

IN THE WATERS OF UNWORLDING: JUMPING WAVES WITH CLARICE LISPECTOR

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There it is, the sea, the most unintelligible of non-human existences. And here is the woman, standing on the beach, the most unintelligible of living beings. As a human being she once posed a question about herself, becoming the most unintelligible of living beings. She and the sea.¹

That is why I write to you. On a waft of thick seaweed and in the tender wellspring of love.²

STARK SEAS OF INVERSION

The writings of Clarice Lispector are replete with water. In her work, readers are met with an otherworldly and ever-bulging liquidity,³ one wherein a literary tributary of seas, oceans, tides, and

¹ Clarice Lispector, "The Waters of the World," in *The Complete Stories*, trans. Katrina Dodson (New Directions, 2015), 405.

² Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, trans. Stefan Tobler (New Directions, 2012), 46.

³ Cf. Rudolf Steiner, who writes of the evanescent liquidity of angelic beings, whose astral parts and pathways find expression through sheets of water: "If you want to look for an Angel, you must keep in mind that his physical part is something like a mirrored reflection of his spiritual principles, which are to be found only in the spiritual world. In flowing and running water, in mists dissolving into water, also in the winds and the lightning flashing through the air, in all these, you have to look for the physical body of Angelic beings. The difficulty for man consists in his fixed idea that a physical body must necessarily have a definite outline. It is difficult for a man to say to himself: I see fog rising, I see a stream of water dissolving into spray, I stand in the blowing wind, I see lightning dart from the clouds, and I know that all these are revelations of Angels; behind this physical

a stark wetness courses its way *with* and *through* her stories. Whether in novels such as *Água Viva* (1973), which in Portuguese means “living water” or “jellyfish,” and *The Besieged City* (1949), where “the radiant moistness was one of the most difficult realities to distinguish in the township,”⁴ or in short stories such as “The Waters of the World” and “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” where her narrators encounter themselves and death at the edge of their own humanity, Lispector posits, in auto-commentarial fashion, a writerly use of water that encircles her and her narrators like a rising tide. The link between commentary and encirclement can also be viewed via a kind of inverted reliction which exposes, analogically, the presence of the margin as the very shore upon which the sea steadily encroaches upon her narrators. As such, they sorrowfully⁵ set sail for their very inexistence by immanently embarking into loving,

body, which is by no means so limited as the human one I have to recognise the spirit. Man has to develop all his principles enclosed within him; because of this he cannot realise that a physical body can be so liquid and evanescent that it does not even have to be enclosed or outlined with precision. You must realise that eighty Angels may be associated with and have the most solid part of their physical body in some one sheet of water. The physical body of an Angel need not be understood as having any boundary; one piece of water may belong to it here, and far away another piece” (Rudolf Steiner, “Lecture VII: The Spiritual Hierarchies and Their Reflection in the Physical World,” *Rudolf Steiner Archive and eLibrary*, June 1, 2024, <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/SpirHier/19090416p01.html>).

⁴ Clarice Lispector, *The Besieged City*, trans. Johnny Lorenz (New Directions, 2019), 8.

⁵ Cf. “The root meaning of the word passion is sorrow. We have all had sorrow of some kind or another, losing somebody, the sorrow of self-pity, the sorrow of the human race, both collective and personal. We know what sorrow is, the death of someone whom you consider you have loved. When we remain with that sorrow totally, without trying to rationalize it, without trying to escape from it in any form through words or through action, when you remain with it completely, without any movement of thought, then you will find, out of that sorrow comes passion. That passion has the quality of love, and love has no sorrow” (Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The Awakening of Intelligence* [Krishnamurti Foundation, 1973], 72-3).

autophagic seas of unintelligibility. Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh writes that

the disaster is not something arriving from beyond but rather exists already ‘on board’ as a vessel charges into certain peril: like the storm-chaser who pursues trouble wherever it arises, she encroaches upon the apocalyptic sea with mad attraction, infiltrating its perceived glamour while yelling ‘the devil’s our pilot’ over and again in deranged singsong excitement.⁶

Looking at the role of the sea found in Lispector’s auto-commentarial works, diving deep below the bubbling surface, what reveals itself is a tidal anti-system of writing that is bathymaniacally obsessed with reaching the limits of the human: “The sun rises and makes her bristle as it dries her, she dives again: she is ever less greedy and ever less sharp. Now she knows what she wants. She wants to stand still inside the sea. So she does. As against the sides of a ship, the water slaps, retreats, slaps. The woman receives no transmissions. She doesn’t need.”⁷ To float like a buoy in the unintelligible (“sometimes I float on a visible shoal that has beneath it dark blue almost black depths”),⁸ in the abyss of worldlessness, both oneself and the world must become unimaginable (“My expectations closed the world to me”).⁹ As such, the bathymaniacs’s unintelligible intensity or sense of depth (both affective and bathymetric) invertedly derives from the emblematic position of floating, being outside the water, as a condition of the human that inheres the certainty of safety from immersion (or drowning) and from the insistent desire to be pulled deeper into the sea.

Following Mohaghegh’s figure of the bathymaniac in “deranged singsong excitement,” this contribution seeks to understand the relation between water and unintelligibility through a pessimal hermeneutics of the sea, wherein one must be submerged fully—“Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold,

⁶ Mohaghegh, *Omnicide II*, 131.

⁷ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 407.

⁸ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 46.

⁹ Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Idra Novey (New Directions, 2012), 9.

I teach you the overman: he is this sea; in him can your great contempt can go under”¹⁰—becoming the sea via a kind of wet-thinking,¹¹ to clean the “polluted stream” of humanity.¹² For, as Astrida Neimanis claims: “We are the watery world—metonymically, temporarily, partially, and particularly.”¹³ As such, we can, observing Nietzsche, become the sea in which the human being is overcome, becoming more fully human, which is to find an inhuman breath-in-drowning that spits us back out of Jonah’s whale¹⁴ as it sinks us deeper and deeper to the ocean floor.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Penguin Books, 1954), 125.

¹¹ Here, we can align ourselves with Elizabeth Purdy, who also engages in an “exercise in ‘water-thinking’ . . . [which] brings the fluid properties of the text itself into the foreground” (Purdy, Elizabeth, “The Weight of Water: Some Implications of Textual Fluidity for the Study of Comparative Literature,” *TRANS-* 27 [2021]: 8–9).

¹² Cf. Meher Baba: “I am the Ocean which has within it both good and bad. The ocean is never polluted if filth is thrown in it, nor does it ever give out fragrance if it contains sandalwood. The ocean is infinite. It always is as it ever was. I contain within myself both your good and bad actions and keep you clean. I am infinitely pure and purify every bit of dirt in my Infinite Ocean. So, dedicating both good and bad to me, everyone should become pure” (“Fiery Free Life,” *Lord Meher*, 3240, <https://www.lordmeher.org>).

¹³ Neimanis continues, “Water irrigates us, sustains us, comprises the bulk of our soupy flesh. Yet it isn’t easy to begin with a ‘we’. Granted, its inclusions are intentionally abundant; counted here are not only humans and other animals, plants, fungi, protoctists, but also geological and meteorological bodies such as oceans, rivers, aquifers, subterranean streams, clouds, storms, swamps, and soils – all dripping or tidal or damp. With this list, the idea of what a body is becomes productively, posthumanly, torqued” (Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* [Bloomsbury Academic, 2017], 27).

¹⁴ Cf. “Time swells around him like an ocean current and he swallows it whole. Standing as an ocean, against and inside the shelled echo chamber of Jonah’s Wail” (Baumgartner, *The -Tempered Mid-riff: A Play in Four Acts* [Schism Neuronics, 49]).

Thus, our aim is to cultivate an understanding of the sea as described in Lispector's watery writings as a form of pessimo-oceanic enchanting, which is to say, readers are called (through a poetics of liquidity),¹⁵ by textual siren songs, into the buoyant non-place of impossibility where one must meet, ultimately and courageously, their very own demise: "The slow journey," Lispector writes, "fortifies her secret courage. And suddenly she lets herself be covered by the first wave."¹⁶ As Margery Kempe notes:

For now you are on what I might call a sort of spiritual ocean, in voyage from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit. Great storms and temptations shall doubtlessly arise during that journey, leaving you bewildered and wondering which way to turn for help . . . [Y]ou will think that you are healed and that all is well. But when you least expect, it will be gone again, and again you will feel abandoned in your ship, blown hither and yon, you know not where.¹⁷

During the voyage from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit, a voyage displayed and enacted, no less, by the reading non-experience engendered by Lispector's prose, this "spiritual ocean"¹⁸ will draw one out to the very edges of their non-being, spreading

¹⁵ Cf. "The salt, iodine, everything liquid, blind her for a few instants, streaming all over—surprised standing up, fertilized" (Lispector, "The Waters of the World," 406.)

