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Heterotopic Moments of Being in Clarice Lispector's *The Besieged City*

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Summary. The paper examines the novel *A Cidade Sitiada*, 1949 (*The Besieged City*, 2019) by Clarice Lispector, a work often overlooked yet rich in the exploration of urban transformation and subjective experience of city life. Through the character of Lucrécia Neves, Lispector presents a multifaceted view of São Geraldo, a fictional city undergoing significant change, and captures the psychological impact of these shifts on its inhabitants. The analysis focuses on what I term heterotopic moments of being, instances where the protagonist's perception of her environment reveals the city's layered and shifting nature. These moments draw on the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia, combining it with the notion of "moments of being" introduced by Virginia Woolf. By examining the moments, I aim to highlight how Lispector negotiates the boundaries between permanence and transience and fluidity and solidity in urban spaces. Methodologically, the study involves close reading and the concepts of literary urban studies in the examination of the passages from *The Besieged City* that vividly depict the transformations of the city. My study seeks to reveal how Lispector's work contributes to the literary portrayal of urban space as an orienting and disruptive force, shaping characters' perceptions of self, place, and the fluid boundaries between them.

Keywords: moments of being, heterotopia, Clarice Lispector, city, *The Besieged City*

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In her novel, *A Cidade Sitiada*, 1949 (*The Besieged City*, 2019), Clarice Lispector delves into the urban transformation of São Geraldo, a fictional city, which serves as a literal and symbolic space for examining urban transformations. São Geraldo, a fictional township, is also a municipality in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. This conjunction of fictiveness and realness implies transformations in the urban environment and the ways in which they could be depicted and interpreted by the authors, readers and urban dwellers. Lispector creates multiple vantage points for seeing how the township is undergoing transformations that destabilise the boundaries between fiction and reality. São Geraldo turns into a space where a real location is enriched with metaphorical dimensions, generating urban pockets of heterotopic spaces. These spaces, in turn, disrupt the dichotomy between transience and permanence, offering unexpected perspectives on their interplay.

I focus on how Lispector interrogates the boundaries between permanence and transience within the urban landscape. These moments embody Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, where spaces operate outside the traditional binarity of real and imagined, create zones of contradiction and multiplicity. São Geraldo itself being real and fictional alternates between permanent and transient spaces, comprising Lispector's experiences of her time in Bern, Rome and Naples as well as her life in Brazil. The article aims to contribute to the field of literary urban studies through the discussion of Lispector's novel, which offers fresh insights into the relationship between the individual and urban environment and the ways urban life can be observed and recorded. To illustrate the moments of connections between an individual and the urban environment, I use the concept of *heterotopic moments of being* which has emerged from my larger research in literary urban studies.

Heterotopic moments of being

In his article "Heterotopias and the Experience of Porous Urban Space," Stavros Stavrides explores a "heterotopic moment" by

giving an example of solidarity that emerged between residents of a neighbourhood and the families of prisoners held in an Athens prison during the German occupation. Stavrides describes this form of "hidden solidarity" as one punctuated by "heterotopic moments" (Stavrides 2007: 8). This solidarity is manifested through symbolic gestures: for instance, the display of a black cloth outside the prison signified an execution within its walls. Such acts bridged the divide between the prison's interior and the neighbourhood outside, creating a unique shared experience that united disparate spatial realms through a powerful, silent dialogue of symbols and actions.

This phenomenon also exemplifies the alternation between permanence and transience, a defining characteristic of heterotopic spaces, as outlined by Foucault. According to Foucault, heterotopias are intrinsically tied to slices of time. They can either "accumulate time," as seen in institutions like museums and libraries, which preserve artefacts and memories, or exist as temporary ruptures in ordinary time, such as festivals and fairs, which break with the everyday rhythm (Foucault 1985: 22). In this context, the prison neighbourhood became a heterotopic space where temporal permanence was interwoven with transient acts of solidarity, creating a dynamic environment that shifted between resistance and routine, visibility and invisibility.

Italo Calvino captured this phenomenon best in his book *The Invisible Cities* (*Le città invisibili*, 1972) through the example of the city Sophronia. This city consists of two half-cities. "In one there is a great roller coaster with its steep humps, the carousel with its chain spokes, the Ferris wheel…" (Calvino 1974: 63). The other "is of stone, marble and cement" where the Ministry, the school, the factories are. When the time comes to "dismantle it, and take it off," the Ministry, the school and the cemetery are removed, leaving the city with "the shooting-galleries and the carousels" (Calvino 1974: 63). This example shows that permanence and transience are not mutually exclusive but complementing elements of the urban environment. To analyse this aspect, I use the concept of

heterotopic moments of being as a way to record characters' urban experiences. The urban environment is full of what Woolf called in her essay *Sketch of the Past* (1939) "nondescript cotton wool" where everyday events happen without any special notice and quickly become moments of "non-being" (Woolf 2002: 83). Everyday life consists of the moments "not lived consciously"; "however, there are moments which cause a 'sudden violent shock' which are punctuated by an unexpected realisation" (Woolf 2002: 85).

Heterotopic moments of being bring together several established research strands. For example, authors like Edward Soja, have expanded on Foucault's concept to explore layered spatialities in urban life, particularly in his work *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996). Soja's thirdspace includes lived, imagined, and physical spaces, and intersects with heterotopic moments in respect to how people experience layered realities within a single encounter or setting.

By analysing the rhythms that shape urban life, the rituals through which characters engage with city spaces, and the recurring patterns that characterise urban environments, I argue that heterotopic moments of being illuminate the intrinsic tension between permanence and transience within the urban experience. These moments capture the city's cyclical nature, showing how transient encounters and rituals overlay the city's structural permanence, thus creating layers of temporal experience.

In his article "Running Water in Clarice Lispector's The Besieged City", Johnny Lorenz examines the relationship between the protagonist, Lucrécia, and the city of São Geraldo, with a particular focus on water and water infrastructure. He argues that elements such as pipes, embankments, viaducts, and faucets serve as means to conceptualise the city and are integral to the text's exploration of vision and identity. Focusing on the ways in which Lucrécia identifies herself with inanimate objects, the analysis brings about liberating experiences and offers new ways of looking at female experiences in the urban environment. In his analysis the women are not merely confined to private, enclosed spaces without op-

portunities to interact with the city; rather, they question the way the city is built from within. As Nathaniel Popkin puts it, "Lucrécia invents her city, which, in turn, gives her life meaning, and her imagination becomes a rather satisfying interior force" (Popkin: 2019).

Additionally, Chris T. Schulenberg's article "The Feminine Identity as an Urban Exploration: 'A Cidade Sitiada and the Case of Lucrécia Neves" examines the theme of feminine identity through the character of Lucrécia Neves in Clarice Lispector's novel. It discusses how Lucrécia's experiences in the urban environment of São Geraldo reflect a new form of feminine subjectivity that challenges traditional gender roles. It highlights the contrast between masculine and feminine narratives in urban exploration. Lucrécia's character embodies a fluid and multifaceted nature of feminine identity. She represents a search for personal freedom and autonomy, which contrasts with patriarchal narratives. However, Lucrécia always has São Geraldo with her, both the old and the new versions of it.

While commenting on the novel, Lispector argues that: "It's how a city takes shape, how a human being takes shape inside a city. A township growing, a township with horses, everything so alive. They built a bridge, they built everything, and then it was no longer a township. So then the character takes off" (Moser: 2023). In Earl E. Fitz's chapter "Clarice and Humour" from the book *Clarice Lispector: From Brazil to the World* (2024) Lucrécia is portrayed as the personification of the city of São Geraldo. She is depicted as superficial and consumed with material ambition, representing a certain kind of human being and society driven by mindlessness of progress.

The examination of Lucrécia Neves in the works by Johnny Lorenz, Chris T. Schulenberg, and Earl E. Fitz unveils the multifaceted relationship between feminine identity and urban space in early twentieth-century Brazil. It highlights how Lucrécia transcends traditional gender roles, embodying a fluid identity that actively engages with the city of São Geraldo, both shaping and being

shaped by it. As she navigates the intricate infrastructure of the urban environment, her journey becomes an emblem of a broader exploration of autonomy and self-definition amid the constraints of patriarchal narratives. Lispector's vision of a city alive with possibilities resonates throughout this discourse and reveals the urban spaces as dynamic entities that influence and reflect the human experience rather than act as a simple backdrop.

Ultimately, Lucrécia emerges not only as a representation of a woman in a changing society but also as a vital force in the ongoing dialogue about the intersections of gender, identity, and urban life.

In my analysis of heterotopic moments of being I focus on the moments in which urban spaces alternate between permanence and transience assuming heterotopic qualities. The moment of realisation, which is a defining feature of anagnorisis and epiphany is determined by the alternation between the fluidity and solidity of space. A heterotopic moment of being does not merely signify a shift in physical space but often denotes a shift in reality or experience. It marks a crossing into a space that has different rules, functions, or symbolic meanings in which characters' relationships with spaces emerge as non-linear and dynamic.

Seeing and being seen. The urban optics

The cover of the English translation *The Besieged City* (2019, fig. 1), featuring Giorgio de Chirico's painting *The Enigma of Fatality* (1914), offers an intriguing entry point into the novel's exploration of perception.

The image depicts a gloved hand, seemingly feminine with its narrow wrist and elongated fingers, lightly touching a checkerboard surface. This disembodied hand invites speculation, its anonymity amplifying a sense of enigma. The houses facing each other and the power plant in the background are placed in a triangle as if the viewer is looking at this scene from a keyhole or an embrasure. These elements, which seem ambiguous before reading the novel, appear as highly significant as the story unfolds. The cover

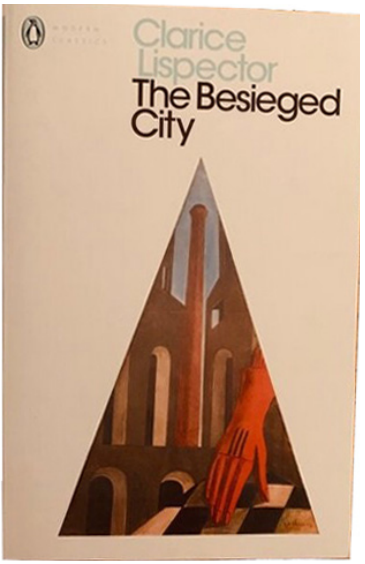

Fig. 1. **The front cover of *The Besieged City* by Clarice Lispector.**
Penguin Classics; International Edition. 2019. Photo Tetyana Kasima

becomes an invitation for "the reinvention of looking" as the novel "interrogates the gaze itself" (Lorenz 2021: 10). It invites readers to look inside the city without yet entering it. "It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world" and De Chirico's cover opens a window into the world of São Geraldo where the interior and exterior spaces are closely connected through the windows, doors and the promise of a future viaduct (Berger 1972: 7).

The juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces in São Geraldo, mediated by these connection points, ties the cityscape to the dynamics of vision and positionality. De Chirico's painting similarly establishes a vantage point – one that poses the possibility of comprehending the city without fully entering it. This interplay between distance and proximity mirrors the theoretical distinction drawn in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) between the two modes of engaging with urban spaces: the detached, panoramic view and the immersive, street-level experience. De Certeau reflects on the

act of seeing the city from an elevated, detached perspective, using the example of viewing New York City from the top of the World Trade Center. He describes this elevated view as providing an illusion of mastery, where the observer feels a sense of control over the city's complexity, as if it were mapped out and comprehensible in a single glance. This detached, bird's-eye perspective turns the city into an abstract, unified image, imposing order on its chaotic and dynamic reality.

Nevertheless, de Certeau contrasts this with the experience of those who move through the city at the street level. He argues that the real activities of everyday life unfold from this perspective, where individuals navigate the city's pathways, creating personalised routes and their own narratives through their movements. Unlike the elevated view, which flattens and simplifies the city, the street-level experience captures its fragmented, lived reality. Each person's path is unique, shaped by personal choices, detours, and interactions with others.

De Certeau's insights suggest that a city cannot be fully understood or controlled from a distance. Lispector's novel poses the question "Where, then, should she stand in order to see the city in its entirety?" and continuously reformulates this question in various ways as shown in Lucrécia's experiments with different modes of seeing and being seen (Lorenz 2021: 11). This question highlights the tension between the desire for a comprehensive view and the fragmented, multifaceted reality of urban spaces. The need for immersion in and engagement with the city emphasises that the city's essence is accessible only through personal, lived encounters. In this way, heterotopic moments of being destabilise the illusion of totality, creating the city as a narrative and as a physical construct.

Heterotopic moments of being in *The Besieged City*

At the beginning of the novel, the readers enter the world of São Geraldo when it is celebrating a religious festival. The festival as a

temporal rupture in the everyday life of the community foreshadows the imminent changes. Life in São Geraldo is to be disrupted by the newly constructed viaduct and the air "was already mingling some progress with the smell of the stable" (Lispector 2019: 8).

The religious festival of São Geraldo is a heterochrony where time takes on a "flowing, transitory, precarious aspect" (Foucault 1986: 26) which creates a sense of continuity of a familiar celebration with an alienating feeling of novelty which for Lucrécia is difficult to explain. Lucrécia's steps are "restrained" and "mechanical" as she tries to escape the sounds of the bells mingled with the laughter of the people and the town seems to be "swaying" and "swinging" (Lispector 2019: 6–7). São Geraldo becomes a theatre where a "series of places that are foreign to one another" function simultaneously (Foucault 1986: 25). Factories spring up and more vehicles appear in the street "honking" and "spewing smoke" while "a wagon that the sluggish horses were pulling" can still be seen in the street (Lispector 2019: 8).

Lucrécia's escape from the festival leaves her on the margins of the city where she can be seen walking with one of her suitors, Perseu Maria. As they leave the city, they can see the festival from the top of the hill, distancing themselves from its transformations and development. They share a heterotopic moment of being when Lucrécia imagines herself "walking alone with a dog and being seen on the hill: like the postcard of a city" (Lispector, 2019: 37).

By imagining herself depicted on the postcard, Lucrécia attempts "to integrate herself completely into the body of the city" (Lorenz 2011:12). To achieve the integration Lucrecia must also undergo changes. These changes emerge as heterotopic moments of being, during which Lucrécia explores the boundaries between fluidity and solidity within her surroundings. This fluidity represents her capacity to adapt and reshape her identity in response to the dynamics of the urban environment. It suggests her identity to be malleable and responsive to the spaces she navigates rather than as something fixed. In contrast, the solidity of spaces may refer

to the rigid societal norms and expectations that define women's roles, often confining them to private spheres.

Lucrécia's experiences at the festival and her escape from the winding streets of the township, give her a different view of the city from the top of the hill. Although often perceived as unremarkable or lacking imagination, Lucrécia exercises the independence and creativity of an urban *flâneur* by projecting herself onto the scene in the postcard. This empowers her and gives her new ways to see the city she knows. This heterotopic moment of being initiated by her imagination and the urban spaces creates a unique perspective on her identity and her relationship with São Geraldo.

Lucrécia embodies the spirit of São Geraldo by embracing the significant changes the city is experiencing, quite literally. The horses that have vanished from the city, now pushed to the margins, are remembered and reimagined through Lucrécia's body when the text refers to her feet as hooves.

Another instance where Lucrécia uses her body to reflect on the transient and permanent nature of spaces is her experimentation with being a statue. In this case, the novel brings back an earlier reference to de Chirico's cover, recalling another of his paintings *Piazza d'Italia with Statue,* 1937[1]. In the painting, the solidity of the statue in the foreground is contrasted with the fluidity of the smoke from the train in the background. This painting captures a heterotopic moment of being where the nature of the permanence and transience of the urban environment is being questioned. In "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces," de Chirico's painting captures the "incompatible" (Foucault 1986: 25) nature of urban spaces. While permanence and transience appear to be in opposition, in the urban space they are often reversed and complement each other. In the process of negotiating different urban spaces, the characters in *The Besieged City* find themselves in different heterotopias where "several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986: 25) are juxtaposed.

[1] See the website of *The National Gallery of Victoria* (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia. https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/piazza-ditalia/.

Building on this interplay of transience and permanence, Lucrécia's experimentation with being a statue deepens her exploration of self and space and embodies another heterotopic moment of being. By envisioning herself as a statue, she confronts the tension between movement and stillness, and between the ephemerality of lived experience and the permanence of a monument. This experimentation becomes a physical and symbolic attempt to anchor herself within the shifting urban landscape, as if by momentarily embodying solidity she might counterbalance the instability that surrounds her. In this case, Lucrécia's body becomes a site of reflection and resistance, an embodiment of her desire to belong within São Geraldo while grappling with its inevitable transformations. This act redefines her relationship with the city and posits her as a participant in and a witness to its evolving spaces.

Lucrécia tests the limits of fluidity and rigidity of objects when looking at the Greek statues in the magazine. "But there were the Greek statues…Could one of them be pointing?... but it no longer had an arm. And they'd even displaced it from the spot that it was indicating with the remaining piece of marble" (Lispector 2019: 68). In this particular instance, the marble becomes both a solid and fluid material placing Lucrécia inside and outside São Geraldo. The reversal of solidity and fluidity happens in the heterotopic moment of being when Lucrécia looks at the statue's missing arm. "And they'd even displaced it from the spot that it was indicating with the remaining piece of marble; each one should stay in his own city because, transported, he would point to the void, such was the freedom to travel" (Lispector 2019: 68). Removing the statue from its original context would mean that it has the freedom to travel and transform. With that comes the possibility of losing its original meaning and either never being able to acquire it again or expecting someone else to rename the objects in the city depending on the new context. Lucrécia imagines herself as "a Greek in a city not yet erected" where she is free to assume any position and name she likes; however, she realises the statues would be given names later. The discrepancy between being, seeing and naming is

captured in this heterotopic moment of being in which all objects, even marble statues become fluid. Through Lucrécia's imaginative experiments Lispector shows how cities could transform under our gaze, making urban life a constant negotiation between permanence and transience.

The further elaboration on the nature of cities in history, "when all the cities were erected with their names, they'd destroy themselves anew because that's the way it has always been," shows that São Geraldo will not escape this fate either (Lispector 2019: 88). While the cities have disappeared or have been renamed, the statues acquire different meaning and purpose depending on where they are placed. The heterotopic nature of the statue as a solid and fluid object demonstrates the ways heterotopias are "linked to slices in time" (Foucault 1984: 26) and invokes an earlier argument of the reversal between the permanent and transient urban spaces. Heterotopic moments of being show the way heterotopia "accumulates time" and breaks away with it (Foucault 1984: 7), and leaves Lucrécia contemplating her own role as a statue in the square. "In that position, Lucrécia Neves could even be transported to the public square. All that was missing was the sun and the rain. So that, covered in moss, she could finally be unnoticed by the inhabitants and finally be seen every day unconsciously. Because that was how a statue belonged to a city" (Lispector 2019: 76).

Lucrécia seems to know what would happen to her as a statue. She would be set down "upside down and feet together in the air" (Lispector 2019: 88). Once she fulfils her function in one city, she would be taken to another where men would build new "things" in "a city that they wouldn't understand" (Lispector 2019: 88). Lucrécia blends with the city until the point of becoming unnoticeable, which makes her a permanent fixture in the city landscape. However, she also stands out as the statue is ageing with time under the natural elements of the sun and rain. As a statue, Lucrécia will embody the ultimate paradox of any urban space: she would be a permanent object which is fluid. She would remain unnoticed in plain sight, creating a space around herself where the urban

dwellers would anchor their rhythms and routines, not knowing what governs them.

Testing the limits of solidity is inherent to both heterotopic spaces and Woolf's "moments of being." Woolf's interest in "moments of being" and "non-being" relates to her interest in solid objects. Woolf's story, *Solid Objects,* portrays the transition of objects from solid into fluid. By picking up a lump of glass on the beach, John becomes curious about the origins of objects. Giving up his career in politics, "solid objects" become his fixation to the point where the rest of the world seems to be unimportant. John moves from one state to another; what seems to be a solid career in politics becomes a blurry vision while the obscure objects on the beach gain more solidity. The fragments of glass captivate him in a unique way. John's enchantment with the city exemplifies a blending of the private and public realms, where their boundaries seem to invert. The rocks and pieces of glass he has found are simultaneously discarded from the "urban wasteland" but also become precious gems (Goldman 2006: 92). The objects he finds used to be fragments of windows, vases and furniture, since washed over by the sea and lying by the railway tracks. The pieces of what was originally someone's home have become part of the urban environment and now they are making their way into John's home where they are displayed on the mantelpiece as unique finds. Like John in Woolf's story, Lucrécia is interested in the afterlife of objects that once comprised the real world and the environment and now are transforming into something else and will continue transformation even when Lucrécia is no longer there. Both John and Lucrécia are experiencing a heterotopic moment of being in which they notice the transition of a permanent object into a transient one.

Another heterotopic moment of being in the novel takes place when Lucrécia looks at the city from the inside of her house. During a rainstorm, the house becomes alive with sounds and movement. "Lucrécia gazes outside at the city beyond her window, but the city manages to get inside; when Lucrécia inspects her apartment, she realizes that the city has infiltrated the domestic sphere" (Lorenz,

2012: 11). São Geraldo was "invading the living room in a rhythmic trott?" making the room fluid in which Lucrécia was "trying to clasp the first solid lifeline" (Lispector 2019: 73). Interestingly, the first solid object that she sees is the keyhole which allows Lucrécia to fix her gaze. This was one of Lucrecia's attempts to take control and "place herself on the same level as the city" (Lispector 2019: 74). By grounding herself in the solidity of the keyhole, she seeks to reconcile the fluidity of São Geraldo with her desire for rootedness and structure. Yet the keyhole also suggests a limited, narrow perspective – Lucrécia is engaging with the city at a distance, through a tiny, controlled aperture, rather than immersing herself fully in it. This phenomenon reflects her ambivalence toward São Geraldo: she is both drawn to it and resistant, compelled to connect yet determined to preserve a sense of self within its overwhelming presence.

Later, as Lucrécia is passing her mother's bedroom, she looks through the keyhole where "the bedroom had a motionless, astonished wealth – which would disappear if you opened the door" and everything was "big" where things "acquired volume, shadow and clarity: they were appearing" (Lispector 2019: 98). Lucrécia and her mother Ana's relationship is centred around domestic space where neither of them feels at home. The discomfort is felt when Ana enters Lucrécia's room to talk to her and when they are sitting at the table together. Lispector uses the home, a place traditionally associated with warmth, security, and familial connection, to explore the complexities and limitations of mother-daughter relationships. Instead of a refuge, the home becomes a site of unease and quiet observation, where both women are caught between their roles as family members and individuals with private inner lives.

Lispector gives the readers multiple vantage points of the urban transformation: through the keyhole, from the top of the hill, from inside its walls and from the embrasure. The contrast between the intimacy and privacy of the keyhole and the military connotation of the embrasure represents a wide range of what urban experiences can encompass. The city can be a space to hide, but also a

space where dangers can lurk from within. The assertion, "The city too should be spied upon through an embrasure" (Lispector 2019: 98) emphasises the need to be invisible and anonymous in the city. "But in the name of what king was she a spy?" (Lispector 2019: 100) remains a rhetorical question. The secretive nature of spying on the city suggests that urban dwellers are not allowed to see the process of urban transformation but only the results. Lucrécia's attention to "the materials of the city" places her at the centre of the urban transformations where the pipes, walls, rubber tube and faucets are displayed in front of her to construct the city (Lispector 2019: 99).

By looking at the city Lucrécia is taking part in "demolishing and constructing" it (Lispector 2019: 65). In this process, objects in Lucrecia's environment take on a fluid and transient quality, embodying a state that "at least wasn't solid, like the small hollow three-legged table - didn't have, didn't give - was transitory – surprising – perched – extreme" (Lispector 2019: 66). As she is looking around the room, she looks at the chair as the first solid object she could start from to eventually end up "remaking the whole city" (Lispector 2019: 66). Lucrécia's initial efforts to perceive and comprehend the changes unfolding in the township are marked by confusion and disarray because of the "intolerable balance" (Lispector 2019: 64) of the objects the order of which she could not understand.

> It was because she could no longer bear that mute existence that was always above her, the room, the city, the high degree the things atop the china cabinet had reached, the small dry bird ready to fly, stuffed, around the house, the height of the tower of the power plant… (Lispector 2019: 64)

In this passage, Lucrécia focuses on the chair as the "first solid object" from which she could begin "remaking the whole city". It symbolises her attempt to impose order on a chaotic and disorienting urban landscape. As a mundane object, the chair becomes a point of anchorage in a world that otherwise seems to elude

her grasp, both physically and cognitively. Lispector employs the chair as a metaphor for stability. In a world where the city is undergoing rapid transformation, Lucrécia seeks to reconstruct her environment piece by piece, beginning with the simplest, most tangible available object. This moment echoes broader themes of the novel, those related to perception and the human struggle to create meaning in the face of overwhelming change.

The "intolerable balance" of objects that Lucrécia cannot comprehend further highlights her alienation from her surroundings. Her inability to understand the arrangement of the room reflects her broader difficulty in making sense of the shifting urban environment. The objects in the room – mute and incomprehensible – symbolise the urban structures that rule her consciousness yet remain inscrutable to her. Lispector captures the tension through imagery that emphasises the oppressive nature of these objects: the room, the city, and the tower of the power plant – all looming above her, creating a sense of claustrophobia and powerlessness. The description of the "mute existence" that Lucrécia can no longer bear presupposes a suffocating stasis, in contrast to the dynamism and unpredictability of the external world.

The reference to the "small dry bird ready to fly, stuffed, around the house" introduces a striking metaphor for the fragility and artificiality of life within this urban environment. The bird, lifeless yet poised for flight, encapsulates the contradiction between stasis and potential movement, a recurring motif in the novel. As the bird is frozen in a position that suggests freedom, Lucrécia is caught in a space where the promise of escape or understanding is tantalisingly close, yet ultimately unreachable. This passage not only reflects her personal disorientation but also proposes a broader commentary on the experience of urban modernity, where the individual is confronted with a landscape that is both familiar and alien, filled with objects and structures that are both meaningful and enigmatic.

Lispector's use of fragmented, disjointed imagery underscores the psychological impact of living in a rapidly changing city. The

accumulation of details – the tower, the power plant, the china cabinet, the bird – creates a chaotic and overwhelming scene that mirrors Lucrécia's internal turmoil. This passage invites an interpretation of urban space as a site of both material and psychological fragmentation, where objects and structures that should provide a sense of order instead contribute to a deeper sense of confusion and estrangement and ultimately foreground Lucrécia's struggles to make sense of her environment.

Conclusion

São Geraldo consists of a multitude of urban spaces that comprise Lispector's experiences in Rome and Naples, where she lived before moving to Bern, and her life in Brazil which consisted of urban spaces of different scales: from Recife Boa Vista neighbourhood, inhabited by the Jewish community, to the diversity of Rio de Janeiro. *The Besieged City* presents an amalgamation of urban stories reflecting every city and no city. "A true portrait of the city is impossible" (Lorenz 2021:11) and the city in the novel is exposed as a series of moments which are simultaneously at odds with each other yet also complement each other.

In portraying São Geraldo as it awakens to the technological advancements of its era, Lispector dissolves the city's solidity, revealing to the reader the transformative processes reshaping urban spaces. The multiple ways of seeing and looking, which Lucrécia Neves employs, become an attempt to understand those transformations. As Lispector writes in her crónica "A Late Response", "A house is not built only of stones and concrete and so on. It is also constructed out of a way of looking" (Lispector 2019: 304). Liberated by all the ways the city can be seen and looked at but besieged by challenges of conveying what is seen. Lispector's novel is both a keyhole and an embrasure through which a limited portion of the city can be captured leaving the rest to the imagination.

Has Lucrécia succeeded in touching the city of São Geraldo? Has insurmountable change made a return to the city impossible?

I argue that through the heterotopic moments of being Lucrécia creates a unique bond with the city. Her multiple vantage points of seeing and looking contribute to her ability to maintain this equilibrium which is her possibility of returning to the city.

Lispector reveals the inherent tension between the individuals' desire for stability and the relentless, incomprehensible transformation of the city around them. The three instances of heterotopic moments of being underscore the alternating nature between the transitory and permanent in the urban environment. The township becomes a richly layered space which forms heterotopic pockets that challenge traditional notions of transience and permanence.

Through these layers, Lispector invites the reader to re-envision the urban landscape and reconsider the fluid interplay between stability and change. In the dynamic between fluidity and solidity, Lucrécia's journey through São Geraldo reveals how urban transformations mirror internal changes. As she encounters spaces in flux – the city's expanding industrial edges and the unyielding, tradition-bound centre – her sense of self becomes a negotiation between adaptation and resistance. The heterotopic spaces she traverses, from the bustling festival to the remote hillside, underscore the fragmented nature of her identity in a city undergoing ceaseless change. Lucrécia's imagined presence on the postcard suggests a yearning for belonging, yet her marginal positioning with Perseu Maria points to a deeper ambivalence: she is part of São Geraldo but also an observer, caught between integrating fully and resisting total immersion. The heterotopic moments of being redefine Lucrécia's relationship to the city and shape her as both an active participant in and a witness to the transforming spaces of São Geraldo.

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