

MEDIATING SILENCE:
TRANSLATION IN CLARICE LISPECTOR'S
THE HOUR OF THE STAR

by

Hillary Jan Hermansen

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Approved:

Christopher T. Lewis
Thesis Faculty Supervisor

Barry L. Weller
Chair, Department of English

Disa Gambera
Honors Faculty Advisor

Sylvia D. Torti, PhD
Dean, Honors College

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ABSTRACT

In Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*, a male narrator, Rodrigo, mediates a feminine and impoverished subject, Macabéa, for a middle class audience. Likewise, two male translators, Giovanni Pontiero and Benjamin Moser, mediate the original Brazilian work for their English-speaking audience.

In the novel, Clarice creates Rodrigo to describe its heroine, Macabéa. Since she is illiterate, she has no words to identify herself to herself or anyone else. Instead, the educated Rodrigo narrates her story to his sophisticated readers; yet he cannot ever capture her truth or essence because she exists beyond the realm of words. Consequently, he must invent and create a good deal of his concept of Macabéa before ultimately realizing that he has failed. Clarice Lispector created Rodrigo as a narrator to emphasize language's inability to access the truth of Macabéa, the feminine subject.

In the English-speaking world, Brazilian literature — like Macabéa — inhabits a marginal space. Both English translations of *The Hour of the Star*, Giovanni Pontiero's 1992 attempt and Benjamin Moser's 2011 version, mediate between Clarice Lispector's Portuguese as an underrepresented subject and the educated, patriarchal English of the United States and Europe. In addition, Clarice's penchant for challenging typical Luso-Brazilian grammatical and literary conventions complicates the translation process. The translators struggle to channel her style in English and, by so doing, they each mark the text with their own creativity.

While mediators, whether translators or narrators, affect their illustrations of their subjects, they still provide otherwise unattainable access to them. Their inventions and creations highlight but cannot describe the untranslatable strangeness of their feminine subjects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	1
II. Glimpsing Silence.....	9
a. Rodrigo: Failure to Illustrate Silence.....	10
b. Macabéa: Existing in Silence.....	12
c. Macabéa: Existing in Language.....	14
d. Rodrigo: Narrating the Narration.....	17
III. The Silence of Translation.....	21
a. Translation's Failure.....	22
b. The Translator's Presence.....	23
c. The Translator's Process.....	27
IV. Silence in Strangeness.....	30
a. Translation Comparison.....	31
b. Translating Clarice.....	35
c. The Translator's Hope.....	38
V. Conclusion.....	40
Works Cited.....	42

INTRODUCTION

[...] bells were ringing but without their bronzes giving them sound. Now I understand this story. It is the imminence in those bells that almost-almost ring.

The greatness of every one.

Silence.

If one day God comes to earth there will be great silence.

The silence is such that not even thought thinks. (Lispector 79)

Every single one of us exists in the silence beyond words. A part of us is the “imminence in those bells that almost-almost ring” because we can almost explain ourselves, but not quite (79). George Steiner complained, “The more I try to explain myself, the less I understand myself. Of course, not everything is unsayable in words, only the living truth” (Steiner 194). Our truest lives are “unrecognizable, extremely interior and there is not a single word that defines it [them]” (Lispector 3). Words are insufficient to explain our essence. We can only know ourselves by experiencing existence. We can only know others, if we know them at all, through our interactions; and yet, the primary medium of these interactions — words — imperfectly convey what we mean. Misunderstandings are all too common. When we try to communicate our feelings and experiences to others, words and other arbitrary symbols dilute them. “Truth,” says Rodrigo, the narrator of Clarice Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*, “is always an interior and inexplicable contact” (3).¹ Words, the tools we use to communicate, limit our access to Rodrigo’s truth. Language separates us, and a part of us — the “greatness” that Clarice Lispector describes — lives in silence.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from Benjamin Moser’s translation of *The Hour of the Star*.

Clarice Lispector, in her last published novel, *The Hour of the Star*, attempts to write this silence with words. She creates Rodrigo, a male narrator, to tell the story of Macabéa, a girl who lives beyond the world of words. As Rodrigo struggles to describe Macabéa, he realizes she can never really exist in his narrative and he cannot explain her. He accepts this impossibility and kills her. In her death, Rodrigo finally hears the bells “ringing but without their bronzes giving them sound.” He realizes that Macabéa has always existed in “the imminence in those bells that almost-almost ring” (79). Once he stops trying to describe her with words, he finds her in the silence that remains.

Chaya Pinkhasovna Lispector (Clarice Lispector) was born December 20, 1920, to Jewish parents, Pinkhas and Mania Lispector, in Ukraine. In 1922, the family migrated to Brazil, the land Clarice would call her native country. She attended law school, became a journalist, and, in 1943, published her first novel at the age of 23. She married a diplomat and spent many years abroad before returning to Brazil in 1959, where she continued to write prolifically for the next eighteen years. She fascinated and enchanted her readers with her beauty, odd reclusiveness, and individuality (Moser, *Why This World* 32). Her most famous works include *Near to the Wild Heart* (1943), *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), *An Apprenticeship or the Book of Pleasures* (1969), *Água Viva* (1973), and *The Hour of the Star* (1977). As Clarice “came to the end of her life, [she] wrote as though her life was beginning, with a sense of a need to stir and shake narrative itself to see where it might take her, as the bewildered and original writer that she was, and us, her bewildered and excited readers” (Tóibín xii). *The Hour of the Star*, published a mere two days before her death in 1977, “stirs and shakes” both narrative and language. Benjamin Moser articulated the book’s importance thus: “Explicitly Jewish and explicitly

Brazilian, joining the northeast of her childhood with the Rio de Janeiro of her adulthood, 'social' and abstract, tragic and comic, uniting her religious and linguistic questions with the narrative drive of her finest stories, *The Hour of the Star* is a fitting monument to its author's 'unbearable genius.'" (372).

A short novel, *The Hour of the Star* is indeed enchanting and fascinating. At fewer than one hundred pages, sometimes it reads more like poetry than a novel. It begins with an enigmatic affirmation: "All the world began with a yes [. . .] But before prehistory there was the prehistory of prehistory and there was the never and there was the yes. It was ever so. I don't know why, but I do know that the universe never began" (3). These are the first words of Rodrigo, the male narrator. His "yes" is a simple word. The implications, however, are eternal. "Yes" existed before every beginning, continues to exist, and will exist forever, reaffirming itself with each new beginning.

The narrative accentuates the opposition between Rodrigo and Macabéa. She is everything he is not. Where he is educated, male, wealthy, and full of words, Macabéa is poor, illiterate, female, and wordless. Rodrigo's language emphasizes his gender. For example, he compares writing to a "carpenter's job," a stereotypically masculine activity (6). Later he refers to his manly pursuits of "sex and soccer" (15), and he often mentions his beard. Macabéa, a girl from Northeastern Brazil, "lives in an impersonal limbo, without reaching the worst or the best. She just lives, inhaling and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling" (15). She has no awareness of the future or the past. "If she thought about it, she might say she sprouted from the soil of the Alagoas backlands like an instantly molded mushroom. [. . .] Despite her aunt's death she was sure it would be different with her, since she'd never die" (21). She can understand neither birth, death nor any other

metaphorical concept. Rodrigo, with his ever-abundant store of words, cannot capture Macabéa's words because they lack substance: "She talked, yes, but was extremely mute. Sometimes I manage to get a word out of her but it slips through my fingers" (21). Even though he claims that the narrative "will have around seven characters and I'm obviously one of the more important" (5), Macabéa is completely unaware of him. Rodrigo is only the medium through which we see and understand her.

When Rodrigo first saw Macabéa on the street in Rio, he was attracted to her. "Yes, I'm in love with Macabéa, my dear Maca, in love with her ugliness and total anonymity since she belongs to no one. In love with her weak lungs, the scraggly girl" (59). He wants to discover her for the literate world, but "truth is an interior and inexplicable contact" (3). Rodrigo recognizes from the beginning that his own "truest life is unrecognizable, extremely interior and there is not a single word that defines it" (3). As a result, he also eventually realizes the impossibility of describing the "truest life" of this poor, illiterate girl. Rodrigo cannot approach the truth of Macabéa because she is beyond words and beyond his linguistic background. She exists in silence. Nothing in his life as a middle class male compares to her life as a poor wordless female.

As Macabéa would describe herself, she is a typist, lives in a bad part of town with four roommates, and is a virgin. Eventually, she meets a man named Olímpico and dates him briefly. However, he is abusive and the relationship soon ends because Olímpico takes up with Glória, Macabéa's more attractive co-worker. Feeling sorry for Macabéa, Glória lends her enough money to see a fortuneteller. The fortuneteller tells Macabéa that she will soon marry a rich foreigner. Macabéa leaves the fortuneteller's house experiencing new emotions about her future. As she does, a car hits her and she

dies. For several pages, Rodrigo struggles to narrate her back into life, but he eventually loses her to the silence. By allowing her to die, he releases her from his narrative and accepts the inaccessibility of her truth. The novel ends with Rodrigo's words: "My God, I just remembered that we die. But — but me too?! