

## THE AUTHOR AND THE ANIMALS: THE INTIMATE LIFE OF ULISSES

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**ABSTRACT.** The aim of this study is to problematize the presence of the dog Ulisses as alter ego of Clarice Lispector in the children's book *Quase de verdade* (1978). Ulisses was also the author's dog, mentioned by her in several interviews and in the book *Um sopro de vida* (1999) in terms of his humanity, that would enable him to understand Clarice in a particular and closer, almost accomplice way. This humanity materializes when he assumes the narration in *Quase de verdade*, positioning Clarice as his interpreter. The relationship with the animal is symbiotic, recovering a more instinctive experience of the author and allowing the enjoyment of emotions present in the animal, in a process of complementarity. As vertices of the same self, we discuss to what extent Ulisses also functions as an interpreter of Clarice, proposing to her a concrete experience of living that would go beyond the construction of rational intelligibility. The dimension of sensory and corporeal living thus presents itself as superior to comprehensive activity, bringing Clarice closer to the intimate, basic, and equally savage universe so well lived and embodied by Ulisses, captained by the position of a pure alter ego capable of teaching her to live with her own animality.

**Keywords:** Clarice Lispector; alterity; corporeality.

## A AUTORA E OS BICHOS: A VIDA ÍNTIMA DE ULISSES

**RESUMO.** O objetivo deste estudo teórico é problematizar a presença do cachorro Ulisses como alter ego de Clarice Lispector no livro infantil *Quase de verdade* (1978). Ulisses era também o cachorro da autora, mencionado por ela em diversas entrevistas e no livro *Um sopro de vida* (1999) em termos de sua humanidade, que o habilitaria a compreender Clarice de um modo particular e mais próximo, quase cúmplice. Essa humanidade se concretiza quando ele assume a narração em *Quase de verdade*, posicionando Clarice como sua intérprete. A relação com o bicho revela-se de modo simbiótico, recuperando tanto uma experiência mais instintiva da autora como permitindo a fruição das emoções presentes no animal, em um processo de complementaridade. Como vértices de um mesmo eu, discute-se em que medida Ulisses também funciona como um intérprete de Clarice, propondo a ela uma experiência concreta de viver que ultrapassaria a construção de uma inteligibilidade racional. A dimensão do viver, sensorial e corpóreo, desse modo, apresenta-se como superior à atividade compreensiva, aproximando Clarice do universo íntimo, básico e igualmente selvagem tão bem vivido e corporificado por Ulisses, capitaneado à posição de um alter ego puro capaz de ensiná-la a viver com a sua própria animalidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Clarice Lispector; alteridade; corporeidade.

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## LA AUTORA Y LOS ANIMALES: LA VIDA ÍNTIMA DE ULISSES

**RESUMEN.** El objetivo de este estudio teórico es problematizar la presencia del perro Ulisses como el alter ego de Clarice Lispector en el libro para niños *Quase de verdade* (1978). Ulisses también era el perro del autor, mencionado por ella en varias entrevistas y en el libro *Um sopro de vida* (1999) en términos de su humanidad, lo que le permitiría comprender a Clarice de una manera particular y más cercana, casi cómplice. Esta humanidad se materializa cuando asume la narración en *Quase de verdade*, posicionando a Clarice como su intérprete. La relación con el animal es simbiótica, recuperando una experiencia más instintiva del autor y permitiendo el disfrute de las emociones presentes en el animal, en un proceso de complementariedad. Como vértices del mismo yo, se discute en qué medida Ulisses también funciona como intérprete de Clarice, proponiéndole una experiencia concreta de vida que iría más allá de la construcción de la inteligibilidad racional. La dimensión de la vida sensorial y corpórea se presenta así como superior a la actividad integral, acercando a Clarice al universo íntimo, básico e igualmente salvaje tan bien vivido y encarnado por Ulisses, capitaneado por la posición de un alter ego puro capaz de enseñar ella para vivir con su propia animalidad.

**Palabras clave:** Clarice Lispector; alteridade; corporeidad.

### Introduction

Only those who fear their own animality do not like animals. I love it [...] Maybe it's because I'm a Sagittarius, half animal<sup>3</sup>.

Having a pet is a vital experience. And anyone who hasn't lived with an animal lacks a certain kind of intuition of the living world. Whoever refuses the sight of an animal is afraid of himself. (Lispector, 2012, p. 28).

Clarice Lispector is one of the most acclaimed contemporary authors, both in Brazil and abroad, since her works were initially translated into French in the 1950s (Costa & Freitas, 2017). In 2020, the centenary of her birth was celebrated. In addition to the classic studies in the field of Literature (Inácio, 2019), Clarice has been studied by Philosophy and Psychology (Rosenbaum, 2018), establishing relationships with gender studies (De Mauro, 2018; Rosito, 2018), corporeality (Pontes, 2017; Scorsolini-Comin & Santos, 2010), with psychoanalysis (Silva, Silva, & Soares, 2018), phenomenology (Pojar & Scorsolini-Comin, 2020), mental health (Junqueira & Scorsolini-Comin, 2021) and also with the narrative of the children's universe (Scorsolini-Comin, 2019). In these investigations, the author's biography has been problematized in the way her personal itineraries emerge in her fictional writing (Gutiérrez, 2019). In this writing-biography, her relationship with animals emerges.

Clarice Lispector's relationship with animals is a frequent theme in her biography and also in her prose (Gotlib, 2009; Moser, 2009). Clarice had a childhood filled with domestic animals, such as dogs and cats, but she also became close to animals such as monkeys and chickens. The chickens are highlighted in her work, in texts such as *Uma galinha, O ovo e a galinha* (*The Chicken, The Egg and the Chicken*, our translation) and

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<sup>3</sup> Interview granted to Edilberto Coutinho, 'Uma mulher chamada Clarice Lispector', published in the newspaper *O Globo* on April 29, 1976.

also in the children's book *A vida íntima de Laura* (*Laura's intimate life*, our translation). In these works, Clarice subverts when she considers the human dimension of the chicken, dealing with her intimacies. In *O ovo e a galinha* (*The Egg and the Chicken*, our translation), the existential dimension comes to the fore, being considered one of the author's most complex and hermetic texts according to her own evaluation<sup>4</sup>. Critic Pedro Karp Vasquez, in the presentation of the collection *Crônicas para jovens: de bichos e pessoas* (*Chronicles for young people: of animals and people*, our translation) (Lispector, 2012), states that Clarice re-signifies the figure of the chicken, as it had no prestige, being even despised. In Clarice, the chicken reaches the status of protagonist with the character Laura.

At the time of the release of *A vida íntima de Laura* (1999a) (*Laura's intimate life*, our translation), for example, Clarice left critics curious about who would be the new protagonist Laura (Gotlib, 2009), on the lookout for human figures such as Joana in her celebrated debut book, *Perto do coração selvagem* (1998a) (*Close to the Wild Heart*, our translation). The revelation that it was a chicken accentuated the author's relationship with this universe that is not only animal, but also instinctive, basic, wild, untamed. Laura the chicken had an intimacy, an intimate life, defined by Clarice as "[...] what we shouldn't tell everyone [...] These are things that you don't tell just anyone" (p. 7). This notion of intimacy as something of its own and also wrapped in prohibitions would not be exclusive to Laura, but shared by other essentially human animals that inhabit Clarice's writing.

One of the animals that most enjoy this position next to humans is the dog. In her works, two stand out: Dilermando and Ulisses. The first, bought when the author lived in Naples, Italy, was considered one of her greatest friends in her chronicle 'Bichos' ('Animals', our translation): "No human being has ever given me the feeling of being totally loved as I was loved without restrictions by this dog" (Lispector, 2012, p. 28). Dilermando was also described as "[...] the purest person in Naples" (Moser, 2009, p. 201). This description is followed by the narrative of a close Dilermando who knew the author deeply, even sensing her difficulties. Humanization of the dog is evident in several descriptions of the author, such as the one recovered by Moser (2009, p. 200): "Despite being Italian, he had the face of a Brazilian and the face of someone called Dilermando". For Montero (1999, p. 126), "Having a dog was a revelation for Clarice, feeling the material he was made of, his stupidity full of sweetness, his peculiar way of understanding others".

This dog also becomes a character in *A mulher que matou os peixes* (*The woman who killed the fish*, our translation) (Lispector, 2010), a children's book that starts from the author's confession for having been negligent in caring for her young children's fish. The fish ended up dying from lack of food. Also, the abandonment of the dog Dilermando for a trip to Switzerland, accompanying her diplomat husband, promotes in Clarice a great emotional mobilization, to the point that Moser (2009) associates this event with her failure to help her sick mother – in her biography, it is related that Clarice was conceived based on the popular belief at the time that pregnancy could be the cure for the disease. Thus, it can be argued that the relationships with the animals – and the way she positioned them and positioned herself in front of them – go back, in a way, to interpersonal relationships and to itineraries that would mark her life experience.

In his short story 'Descoberta' ('Discovery', our translation), the figure of the dog emerges as a revelation: "The thought about the dog suddenly enlightened him and suddenly opened a clearing" (Lispector, 2012, p. 55). Thus, the dog figure, in Clarice, can

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<sup>4</sup> Interview granted to Júlio Lerner for TV Cultura, a few months before the author died, in 1977.

be associated with a company that has as an asset the possibility of seeing beyond, without social filters, being able, in fact, to surrender. It is with animals and, to a large extent, with dogs, that Clarice claimed the possibility to undress herself from conventions, giving herself completely. Here appears a first inversion of the author when dealing with the relationship between humans and dogs: humanizing dogs, as popularly occurs, especially in contemporary times, would be an offense to these animals; the most appropriate thing would be to seek, in humans, their animalization, their more organic connection with the wild, pure essence, which can surrender without questioning or reservations. The human being, from this perspective, should take on the challenge of animalization. Clarice's biography reveals in the connection with animals a possibility of being understood.

Although it has great importance in Clarice's biography, Dilermando does not occupy a different position from that of the author's dog, a movement that differs from her relationship with another dog evoked in her narratives, Ulisses. Based on this brief explanation of the author's connection with animals, in this present study our central character is the dog Ulisses. The objective of this theoretical study was to problematize the presence of Ulisses as Clarice Lispector's alter ego. To deal with this figure, we explore its different positions in the author's life and work, first as a domestic dog, a dimension present in Clarice's interviews and testimonies, then as Ulisses-character, narrated in the work *Um sopro de vida* (1999b) (*A breathe of life*, our translation) and, later, as narrator, interpreter of Clarice, in the book *Quase de verdade* (2010) (*Almost true*, our translation), originally published in 1978. For an integrative analysis, we resorted to different concepts explored in psychoanalysis to reach the central objective, such as the remeshing of bonds from psychic transmission (Benghozi, 2010), aggressiveness and destructiveness in Winnicott (1994) and Lacanian topology (Lacan, 2001), in the seam with the author's biography (Gotlib, 2009; Moser, 2009) and with the analysis of her works in which the canine characters emerge, especially Ulisses.

## The dog Ulisses

And the fate of the animals was made and remade there: that of loving without knowing that they loved (Lispector, 1978).

The character Ulisses, from the book *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* (1998b) (*An apprenticeship or the book of delights*, our translation) is a university professor who falls in love with Lóri, a primary school teacher in Rio de Janeiro. By proposing to Lóri an apprenticeship to mature the relationship until the epic of the sexual act, Ulisses becomes a protagonist in a writing that proposes to reveal the permanent transformation - of the characters, the plots, the affections and the very learnings about living. This human Ulisses is in chorus with a homonymous character who would cross not only Clarice Lispector's life, but also her writing aimed at children. Ulisses was much more than an animal: he was a real-life character, a character in Clarice's intimate life. For this reason, it is Ulisses who appears next to the writer in a statue in the Leme neighborhood, south of Rio de Janeiro, inaugurated in 2016. Clarice lived in Leme for 12 years.

Ulisses was Clarice's dog that was bought to keep the author company in the absence of the children and when she was already separated from her husband and back in Brazil. Taken as a dog that could be with Clarice, it receives from the author an interpretation and the possibility of enjoying with her in relation to her everyday world, wrapped not only in concrete actions, such as sharing drinks and even cigarettes (Moser,

2009) – , for example, but from observation about his own internal world. The ‘inner world’ of Ulisses was so called because it was submitted, by Clarice, to the human sieve, something close to what could be called its ‘psychic functioning’:

She calmly let him do whatever he wanted. Ulisses was part of her return to childhood, and motherhood. She told an interviewer: I bought Ulisses when my children grew up and followed their paths. I needed to love a living creature to keep me company. Ulisses is a mixed breed, which guarantees him a longer life and greater intelligence. He is a very special dog. He smokes cigarettes, drinks whiskey and coke. He’s a little neurotic (Moser, 2009, p. 482).

Here, the author identifies with Ulisses, attributing to him human characteristics that were subject to observation and judgment. To describe Ulisses, Clarice uses essentially human beacons, such as behaviors and personality traits, embodying what she herself criticizes: the fact that the humanization of the dog is an offense to the animal. Perhaps because the animalization of the human being was a more complex process to be undertaken.

When narrating the dog as ‘a little neurotic’, it also operates a certain identification with its own psychic functioning, described by Moser (2009) as dependent and depressive. Also, in this biography there is a mention of one of the psychotherapists who attended Clarice throughout her life. One of them – also called Ulisses (Ulysses Girsoler) – administered her the Rorschach test, which pointed out that Clarice was quite egocentric and that she lived a great conflict between impulsiveness and sensitivity: “It will be very difficult for such a temperament to find balance, a domestication conscious of these elementary impulses through intellectual participation” (Moser, 2009, p. 218). This conflict, somehow, could find a certain control – or attempt at domestication – in writing, in a movement of tolerance to aggressiveness and destructiveness (Winnicott, 1994).

Here, Clarice also refers to Ulisses’ mixed breed characteristic as a mark that would allow him to enjoy better health compared to other dogs considered ‘bred’. As having a mixed-breed nature, the dog approaches Clarice’s nature, the fruit of two homelands, Ukraine, from which she left with months of life, and Brazil, a land she took for her own and to which she always returned after hiatuses lived abroad in the company of her husband and children. The author’s nature, half foreign, half Brazilian, would also bring an interesting miscegenation to her writing: for being mixed race, she could also enjoy more intelligence, in the metaphor attributed to the dog. Miscegenation also refers to Dilermando, the Italian dog that had a ‘Brazilian face’. In the case of Clarice, a foreigner who was a naturalized Brazilian and, by extension, a Brazilian who would forever be confused as a foreigner, making the search for a place of belonging throughout her life uncomfortable.

Although there are not enough records about the choice of name for Clarice’s dog, Ulisses refers to the homonymous figure, also known as Odisseu, in Greek, a character in Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey. As the protagonist of Odyssey, he brings in his archetype the figure of a cunning warrior. Thus, Clarice’s dog already brought, in his name, a clear reference to literature and an audacious position in the narrative. It was an imposing name for a crossbred dog, without pedigree, who had been welcomed by Clarice as a companion.

According to Olga Borelli, in an interview with Julio Lerner, Clarice had named the dog Ulisses after a Swiss philosophy student who had fallen in love with her when she lived in Bern, with her husband: “In Brazil she bought a puppy, a long sausage dog, and named it Ulisses, which was the name of the Swiss in love [...]” (Lerner, 2007, p. 47). But it is also legal to associate the choice of this name with that of her former psychotherapist,

Ulysses, the same one who pointed out the author's psychic difficulty in balancing her intense impulsiveness with her sensitivity (Moser, 2009).

The repetition of the name Ulisses at different times (Swiss student, psychotherapist, story character, dog, book narrator) can also be interpreted as a record of psychic transmission (Benghozi, 2010), as an important sign for the author. According to the psychoanalysis of bonds, to elaborate it was necessary to repeat, which also involves the symptom, the interdict and the failure that can be represented in the name. In Lacan (2001), the repetition of this signifier also emerges associated with a trauma, but allowing the subject to appropriate what is unique to them.

In Clarice, it is observed that her personal experiences are, in fact, introduced in the narratives. Here, the maternal trait present in her prose aimed essentially at children is reinforced (Gotlib, 2009), pointing out that the children's writer was basically formed by Clarice-mother (Scorsolini-Comin, 2019). The experience of motherhood, therefore, occupies a prominent place as a power for communication with children. Thus, it also seems to reaffirm a position that naturalizes and sacralizes motherhood as a way of accessing the child's world. It is because she is a mother that Clarice could communicate with children and, by extension, write for children.

However, Clarice's biography reveals flaws experienced in her relationship with her own mother, who died when the writer was still a child. Thus, her experience as a mother is not expressed as the possibility of remeshing the fragmented bonds with her mother (Benghozi, 2010), but asserts possible symptoms of a troubled relationship marked by interdictions - such as her conception related to the possibility of curing the mother, which, in fact, did not occur.

Mothering, here, expands to the figure of Ulisses, who is not only a companion, but also occupies the empty space left by the children who had left home in adulthood. But Ulisses would not occupy a typical position of a son, which would involve dependence and need for constant education and care. Identified as a 'mutt', mongrel, mestizo, Ulisses already brought a story, a story of resistance rich in life and intelligence. Thus, he works close to his primary mission in Clarice's life, as a companion, a character capable of assuaging loneliness. And, similarly, with a particular 'psychic' functioning - in the case of the dog, 'a little neurotic'.

But more than that, as we analyze in the present study, Ulisses occupies a role of alter ego, which reveals not only a deep identification with the author, but the possibility that, from it, Clarice comes into contact with aspects necessary for a more authentic, visceral, wild writing. By teaching the author to 'be', as explored in Ângela's fiction (Lispector, 1999b), Ulisses also enabled Clarice, to a certain extent, to write. A more 'animalized', wild Clarice could write more truthfully. This identification with the dog not only made writing possible, but also the tolerance to her aggressiveness and destructiveness, summarized in the intense impulsivity reported by her psychotherapist.

One of the first images of the dog Ulisses in the press was in an interview given by Clarice to the newspaper *O Pasquim* in June 1974 (Gotlib, 2009). Ulisses was a dog that had already attacked Clarice on two occasions, but who enjoys a status with the author that goes beyond the cliché of 'man's best friend' or 'faithful companion': the dog is described as someone capable of understanding Clarice and this as one who can understand the animal. In this same interview, she highlights: "There is an understanding that is ours but that goes beyond us and that we do not capture. But there is".

This understanding would not only take place on a level that we could describe as intellectual or experiential, but eminently basic, wild, linked to emotions not yet purified. As

an animal, Ulisses could capture Clarice's animality and accept that condition. Clarice, seeking to get in touch with her most primitive aspects, saw in the connection and living with Ulisses an opportunity to experience this condition in her own flesh.

Perhaps for this reason, the two bites she received from the dog were not considered as attempts at aggression towards the author, but the demonstration of a very basic life instinct brought by the dog and that Clarice sought to assimilate not only in her life, but also in her own writing. This most basic, wild, cutting writing would allow access to states that we often block or evade. As Gotlib (2009) highlights, the contact with Ulisses brought to Clarice's life and writing a kind of "[...] wild force" (p. 556).

Thus, it can be said that the presence of Ulisses goes beyond the consideration of a typical domestic dog. The aim here is to explore the extent to which the Ulisses-dog, being essentially an animal, promoted in Clarice a revisitation of her primitive aspects for a more refined experimentation about living. The 'teaching to be', mentioned in *Um sopro de vida* (1999b) (*A breathe of life*, our translation), is an apprenticeship provoked by Ulisses in the writer Ângela, and, by extension, in Clarice herself.

Contact with this dimension is evoked in psychoanalysis when Freud (1989) proposes an explanation of the functioning of our psychic apparatus. These irrational, unrepresentable, wild and unpurified aspects of us would be allocated in a dimension called the id, which would be submitted to the super ego in an attempt to control and give vent to these less developed aspects of our personality. The id would contain our psychic energy (libido), in addition to unconscious drives, instincts and desires, being regulated by the pleasure principle. Although the super-ego is involved in this task of control/regulation/direction, the existence of these basic aspects is of paramount importance for our psychic functioning, according to Freud.

Although they are not similar aspects, but which can be approximated around the argument developed here, the English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott explored the notion of aggressiveness as an adaptive human internal component, being negatively experienced when repressed (Winnicott, 1994). Aggression emerges as an element involving the primitive, destructiveness and the ability to hate, and must be known and tolerated as part of the human condition itself. According to Winnicott, destructiveness is a condition for true love. Tolerance in relation to destructive impulses is an important condition for the integration of the self, which involves the ability to enjoy ideas, even if they are destructive (Dias, 2000).

This consideration seems close to that explained by Clarice when narrating the animality of Ulisses. Thus, Ulisses allowed Clarice to get in touch with this dimension, not repressing it or exercising some rational control over it, but precisely recognizing it as something foundational and that should be tolerated. The experience of writing would be an important direction within this recommendation, which was also inspired by the observations of Ulisses' animality and humanity. Thus, this dog plays a key role in Clarice not by bringing her to a more affective dimension, which could be interpreted as something close to mothering, but a locus for her own destructiveness, so that her hatred – for the world, for people, for her own biography from the initial failure to save her mother, through her own experience as a mother – could, thus, be channeled, embodied, or, in Winnicottian terms, tolerated. Writing also seems to function as an environmental condition capable of, in the author's adult story, welcoming and accepting her aggressiveness and destructiveness.

The fragmentation in sustaining the bonds with the mother and children is also brought to the way she deals with animals, which can be exemplified by the abandonment

of the dog Dilermando, in Naples. The attempt to atone for guilt in relation to the neglect of children appears in *A mulher que matou os peixes* (*The woman who killed the fish*, our translation) (Lispector, 2010), while the guilt in relation to the abandonment of the dog is represented in the short story 'O crime do professor de Matemática' ('The crime of the mathematics professor', our translation), in which a man climbs a hill carrying a dead dog in a bag (Moser, 2009). In the story, the dog is called José: "Every day you were a dog that could be abandoned" (Lispector, 1998c, p. 122).

## The character Ulisses

Today I was interviewed by four eleven-year-old girls from Santo Inácio, with photography, questions and questions and questions... about the Woman who killed the fish. And if it was true that I liked animals. I said: - I'm an animal too!<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the mentions of animals made by Clarice in interviews and in short texts, her children's production not only includes them as characters, but positions them as protagonists. The books that make up Clarice Lispector's children's literature are *O mistério do coelho pensante* (originally published in 1967) (*The mystery of the thinking rabbit*, our translation), *A mulher que matou os peixes* (original 1968) (*The woman who killed the fish*, our translation), *A vida íntima de Laura* (dated 1974) (*Laura's intimate life*, our translation), *Quase de verdade* (1974) (*Almost true*, our translation) published in 1978, after Clarice's death) and *Como nasceram as estrelas* (published in 1987) (*How the stars were born*, our translation), the latter with reinterpretations by Clarice about Brazilian folklore legends.

In all these works, animals emerge in a very humanized way, sometimes behaving like human beings, sometimes responding to the animality that constitutes them, in a movement that has already been extensively explored, for example, in the fable genre. These animals oscillate between positions assumed by adults and positions occupied by domestic animals or, in a certain way, domesticated and docile in Clarice's prose. Among the studies dedicated to understanding the presence of these animals in the author's literature, there is a certain consensus that the exploration of the human character in these animals reveals an approach by the author to a life considered more instinctive and basic, linked to passions and emotions (Dinis, 2003).

In addition to these aspects already extensively explored in the literature produced about the author, it is noteworthy that the recovery of the animals in these narratives seems to function as a locus in which the author also deposits her difficulties of psychically regressing to identify and communicate with children (Winnicott, 1994). This resumes Clarice's own difficulty in being with her own children, even though motherhood is often narrated by her as a mission in her existence (Moser, 2009). Thus, the use of animals, in addition to being a common place in children's literature, enables the embodiment of a nature that is close to both children and Clarice, allowing for exchange, dialogue, porosity.

In *Quase de verdade* (*Almost true*, our translation), Ulisses is raised to the illustrious position of narrator, a narrator *about* Clarice and *for* Clarice. The narrator begins by placing himself, in addition to being a narrator, as a character. This character is so important that opens the book, proud of his own narrative:

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<sup>5</sup> Interview given to MIS-RJ on October 20, 1976 and retrieved in the biography written by Gotlib (2009).



Once upon a time [...] Once upon a time: me! But I bet you don't know who I am. Get ready for a surprise you can't even guess. Do you know who I am? I'm a dog named Ulisses and my owner is Clarice. (Lispector, 2010, p. 51).

As the book has only animal characters, Ulisses reveals himself to be the precursor of the story, the most important animal, the one who holds the power, because narrating is power. Thus, Ulisses positions himself as the owner of the story and who also dictates the course. But this Ulisses, the dog, has an owner in his domestic universe, parallel to that of writing. Thus, to a certain extent, he also positions himself as submissive to the author at home. However, in the story in question, and this is the dimension prioritized in the narrative, Ulisses can enjoy a privileged status, a narrator who depends on Clarice to materialize his writing, given that his grammar is not capable of being understood by everyone, especially to the humans who will read the book. His narrative force, in this way, is only embodied 'with' and 'by' Clarice, making it intelligible:

I keep barking at Clarice and she – who understands the meaning of my barking – writes what I tell her. For example: I took a trip to the backyard of another house and I told Clarice a well-barked story: soon you will hear about it: it is the result of an observation I made about this house (Lispector, 2010, p. 51).

Clarice appears in the work as an interpreter of the dog, occupying a position that submits to the narrative force of the animal. Even though she is his 'owner', as informed by Ulisses himself, is the dog that seems to be the 'owner' of the narrative, inverting the power-knowledge relationship. But the role of interpreter is not shown passively, on the contrary. Occupying the role of interpreter is understood, in the book, as understanding the meaning of barking. Thus, it is not a transcription of what Ulisses her him – or barks at her, but an intelligibility: the understanding of the meaning of barks. Barks emerge as a language, a communication, a sign pregnant with meanings that must find in the interlocutor a possibility of apprehension. Thus, the interpreter Clarice also has her narrative power, even if the story is a vision of Ulisses about the animal world or about the humanized relationships woven by animals in a given society. By understanding the communication of barks, Clarice also reveals herself to be close to this system, psychically regressing, animalizing herself, and being able to find comfort in this position led by Ulisses that, otherwise, would cause estrangement in the interlocutor.

There is, here, a relationship of mutual trust: Clarice accepts the task and the position of interpreter, trusting in the nature or in the quality or in the necessity of the report and, at the same time, Ulisses trusts in the understanding that Clarice can bring to his barks. This relationship of trust can be described as intimate, in a sense close to that brought in *A vida íntima de Laura* (1999a, p. 7) (*Laura's intimate life*, our translation), as "[...] things that are not said to just anyone". By extension of meaning, intimacy would also be, for Ulisses, what one could not bark at just anyone. The meaning of bark not only could not be understood by anyone, but the story also enjoys a certain status of secret with Clarice, of establishing a pact: it is only Clarice who can understand him, precisely because they have an intimate relationship.

The bond established by the author and the dog seems to be a possibility of remeshing (Benghozi, 2010) interpersonal relationships fragmented in the past, both in relation to her experience as a daughter, as a mother and also with the previous dog, Dilermando. Writing, therefore, operates in the sense of enabling the emergence of a safer bond, the construction of a healthier psychic environment for a Clarice marked by ruptures and discontinuities in her biography (Gotlib, 2009; Montero, 1999; Moser, 2009). Writing, symbolically representing tolerance to destructiveness and aggression, emerges as an

indication for emotional maturation also because it is representative of transitional phenomena as an attempt to deal with objects that are in the world (Dias, 2000; Winnicott, 1994).

Clarice emerges as a mediator, recovering the very function of writing as a purifier of feelings. Thus, Ulisses' animality had to be submitted to Clarice's scrutiny, it had to be purified, understood, so that it could become something intelligible and, later, communicated to children. Interpretation, which is one of the functions of the interpreter, goes beyond the possibility of accessing meaning and starts to consider the built and shared intimacy. Intimacy would be a substrate for the interpretation of the dog's barking language.

Clarice, who can understand not only Ulisses' barks as a specific grammar, can, at the same time, recognize herself in her animality. By sharing this animality, she legitimizes herself in the role of interpreter. The interpreter, here, is not limited to an automated function that translates one language into another, but that allows the purification of language, allocating emotions in the writing that is weaved in this intergame: "The dog, like animals, in general, in literature by Clarice, composes a bestiary that translates a wild force" (Gotlib, 2009, p. 556). This 'wild force' is translated in Clarice's literature, but it is also the object to be translated by her in *Quase de verdade* (*Almost true*, our translation).

Another aspect that catches our attention, at the beginning of the book, is the highlight of Ulisses for a 'trip' to a neighboring backyard, so that he would report what he had observed in this incursion. The narrator presents himself as an observer of everyday life, as well as Clarice herself, reinforcing the alter ego thesis. Clarice was also an observer of daily life and customs – but from Rio's middle class. Ulisses was interested in his own backyard, but he was still interested in the microsocial relationships he could observe. Here his backyard also emerges not as a specific reality, but as a mirror of the relationships established in society in terms of the notions of work, property, surplus value and exploitation, which gain expression with urbanized and industrial society.

Seeking to introduce himself to the reader, the narrator makes a digression at the beginning of the book to create an image of this dog that will lead the story:

First of all, I want to introduce myself better. They say I'm very handsome and knowledgeable. Cute, looks like I am. I have guarana brown fur. But above all I have eyes that everyone admires: they are golden. My owner didn't want to cut off my tail because she thinks cutting it would be against nature. They say: 'Ulisses has the look of people'. [...] But I'm only knowledgeable when it's time to bark words (Lispector, 2010, p. 51-52).

When Ulisses says that cutting off the dog's tail would be against the animal nature, we can return to a passage in which the narrator of *O mistério do coelho pensante* (*The mystery of the thinking rabbit*, our translation) deals with what the 'nature' of the rabbit would be. Nature, in Clarice's children's literature, assumes as meaning what is innate, which does not need to be learned, which the person (or the animal) already brings with them, or even as "[...] the way they have to adjust themselves in the life" (Lispector, 2010, p. 71). Not going against the nature of the dog was, therefore, accepting the phylogenetic history of the animal and its 'way of being'. It was about respecting the history of that species. By extension, it was also about accepting Clarice and her ruptures throughout life, her fragmented bonds and the difficulty of placing herself in the world, a movement that, in literature, gains a place of legitimacy and apparent comfort for the restless author.

This respect for the species or nature of the animal seems paradoxical when the rest of the sentence is presented: Ulisses had a human look, so that his nature, although aligned with what is expected of a dog, was also close to what is expected of a human.

This amphibious nature, therefore, would transform this narrator into a figure that not only constantly transits between reality and fantasy ('almost true'), but also oscillates between being an animal and being a person, between the movements of humanization and animalization. Ulisses keeps the animal fur, the animal tail, but he has the human gaze, which leads him to the position of observer. Observing reality in search of intelligibility is an essentially human characteristic. Animals also observe, but they have very specific objectives, such as following prey, on the prowl, for example. Ulisses did not observe with an animal objective, but with a human intention: to observe in order to understand, to observe in order to describe.

Ulisses deconstructs his own nature by stating that he was only known to bark words. The dog, in this way, places himself as a being that narrates by nature and that recognizes himself in this position, attributing value and power:

[...] Other than that, I'm an almost normal dog. Oh, I forgot to say that I'm a magical dog: I guess everything by smell. This is called having a sense of smell. [...] What I'm about to tell you also seems like a human thing, although it takes place in the realm where animals talk. They speak in their own way, of course (Lispector, 2010, p. 52).

In a realm where animals speak, Ulisses is considered normal, as he also speaks, through his barks. The fantasy universe presents itself as a development context and, within it, Ulisses has characteristics like those of other beings, notably animals. As animals speak, in this world, the dog can also speak. This speech, then, becomes part of his essence, or rather, of his nature.

*Quase de verdade* (*Almost true*, our translation) is a story that works, all the time, with the polarities of reality and fantasy. Was it all true? Obviously not. But what would be a lie and what would be true in this narrative? We cannot know. The 'almost' of truth can also approach the 'almost' of a lie, playing with the game of 'inside-and-outside' (Lacan, 2001) also present in the hermetic short story *O ovo e a galinha* (*The egg and the chicken*, our translation). Ulisses plays with these positions all the time, creating a magical narrative, either through the content or through the way of saying (barking) in another way what already exists. His bark, characteristic of his species, was raised to the status of speech. His sense of smell was interpreted as his magic of guessing what was to come or what was presented right before his eyes.

In the book, Ulisses establishes a dialogue with children. All the time, he refers to them to keep them involved in the story. The situation of the impasse experienced by birds, whether or not to swallow the seeds of jabuticaba, is shared with the children-readers: "– Do you swallow or not swallow the seed? You, child, ask grown-ups that" (Lispector, 2010, p. 65). By asking children to question adults about the 'impasse', Ulisses also promotes the interpretation that this problem could not be solved by a child alone, not even by him. It was therefore necessary to consult the adult world. Perhaps, at that moment, Ulisses could also consult Clarice, trying to find an answer. But Clarice's understanding was already in place, it didn't need to be questioned: "Meanwhile, I say: – Whoop, whoop, whoop! And Clarice understands what I mean: – Goodbye, child! To swallow or not to swallow the seed? That is the question" (Lispector, 2010, p. 65).

Clarice's interpretation, at this moment, captures the non-response to the impasse. It was not important to answer the question, but precisely to state it while it is a question that is subjected to many answers and, at the same time, to the non-possibility of answering it. The interpreter, Ulisses' accomplice, only confirms the possibility of continuing to question, which would be a valid exercise for the human condition, because, as humans, we would not have answers to various impasses experienced throughout our

existence. Ulisses agrees with this dimension of the human. Clarice, by reaffirming the pertinence of the question, brings Ulisses closer to the experience of the human condition: even though we cannot answer several existential impasses, the human experience consists of continuing to live and perpetuating these questions, so that they warm us as incomplete beings, in a constant becoming. These aspects will be better addressed in the following category.

### **Ulisses- interpreter of Clarice**

Although in *Quase de verdade* (*Almost true*, our translation), Clarice is presented to the reader as an interpreter of Ulisses, in a position of apparent subalternity, it can be highlighted that Ulisses, throughout his history as a dog tutored by Clarice and also in his mentions in children's books and even in the author's adult fiction, as in *Um sopro de vida* (1999b) (*A breathe of life*, our translation), discusses precisely the position that this dog occupies as Clarice's interpreter. There are at least two possibilities of understanding this thesis that we will share in this study.

The first possibility refers that, in this position of interpreter, Ulisses does not commit himself to making what Clarice dictates to him intelligible, but transcribes to his animal world, as an animal, what Clarice narrates in her stories. It would be, by similarity, to turn what Clarice writes into something that could be 'understood' by the animal. Bringing Clarice's narratives into the grammar of the animal would be a way of establishing a two-way street in the communication of these universes, the human and the animal. Ulisses, then, would also understand Clarice. This understanding would fundamentally take place through the world of the senses, through the look, through the smell, through the wagging tail, through shenanigans such as peeing on the carpet and provoking the author, as narrated in *Quase de verdade* (*Almost true*, our translation). In this metaphor, Ulisses would understand Clarice and, therefore, somehow, Clarice would also understand herself.

In a second interpretative possibility, it is highlighted that Ulisses can be Clarice's interpreter precisely because he recognizes, in the author, his animalistic, basic, equally wild nature, capable of biting even the owner/tutor, as Ulisses had done with Clarice in real life. Ulisses, in his gaze as an observer of everyday life, would ask Clarice her questions: and then, can one swallow the seed or not? In his wild nature, what to do? Looking at Clarice, smelling the owner and observing her behavior, 'her nature', Ulisses would inaugurate an original interpretation of Clarice, detached from her intellect and her nature as a renowned writer. Only the animals could recognize each other by the look, by the smell, by the presence.

In support of this second possibility, Clarice calls herself 'animal' for the children who interview her. In the epigraph that opens this study, with humor, Clarice recognizes herself in the myth of the centaur, half animal, half human. But, in Clarice, these two 'natures' would not be separated, as in the centaur, but precisely mixed, the task of separating them being complex for a more Cartesian analysis. Clarice's 'wild force', recognized – and accepted – by Ulisses, would make room for a new interpretation of the author without refinements (and, possibly, distances) of a literary or psychological analysis, for example. It was a question, as Winnicott (1994) postulated, of recognizing and tolerating this aggressiveness, this destructiveness, this excessive force. Ulisses was, therefore, the interpreter of an essentially animal Clarice and, for that very reason, essentially human.

Although not present in book writing, a sign that can be brought up in the understanding of the relationship between Clarice and Ulisses is the illustration by Flor

Opazo for the 2010 edition of the book *O mistério do coelho pensante e outros contos* (*The mystery of the thinking rabbit and other tales*, our translation), published by Publisher Rocco. This book brings together four books by Clarice: *O mistério do coelho pensante* (*The mystery of the thinking rabbit*, our translation), *A mulher que matou os peixes* (*The woman who killed the fish*, our translation), *A vida íntima de Laura* (*Laura's intimate life*, our translation) and *Quase de verdade* (*Almost true*, our translation). In this book, Ulisses is represented with almond-shaped eyes that resemble Clarice's. Thus, it is visible that Ulisses has (or is represented) with 'the eyes of Clarice' or with 'the look of Clarice'. In her biography there is also space for the narrative from the author's point of view: "People who knew her now and then compared her to an animal, usually a feline: elegant, inscrutable, potentially violent" (Moser, 2009, p. 80). Clarice, by extension, would be 'present' in Ulisses. Clarice and Ulisses, vertices of the same self, human and animal, emotional and rational, domesticated and wild: centaur. This metaphor of 'inside-and-outside', referring to Lacan (2001), would give the author a certain integration in the image of an animal-Clarice.

This interpretation takes us to the Lacanian topology, which attests that, at the level of enunciation, there would be no distinction between the reverse and the right, that is, that the unconscious would reveal itself in the saying (Lacan, 2001). Inside-out, conscious-and-unconscious, domesticated-wild would, by extension, form part of the same structure. The symbiotic relationship Clarice-Ulisses seems to refer to this image, complementing each other in bodies that narrate identifications, approximations and facets of two selves that are produced in partnership, one accompanying the other, one being able to narrate the other precisely because one knows the other, live in their own flesh.

From this image, spaces and gaps associated with a possible fragmentation of Clarice are filled. It is not because she is fragmented that Clarice seeks the narrative 'about' and 'for' the dog, as if she wanted to hide behind her alter ego, but it is precisely because she accepts her dual condition that she could narrate a more integrative experience, possibly opening the field for remeshing previous links considered disruptive (Benghozi, 2010). That said, the consideration of Ulisses as an interpreter of Clarice is reaffirmed, capable of shedding light on a more basic understanding of the author and, possibly, closer to an 'almost true'. Why the enigma, in spite of everything, should be maintained? That is the question.

### **Final considerations 'or' Clarice- interpreter of Ulisses**

Based on what was discussed in this study, the interpretation of the symbiotic relationship between Clarice and Ulisses is supported, as they represent vertices of the same self. Thus, both the consideration that Clarice is an interpreter of Ulisses and that he emerges as an interpreter of the first prove to be valid. Ulisses proposes to Clarice a concrete experience of living that involves contact with basic, pure, wild, irrational feelings, which are embedded in the body and sensations. It is recovered, here, that the experience of living, of the lived-body that occupies a space that overlaps with the attempt at intellectual understanding, the construction of a rational intelligibility. This living experience, superior to cognitive understanding, is not only enlivened by Ulisses, but also becomes the basis for the transmission of one of his learnings, metaphorically taking up the position of the human Ulisses in *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres* (*An apprenticeship or the book of delights*, our translation) that opens the present study.

Also, in the book *Um sopro de vida* (1999b, p. 59) (*A breathe of life*, our translation), a mention of the dog seems important in an attempt to understand the relationship between Clarice and Ulisses: “My dog teaches me how to live. He just ‘is’. ‘Being’ is his activity. And being is my purest intimacy”. Although the book does not refer to the figure of Ulisses, this ‘being’ taken as a neighbor reminds us of the concept of intimacy brought in *A vida íntima de Laura* (*Laura’s intimate life*, our translation), as something that is not told to anyone, that is, that enjoys a secret, forbidden status. The dog’s activity, that of ‘being’, demonstrates proximity to the embodiment of what is most secret to us. Thus, Clarice’s interpreter could be the guardian of what cannot be said to everyone, which takes place in the domestic universe of feelings, which is hidden, not out of fear, but out of respect for the very condition of being and to preserve its intimacy.

Clarice thus allows herself to be interpreted by Ulisses, who receives the task of safeguarding the author’s privacy. It is not, therefore, a dog in the common domestic sense that promotes playfulness or even the material protection of the home. Ulisses is essentially human. Ulisses is essentially a living body, superior to any attempt at intellectual reading. Thus, Clarice is shown to be a figure that is doubly necessary: first, to her life marked by ruptures of which the dog can be depositary and, in fact, sustain this place of helplessness, destructiveness and failure; later, to her own narrative, allowing the author to submerge herself in a place of difficult access as an author, in an itinerary in which the dog can be her conductor.

Accomplice of its subjectivity and of what cannot be revealed, the dog occupies a prominent position not merely as a character that says about the author, but as a living being that contributes to the construction of being-Clarice, a Clarice who wants to be more animalized in an attempt to occupy a place that, paradoxically, can give vent to its eminently wild and uncontrolled essence, but also be a possibility of remeshing connections and smooth out discontinuities along its itinerary as a figure that is weaved beyond books. It is because she does not fear her own animality that Clarice can finally humanize herself in the eyes of her interpreters.

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