extinguished.

Additionally, the relatively infrequent use of color descriptors in the novel raises substantial support for their significance to Lispector's overarching theme. For instance, green is mentioned but once by name, when Macabea lay "helpless on the side of the street...and saw among the stones lining the gutter the wisps of grass *green* as the most tender human hope" (71, emphasis added). Green, a naturally occurring color, here deliberately established as a signet of hope to a dying woman, gains even more credence because of its lack of other appearances in Rodrigo's narrative. Even with the solitary use of green, Lispector plays off its multiple meanings which range from growth and fertility to greed, envy, misfortune, and jealousy. Green brings us into Macabea's "anonymous misery," and we become participants in the dark humor of the scene; whether we mock Macabea with the same derisive irony as the green plant growing through the cracks or show the same supercilious charity as Madame Carlota does not change our presence in Macabea's world. Neo-Concretist Oiticica quoted Mondrian, a proto-Abstract Post-Modernist, when he wrote,

"There is no escape for the non-figurative artist; he must stay within his field and march toward the consequence of his art. This consequence brings us, in a future perhaps remote, toward the end of art as a thing separate of our surrounding environment" (Amor 26).

In much the same way, Lispector's colors marched us, as the readers, towards the inevitable ending of Macabea, a star doomed to burn out, indeed, even to bleed out, on a dusty Rio street. Lispector's non-figurative prose, comparably abstract to Oiticica's 1959 monochromes or Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, draws the reader in and does not release them from the burden of Macabea's tragedy; in fact, her deliberate use of color, mocking Macabea and the world she inhabits, heightens the dark humor that makes Macabea's demise unavoidably pitiful.

Color adds an additional layer of support for common readings of Lispector's *The Hour of the Star* as her commentary on poverty and social constructs in Rio de Janeiro during the 1970s. Lispector spoke of her desire to commentate on the "social drama" of the day in "O que eu queria ter sido" [What I Should Liked to Have Been], as she said, "The misery I saw there [in the slums of Rio] convinced me that something had to be done to change the situation. I wanted to act" (Torres 195). Lispector's treatment of the social issues of her time, namely that of the cultural tensions between the Northeast and the urban Rio, is more fully realized through her

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<sup>7</sup> Even the blatant and more established connotation of yellow as optimistic (even sunny) is satirical. Macabea waits in a sunny room, full of hope and optimism for a future that is anything but. Carlota, when asked by Macabea how to make her hair grow longer and thicker, says, "Don't use hard yellow soap. I won't charge you for that advice" (69). At one level, yellow can mean hope for Macabea; this reading alone creates a new dimension to the advice: when Carlota warns her against using yellow soap, she is warning her against using hope, and, knowing the futility of her advice, does not charge Macabea for the empty words. The yellow is here ironically turned; the very thing Macabea seems to need (hope) is frowned upon and warned against, and yet, hope (dishonestly given and naively received), is what Macabea walks away with.

<sup>8</sup> Of merit to the discussion of yellow as a satirical device is Pontiero's translation of *Hour of the Star*, in which "a yellow Mercedes, as huge as an ocean liner, knocked her down" (69). The use of yellow here, the descriptive color of the ironic means of Macabea's death, is fascinating; interesting to consider as well is the parallel between Lispector's vehicle of death and Fitzgerald's yellow car that hit and killed Myrtle Wilson in *Gatsby*.

deliberate use of black and white in the novella. Of interest to my discussion on black and white is Sargent's analysis of the nature of these two dichotomous colors:

“White is our nearest approach, in pigments, to full reflection of light. Black is our nearest approach to complete absorption...because we are to work with pigments, black and white paint represent the extremes of value which we can use” (11).

Perhaps representing the extremes of racial prejudice and cultural differences was Lispector's intent while writing of the characters from the Northeast, primarily described in black or dark tones, and the characters from Rio, assigned shades of bleached yellow, blonde, and white<sup>9</sup>. The black and white references to cultural and racial extremes are not employed by Lispector to characters alone; she also showcases all that Macabea desires and never achieves by the color white. White, which can represent purity and virginity, is referenced in the novella as such, when Rodrigo writes “with the delicacy of a white butterfly. This idea of the white butterfly comes because, if the girl gets married, she'll marry...as a virgin, in white” (12). Macabea attempts to cover her own imperfections with “a thick layer of white powder and if that made her look whitewashed it was better than looking drab” (Lispector 19). Her dreams of the future center around a “house painted pink and white” (40). Her inability to achieve these dreams of a whitewashed world are made more apparent by the dichotomy created at the end of a “day stained almost black gold” (69) when Macabea lays dying and goes to “see in the very deep and black core<sup>10</sup> of her self the breath of life that God gives us” (74). Due to her racial, cultural, and economic background, Macabea is relegated to the black mystery of death in Lispector's prose; presented with the color white, the people of Rio are those who were just like Macabea: black at the roots but intent on playing out their racial pretensions of superiority in whitewashed and bleached lives. Perhaps Rodrigo, and Lispector through his voice, are apologizing for the racial misery they are forced to portray in *The Hour of the Star* as he says, “After such black terror I resurged in pardon” (76). The black mud of Macabea—and the racial and cultural discrimination it represents—seems to have stuck to Rodrigo even after her death.

To build upon Lispector's use of color and abstraction in her prose, I will discuss in more detail the Neo-Concrete Movement and its artistic tenets; then, through comparison of *The Hour*

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<sup>9</sup> Rodrigo, full of cultural tension himself as he tells a tale of a composited Northeastern girl with contempt and a sense of bewildered curiosity, described Macabea as “black mud” (Lispector 13, 44) that stuck to his skin. He says this with a sense of duty; he is not, at the beginning of the story, willing to scrape Macabea's black mud off his frame, and towards the end says, “I want to stagger through the mud” (Lispector 61). In fact, throughout the novella, most Northeastern characters are associated with black: “Olimpico's greased black hair” (Lispector 48) that looks like a “fatty treacle” recognizes the destitute circumstances that he comes from and seeks to improve his situation through association. Macabea, with her “sex covered with thick and abundant black hairs” (61) is outshined by Gloria, who was “born and bred in Rio!” Gloria, with her white race and “bleached egg-yellow” hair (“whose roots were always black” suggestive of a denial of her ancestry, or perhaps the cultural buy-in to Eurocentric beauty standards) becomes a “step up for Olimpico” (Lispector 50).

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to consider Lispector's painting “Cave” (1975) when reading this section of the novella. Lispector's choice to have Macabea descend into the “very deep and black core of her self” (note the separation of the word “herself” as well for further discussion) and her abstract work, painted in yellows, blacks, and reds, draw curious yet substantial parallels between the two. Of special note is the lone green abstract figure in the lower left quadrant of the “Cave”; it is not a stretch to consider that the green figure resembles the “wisps of grass green as the most tender human hope” that Macabea sees growing from the gutter in her last moments, as she goes into her own “cave.” A further in-depth comparison of Lispector's paintings—their forms, lines, and especially colors—and *The Hour of the Star* would prove both fascinating and fruitful towards further understanding of Lispector's work, and of the artist “her self.”

of the *Star's* text and the *Neo-Concrete Manifesto* (Frank 157-160), I hope to draw similarities between Lispector's style and the artistic movement that will inform and add depth to *The Hour of the Star*. A further exploration of Lispector's own abstract artwork completed during the last years of her life will bring additional insight into the author's deliberate abstraction of prose. Patrick Frank, Latin American art scholar and editor of a compilation of 65 primary documents essential to the twentieth century Latin Art movements, perhaps described Neo-Concrete art best when he said:

"This is one of the more exciting, and also difficult, artistic statements. It reasserts the primacy of firsthand, sensory experience in art appreciation. In the interest of elevating bodily sensations, it opposes rationalism and calculation of any kind...previous movements, such as neoplasticism, suprematism, and constructivism, it says, have hinted at the primal sensory meanings that neoconcrete art emphasizes, but they have been derailed by an overly rational type of art criticism that emphasizes form over sensation. The neoconcrete artists...call us back to a fresh and spontaneous sensory encounter with art" (157).

Frank's emphasis on Neo-Concrete's concern with creating a "firsthand, sensory experience" agrees with Neo-Concrete artists' concern. Originating as a direct response to the Concrete movement of the 1950s in Rio de Janeiro, the Neo-Concrete movement rejected the rigidity and "dogmatism" (Barnitz 216) that imposed limitations on art and its meaning. The Concretists reflected the desire for a universal applicability of their age; they also held that art should not be based upon personal beliefs, standards, or preconceptions, but instead upon established rules handed down from the artistic "above". After the international turmoil of World War II and ensuing political instability, the Concrete movement appealed to those seeking to return to a sense of rationality and order (Chiarelli). Above all else, Concrete art represented art as itself, in form, color, and design, and *nothing* else. Finding "meaning" in the art, whether by the artist or (ascertained after observation) by the viewer, was not the purpose of Concretism. The strict adherence to international designs and rationality caused the Neo-Concretists to arise, with Helio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, and Lygia Clark among those who joined themselves to the new, relatively avant-garde movement. They did not deviate stylistically from Concrete art conventions so much as focus on an idealistic reformulation of art itself. They sought to bring meaning back into abstraction; meaning, in fact, was heightened by such abstraction (Barnitz 216-228; Chiarelli). Two trends in Neo-Concrete art, identified by art critic Ronaldo Brito, are: one, "a *sensitizing* of the work of art" in an "effort to preserve specificity"; and two, a "type of production that effected a 'dramatization of the work, its reason for being, and which placed in check the established statute of art'" (Brito 51). In other words, the artists wanted to create an artistic experience that engaged the viewer's senses and sensitivities and made the viewer aware of the work's "reason for being." Lispector's work seems to share the same focal points; indeed, her use of color and abstraction of prose create for the reader an experience meant to convey the novella's "reason for being."

Lispector's own words concerning her writing style showcase a concern with both the artistic nature of the words themselves, as well as (and this being most important to my point) a deep-rooted sense of purpose and meaning to her work. The intentionality of her syntax, diction, use of grammatical conventions (and the lack thereof) was entirely her own. In letters directed to her editor concerning the "calamitous" (79) translation of her first work, Lispector wrote:

"I admit, if you like, that the sentences do not reflect the usual manner of speaking, but...the punctuation I employed in the book is not accidental and does not result from an ignorance of the rules of grammar...I am fully aware of the *reasons* that led me to choose this punctuation and insist that it be respected" (emphasis added).



Lispector's "reasons" behind her "foreignness of prose" (80) are difficult to definitively ascertain but do not negate the fact that they are *there*. The translator of the latest edition of *The Hour of the Star*, Moser, commented that Lispector's "weird word choices, strange syntax, and lack of interest in conventional grammar produces sentences...that veer toward abstraction without ever quite reaching it" (80) pushed the author forward toward her "mystical as well as artistic" goal: to rearrange traditional language in such a way that meaning could be found. In much the same way, Neo-Concrete artists sought to rearrange traditional, Concrete artistic conventions of the time in such a way that meaning could be found again in the art. In Gullar's *Neo-Concrete Manifesto* (1959), he synthesizes the search for meaning in art and its eventual triumph, found in rejection of Concrete ideals, as follows: "[This art] surpasses materialism by transcending those mechanical relationships...and by creating in itself a tacit meaning that emerges from it as if for the first time" (Frank 159). Through rearrangement of the artistic conventions of the day, the Neo-Concretists found an almost organic relationship again with their art; Lispector's rearrangement of the language conventions of her day—from her fragmented sentences to the unfamiliar rhythm of her diction—creates a novella that has taken on a life and a multitude of possible meanings of its own. Put more simply, Lispector did not write the way she did just to write, just as the Neo-Concretists refused to create art (as the Concretists did) just to create art. Whether or not a definitive meaning to the *Hour of the Star* can be determined does not undermine Lispector's desire for meaning—however ambiguous, specific to each reader, or difficult to ascertain—to be there; her deliberate choices concerning prose, color and other synesthesia-like conventions, and grammar present a strong case that she wrote with purpose. Considering Lispector's work in the context of this artistic movement adds further potential depth to her prose, along with increased motivation on the part of the reader to find meaning in her abstraction: it gives hope and almost unshakeable faith that there is, in fact, meaning to be found.

Purposeful abstraction—a thoroughly Neo-Concrete tradition—is not the only similarity to be drawn between Lispector's style and Neo-Concretism; Neo-Concrete art also sought to involve the viewer more into the art itself. Their complaints about Concretism included that such artists "only invite a reaction of stimulus and response from the viewer. They speak to the eye only as an instrument, not as a human mode of taking in the world and giving oneself to it" (Frank 160). There was a general feeling that Concrete art was only to be spoon-fed to the viewer, without engagement or original thought and emotion required while appreciating its form. Neo-Concrete art sought to create a "new and expressive space" in which the viewer became an "active participant" to the work itself (Frank 160). The artist Lygia Clark took the viewer-artist-art relationship to a new level through her interactive table-top sized sculptures; the "*Bichos*" ("Beasts") were metal hinged sculptures of complex construction and function. For the sculptures to fully display their form and function, viewers were required to interact with the "beasts," moving them into new configurations<sup>11</sup>. In Lispector's work, there is deliberate

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that while the viewers could move the "beasts" into many possible configurations, they could not "put them into any shape that they desire; the hinges and flat shapes resist certain configurations and predispose the *Bichos* to others" (Frank 161). In much the same way, interaction with Lispector's text creates many possible meanings and explorations of thematic elements; however, Lispector's prose also predisposes the text to certain directions of thought more than others. It is not a meaning or configuration free-for-all; in the interaction between viewer and artist (or in this case, author), the artist remains in charge of the ultimate trajectory of the work.

engagement of the reader<sup>12</sup>; Rodrigo repeatedly speaks to the outside observer of his text, his interactions tinged with the same abusive nature with which he treats Macabea. From "...you're not understanding me and I darkly hear you laughing at me with the quick and rasping laugh of the old" (12) to "...so you gentlemen know more than you think and are just pretending not to...I'll have to use the words that sustain you" (Lispector 4), Rodrigo's first-person narrative demands a response from the reader, if only that of compulsory attendance to Macabea's drama. He drags the reader into the plot, and later, into the enslavement of Macabea's character, stating, "She was finally free of herself and of us" (76). Peixoto perhaps summarized this difficult engagement of reader, narrator, and work best when she said, "In this work, Lispector...accuses writer, narrator, and reader of *participating in* and profiting from that oppression" (Peixoto 89, emphasis added). Just as in the Neo-Concrete artwork of Clark, Lispector creates a "new, expressive space" in which the first-person narrator Rodrigo, Lispector the unseen but not unheard author, and the viewer develop an almost, to use Clark's words again, "one-on-one interaction between...two living beings" (Frank 161). This relationship is enhanced when we realize it is there; to compare Lispector's interactive prose to the interactive works of Neo-Concretism is to see more clearly the engagement already present in the work between the reader and the author and makes possible a more complete and fulfilling interaction with the text.

An exploration of Lispector's paintings adds an element of both tension and resolution to the growing connections between her body of work and the Neo-Concrete movement. Over the course of her life, she painted 22 works of art; 19 of them were painted over wood, the majority made of Riga pine, and three were painted on canvas. Sixteen of her works were exhibited in 2009 in Rio de Janeiro at the Instituto Moreira Salles, displaying a new dynamic of the enigmatic author. Her artistic style was abstract, creating an interesting parallel between her prose and her painting, and although she denied herself a painter, she said of the process:

"What relaxes me, oddly enough, is painting. Without being a painter in any way, and without learning any technique. I paint so badly that it tastes and I do not show my "paintings" to anyone. It is relaxing and at the same time exciting to tinker with colors and shapes without compromise with anything. It's the purest thing I do. I think the process creator of a painter and the writer are from the same source. The text must be expressed through images and images are made of light, colours, figures, perspectives, volumes, sensations" (da Costa, Rodrigo, et al. 228).

Her painting and her writing were, to her, "from the same source." Connections to her text can be made based on the titles of her creations alone; four of her works' titles draw instant similarities to her literary works as a whole, and to her prose in *Hour of the Star* in particular. All dated as painted in 1975, two years before her death, "Explosion,"<sup>13</sup> "Bloody Fight for Peace," "Fear," and "Cave" all parallel her literature's central themes of tension, the fears inherent in poverty, sexual violence, and abuse, and (explosion!) the abundant characters experiencing an almost Platonic cave-sequence of enlightenment, or, conversely, disillusionment. Macabea stands as an apt example of this disillusionment, having lived her whole life in a "cave" of ignorance to her true misery. Again, and again, Lispector uses the explosion expression to inject herself into

<sup>12</sup> When asked how many movements the sculptures were capable of, Clark said simply, "I don't know, and you don't know, but it knows." Speaking later of her art, she said, "The beast has no wrong side...in the relationship...established between you and the Beast, there is no passivity, for you or for it. A type of one-on-one interaction develops between the two living beings" (Frank 161). The one-on-one interaction is developed by Lispector by a deliberately outspoken and outreaching narrative voice: Rodrigo does not allow passivity from the reader.

<sup>13</sup> See End Notes for images of Lispector's four paintings discussed above (images from da Costa, Rodrigo, et al.)

Macabea's story; the fear of death felt by Macabea and, by extension, Rodrigo was possibly shared by the author, as Lispector was dying of ovarian cancer at the time of the novella's creation. There is a sense of a "bloody fight for peace" in Macabea's last moments, as Rodrigo says:

"At this very moment Macabea feels a deep nausea in her stomach and almost vomited, she wanted to vomit something that wasn't her body, to vomit something luminous. A thousand-pointed star. What am I seeing now and that frightens me? I see that she vomited a little blood, vast spasm, essence at last touching essence: victory!" (75)

Perhaps the "peace" here was freedom of Rodrigo and "of us" (76). Analysis of the painting's colors reflects a curious juxtaposition of red, the blood in Lispector's fight, and blue, which is traditionally peaceful. The painting is vaguely reminiscent of Rodrigo's stated questions in the novella, as he says, "Meanwhile the clouds are white and the sky is all blue. Why so much God. Why not a little for men." It is as though Macabea must, in the "very deep and black core of her self" (74), wrestle from an all-powerful being the peace she longs for. The red paint on the canvas mimics childlike macabre finger-painting, almost as though someone is clawing at the canvas itself with bloody fingers. Considering Lispector's art, including its colors and forms, has shed new light on the passages whose meanings were, at first, so ambiguous and obscure. Harkening back to our earlier discussion of the satirical use of yellow in *Star*, it is interesting to consider the colors of Lispector's painting "Fear." A dark canvas, coated in black and brown shades, stands in stark contrast to the lone figure, though abstractly rendered, in the center of the canvas. The yellow apparition, a painted cartoonish howl upon its face, adds additional speculative power to the use of yellow in Lispector's work. One can ask, why yellow? What is being said by its use in a painting titled Fear? Answers to these questions will always be inherently subjective, but it is in the exploration of the subjective that we can come closer to understanding the enigma that is Lispector's work.

I acknowledge that Lispector, enigma that she was, cannot be placed into one artistic movement or moment in creative history. There are elements of the modern, postmodern, and feminist movements in her work. As she once, when asked who her literary influences were, said literature made her "bristle like a cat" (Aviv) and that she never read anyone (though many critics have drawn literary style connections to Woolf, Proust, or Joyce, she denied ever picking up one of their works). Perhaps an extension of that line of reasoning would imply that Lispector "saw" no one; in other words, she very well may have been purposefully unaware of artistic movements, their tenets, and their works. Her paintings, however, say otherwise. While it is difficult to place an abstract style such as hers conclusively anywhere, the fact that she titled her paintings as she did imply a certain awareness of abstract art's ability to convey meaning beyond form or line. Carrying this idea into her literary work, as she herself said that her writing and painting process were one and the same<sup>14</sup>, it increases the credibility of the overall claim so many make of Lispector's works: that her prose, as abstract, obscure, and inaccessible at times

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<sup>14</sup> Annie Dillard, author-painter herself, when asked why she chose to create art and write as well, once said, "Do you mean to say that there are some writers who don't make art?" (Friedman and Wronoski 155) Her work, along with over 150 other artists, was displayed at a gallery showing in 2007. Speaking of the exhibit, curator Friedman said, "From Hugo to Huxley to Smith, we are presented with writers who, in the words of writer-artist Max Jacob, exteriorize themselves by their chosen means, and it may be by whatever means is at hand. Here it's not poetry but paint, not metaphor by matchsticks, not irony but ink brush" (Friedman and Wronoski v). Lispector's works were not displayed, nor was she mentioned in Friedman's book, *The Writer's Brush: The Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture of Writers.*"

that it is, conveys a deeper meaning. When speaking of the abstract, Lispector said, "Both in painting and in music and literature, so often what they call abstract, to me seems only the figurative of a reality more delicate and more difficult, less visible to the naked eye" (da Costa, Rodrigo, et al. 237). It was to this reality that she attempted to speak, and the longevity of literary conversations that center around her work speak to her successful portrayal of it. Whichever meaning one chooses to derive from the sufferings of Macabea and *The Hour of the Star*, the search for meaning is enhanced by the artistic use of color that Lispector employs. Macabea may be a fading and, at the end, faded character, "nothing in her...iridescent," (19) and yet, how carefully she is painted.

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Lispector's paintings as discussed above. Images from da Costa, Rodrigo, et al. In order clockwise from left to right: "Explosion," "Bloody Fight for Peace," "Cave," and "Fear."



ilustração 1  
LISPECTOR, Clarice. *Explosão* (1975)  
Acervo Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa



ilustração 2  
LISPECTOR, Clarice. *Luta sangrenta pela paz* (1975)  
Acervo Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa



ilustração 3  
LISPECTOR, Clarice. *Medo*(1975)  
Acervo Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa

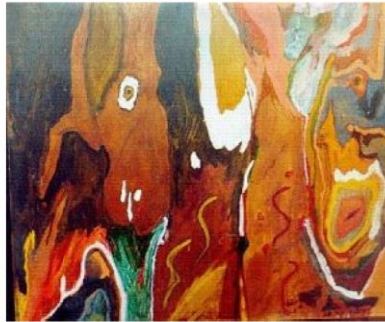


ilustração 4  
LISPECTOR, Clarice. *Gruta*(1975)  
Acervo Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa