

# Psychoanalysis and the transformations of childhood in the articles and columns written by Clarice Lispector, 1952- 1973

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Received on 23 Mar. 2018.

Approved on 3 May 2018.

Translated by Tracy Miyake.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702020000100004>

JOSIOWICZ, Alejandra. Psychoanalysis and the transformations of childhood in the articles and columns written by Clarice Lispector, 1952-1973. *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, Rio de Janeiro, v.27, n.1, jan.-mar. 2020. Available at: <<http://www.scielo.br/hcsm>>.

## Abstract

The article examines the role of psychology in how childhood was understood during the period spanning 1950 to 1970, focusing on articles and columns Clarice Lispector published in broadly circulating magazines and newspapers from 1952 to 1973. From these writings emerges a new paradigm considering children as psychological mysteries within the domestic sphere, in which childhood is understood as the core of the adult psyche, as well as object of maternal exploration and care. This biopsychological model combines hygienic concerns related to physical health with psychological attention to childhood subjectivity. This way, the middle-class child reveals a transformation of family models and the new centrality of the individual.

Keywords: Childhood; psychoanalysis; Clarice Lispector (1920-1977); mass media.



The article examines the influence of psychology and psychoanalysis on the conceptions of childhood during the period spanning 1950 to 1970, focusing on columns and articles published in broadly circulating magazines and newspapers by Clarice Lispector from 1952 to 1973. It looks at the role of psychological and psychoanalytical discourse in mass media during these decades, assuming that it was central in transforming family relationships, subverting traditional educational parameters, roles of authority and obedience, and changes in how childhood was understood. Children, who during the first half of the twentieth century had been considered central to citizenship and the future of the nation, in the 1960s and 1970s began to be seen as the nucleus of the private sphere, in line with the emergence of a consumer society and alongside social and cultural modernization. It argues that the diffusion of psychological and psychoanalytical discourse to a broad audience through wide-reaching publications such as magazines and newspapers was central in redefining ways of thinking about childhood, making it a symbol of the new centrality of individual subjectivity during this period in Brazil. By highlighting the transformations in the conception of childhood as it appeared in mass media, we draw attention to the relevance of the representation of the psychological health of children in the middle strata of society, a topic which has been the subject of little historiographic attention; for the most part, critical studies have focused on concerns about the health and the protection of poor, illegitimate, and “minor” children, as well as public policies directed at these groups.

### **Concerns with children’s physical and mental health during the first half of the twentieth century**

Since the proclamation of the Republic and the beginning of the twentieth century in Brazil, concerns with the health and well-being of children occupied a prominent position in public discourse and in social policies. A series of institutions were created to protect children, along with research programs, policies and agencies involved in their health and well-being. Physicians, pediatricians, hygienists, and philanthropists such as Doctor Moncorvo Filho and Doctor Antônio Fernandes Figueira worked to develop and disseminate ideas on hygiene and child rearing, as well as policies to reduce high infant mortality rates (Sanglard, 2015; Freire, 2015). For these doctors, ensuring the health and well-being of future generations became an essential condition to ensure the progress and social harmony of the Brazilian nation. Hygienist, legal and pedagogical knowledge played a central role in the creation of state policies that would assist and protect children, which involved the education, correction and reform of *menores* (minors). This term was used, particularly after the creation of the Código de Menores in 1927, to describe children who were abandoned, helpless and in need of moral or material support (Rizzini, Pilotti, 1995). Childhood was considered (as stated by senator Lopes Trovão in 1902) the “genesis of society” (Rizzini, Pilotti, 1995, p.111).<sup>1</sup>

From the 1930s, with the emergence of the New School movement and the public policies instituted by the Getúlio Vargas administrations, the state’s role in protecting children grew (Carvalho, 1997; Corrêa, 1997). During these decades, a new emphasis on the pedagogical and hygienic replaced the previous concerns on institutionalization, correction,

and punishment. The new conceptions emphasized the educability and “regeneration” of Brazilian populations, with the purpose of instilling work habits and adapting future citizens to the needs of a modern capitalist society (Carvalho, 1997; Corrêa, 1997). The process was linked to the emergence of a psychological discourse in which children began to be perceived as malleable and adaptable. In medical and psychiatric terms, this translated into a stronger link between treatment and education in state policies, and a combination of psychoanalysis with eugenic and pedagogical knowledge, with the purpose of preventing educational and family problems (Da Silva, 2009; Reis, 2000). This explains why psychiatrists and physicians in the Brazilian League Of Mental Hygiene attributed great importance to the treatment of children, emphasizing preventive activities and eugenic measures in the school and family environments as means of prevention and of adjusting children, who were not seen as incurable but rather malleable beings which could be adapted to society (Da Silva, 2009; Reis, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

The concern with childhood was also prominent as psychoanalysis spread among the middle and educated classes from the 1920s and 1930s through books, radio programs, and magazine columns. Psychoanalyst and promoter Gastão Pereira da Silva was intensely active in newspapers, magazines, and radio between 1936 and 1956 producing numerous articles and columns on psychoanalysis and education (Russo, 2002; Russo, Carrara, 2002).<sup>3</sup> Pereira da Silva published *Educação sexual da criança* (Sexual Education of Children) (1934) and *O drama sexual de nossos filhos* (The Sexual Drama of Our Children) (1939), and wrote a column entitled “Página das mães” (Mothers’ Page) in the *Vamos ler* magazine, published later in his book *Conheça seu filho* (Know Your Child). *A psicanálise da criança* (Psychoanalysis of Children) (1942) was republished several times between 1942 and 1960 (Russo, 2002; Russo, Carrara, 2002). In *Conheça seu filho* (1942), Pereira da Silva, who had read many psychoanalytic authors, such as Ernst Jones, Stanley Hall, Wilhelm Steckel, and Anna and Sigmund Freud, dismantled many traditional ideas about the education of children: he criticized the use of punishment (both physical and psychological) and recommended a “great liberation of instincts” in children, implying that adult help and guidance should be minimal and subtle, without reprimands, threats, or hostility (Pereira da Silva, 1952, p.45-51, 170). According to Pereira da Silva (1952, p.11), it is the parents’ responsibility to adapt to their children’s specific modes of “thinking, of criticizing, or feeling, and even of living,” not the contrary. This transformation in how the parent/child relationship was seen meant that the central pillar was no longer the adult world, but instead the child and his personality, which became the object of interest, observation, and research, from a psychological and psychoanalytical perspective. Furthermore, the focus was not the “abnormal child” nor the “minor” any more, but the (non-pathological) child of the educated middle classes, whose parents had sufficient resources, attention, and time to get to know their children, understand them, and appreciate them for their individual characteristics, thus ensuring the development of their personalities and their future transformation into confident, successful adults. These texts point to the beginning of a process that intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when psychological and psychoanalytical information spread widely through the media, in line with the transformation of parent/child relations and the emergence of a new understanding of childhood and education (Coimbra, 1995).

## **The psychologization of family relations, mass media and the new consumer society: 1950-1970**

In Brazil, between the 1950s and 1970s, a new consumer society emerged and the middle class solidified, especially in the urban centers. The demographic increase in the post-war period and the expansion of access to education at all levels, including university, took place alongside the modernization and diversification of popular print culture, which had arisen during the first half of the twentieth century (Martins, 2001; Barbosa, 2007). During these decades, the press organized itself along capitalist and industrial lines, encompassing the various segments of the culture industry, such as magazines and newspapers (as well as the supplements and special sections) and the book market, as a differentiated reading public grew (Miceli, 2001). As part of the process that began in the first half of the twentieth century, the press became increasingly connected to advertising while it specialized around the diversified interests of the female, male, and juvenile audiences (De Luca, 2012). During the 1950s, the “golden age” of the women’s press, these publications showed the image of a woman who had consumer habits associated with new technologies: the married, middle-class urban mother who could choose what to buy from a wide variety of products including food, hygiene articles, clothes, medicines, and household appliances (De Luca, 2013, p.456; Schroeder, 1986; Kobayashi, 2012).

Although women’s share of the labor market grew, along with their access to formal education, a traditional division of gender roles persisted, together with the notion of a woman dedicated to motherhood and the domestic sphere, devoted to her husband and educator of her children (Bassanezi Pinsky, 1997, p.609). Only after the 1970s did the greater consumer capacity and upward social mobility of the Brazilian urban middle classes generate a gradual transformation of sociocultural models and gender roles, through which women began to be considered outside the exclusive horizon of marriage and motherhood (Berquó, 1998, p.413-414; Santos, 1982, 1990). Issues like separation, sexuality, and contraceptive methods began to be discussed publicly, in magazines and newspapers (De Luca, 2013). In the 1970s, psychoanalysis had already attained considerable success among Brazil’s middle classes, with wide dissemination in the media and television (Russo, 2002, 2012). There was a veritable psychoanalytical boom in the educated classes of the urban centers, which helped destabilize gender roles and focused on exploring one’s individual history, one’s personality, self-knowledge, and emphasized the liberation of the self and exploration of one’s own desires (Russo, 2002, 2012). Research on the dissemination of psychoanalysis in women’s magazines of the 1960s and 1970s shows that although marriage remained the core of the family, the way it was considered and experienced by its members was transformed: the fixed and immutable roles of men and women, parents and children, began to be questioned in favor of new moral values considered “modern,” such as self-understanding, autonomy, and independence (Santos, 1982, 1990). The diffusion of psychoanalytical knowledge among the lay public is thought to have contributed to the modernization of social behavior and the discrediting of gender and age hierarchies (Santos, 1982, 1990). But even when children started to be increasingly considered the result of well-thought decisions, the nuclear family was maintained as a model and marriage continued to be the

guiding cultural standard of social relations, the main point of reference in constructing the child's identity (Dauster, 1988). The process of psychologization of society positioned the individual as a dominant reference, assuming that his or her individuality could be realized and expanded (Velho, 2006). It is important to emphasize that although psychoanalysis does not appear to be connected to the demands of feminism in Lispector's articles and columns (she appears ambivalent and even confrontational on the subject, presenting a model of femininity which is "modern" but still connected to the domestic sphere, marriage and motherhood), it remains related to the process of modernization of family relations, the transformation of ways of thinking about procreation, children, and of educating one's offspring.<sup>4</sup>

Childhood was one of the fundamental pillars of this sociocultural transformation of family models; incorporated into the world of modern cultural consumption throughout the first half of the twentieth century, from 1950 and 1960 children began to be increasingly targeted by advertising strategies as both recipients of and participants in consumption (Brites, 2000; Josiowicz, 2018). Between 1950 and 1970, childhood becomes a symbol of the transformation of family models and ways of thinking about subjectivity and individual history. The dissemination of psychoanalysis contributed to this process by strengthening the role of parents in the primary socialization of their children, expanding children's autonomy, individuality, and choice, as well as questioning traditional values and social conventions. Consequently, although inequalities remained between men and women, their roles as fathers and mothers changed, now with the primary mission of discovering, encouraging, and cultivating the subjectivity of their children. This was because according to the new paradigm of understanding children, it was important to care for their psychological balance and personality as well as of their physical health, nutrition and well-being, through medical knowledge. As a result, the new model conceived children (not only "minors" or "abnormal" children) as the subjects of physical, biological, mental, and psychological care, center of biopsychological concerns, making them the focus of considerations, research, and study on the part of parents, psychologists, teachers and doctors.<sup>5</sup>

### **Psychology, psychoanalysis, and self-help in Clarice Lispector**

Clarice Lispector began psychoanalytical therapy in the 1940s while she was in Bern, Switzerland, and maintained contact with psychoanalysis after returning to Brazil in 1959, where she underwent therapy with several psychoanalysts. Lispector read widely on the topics of psychology, sexuality, and psychoanalysis. Along with a series of books intended for the female public, containing tips on beauty, recipes, exercise, diet, health, and fashion,<sup>6</sup> her library contained a considerable range of psychological literature. These included volumes on psychoanalysis written by the feminist psychologist Karen Horney, texts by Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm, as well as brochures, books, and best-sellers on psychology, personality, and self-knowledge, such as those by the American psychologist Jerome Bruner. There were also publications on sexology and sexuality by authors such as psychologist and sexologist Albert Ellis, on psychological self-help and spirituality, in

addition to self-help manuals for women, sex education and children's education, which included questions and answers about child behavior.

Lispector's library includes an extensive bibliography on psychology, psychoanalysis, sexuality, the education of children, and self-help spanning the 1930s to 1970s, with a significant presence of American psychological self-help texts that adapt psychological knowledge to a broader audience and offer psychological tools applicable to everyday life. In them, psychological knowledge is portrayed as a tool to strengthen confidence, ward off pessimism and frustration, and address feelings of anxiety and anguish, sexuality, and offer tools for achieving material and affective success. Although Lispector's readings covered a variety of sources, in them psychology is strongly linked to psychoanalytical references.

The role played by parents in educating their children was enormously important in the texts annotated by Lispector. They could stimulate the formation of their personalities and were capable of ensuring their successful socialization. Lispector made profuse notes in sections addressing the transformation in how children were raised and the role of parents, as well as those questioning parental authority and emphasizing the new role played by children and their individual choices. She underscored the importance of abandoning authoritarian attitudes that paralyze and weaken children's personalities, of prioritizing attitudes of trust, understanding, and tolerance that can stimulate development. Instead of transmitting a fixed standard or goal, adults were to help children achieve their potential, spontaneity, and originality. As part of these transformations, Lispector's readings stressed the need to talk openly about sex with children, ensuring the healthy development of the capacity for sex and love.

### **Psychology, psychoanalysis, family transformations, and the new centrality of childhood**

The impact of her readings on childhood psychoanalysis and psychology is evident in the series of columns aimed at women which Lispector published under a pseudonym from 1959 to 1961.<sup>7</sup> Lispector wrote the "Entre mulheres" (Among Women) column in *Comício* magazine from May to September 1952 under the pseudonym Teresa Quadros; she wrote another column for the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* from August 1959 to May 1961 as Helen Palmer,<sup>8</sup> and a section entitled "Só para mulheres" (For women only) in the daily tabloid *Diário da Noite* from April 1960 to March 1961 as a ghostwriter for film and television actress Ilka Soares.<sup>9</sup> The latter two focused primarily on ways of considering motherhood and childhood.

These chronicles feature a stereotypical woman associated with maternity, domesticity, and marriage. However, this does not imply that they follow the traditional model of femininity, but rather they present a woman who "keeps up with the pace of life today," and is "modern and interesting." A modern woman responsible for modernizing the family environment, who can rethink family relations and domesticity from a new point of view that is compatible with a consumer society. It is an ambivalent feminine model: the woman is modern, but not necessarily independent. The women's column touches upon topics like separation and divorce, not to open them as possibilities, but to stimulate women's

psychological and psychoanalytical understanding of the family, including the husband and the children (Lispector, 30 dez. 1959). The psychoanalytical vocabulary is associated with a modern family model in which the woman acts as an analyst within the home, able to understand her husband's emotions, affects, and personality, in which psychoanalysis is seen as a tool for resolving marital conflicts.

As for her role as mother, the columns present the woman as a nurse who cares for the child's physical health, nutrition, clothing, physical activities, and rest (Lispector, 15 jul. 1960), as well as a true psychoanalyst inside the home: they mention psychoanalytical knowledge and psychologists' opinion and transmit a model of education in which mothers and fathers should "study their children in detail," give attention to them, listen to what they have to say, bolster their confidence and avoid any labels:

it will be greatly beneficial for the child if the parents pay attention, listening without interruption to the long stories the child has to tell, even though full of errors and often difficult to interpret. The climate of confidence around the child is very important for his positive mental development and for his adaptation to the environment. Difficulties in his contact with the outside world are neutralized by efficient guidance given by his parents; a child who is well understood in his own home has the best weapons to succeed when he needs to confront life (Lispector, 5 ago. 1960, p.5).

According to Helen Palmer, this type of education, in an atmosphere of respect and dialogue, can ensure mental health and the child's successful social adaptation. This educational model is attentive to the specific characteristics of each child's psychological life and considers that parents should become true students of their child, avoiding labels or impositions. Parents should be their children's friends and companions, have "tolerance and patience" for their needs, and offer appropriate advice. "It would be a very good thing for certain mothers to set aside their cold authority to discuss certain issues of great interest to their daughter, which to adults often seem silly and infantile but for children are extremely important" (Lispector, 5 ago. 1960, p.5). Authority and obedience are replaced by understanding the child's emotional life, with a focus on children's needs. This way, it redefines "discipline" not as an imposition, but rather as "justice," "affection," and "firmness;" not authoritative and not necessarily based on an attitude of passive obedience on the part of children (Lispector, 22 fev. 1961).

In this direction, Helen Palmer says that "being a mother:"

Is not just giving birth to a child. It is not suffering labor pains and then forgetting the fruit of her womb, leaving it on its own. A real woman and mother knows that her duties go beyond feeding, cleaning, and dressing her child warmly. Above all, she needs to love him. Love that is devotion, care, guidance, and especially participation in his problems and his difficulties. Every mother should get to know the son she brought into the world, and this should be done by approaching him, listening to his first complaints and wishes. Leaving him entirely in the care of an outsider, a babysitter, seeing him for only some minutes, kissing him hastily when showing him off to visitors, this is more than just an error. It is a crime. I do not believe my readers would do that, but there are women who do this. Later, they complain about the grief these children bring them as adolescents. They resent their son's unhidden preference for his father or for the nanny. They despair to discover that what they

considered a harmless and insignificant baby has become a delinquent, a rebel, an adult that neither respects nor loves them. My friend, the first quality for a woman to be a woman is to know how to be a mother. Do not neglect this duty. Do not be the monster responsible for your child's future failures, leaving him casually to develop far from your view and your affection (Lispector, 9 set. 1959, p.5).

The text highlights the transformation in how childhood and the relationship between parents and children are conceived. Parents should be no longer exclusively concerned with physical health, but should stimulate a kind of emotional closeness that requires them to be true psychologists within the home, constantly attentive to changes in their children's personalities, understanding their "problems" and "difficulties," listening to their "complaints" and their "wishes." Maternal education is redefined and loaded with deep psychological meanings, since children's mental health, socialization, and adaptation to society depend on it. The child's conduct becomes the site of potential meanings and symptoms, the source of detailed, everyday psychological investigation. Maternal carelessness or indifference (or the presence of a nanny) could lead to "rebellion" or "delinquency" in adult life; in other words, social maladjustment. The columns ask mothers to look at the world from the perspective of their children, to understand the deep psychological meaning of their behavior, the reasons for their actions, and to be aware of the central role they play in the psychic and emotional lives of their offspring.

Similarly, in the column "Explicando para as crianças: 'amor'" (Explaining to children: "love"), Ilka Soares comments on a book by an American author who explains "how to teach children about ... the vastness of love" (Lispector, 26 jul. 1960, p.19). Instead of explaining the adult world to children, the book asks parents to approach their children from their own perspective, seeing the world through their eyes and speaking in their language. Only through this understanding can children's behavior gradually be modified, without impositions. The main purpose of this model of upbringing is to encourage socialization, a successful social adaptation, to cultivate a public persona and the child's social abilities.

Various columns address teenage daughters' education, of girls described as "astray" or "maladjusted." According to the columnist, mothers are responsible for their daughters' behavior: "Above all, be your daughter's friend!" recommends Palmer, which includes "talking to her, listening to her, helping her with her little problems," getting to know her "inner world," gaining her trust. "Don't contradict her on everything, do not prohibit or make demands." Mothers should provide their daughters with "constant attention," understanding instead of repressing them: "If we are not at her side, life will teach her... but at what price! At twenty, she may be a bitter, angry adult, unloved and with no respect for anyone. She will be accused, unfairly. The blame is only ours, her parents' and especially her mother's!" (Lispector, 16 dez. 1959, p.5). Instead of judging their children from a position of authority, parents should approach them, see the world from their point of view, get to know their psychological lives and their emotions, from a position of deep emotional intimacy. This model of mother/psychologist appears as the only person capable of (and primarily responsible for) determining the success or failure of her children in adult life, their adaption to society and socialization. Mothers are seen as responsible for screening every symptom of abnormality in their children's psyche and behavior, and



even determining ways to cure them, helping them sublimate their libidinal and aggressive impulses.

The dissemination of psychology and psychoanalysis (psychological knowledge is strongly associated with psychoanalysis in these texts) is associated with a type of “modern” education which implies an intense mother/child bond and the cultivation of affective and psychological intimacy between parents and children. In this model, children become true objects of study and psychological research on the part of parents, as spontaneous and original individuals who are the central figures of their own upbringing. Instead of trying to adapt children to the parameters of the adult world, “civilizing” them, parents must adapt to how children perceive and experience it. This change of focus, from adult authority to children’s experience, is linked to the transformations in the Brazilian urban middle classes during these decades. During the latter half of the twentieth century, amid the framework of advanced capitalism, an increasingly cosmopolitan consumer society emerged, and the consumer market became a fundamental environment for socialization and the formation of values (Ortiz, 1998, p.101). In this type of society, children should receive a type of education that stimulates their capacity for individual judgement, free them from any label or classification. Children become the creators of their own identity, instead of reproducing external moderns, which stimulates a fluid and dynamic relationship with a rapidly changing world. This psychological education, based on the comprehension of their psyche and the stimulation of individual capacities and originality, would ensure their successful socialization in a world without parameters and fixed structures, based on consumption, in which the market is the main formative space. Although the role of women remains tied to a conventional family structure, the ideological horizon of reference and legitimation is reconfigured precisely through the diffusion of psychological and psychoanalytical notions among the lay public, entering the domestic sphere and the life of the family.

### **Childhood and psychoanalysis in the printed press**

In Lispector’s writings in the *Jornal do Brasil* from August 1967 to December 1973 (this time with her own signature, reaching wide popularity among the middle-class public), psychoanalysis also becomes highly relevant in the consideration of childhood and the mother/child bond. Firstly, because her chronicles, which have been considered highly autobiographical, are self-analytic in nature, describing childhood as a way of reflecting on subjectivity and on the formation of the psyche. Secondly, because psychoanalysis provides a vocabulary to describe tensions in the relationship between the author/mother and her children, revealing a transformation in the way childhood and education were viewed.

Lispector’s writings in *Jornal do Brasil* reveal the great impact that psychoanalytic discourse had in Brazilian society during the 1960s and 1970s, which reached wide circulation among lay readers and the large urban centers’ middle class who were consumers of psychoanalysis, talked about it, and considered themselves from a psychoanalytic point of view (Russo, 2002). Lispector first underwent psychoanalytic therapy in the 1940s, and her relationship with psychoanalysis intensified after she returned to Brazil

in 1959. During this period, she was separated from her husband (the diplomat Maury Gurgel Valente) and lived with her two children in the district of Leme in Rio de Janeiro, undergoing psychoanalytic treatment with Doctors Inês Besouchet, Catarina Kemper, and Jacob Azulay; her treatment with the latter was the longest and probably most significant, between 1968 and 1973, while she wrote her column for *Jornal do Brasil* (Moser, 2009, p.307).

Her chronicles refer to psychoanalysis countless times, as part of people's everyday life: she describes a maid undergoing psychoanalysis, the interpretation of her dreams by a psychoanalyst "friend," and describes offering one of her books to a psychoanalyst, "from Melanie Klein's group" (Lispector, 13 jul. 1968). In another column, she herself analyzes her psychoanalyst, Jacob Azulay (Lispector, 20 mar. 1971). Furthermore, the column itself becomes a space for psychoanalytic writing, not in the sense of a theoretical or clinical reflection, but rather as a meditation on her own subjectivity, using a lay vocabulary understandable to a broad public. Psychoanalysis appears not as a medical-scientific discipline, but rather as a vocabulary that can be appropriated and understood by anyone, a tool for understanding oneself, as well as for careful observation of others and the world.

From this psychoanalytic lay gaze, attentive to the manifestations of the unconscious, her chronicles investigate everyday situations, focusing on the bond between the mother (chronicler) and her two sons, who share her home. In her chronicle "O caso da caneta de ouro" (The case of the gold pen) (Lispector, 23 dez. 1976), for example, the mother uses a gold pen she received as a gift as the starting point to thoroughly investigate her sons' psyche, to decipher their unconscious desires, to talk with them and understand their way of thinking, their perceptions, and emotions. She becomes a true psychologist inside her home, always willing to offer an attentive ear to their thoughts and perceptions, able to unravel their unconscious impulses, feelings of guilt, desire, and frustration. In other pieces, her son acts as his mother's "analyst" and interprets her behavior. Her chronicle "Liberdade" ("Freedom") narrates an apparently trivial domestic conflict that reveals a transformation in the mother/child relationship: her son does not like his mother's haircut and says he has "a right to not have an ugly mother," while his mother claims her right to "be myself, as ugly as that might be ... my complete right to freedom" (Lispector, 26 abr. 1969, p.2). This text reveals a questioning of the mother/son hierarchy, since both are seen as having equal rights, and the ability to speak of one another (the mother about her son and the son about his mother) as part of a new family model defined by "freedom" for each and every member. Also, in the chronicle "Mãe-gentil" (Kind mother), her children rediscover their mother: "Some time ago my children were discovering me. As a person, I mean to say, since they had been discovering me as a mother since they were born ... It was so funny when they discovered that not only was I their mother, but also a person they could talk to" (Lispector, 12 out. 1968, p.2). The chronicle describes a process in which Lispector's children "discover" her as a "person" by abandoning fixed family roles of "mother" and "child" rediscovering her identity, not exclusively seeing her as "mother." In this process, each family members' individuality is reinvented: the children become real protagonists, their perceptions are valued and their voices are listened within the family.

In other chronicles, the psychoanalytical vocabulary functions as a tool for investigating the subjectivity of children and the manifestations of their unconscious. Through an

experimental language, Lispector's columns attempt to describe the child's perception, focusing on two crucial moments: birth and access to the world of language. "O terror" (The terror) is written from the perspective of a newborn child, in an unformed world of lights, colors, sounds, voices, and physical sensations without linguistic articulation. Birth is not seen as idyllic or as a time of fulfillment, but rather as the "death of one being divided into two solitary ones," which inaugurates a "secret terror that lasts until death. A secret terror of being on earth, like a longing for heaven" (Lispector, 5 out. 1968, p.2). This view of birth as a traumatic event, a rupture that leaves a lasting mark into adulthood is strongly linked with Melanie Klein's theories, which were widespread in Brazilian psychoanalytic circles during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly among child psychoanalysts (Klein, 1997; Abrão, 2009).

Meanwhile, in "Menino a bico de pena" (Ink sketch of boy), childhood points to the limits of the knowable, of language and of representation: "How to ever know the boy? To know it you have to expect that he will deteriorate, and only then will he be within my reach ... I don't know how to draw the boy. I know that it is impossible to draw him in charcoal, since even the ink pen stains the paper beyond the fine line of the present moment in which he lives" (Lispector, 18 out. 1969, p.2). The child dwells in an absolute present, and only with the appearance of language and its representation will he be introduced into the social world and into historical time. The text thoroughly investigates the child's sensations and perceptions prior to language: the act of getting up, falling, feeling his own hand, drooling, crying, calling his mother, all appear as objects of the writer's reflection. "Menino a bico de pena" explores the moment in which the child enters into symbolization, his first linguistic articulation, when he comes out of silence, at the pre-linguistic level, to enter the world of the letter and of socialization. This is represented as a rupture, a break, the abandonment of the world of pure sensation, of the pure present:

The boy himself will help in his domestication: he is hardworking and cooperates. He cooperates without knowing that we ask for his self-sacrifice ... While he cries, he will recognize himself, becoming that which his mother will recognize. He nearly collapses into hiccups, he urgently needs to become understandable or else nobody will understand him, or else nobody will come to his silence, nobody will know him if he doesn't speak and talk, I will do everything that is required so that I can belong to others and them to me, I will trample on my own true happiness, which would only bring me abandonment, and I will be popular, I will make a bargain to be loved ... And his safety is knowing that he has a world to betray and sell, and that he will sell it (Lispector, 18 out. 1969, p.2).

The process involves domestication, self-sacrifice, breaking the connection with the unconscious that characterizes pre-linguistic children. The acquisition of language involves constructing an image of the "I" for others that becomes "recognizable," "understandable," that can be appropriated by the social world, that conforms to its expectations, a sort of "betrayal." "Menino a bico de pena" explores what Julia Kristeva called the "semiotic chora," a provisional and mobile articulation, uncertain and indeterminate, close to a rhythm, a nutritive receptacle, maternal and welcoming (Kristeva, 1981, p.262; Jardim, 2008, p.27).

The “semiotic chora” denotes pre-oedipal functions, oral and anal impulses, directed and structured in relation to the mother’s body, linked to the unconscious, which does not yet refer to an object signified by a consciousness (Kristeva, 1981). They are pre-phonological, pre-predicative states, in a state of maternal fusion, dependent on libidinal and aggressive bodily impulses, dating back to a time before signification. According to Kristeva’s theory, in this state of pre-symbolic fusion with the mother, designation emerges, which implies rejection of the maternal (Kristeva, 1981). The archaic forms of vocalization and babbling respond to an impulse of rejection: the emergence of sign through phonic, gestural, semantic, and syntactic means, is intrinsically negative, separating and naming the body of the child (Kristeva, 1981, p.285). “Menino a bico de pena” explores the child’s passage from the pre-linguistic state, which Lispector conceives as “real,” “absolutely current,” the “truth” of a “pure” and “crazy” existence (according to Kristeva, it is similar to psychotic speech) to the symbolic dimension. Thus, socialization, the entrance to the lettered world of signification, appears as a process marked by negativity and violence, a “self-sacrifice,” a “betrayal:” the break with the world of bodily impulses and fusion with the maternal, from which emerges the self and the linguistic ability. Subjectivity and signification, then, are, from the beginning, characterized by a lack, which points to the divided conception of psychological life that is intrinsic of psychoanalysis.

There are other chronicles by Lispector in which psychoanalysis is important: some are self-analyses, descriptions of key moments in the narrator’s childhood mental experience. In them, child psychology appears as highly complex: as a subject of libidinal and aggressive impulses, capable of cruelty, perverse and sadistic acts, and also an intense and profound force of desire, enjoyment, and sensuality. In “Tortura e glória” (Torture and glory), the narrator says: “I was no longer a girl with a book: I was a woman with her lover” (Lispector, 2 set. 1968, p.2). In “Restos do carnaval” (Remnants of the carnival), she recounts her memory of a carnival in childhood. The child has a complex inner world marked by suffering (a sick mother and a precarious family situation) and a “secret” “capacity for pleasure” that the carnival reveals:

I was afraid, but fear was vital and necessary because it responded to my most profound suspicion that the human face was also a kind of mask. ... if a masked person spoke to me I suddenly came into undeniable contact with my inner world, which was not comprised only of elves and enchanted princes, but of people with their own mystery (Lispector, 16 mar. 1968, p.2).

Instead of with innocence, imagination, and fantasy, the child’s perception is associated with the divided nature of subjectivity, with the unconscious and the duplicity of the self. Similarly, in Sigmund Freud (2000, p.57-99), children were not only close to the unconscious, but also “polymorphous perverse” and, particularly in the pre-genital stage, tended toward cruelty, sadomasochism, as well as erogenous impulses. For Freud (1973a), sexual precocity was strongly linked to intellectual precocity, curiosity, and the pursuit of knowledge. Lispector takes psychoanalysis as a tool for interpreting childhood as key to the formation of the adult psyche. Childhood also appears associated with fruition: in “Banhos de mar” (Swimming in the ocean), for example, the girl experiences complete

happiness. The child is the model of aesthetic sublimation, in perpetual ecstasy, able to lose herself in each experience, for whom words are instruments of bodily enjoyment.

On the other hand, Lispector's writings also reveal the importance of discussing sexual matters openly with children (as pointed out by Freud), which can help combat feelings of guilt, suspicions, mental conflicts, and unnecessary repressions (Freud, 1973b). Along these lines, "A descoberta do mundo" (The discovery of the world) describes the "discovery" of sexuality during pre-adolescence as a traumatic event that leaves an indelible mark on the subject. Lispector (6 jul. 1968, p.2) writes: "I suffered greatly, which could have been avoided if a responsible adult had endeavored to tell me what love was like. This adult would know how to deal with a child's soul without martyring it with shock, without forcing it to bear everything alone and redoing everything in order to accept life and its mysteries again". The availability of an adult to discuss and explain "love" and "the facts" of sexual life could prevent psychological trauma and future suffering.

In the chronicle "Pertencer" (Belonging), Lispector cites a "doctor" (probably a psychoanalyst), who said that from the cradle, children are highly perceptive to what happens around them. She then analyzes her birth scene:

... I was born in such a beautiful way. My mother was already sick, and it was a widely-held superstition that having a child would heal a woman. So I was deliberately conceived: with love and hope. But I didn't heal my mother. And even today I feel this burden of guilt: they made me for a mission, and I failed (Lispector, 15 jun. 1968, p.2).

From the moment of birth, the ego appears as disappointing others' expectations, provoking guilt, deprivation, and lack, failing to accomplish the objective for which she was created. It is an "intense" "hunger," "a need of belonging" that will indelibly determine the adult's mental life. It is important to emphasize the influence of Melanie Klein's (1997) theories, who conceives birth as a potentially traumatic event that leaves lasting marks into adulthood and for whom the child is a divided being who experiences disappointments, neurotic impulses and anxieties, oedipal conflicts, sadistic and masochistic impulses, guilt and anguish (Klein, 1997, 2011). These theories were widely influential in Brazilian psychoanalytic circles during the latter half of the twentieth century, especially in children's psychoanalysis and that of psychotics (Abrão, 2009). In Lispector's texts, from the moment of conception, the child is incorporated into the world of adult expectations as a ghost of other people's desire; the self is marked by this primary experience, a source of anxiety, conflict, and alienation.

## Final considerations

The centrality of psychology and psychoanalysis in Lispector's columns and chronicles in newspapers and women's magazines reveals a transformation in how childhood was envisioned, a new educational paradigm, in which children begin to be the center and protagonists of their own upbringing, true psychological mysteries within the domestic sphere. In this new model, childhood appears as the center of adult psychoanalysis. Her writings reveal the importance childhood acquired as the object of both physical and mental

preoccupations within the sphere of modern consumer culture (i.e. the popular press). In this sense, although psychoanalytical discourse is psychogenic, Lispector's writings reveal a biopsychological model for understanding the family unit, connected to hygienic and psychological concerns for children's physical as well as mental health. Together with the centrality of public, hygienic, and eugenic policies for assisting "minors" and unprotected children, as well as for educating their mothers, middle-class children emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as another fundamental paradigm for understanding childhood as the center of modern cultural consumption. This paradigm points to the importance of personality, individual choices, and of new ways of understanding child subjectivity and its relationship with the adult psyche. It also reveals the challenge of fixed roles, of obedience and authority between mothers and children, and points to the new centrality that children and young people acquired in society as consumers and true structuring units of adult subjectivity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this and other citations of texts from Portuguese, a free translation has been provided by Tracy Miyake.

<sup>2</sup> One psychiatrist and psychoanalyst in this League, Júlio Porto Carrero, emphasized the educational role of psychoanalysis, which was considered capable of reorienting childhood sexual impulses through education (Facchinetti, 2015). On educating the primitivistic character of Brazilians through psychoanalysis, see Castro (2014).

<sup>3</sup> On the hygienic and eugenic adjustment of child sexuality according to Freudian ideas during the first decades of the century, see Oliveira (2010).

<sup>4</sup> The bibliography on the issue of gender in Clarice Lispector is very broad: for example, see Peixoto (1994). For a reading on the issue of gender in her columns, see also Lobo (2002).

<sup>5</sup> This was truly a combination of the biological with the psychological. It is important to compare this process with the Argentine case, in which historians have noted the evolution from the biological paradigm of the "eugenic family" to the psychological familial paradigm, corresponding to the narrowing of the basic "father-mother-child" triangle. On the Argentine process, see Vezzetti (1999); Borinsky (2006).

<sup>6</sup> These books are held in the Clarice Lispector Library at the Instituto Moreira Salles in Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>7</sup> On Lispector's literature for children, see Wasserman (1994) and Josiowicz (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Lispector signed a contract with Pond's to write the column in the *Correio da Manhã*, which required a tone described as "informed without being wise," reasonably intelligent but indecisive at times, as if the writer relayed on the reader's opinion. It was supposed to encourage the readers' active participation in identifying and presenting the products (Pond's creams), explaining details about their effectiveness to the female audience. The contract can be found in the Clarice Lispector Archive at the Casa de Rui Barbosa. This could partly explain both the importance of consumption in this family model as well the continuity of a stereotypical view of femininity.

<sup>9</sup> Some of the columns were published in two volumes edited by Aparecida Maria Nunes (Lispector, 2006, 2008). Given that this version does not follow the historic chronology of publication and does not include all the chronicles, here we cite the newspaper versions, accessed from the digital collection of the Biblioteca Nacional, Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (available at: <<http://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital>>).

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