¹⁶ Lispector, "The Waters of the World," 406.

¹⁷ Margery Kempe, "The Book of Privy Counseling," in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford University Press, 2015), 184.

¹⁸ On this impossible journey across the spiritual ocean, the words of Thich Nhat Hanh are instructive when he writes that "one day you will realize that you are free from birth and death, free from the many dangers that have been assaulting you. When you see that, you will have no trouble building a boat that can carry you across the waves of birth and death. Smiling, you will understand that you do not have to abandon this world in order to be free" (Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* [Penguin, 1995], 138).

their being across the waters,¹⁹ where the corporeality of celestial navigation meets the infinite horizon²⁰ of thought: “She looks at the sea, that’s what she can do. It is only cut off for her by the line of the horizon, that is, by her human incapacity to see the Earth’s curvature.”²¹ Not only is the sorrowful direction placed more on the psychic pull of the deep rather than the position on the surface, it is the impossibility of becoming the surface itself that comes to exemplify the tension among floating, breathing, and being submerged. The impossibility of becoming the surface itself generates ocean madness, wavelike tremulations enticing readers to take to the sea, where one can no longer read, think, or be at all.²²

DERANGED WAVES OF INHUMANITY

In this way, writing *with* and *through* the sea becomes a heuristic technique used to walk in what we will call the *waters of unworlding*. Unworlding is a process in which, following Lucienne Jeannette Spencer, “a distance emerges between the subject and the world as the patterns of embodiment that serve as a backdrop to the person’s very existence collapse.”²³ By entering the waters of unworlding, one

¹⁹ Cf. Genesis 1:2 (Revised Standard Version): “[A]nd the Spirit of God was moving over the face of waters.”

²⁰ Cf. Nietzsche, who writes: “In the horizon of the infinite. – We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us – more so, we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more freedom there and there is no more ‘land!’” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff [Cambridge University Press, 2001], 119.)

²¹ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 405.

²² Cf. “How sad the flesh! and there’s no more to read” (Stéphane Mallarmé, “Sea Breeze,” *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws [New Directions, 1982], 17).

²³ Lucienne Jeannette Spencer, “Hermeneutical Injustice and Unworlding in Psychopathology,” *Philosophical Psychology* 36.7 (2023), 1304.

is able to experimentally drown oneself in their own inexistence, to be soaked, speculatively, in the inhumanity of the sea via the unintelligibility²⁴ of living things. But how might one take on such a task?

It is due to a veritable non-speech or no-speaking,²⁵ then, that is, through the practice of a writing that unfathomably voices²⁶ that

²⁴ Thomas Metzinger notes the triumvirate relation among the ocean, unintelligibility, and absurdity, which serves as a potential catalyst to thinking a “world without itself.” He writes: “When you think about it, there is something deeply unintelligible, or perhaps even absurd . . . in the idea that given the vastness of the physical universe—“in those oceans of space and time”—each of us should really be just one single embodied ego, one minuscule person among countless equally contingent others. The absurdity results from what I call the “inbuilt metaphysical megalomania of the self”: How can I—indeed, how can any real ego—be something so unimportant, so highly contingent? Aren’t I in some sense necessarily the person I am? Of course, the metaphysical megalomania of the self (which cannot really conceive of its own nonexistence) mirrors some classic philosophical arguments for the existence of God: If there is a supreme being, it exists because its necessary existence is self-evidently contained in the very idea of a supremely perfect being. The ego is a supreme being that cannot imagine the world without itself in it. But could all of us actually take on an impersonal standpoint, the zero-person perspective, while detaching ourselves from this specific, locally embodied ego?” (*The Elephant and the Blind: The Experience of Pure Consciousness: Philosophy, Science, and 500+ Experiential Reports* [The MIT Press, 2024], 390).

²⁵ Spencer argues that “the relationship between speech expression and unworlding in psychiatric illness is more complex than previously assumed” (“Hermeneutical Injustice and Unworlding in Psychopathology,” 1300).

²⁶ In *Language and Death*, Giorgio Agamben posits that “the Voice . . . says nothing; it does not mean or want to say any significant proposition. Rather, it indicates and means the pure taking place of language, and it is, as such, a purely logical dimension. But what is at stake in this will, such that it is able to disclose the man the marvel of being and the terror of nothingness? The Voice . . . wills that language exist, it wills the originary event that contains the possibility of every event” (*Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*,

which cannot be spoken (“The water, at sea, when one is within, prevents talking.”),²⁷ that the bathymaniacal and the negative process of unworlding are undeniably linked. Spencer, for instance, argues that “‘unworlding’ not only causes a breakdown in speech expression but a breakdown in speech expression can perpetuate, and even exacerbate, the experience of ‘unworlding’ characteristic of psychiatric illness.”²⁸ This uncomprehensible no-speaking is the negative index of a writing which voices that which cannot be spoken, that is, through an undinic (from Latin *unda* “a wave, billow,” from PIE root *wed- “water; wet”) non-language that can *only* be written: “This text that I give to you is not to be seen close up: it gains its secret previously invisible roundness when seen from a high-flying plane. Then you can divine the play of islands and see the channels and seas. Understand me: I write to you an onomatopoeia, convulsion of language. I’m not transmitting to you a story but just words that live from sound.”²⁹ Circumscribing the bathymetrical terrain of a deadening voyage, Lispector’s prose opens readers to an unhuman, oceanic space³⁰ where unintelligibility curates a “forgetting which weighs,” following Samuel Beckett, “gently upon worlds unnamed / [w]here the head we shush it the head is mute / and one knows no but one knows

trans. Karen E. Pinkus and Michael Hardt [University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 86–7).

²⁷ Tony Duvert, *Atlantic Island*, trans. Purdy Lord Kreiden and Michael Thomas Taren (Semiotext(e), 2017).

²⁸ Spencer, “Hermeneutical Injustice and Unworlding in Psychopathology,” 1300–01.

²⁹ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 20.

³⁰ Cf. “In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1988) write, ‘The sea is a smooth space par excellence,’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) while Michel Foucault (1986), in *Of Other Spaces*, writes, ‘The ship is the heterotopia par excellence’ (Foucault, 1986: 22–27). In both cases, the allusions to the ocean as a space of alternate ordering are metaphorical, but, like all metaphors, they gain some of their power because they resonate with what is known about the material conditions of the entity being referenced” (“Oceans of Conflict and Imagination,” *Geography*, June 14, 2024, <https://geography.name/oceans-of-conflict-and-imagination/>).

nothing / the song of dead mouths dies / on the shore it has made its voyage / there is nothing to mourn.”³¹

In “God Stirs the Waters,” a chapter in Benjamin Moser’s insightful biography of Lispector entitled *Why This World* (2009), Moser writes that “when Clarice Lispector began to enunciate her own speculations about the divine, she would echo writings of earlier generations who sought the eternal amid crisis and exile.”³² After the publication of her first novel, *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), which was touted as perhaps the greatest novel ever written in Portuguese, Lispector quickly became an esteemed and sought-after literary figure who was noted for her bewildering but poignant prose. It was during this time that she was given a nickname: “Hurricane Clarice.”³³ The motif of the hurricane, which is known for its fierce, destructive nature, has long been deeply implicated in the paroxysmal dynamics of sea change and exemplifies the relation between turbulence (from Latin *turbulentus* “full of commotion, restless, disturbed, boisterous, stormy,” figuratively “troubled, confused,” from *turba* “turmoil, crowd”)³⁴ and unintelligibility.³⁵ Such a nickname would continue, divinely, to disturb the passionate waters³⁶ of Clarice’s inner and outer worlds, each of which could be said, literally and metaphorically, to enrapture audiences both

³¹ Samuel Beckett, “bon bon il est un pays,” trans Philip Nikolayev, *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/50726/bon-bon-il-est-un-pays>.

³² Benjamin Moser, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 108.

³³ Moser, *Why This World*, 125.

³⁴ “Turbulent,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/turbulent>.

³⁵ C.f. Seneca on “turba” and the inhuman: “[Y]ou ask me what, above all else, you ought to avoid? the crowd (turban)” and further “I come home greedier, more ambitious, more degenerate. And worse still: I come home crueler and less human, because I was among humans” (“EP. 7.1, 3,” *L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, Vol. 1, ed. L.D. Reynolds (Oxford University Press, 1965), 11–2).

³⁶ Cf. “The Waters and the deified female principle in terms of a Goddess or Mother seem to be closely linked to each other in traditional symbolism” (Julius Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* [Inner Traditions, 1983], 103).

human (readers) and unhuman (water spirits). As a woman writer who conjured up worlds divine, Lispector increasingly took on a more hermetic approach to public life. In her voluminous inner life, however, which encompassed both her writing and mystical lives, evidenced in her fluidic auto-commentarial prose,³⁷ she was becoming, resolutely, a kind of antinomian queen—that is, a water witch (or left-hand pathed undine figure) whose literary import was of no real consequence except as that which, as a weight on her shoulders, anchored her unhuman impulses to the human world. Ultimately, Lispector's use of auto-commentary characteristically includes writing that addresses itself, quotes itself back to itself, and stages itself as commentary on its own text.³⁸ In this way, her use of auto-commentary, which bewilders the distinction between background and foreground, text and margin, employs new, unexpected textual fecundities to rethink key maritime categories and formerly unexplored fluidic themes.

Inside this intervallic mode of writerly passion, one with which the liquidity of the auto-commentarial overflows through the fluidity

³⁷ Cf. Clarice Lispector: "I am at this instant in a white void awaiting the next instant. Measuring time is just a working hypothesis. But whatever exists is perishable and this forces us to measure immutable and permanent time. It never began and never will end. Never. . . . Before writing to you I perfume myself all over. I know you all over because I have lived you all over. In me life is profound. The early hours find me pale from having lived the night of deep dreams" (Lispector, *Água Viva*, 46).

³⁸ In her writing, Lispector offers a panorama of auto-commentarial passages that attempt to remark on previous ones, question themselves, acknowledge epistemic curvatures, or tease out gaps in thought only to double down on their invariable fusion, to show how the text clamors for silence as it announces itself, pries open and yet closes off access to itself, etc. For example, after the passage cited above about how her "text gains its secret previously invisible roundness," which itself can be related to the earlier image of her "human incapacity to see the Earth's curvature," Lispector writes: "I speak to you thus: 'Lustful trunk.' And I bathe within it" (*Água Viva*, 20). As such, the margin of her writing, housing an impressive semantic mischievousness that characterizes the passage, becomes both the space of her bathing in the text and the center on which her writing comments.

of life, lurks the bubbling non-breathing of an ever-present Outside. In this way, Lispector, in what we might call an undinal³⁹ act of oceanic unknowing, undoes the living waters of self and world, drawing her readers deeper and deeper into the bathymaniacal waters of unworlding: “And knowing-everything-without-knowing is a perpetual forgetting that comes and goes like the waves of the sea that advance and recede on the sands of the beach.”⁴⁰ Additionally, in this act of self- and world-forgetting, readers must suit up, in full diving regalia, as they are thrown into the ocean to fulfill the interdimensional soak-through of the dive/divine: “She dives again and drinks more water, no longer greedy for she doesn’t need more. She is the lover who knows she’ll have everything all over again.”⁴¹ As such, readers, as divine divers, must un-learn, using their speculative swimfins, to dive deep into the overflowing waters—a diving suicide mission, to be sure, but one which speculatively opens to the divining nature of “the finite living being,” following Gabriel Catren, who is “submerged in the pleromatic infinitude with its transcendental diving suit on, [and who] feels ‘external’ pressure in

³⁹ Cf. “And I die, loving undyingly with the undine of Love” (Brad Baumgartner, *Celeste: Our Lady of Flowering Marvel* [Spuyten Duyvil, 2020], 68).

⁴⁰ Clarice Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, trans. Jonny Lorenz (New York: New Directions, 2012), 59.

⁴¹ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 407; on the notion of having this rapturous experience of the sea all over again, Luce Irigaray is illuminative, writing, “yet is there any greater rapture than the sea? for he who climbs high to set his senses areel as if from good wine must still climb down again at last. And his rapture lasts only so long. And all kinds of depressions lie in wait, and the spell is often broken. But endless rapture awaits whoever trusts the sea. For as she rises and falls, so one’s rapture swells and sinks. Whether the sea is rising or falling, nothing changes in the enchantment of living—moving about endlessly. And does it matter if the sea is pouring over the beaches or sinking back into its bed? Doesn’t the one will the other, and the other the one? And isn’t it the passage from one to the other that makes for eternal good fortune?” (*Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill [Columbia University Press], 13).

multiple dimensions.”⁴² Diving into “pleromatic infinitude,” readers simultaneously detach from—via Lispector’s auto-commentarial prose—any worldly attachments that have hooked⁴³ them while in the net of Maya: “Writing—I tear things out of me in pieces the way a harpoon hooks into a whale and rips its flesh . . . ”⁴⁴

By piecing together this maritime non-atlas that helps readers to voyage, courageously, *with* and *through* the unintelligible tides lurking within the text, we turn to (and into) the boundaryless fluidity⁴⁵ of liquid brimming to the surface in Lispector’s work so that we, too, may soak ourselves, bathmaniacally, in the sweet wetness of negative affect, “turn[ing] sorrow,” following Mohaghegh, “into uncontainable desire: to charge beyond the inviting surf of breakwaters and reenter the uninviting, certain that the sea depths contain some fallen zone of perfection.”⁴⁶ Invariably, to enter such a fallen zone of perfection, one must meet themselves at the frothing brink of unknowable, spiraling waters. Lispector writes: “The salty sea is not alone because it’s salty and vast, and this is an achievement. Right then she knows herself even less than she knows the sea. Her courage comes from not knowing herself, but going ahead nevertheless. Not knowing yourself is inevitable, and not knowing yourself demands courage.”⁴⁷ Frothing over the brim of an intolerable and incongruous tide, the poetics of unworlding we find in Lispector’s prose permeates all boundaries at once as it invalidates any desire to stop the fluidic overflow—simultaneously negating any

⁴² Gabriel Catren, *Pleromatica, or Elsinore’s Trance*, trans. Thomas Murphy (Urbanomic, 2023), 276.

⁴³ Analogous to this notion is that of removing shenpas in Buddhist thought. In Tibetan, *shenpa* is roughly translated as attachment or “hooked” (Pema Chödrön, “How We Get Hooked and How We Get Unhooked,” *Lion’s Roar: Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time*, 13 January 2023, <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-we-get-hooked-shenpa-and-how-we-get-unhooked/>).

⁴⁴ Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, 99.

⁴⁵ Here, we are with Elizabeth Purdy, who opposes scholars who take a “bordered, anthropocentric approach to water . . . [and] overlook the flexibility and fluidity that characterise water” (“The Weight of Water,” 2).

⁴⁶ Mohaghegh, *Omnicide II*, 134.

⁴⁷ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 406.

casted aspersions from the (reader)ship's Outside, while aspiring profusely from the Inside.

As such, we must foreground the inherent ungroundedness⁴⁸ of the ocean floor⁴⁹ by noting the underlying prevalence of an alternating dialectic of textual unintelligibility (i.e., concentric whirlpooling) and unintelligible textuality (i.e., eccentric stagnation). To anchor writing to the unfathomable depths is to posit the necessity of developing a theoretical approach to writing about the sea that accounts for, operates from, and reveals an auto-commentarial mode of immersive writing in which Lispector, in an undinal act of oceanic bewitching, lovingly surrenders herself and the sea to a vaporous "cloud of unknowing":⁵⁰ "Their mysteries

⁴⁸ Lispector's watery writings hold a unique relation to the mystical works of Hadewijch of Antwerp and Meister Eckhart, both of whom see divine groundlessness in the sea. Thomas Metzinger notes that "in German, *Grund* (ground) and *Abgrund* (abyss) are closely related words, just as in Hadewijch's Middle Dutch we have *gront* and *afgront* and Meister Eckhart's Middle German speaks of *grunt* and *abgrunde/abgrunt*. Accordingly, in Meister Eckhart, we also find the *abgrunt sīner gotheit* (the "abyss of Godhood"), as well as the *groundeloese gotheit* (the "groundless Godhood"). English translations of *abgrunt* as an "abyss" or a "bottomless pit" make this relation invisible. Interestingly, in Middle Latin, *abyssus* also meant not only an unfathomable depth, but also "space" (the *Weltenraum* in which disembodied souls may live) or simply "ocean." In her poems, Hadewijch says that the groundless ground of the soul is "deeper than the sea" and that one can actually "swim through it" (Metzinger, *The Elephant and the Blind*, 315).

⁴⁹ On the notion of the ocean ground, Julian of Norwich writes, "One time mine understanding was led down into the sea-ground, and there I saw hills and dales green, seeming as it were moss-be-grown, with wrack and gravel. Then I understood thus: that if a man or woman were under the broad water, if he might have sight of God so as God is with a man continually, he should be safe in body and soul, and take no harm; and overpassing, he should have more solace and comfort than all this world can tell" (*Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. Grace Warrack [Methuen and Company, 1901], 22).

⁵⁰ The pneumo-vaporous process noted here resembles, metonymically, the one undergone by the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who writes, "For whi He may wel be loved, but

could only meet if one surrendered to the other: the surrender of two unknowable worlds made with the trust by which two understandings would surrender to each other.”⁵¹ In doing so, Lispector’s wet writing⁵² draws her readers, via a decreative process of bathymaniacal madness, deeper and deeper into in the waters of unworlding.⁵³

LIQUIDOGRAPHIC DISPERSIONS

Insofar as the waters of unworlding intensify the divine stupors of Lispector’s auto-commentary and fluidically disperse them among a readership who experience, *with* and *through* her writing, a similarly stupendous bewilderment, her novels, including works like *Água Viva*, *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), and *A Breath of Life* (1978), also direct their prominence, due to the boundarylessness of fluidic overload, to a kind of underwater breathing practice. In *Água Viva*’s introduction, “Breathing Together,” for example, Benjamin Moser notes that “of all Clarice Lispector’s works, *Água Viva* gives the strongest impression of having been spontaneously committed to paper.”⁵⁴ The multimodal notion of a “living water” (i.e., “Água Viva” in Portuguese) that flows through her work arrives in several unconventional modalities, including the unusual forms her novels take and the piercing yet fluid-like quality that inheres in her prose,

not thought. By love may He be getyn and holden; bot by thought neither . . . and fonde for to peers that derkness aboven thee. And smyte apon that thicke cloude of unknowing with a scharp darte of longing love, and go not thens for thing that befalleth” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher [Medieval Institute Publications, 1997], 36).

⁵¹ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 405.

⁵² Cf. Clarice Lispector: “And what I write is a moist fog. Words are sounds transfused with unequal shadows that intersect, stalactites, lace, transfigured organ music” (Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Benjamin Moser [New Directions, 2011], 8).

⁵³ Cf. Clarice Lispector: “Afterward she walks in the water back to the beach. She not walking on the water—ah she’d never do that since they walked on water millennia ago—but no one can keep her from walking in the water. Sometimes the sea resists her, powerfully dragging her backward, but then then woman’s prow pushes ahead a bit harder and tougher” (“The Waters of the World,” 407).

⁵⁴ Benjamin Moser, “Introduction,” in *Água Viva*, x).

one marbled with the sacred and the profane, facticity and the absolute. Lispector's curious prose dictates the marvelous union she has *with* the divine while writing and the sovereign experience she has *through* the veritable act of writing:⁵⁵ what we can call a *liquidography* (or wet writing).⁵⁶ Eliciting and curating this wetness (from Old English *wætan* "to wet, moisten, water; be or become wet;" see wet [adj.]. From mid-15c. as "to intoxicate [oneself]"),⁵⁷ we are engulfed in the liquidographic experience of boundaryless freedom via the practice of writing.

The idea of liquidography finds its modern manifestation in Lispector, but it holds a role in medieval and early modern mystical texts, finding expression, for example, in the motif of liquefaction and melting. For instance, in his mystical work called *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616), Francis of Sales, the mystic and Catholic bishop who was later canonized in 1665, emphasizes the "sacred outflowing of the soul" of the lover, who "gently glides as a fluid and liquid thing, into the divinity whom she loves."⁵⁸ The metaphor of liquefaction, then, is bolstered by the liquid medium through which the lover experiences God. Francis of Sales continues:

And as we see that the clouds, thickened by the south wind, melting and turning to rain, cannot contain themselves, but fall and flow downwards, and mix themselves so entirely with the earth which the moisten that they become one thing with it, so the soul which, though loving, remained as yet in herself, goes out by this sacred outflowing and holy liquefaction, and quits herself,

⁵⁵ Cf. "The word is my fourth dimension" (Lispector, *Água Viva*, 4).

⁵⁶ Cf. "In this instant-now I'm enveloped by a wandering diffuse desire for marvelling and millions of reflections of the sun in the water that runs from the faucet onto the lawn of a garden all ripe with perfumes, garden and shadows that I invent right here and now and that are the concrete means of speaking in this my instant of life" (Lispector, *Água Viva* 10–11).

⁵⁷ "Wet," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/wet#etymonline_v_42847

⁵⁸ Saint Francis of Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God* (Cosimo Books, 2007), 266–67.

not only to be united to the well-beloved, but to be entirely mingled with and steeped in him.⁵⁹

In this passage, Francis of Sales emphasizes a holy kind of spiritual liquefaction in which the lover is capable of merging with God, leaving her melted but entirely mingled with the divine.

To decreate oneself and the world in the wildly degenerative yet purely antiseptic waters⁶⁰ of unworlding, that is, to jump the waves *with* which and *through* which Lispector unintelligibly writes, we must first define the buoyant parameters of this writerly vehicle's immanent seaworthiness. By unpacking her work's unintelligible textuality via its textual unintelligibility (i.e., the spiro-illogical, whirlpooling waves⁶¹ of thought that render the unreality of this liquidographic non-reading experience), readers will note, first and foremost, that the waters of unworlding are, put simply, unbearably bewildering. Etymologically speaking, the term bewilderment ("1680s, "confuse as to direction or situation," also, figuratively, "perplex, puzzle, confuse," from be- "thoroughly" + archaic wilder "lead astray, lure into the wilds")⁶² connotes, emblematically, entering the wilderness, just as one might enter the sea: "She goes in. The salt water is cold enough to make her legs shiver in ritual. But an inevitable joy-joy is an inevitability—has already seized."⁶³

⁵⁹ Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, 267.

⁶⁰ Cf. "Giordano Bruno said, 'There are two kinds of waters; the lower waters below the firmament which blind men, and the upper waters above the firmament which enlighten'" (Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, 105).

⁶¹ Cf. Paramahansa Yogananda, who writes that "The ocean of Spirit has become the little bubble of my soul. The bubble of my life cannot die, whether floating in birth, or disappearing in death, in the ocean of cosmic consciousness, for I am indestructible consciousness, protected in the bosom of Spirit's immortality. I am no longer the wave of consciousness thinking itself separated from the sea of cosmic consciousness. I am the ocean of Spirit that has become the wave of human life" ("Expansion of Consciousness," in *Metaphysical Meditations: 1952 Edition* [Crystal Clarity, 2023]).

⁶² "Bewilder," Online Etymology Dictionary, (July 2, 2024), https://www.etymonline.com/word/bewilder#etymonline_v_11100

⁶³ Lispector, "The Waters of the World," 406.

Thus, mooring the relation between the sea and bewilderment, Lispector's liquidographic texts permit readers to "raise anchor for exotic wilderness"⁶⁴ vis-à-vis the stark seas of incomprehensibility.

Conceptually speaking, the decreative writing practice of unworlding "takes seriously the 'un' that serves as what Fred Botting terms a 'complex process of negation beyond the reaches of opposition, inversion, and antithesis'. Opposition, inversion, and antithesis are all instances of subversion or reversal, whereas the prefix 'un' does away whatever it attaches itself to"⁶⁵—underscoring the indexical power and prowess of the negative in critically reformulating our relation to the sea. Taken to its illogical endpoint, the negative process of unworlding primacies the inversion of fluidic abundance in favor of a kind of privative sensuality of the haptic void, one which delimits the waters of the world and negatively indexes the waters of un-worlding as the improbable fluidic vessel within which one encounters the *without*, that is, an impossible crucible. Lispector writes: "Hear me, hear my silence. What I say is never what I say but instead something else. When I say 'abundant waters' I'm speaking of the force of the body in the waters of the world. It captures that other thing that I'm really saying because I myself cannot. Read the energy that is in my silence. Ah I fear God and his silence."⁶⁶ Hearing nothing but the non-reverberant echoes of an absent God, Lispector's call to read the energy that is *her* silence is at once a (siren) call and an illustrative imperative.

Paradoxically put, to hear one's silence ("That body will enter the limitless cold that roars without rage in the silence of six o'clock.")⁶⁷ is to be unknowingly immersed ("The woman doesn't

⁶⁴ Cf. Stéphane Mallarmé: "Escape, far off! I feel that somewhere birds / Are drunk to be amid strange spray and skies! / Nothing, not those old gardens eyes reflect / Can now restrain this heart steeped in the sea / . . . I shall depart! Steamer with swaying masts, / Raise anchor for exotic wilderness!" ("Sea Breeze," *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws [New Directions, 1982], 17).

⁶⁵ Steen Ledet Christiansen, "Unworlding in Nameless: The Negation of World-Building," *Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media* 2.1 (2023): 10.

⁶⁶ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 23.

⁶⁷ Lispector, "The Waters of the World," 406.

know it: but she's fulfilling a courage.")⁶⁸ in the unlimiting waves of a "concentration *without effort*," wherein

[o]ne may say that the entire being becomes like the surface of calm water, reflecting the immense presence of the starry sky and its indescribable harmony. And the waters are deep, they are so deep! And the silence grows, ever increasing . . . what silence! Its growth takes place through regular waves which pass, one after the other, through your being; one wave of silence followed by another wave of more profound silence, then again a wave of still more profound silence . . . Have you ever drunk silence? If in the affirmative, you know what concentration without effort is.⁶⁹

Immersion in this state of being, which is really a hyper-realized state of non-being, that is, to deafen⁷⁰ the ears of being, hearing nothing while diving, deeper and deeper, into the pessimal waters of unworlding, is to atone for one's previous lack of liquidity. In other words, to harken the non-sonorous echoes of the divine, decreating the conditions of impossibility (via the negative process of unworlding), imbues oneself, enchantingly and simultaneously, as the chief antagonist in their own fluidic non-narrative of deactualization. Elizabeth Purdy writes that there are three properties of water to take note of

when considering narrative itself as a fluid medium. Firstly, there is the perpetual motion of water, since even apparently still water is always shifting at the level of its particles. Secondly, there is the shapelessness of water and its propensity to fill any vessel, delving into its cracks and

⁶⁸ Lisspector, "The Waters of the World," 406.

⁶⁹ *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*, trans. Robert Powell (Penguin, 1985), 10.

⁷⁰ Cf. Clark Ashton Smith: "Far up, the sea-gales blare their bitter screech: / But here the buried waters take no heed— / Deaf, and with welded lips pressed down by weight / Of the upper ocean." ("Atlantis," in *The Last Oblivion: Best Fantastic Poems of Clark Ashton Smith*, ed. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Hippocampus Press, 2002).

imperfections. Finally, there is the connective potential of water, as it reaches beyond borders, drawing places together.⁷¹

In this way, Lispector's very own writerly, albeit sirenic, charm is cast as the fluidlike potentiality of unbecoming: "And I'm nothing more than potential—I feel a fresh spring within me but cannot locate its source."⁷²

Driven by a negative propulsion to decreate oneself and the world, this potential holds a kind of enchanting charm, a bathymaniacal magnetism originating from the ocean floor, which, like a funeral dirge emanating from the beyond, calls one out of oneself. As Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh writes, "the Bathymaniac is . . . motivated by the rich melancholic sadness of a forlorn place ('the lost dimension') and therefore listens for all traces or signals its potential retrieval somewhere across the ocean floor."⁷³ Mohaghegh continues, writing,

This vivification process, however, is a source of both terror and fascination, in that it requires submergence in a fatal exercise of freedom (like stepping off a building's edge): more acutely it perhaps approximates the feeling of those great sandbars or straits that allow one to walk kilometers in electric blue, warm shallow pools until suddenly coming across a sallow lone and bone-chilling drop in temperature (reflecting one's having fallen off a cliff under the ocean's surface).⁷⁴

Such bathymaniacal potential is evidenced by the depersonalizing potency of an inverted buoyancy—that of falling-qua-floating (off a deep-sea cliff). If the textual incomprehensibility of such an act can be known at all, it comes by way of the fluidic interconnectivity of an incomprehensible oceanic text, an abyssic psycho-spiritual parallelism being un-written in real time. From the depths of the

⁷¹ Purdy, "The Weight of Water," 3.

⁷² "Lispector and Montero, letter to Lúcio Cardoa, July 13, 1941," *Correspondências*, 15, (quoted in Benjamin Moser, *Why This World*, 107).

⁷³ Mohaghegh, *Omnicide II*, 133.

⁷⁴ Mohaghegh, *Omnicide II*, 133.

ocean to above the surface of the water, one's self-irretrievability serves as the ungrounded ocean floor, wherein the double non-experience of groundlessness vis-à-vis oceanic non-duality unfolds in the decreative processes of unworlding. On the notions of groundlessness and non-dual being, Thomas Metzinger notes the friar Johannes Tauler, who

wrote about the 'hidden abyss' (*verborgen appetgrunde*), in which the divine abyss and the abyss of the human soul turn toward and call to each other. This hidden abyss is the purest part, the innermost and most hidden ground of the soul, and through the practice of concentration and calm collectedness, the human mind has to 'sink out of itself' (*entsunken*) to lose itself in God as a drop of water does in the ocean.⁷⁵

It is by way, then, of a concentration-without-effort, one in which the hidden abysses of both the human and non-human secretly collide, abiding by nothing at all (not even by their very secrecy), that the maddening ocean gives tidal rise to a total loss of self in God. And in this loss of self and world we find a greater secret still—one treading water in divine Love itself.

THE UNDINIC DIVINE

At this juncture, it should be noted that the auto-commentarial prose through which Lispector's charm is entrusted to her readers is the same bewitching siren song that casts a double net over them. In pure entrancing fashion, Lispector simultaneously casts a net into the seas of her readership's collective unconscious while casting a veritable spell on them that is the text itself: "What I'm writing to you is a 'this.' It won't stop: it goes on. Look at me and love me. No: you look at yourself and love yourself. That's right. What I'm writing to you goes on and I am bewitched."⁷⁶ Inherent to the text, then, is a kind of oceanic book of spells, a benevolent witchery that emanates from within her prose—one that marks us but cannot be understood or even described. Lispector writes: "They who fear us and our alchemy stripped witches and sorcerers in search of the hidden mark that was almost always found though it could only be

⁷⁵ Metzinger, *The Elephant and the Blind*, 322.

⁷⁶ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 88.

known on sight for that mark was indescribable and unpronounceable even in the darkness . . . even in the white mass blood is used and there it is drunk.”⁷⁷ This apophatic mode of witchery, one which fascinates, through a dazzling yet bewildering style of elocution, is the very negative mode with which we are lured to our readerly peril.

Let us take, for instance, “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” a short story that survives by its very lack of “storyness,” but which moves forward, luring us towards an encounter with death, via a staccato-like series of narrative disclosures followed by probing metaphysical questions: “I don’t have a story. Does the dead man? He does: he went to swim in the sea at Urca, the fool, and died, who gave the order? I swim in the sea with caution, I’m not an idiot, and I only go to Urca to try on dresses. And three blouses. S. came along. She’s meticulous when it comes to fittings. What about the dead man? meticulously dead?”⁷⁸ Swimming in her own exactitude, breathing within the breaststroke between the watery effusion of immortality and the uneffusive mortality of drowning in water, Lisperator’s narrator, much like a bewitching undine queen or Ur-woman, proves herself “master of what magicians call the magnetic fluid: the feminine counterpart to the electric, masculine energy in the universe.”⁷⁹ In her fluidic⁸⁰ meditation on the sea, she comments upon the inherent convergence of the masculine and feminine (or death and life drives). This conjunction of the death and life drives also suggests a marginal nexus within the formulation of the bathymaniactal regarding sorrow/passion, explicitly that life is no less dreadful than death, and that what fluidity ensures is an overflowing of being that spills over into non-being, and vice versa. Ultimately, the figure of the undine un-does the ontological heresies of being,⁸¹ tempting, alluringly, readers further and further into the

⁷⁷ Lisperator, *Água Viva*, 19.

⁷⁸ Lisperator, “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” in *The Complete Stories*, trans. Katrina Dodson (New Directions, 2015), 491.

⁷⁹ William Mistele, *Undines: Lessons from the Realm of the Water Spirits* (North Atlantic Books, 2010), 5.

⁸⁰ Cf. Purdy, who writes that “textual fluidity . . . encourage[es] us to read beyond the bounds of the text, just as water flows beyond established borders” (“The Weight of Water,” 3).

⁸¹ Cf. “And the blood of time soaks into my bones and my sagging skin tingles, dangling over the roof of the ocean. / And I see you

deepening waters of Love—not merely the love between two people but the divine Love that permeates the nightside journey⁸² across the waters of unworlding and perpetuates the turbulent waves of the sea. Lispector writes that “on those nights all of me was slowly blackening from my own plankton . . . and my gradual blackening was keeping track of the passing time.”⁸³ She continues: “love is much more than love: love is something before love: it’s plankton struggling, and the great living neutrality struggling.”⁸⁴ This love before love indicates a primordial wellspring—“That is why I write to you. On a waft of thick seaweed and in the tender wellspring of love”⁸⁵—or primeval source through which the waters of unworlding, the ultimate filtering agent of self and world, have come into existence. Julius Evola writes that

in traditional symbolism, the Waters have represented the undifferentiated substance of all life, that is life in the state prior to any form and therefore free from all the limitations of individual existence. On this basis, in the rites of many traditions ‘immersion in the waters has symbolized regression to the preformal, total regeneration and a new birth, since immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms and to a reintegration into

down there. O, you oracular angel, you sweetness, you undine of the stars of Love. / And I call to you, “Ye are thine own undine?” / And you wink with a sea of striping water and light streams out of your eyes. And your fingers carve into the clouds: “I Am the Undying Undine of God” (Brad Baumgartner, *Celeste: Our Lady of Flowering Marvel*, 67-68).

⁸² Cf. “More than all else do I cherish at heart that love which makes me to live a limitless life in this world. / It is like the lotus, which lives in the water and blooms in the water: yet the water cannot touch its petals, they open beyond its reach. / It is like a wife, who enters the fire at the bidding of love. She burns and lets others grieve, yet never dishonours love. / This ocean of the world is hard to cross: its waters are very deep. Kabîr says: “Listen to me, O Sadhu! few there are who have reached its end” (“XXIV,” *The Songs of Kabîr*, trans. Rabindranath Tagore [New York: MacMillan, 1915], 49).

⁸³ Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 91.

⁸⁴ Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 91.

⁸⁵ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 46.

undifferentiated ways of preexistence'. The Waters thus represent the element that 'purifies' and, in religious and exoteric terms, 'washes away sin' and regenerates.⁸⁶

Lispector's prose unveils, as she courageously struggles to move with and through the waters of unworlding, the remnants of a divine Love⁸⁷ that has thrown us into the freezing ocean without so much as a life jacket: "Now the cold becomes frigid. Moving ahead, she splits the sea down the middle. She no longer needs courage, now already ancient in ritual. She lowers her head into the shine of the sea, and then lifts out the hair that emerges streaming over her salty eyes that are stinging."⁸⁸ For, Love is a divine ocean⁸⁹ so vast and purifying that to try to find the words to exemplify it will always fail, leaving our eyes⁹⁰ stinging and our hearts melting at the chance to mesh with it in the thrilling dragnets of divine desire.

In the case of engaging with Love—that "great living neutrality struggling"—which bathymaniacally renders the lover stuporous, perhaps the best one can do is to defer to a writing practice that engages with a gripping language chic enough to harbor the posthuman intensities of all cataclysms involving water—hurricanes, floods, massive releases of glacial meltwater, ocean gyres, pollution—

⁸⁶ Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, 103.

⁸⁷ Cf. "True love is no game of the faint-hearted and the weak; it is born of strength and understanding" (*Sparks from Meher Baba*, [Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook, 2011], 17, <https://avatarmeherbabatrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Sparks-from-Meher-Baba.pdf>)

⁸⁸ Lispector, "The Waters of the World," 406.

⁸⁹ Cf. Bal Natsu, who writes: "Let your love flow on ceaselessly, like a stream down the mountain on its way to the Ocean. Obstructions there will be, of pleasures, of pains. Pass by these as passing phases. There will be flowers and thorns by the bank and in the flow. Do not get attached; do not get affected. Go on and on and let the stream become a river. Doubts may assail you, self-complacency may lure you, but with love in the heart, roll on, flow on to me – the Ocean. Worry not, fear not. I am the Ocean of Love" (Bal Natsu, *Glimpses of the God-Man, Vol 1* [Sufism Reoriented, 1977], 212.)

⁹⁰ Cf. "Unable to swim the ocean of each other's eyes / We must sit side by side, gazing at a blind world / Whose dumb mouth has lost all taste for silence" (Pseudo-Leopardi, *Cantos for the Crestfallen*, trans. A. Necrezuta, F. Pilastru & I. Imaculata [gnOme, 2014], 1).

to ecstatically impel language to do what it literally cannot do:⁹¹ to take shape from the shapeless, to extol existence from inexistence, in the no-speaking,⁹² impersonal floods of the creaturely: “I’m myself. But there’s also the mystery of the impersonal that is the ‘it’: I have the impersonal inside me and isn’t something the personal that sometimes floods me can corrupt or rot by the personal that sometimes floods me: but I dry myself in the sun and am an impersonal of the dry and germinative pit of a fruit.”⁹³

In one way, to write the perfect commentary on Lispector’s works would be to literally superimpose or affix the text onto itself⁹⁴—a textual re-attachment that at once philologically affixes and yet annotatively reinscribes its own hermeneutic magnificence-cum-

⁹¹ Cf. Björk on the nature of language and putting an ocean through a straw: “At least, I’m the sort of person who, when it comes to, say, something like language or just communicating on a daily basis, I feel like I’m trying to put an ocean through a straw” (“Björk: 2001 Full Interview W/Charlie Rose,” YouTube video, 48:38, 2001, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaT-Utq7tkU>)

⁹² Cf. “MAGGIE THE UNDINE: Simply know it not. And swim with me in The Ocean” (Brad Baumgartner, *The -Tempered Mid-riff: A Play in Four Acts*, 76).

⁹³ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 23.

⁹⁴ Perhaps akin or analogical to this textual superimposed method is the topographical one described in “On Exactitude in Science,” wherein Borges writes: “In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography. —Suarez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658” (Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley [Penguin Books], 325).

magnetism: “What I’m writing now is meant for no one: it’s directly meant for writing itself, this writing consumes writing.”⁹⁵ An oceanic writing that consumes itself, autophagically, from the Inside (i.e., waves engulfing waves *ad infinitum*), is a beyond-writing superimposed upon itself from without, which is to say that writing the beyond⁹⁶ (as an act of self-devourment)⁹⁷ is the very textuo-hermetic re-attribution of something higher onto a lowering something in which the impersonal singularity of its reattachment doubles (down on) its own auto-commentarial interlocation: “I looked and all I saw was the sea that must have been very salty, blue sea, white houses. What about the dead man?”⁹⁸

‘WHIRLPOOLS OF HILARITY AND HORROR’

Undoubtedly, there is a certain acute fearlessness and an acuminous certitude with which Lispector writes. In her work, Lispector negatively indexes and auto-comments upon the intoxicating sovereignty of flowing water⁹⁹ via the narrative opening-up—that is, a kind of writerly *blood-wetting*¹⁰⁰—of an acephalic voyager who journeys, doubly, to the starkly unknowable and echoing littoral caves¹⁰¹ of an Ur-wetted Inside (spiraling to the

⁹⁵ Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, 71.

⁹⁶ Cf. “God in the Beyond-Beyond state is likened to a soundless, shoreless Ocean” (Francis Brabazon, *Stay with God: A Statement in Illusion on Reality* [New Humanity Press, 1990], 65).

⁹⁷ Cf. “Only the lustful consume and destroy what they want. / Lovers give themselves to be eaten by the beyond / Of being, to burning in the total holocaust of pronouns” (Pseudo-Leopardi, *Cantos for the Crestfallen*, 17).

⁹⁸ Lispector, “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” 491.

⁹⁹ Cf. “My state is that of a garden with running water” (Lispector, *Água Viva*, 11).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. “I invent you, reality. And hear you like remote bells deafly drowned in the water peeling palpitating. Am I in the core of death? And is that why I am alive? The feeling core. And this *it* exhilarates me. I am alive. Like a wound, flower in the flesh, the path of sorrowful blood is opened within me” (Lispector, *Água Viva*, 67).

¹⁰¹ Cf. “And if I often paint caves that is because they are my plunge into the earth, dark but haloed with brightness, and I, blood of nature—extravagant and dangerous caves, talisman of the Earth, where stalactites, fossils and rocks come together . . . These caves

right, concentrically [within oneself]), and into an a-melodious,¹⁰² sirenian whirlpool—"I will avoid sinking into the *whirlpool* of her river of liquid gold glimmering with emeralds"—¹⁰³ of oceanic proportions/propulsions (spiraling to the left, contrapuntally [without oneself]), that is, sucked into the slickened non-opening of an ever-present Outside:¹⁰⁴ a "*whirlpool of hilarity and horror*."¹⁰⁵

Being caught up in the whirlpool of horror is to be hilariously transformed by an undinic beauty so grotesquely unreal that its very

are my hell. Forever dreaming cave with its fogs, memory or longing? eerie, eerie, esoteric, greenish with the slime of time . . . Only by repeating its sweet horror, cavern of terror and wonders, place of afflicted souls, winter and hell, unpredictable substratum of the evil that is inside an earth that is not fertile. I call the cave by its name and it begins to live with its miasma. I then fear myself who knows how to paint the horror, I, creature of echoing caverns that I am, and I suffocate because I am work and also its echo" (Lispector, *Água Viva*, 8-9).

¹⁰² Cf. "I'm being antmelodic. I take pleasure in the difficult harmony of the harsh opposites. Where am I going? and the answer is: I'm going" (Lispector, *Água Viva*, 23).

¹⁰³ Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze notes, "A consciousness of the earth and ocean, such is the deserted island, ready to begin the world anew. But since human beings, even voluntarily, are not identical to the movement that puts them on the island, they are unable to join with the élan that produces the island; they always encounter it from the outside, and their presence in fact spoils its desertedness. The unity of the deserted island and its inhabitant is thus not actual, only imaginary, like the idea of looking behind the curtain when one is not behind it. More importantly, it is doubtful whether the individual imagination, unaided, could raise itself up to such an admirable identity; it would require the collective imagination, what is most profound in it, i.e. rites and mythology" (Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*, trans. Michael Taormina [Semiotext(e)], 11).

¹⁰⁵ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Dice Thrown Never Will Annul Chance," *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Brian Coffey, (New York: New Directions, 1982), 117.

visibility is its maddening call to bathymathical initiation,¹⁰⁶ where what is inhuman grows translucent via the annulment of human sight and what was once seen as human is inhumanly inverted via the transgressive process of negation set forth from the flooding waters of unworlding: “Could I be betraying myself? Could I be altering the course of a river? I must trust that abundant river. Or maybe I’m damming a river? I try to open the flood-gates, I want to watch the water gushing out. I want every sentence of this book to be a climax.”¹⁰⁷ What gushes over is a kind of entelechial meontology, that is to say, an auto-commentary of divine negation concentrically penned while treading stagnant water, watching oneself, secretly, as a non-being on the beach, from above the sea, in which the rapid, imminent push towards unavowed immanence takes fluidic precedence amid an inviolably apophatic or *self-subverting (st)utterance*.¹⁰⁸

I’m not going to speak of the God, He is my secret. The sun is shining today. The beach was full of a nice wind and a freedom. And I was on my own. Without needing anybody. It’s hard because I need to share what I feel with you. The calm sea. But on the lookout and suspicious. As if a calm like that couldn’t last. Something’s always about to happen. The unforeseen, improvised and fatal, fascinates me. I have started to communicate so strongly with you that I stopped being while still existing. You became an I. It’s so hard to speak and say things that can’t be said. It’s so silent. How to translate the silence of the real encounter between the two of us? So hard to explain: I looked straight at you for a few instants. Such moments are my secret. There was what’s called perfect

¹⁰⁶ Cf. “MAGGIE THE UNDINE: I am like a river, but I live in The Ocean.” / “PAUL-JEAN SARTRE: You bared your midriff to me. You bared it to me as the oceanic outline of the river” (Baumgartner, *The –Tempered Mid-riff: A Play in Four Acts*, 78).

¹⁰⁷ Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ This phrase is play on what has been called the “self-subverting utterance,” a term coined by Denys Turner to define “the utterance which first says something and then, in the same image, unsays it” (*The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* [Cambridge University Press, 1998], 21).

communion. I call it an acute state of happiness. I'm terribly lucid and it seems I'm reaching a higher plane of humanity. Or of unhumanity—the *it*.¹⁰⁹

Such secret¹¹⁰ indescribable scribblings—perhaps the whirlpooling resultant of an “irresponsible commentary”¹¹¹—are written from within the pulsating drones of a spiraling un/humanity: sliding down the water slide of a Möbius strip between reality and unreality.¹¹²

What is written in the frothing pools of liquidographic unreality crashes up against the mouth of the Ocean Terminus,¹¹³ wherein we find beatitude¹¹⁴ in the leftover vomit of almost drowning in the

¹⁰⁹ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 47.

¹¹⁰ Cf. “I’m going to tell a secret: my dress is lovely and I don’t want to die. On Friday the dress will be at my house, and on Saturday I’ll wear it. No death, just blue sea” (Lispector, “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” 491).

¹¹¹ Cf. Lispector’s narrator on Angela’s life as a commentary (wherein her writing is fragmented): “She’ll never be a writer. That spares her the suffering of barrenness. She’s very wise to put herself on the margins of life and enjoy the simple irresponsible commentary” (Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, 99).

¹¹² Fred Botting notes that “‘Unrealism’, marked by negativity, interruption and discontinuity, registers tears in the fabric of generic and social realities. Neither a genre in itself nor a genre-specific property, it discloses – amid fictional genres (such as romance, horror or fantasy) considered inimical to protocols of realism and naturalized habits of reality – an insubordinate disposition towards discrete and distinct forms (‘Unrealism: Critical Reflections in Popular Genre,’ *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 51.2 [2018]: 19).

¹¹³ Cf. David Roden who writes in “Letters from the Ocean Terminus,” following J.G. Ballard’s *The Terminal Beach* (1964), that “the end of the end is in view, in a matrix of possibilities we no longer hope to master.” He continues: “You are inside me, turning excess organs into smoke. Everything outlives itself at Ocean Terminus. You sit in a maze of bleeding stone, viscerally robbed” (David Roden, *Xenoerotics*, [Schism Press 2, 2023], 127).

¹¹⁴ Calling to mind the thirteenth-century theologian Duns Scotus, Giorgio Agamben notes “the individuation of a beatitude, the becoming singular of that which is perfect” (*The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt [University of Minnesota Press, 1993], 54).

alternating current of being and non-being. Lispector's "perfect communion" comes by way of what Giorgio Agamben notes as the "unraveling or an indetermination of its limits: a paradoxical *individuation by indetermination*,"¹¹⁵ which, desolately beautiful and purely indeterminate, renders inside-out the seaweed wafer of one's inhuman holy communion via the untranslatable siren song of a wailing, apophatic autophagy (of the oceanic Beyond): "The transcendence inside me is the living and soft 'it' and has the thought that an oyster has. Could the oyster when torn from its root feel anxiety? It is disturbed in its life without eyes. I used to drip lemon juice onto the living oyster and watched in horror and fascination as it contorted all over. And I was eating the living *it*. The living *it* is the God."¹¹⁶

LOVING SHORES OF A LIVING DEATH

In "Dead Man in the Sea at Urca," a story originally published in her collection of short stories entitled *Soulstorm* (1974), Lispector writes of an oceanic transubstantiation of Eros, one that paradoxically transforms her narrator by a literal engulfment of the sea (i.e., the sea inside her—a kind of sea man/seed) via the transmutation of the inward and outward: "With cupped hands she does what she's always done in the sea, and with the pride of people who never explain even to themselves: with cupped hands filled with water, she drinks in great, good gulps." Lispector continues: "And that is what she'd been missing: the sea inside her like the thick liquid of a man. Now she's entirely equal to herself."¹¹⁷ In this example, Lispector's narrator is engaged, metonym(ph)ically, in a sex act wherein the sea (the same sea in which the dead man had been found earlier that day) stands in for a lover's seminal fluid, offering an obscure, if not metaphysical, juxtaposition of how the undying undinic impulse of Eros itself, swelling like a wave in the ocean, finds expression through the corruptible vessel of the human being.

Julius Evola insightfully writes about the "mirage of immortality" that stems from two lovers who, during coitus, perceive themselves as one soul but rather are "grasping at unity."¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁵ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 54.

¹¹⁶ Lispector, *Água Viva*, 24.

¹¹⁷ Lispector, "The Waters of the World," 406-7.

¹¹⁸ Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, 50.

imperfect bond between two lovers can surely be seen as being made perfect during the sexual act; however, there is a bulbous liquidity—the vast seas both within and without the physical body,¹¹⁹ that is, what we might call a *seminal specter*—that haunts the lovers, lowering their transcendental ascension with each entrusted thrust. Evola writes that “the obscure impulsion toward absolute being, while deteriorating and deviating, passes into that which is hidden behind animal copulation and procreation. Its purpose is the search for a substitute for the real need of a metaphysical confirmation of self.”¹²⁰ Eros is then led (like a tributary to a sea) to a maximal point of oceanic pleasure, that of insemination, in which “the wave swells, comes to its peak, reaches the dazzling instant of coitus and of the destruction of the dyad, only to be overturned by the experience. It is drowned and dissolved in what is in fact called ‘pleasure.’ *Liquida voluptas* or liquid pleasure, a phenomenon of dissolution, is the Latin expression.”¹²¹ The antinomian pleasure principle deeply at work in the dissolution of self is oceanically cathected and phenomenologically conjoined to two carnal bodies who drown together in swirling physical union.¹²² Such an impulsive shift in the massive swelling of wavelike pleasures—“Her nourished throat constricts from the salt, her eyes redden from the salt dried by the sun, the gentle waves slap against her and retreat for she is a compact embankment”¹²³—which ultimately recant and annul the unity of two souls via biological and instinctual processes, is indicative not only

¹¹⁹ Lispector writes, “Her body soothes itself with its own slowness compared to the vastness of the sea because it’s her body’s slowness that lets her stay warm and it’s this slowness that makes her a poor and free person, with her portion of a dog’s freedom on the sands” (“The Waters of the World,” 405.)

¹²⁰ Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, 50.

¹²¹ Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, 50.

¹²² Here, the maxim “from womb to tomb” can be altered, following Astrida Niemanis, to “from watery womb to watery world,” demarcating the dissolution of self via an oceanic sex act, hurling the little death of liquid pleasure (or ejaculation of the self) from one’s “insides to out.” She writes that “blood, bile, intracellular fluid; a small ocean swallowed, a wild wetland in our gut; rivulets forsaken making their way from our insides to out, from watery womb to watery world: *we are bodies of water*” (Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, 1).

¹²³ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 407.

of the onerous pounding of the ocean's waves on the now encumbered and inverted skyline or, following Evola, a "mirage of immortality,"¹²⁴ but also of a total liquidation of finitude in the last instance, that is, at the instant of self-dissolution, resulting in an impossible, devolutionary superimposition which floats, invertedly, above its own ascension like a dead albatross.

Furthermore, in "Dead Man in the Sea at Urca," Lispector names the impossible yet perfunctory/perfumatory contradiction among a buoyed triumvirate of self/world, sexual union/metaphysical dissolution, and Eros (life drive)/Thanatos (death drive). Lispector writes:

Dead from being the fool he was. You should only go to Urca to try on cheerful dresses. The woman, that's me, wants only cheerfulness. But I bow before death. Which shall come, shall come, shall come. When? That's the thing, it can come at any moment. But I, who was trying on the dress in the morning heat, asked for a proof of God. And I smelled the most intense thing, an overwhelmingly intense fragrance of roses. So I had fitting proof, the fitting and the proof; of the dress and of God.¹²⁵

Not content to disavow the proof that comes from a proper (from Old French *propre* "own, particular; exact, neat, fitting, appropriate" (11c.) and directly from Latin *proprius* "one's own, particular to itself") fit, the shape of water in this passage seeks to take the form of its vessel, the narrator and her stark longing for God, and spill beyond it. The "fitting proof" of the divine, doubly represented by the fit of her dress, serves as a corollary for fitting the "sea inside her" in the above passages. Additionally, the relation between the saintly and the profane (evidenced by the fragrance of roses)¹²⁶ is

¹²⁴ The "mirage of immortality" noted here, one that might be seen by a veritable seafarer, a lover, or through the oceanic reading experience enacted through Lispector's prose, is more than simply a delusion or hallucination. For, as Thich Nhat Hanh notes, "Enlightenment is when the wave realizes that it is the ocean" (*Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 138).

¹²⁵ Lispector, "Dead Man in the Sea at Urca," 492.

¹²⁶ There is a deep, aromatic history, evidenced in the Odour of Sanctity (notably associated with Jesus, Mary, and Thérèse of

juxtaposed against the brackish scent of the sea (wherein “the dead man in brine”¹²⁷ was found), which awakens, via concentration-without-effort, an Ur-impetus towards primeval modes of unknowing: “The smell is of a heady sea air that awakens her most dormant age-old slumbers. And now she is alert, even without thinking, as a hunter is alert without thinking.”¹²⁸

The dead man in the sea, a man who is at once deceased and whose communal existence has been annulled—has been forgotten¹²⁹—and who is the very speculative brining agent for Lispector’s liquidographic prose, is himself part and parcel of a failed social contract that finds its beginning in the deadened pleasure of an abortive, universal rite of (seminal) passage which obscures the death drive and impels the life of pleasure to an infinite succession of waves which, like Stéphane Mallarmé’s thrown dice, may never reach the shore: “he / his puerile shade / caressed and polished and rendered and washed / supplied by the wave and withdrawn / from the hard bones lost among the timbers / born / of play / the sea via the old one trying or the old one against the sea / a useless chance.”¹³⁰

Lisieux (aka. “The Little Flower”), that runs through the Church. Among other mystics who give off fragrant smells while their body takes on worsening dejected states, “there is also an active association between Osmogenesis and Stigmata,” writes Nuri McBride, “with the floral odour emanated from the wounds. Stigmatic Osmogenesis in every case is reported as the smell of roses, which again is deeply symbolic with the wounds of Christ” (“The Odour of Sanctity: When the Dead Smell Divine,” *The Order of the Good Death*, <https://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/article/the-odour-of-sanctity-when-the-dead-smell-divine/>).

¹²⁷ “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” 491.

¹²⁸ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 406.

¹²⁹ Cf. “But what about the young man? And his story? He might have been a student. I’ll never know. I just stood looking at the sea and the houses. Dona Lourdes unflappable, asking whether to take it in at the waist. I said yes, that waistlines are supposed to look tight. But I was stunned. Stunned in my lovely dress” (Lispector, “Dead Man in the Sea at Urca,” 492).

¹³⁰ Stéphane Mallarmé, “Dice Thrown Never Will Annul Chance,” *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Brian Coffey (New Directions, 1982), 114.

The shoreline itself, then, is the boundary crossed not between life and death but rather the exuberant exaltation of the failure of the narrator's self-dissolution, wherein it is not the world that rightly passes away but the self-incriminating disaster of a perceptual conundrum which fails to give way: "I really don't understand death. A young man dead?"¹³¹ Gilles Deleuze writes that

the Ocean, the Unlimited, first plays the role of an encompassing element, and tends to become a horizon: the earth is thus surrounded, globalized, "grounded" by this element, which holds it in immobile equilibrium and makes Form possible. Then to the extent that the encompassing element itself appears at the center of the earth, it assumes a second role, that of casting into the loathsome deep, the abode of the dead, anything smooth or nonmeasured that may have remained.¹³²

The corpse-swelling tides of death unleashed by "the dead man in brine" at Urca underscore the incredulous nature of identity and denote, corollarily, the incredible impossibility of depersonalization is at once entirely possible via the self-dissolving forces of the waters of unworlding. Lispector's narrator exclaims: "I don't want to die! I screamed mutely inside my dress. The dress is yellow and blue. What about me? dying of heat, not dead from the blue sea."¹³³

Ultimately, Julius Evola maintains that "the contact with the Waters or with the formless can have a dual outcome if we consider correctly the supernatural nucleus of the personality; it may equally loosen or dissolve that nucleus. This was seen to a certain extent by Eliade when he recalled the saying of Heraclitus (fr. 68), 'For souls it is death to become water,' which corresponds to an Orphic fragment, 'For the soul, water is death'.¹³⁴ The self-dissolving process exhibited in Lispector's writing, wherein both self and world are called to walk with her in the waters of unworlding—being steamed by the sun in the evaporative brine of inexistence—is thus

¹³¹ Lispector, "Dead Man in the Sea at Urca," 492.

¹³² Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, "1440: The Smooth and the Striated," *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Continuum), 495.

¹³³ "Dead Man in the Sea at Urca," 491.

¹³⁴ Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, 104.

the inexplicably apophatic mode *with* and *through* which readers might come to remember, during a moment of drowning in their very own anamnesis, that we were once, and still remain, indefatigable castaways after all: “And now she steps onto the sand. She knows she is glistening with water, and salt and sun. Even if she forgets a few minutes from now, she can never lose all this. And she knows in some obscure way that her streaming hair is that of a castaway. Because she knows—she knows she has created a danger. A danger as ancient as the human being.”¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Lispector, “The Waters of the World,” 407.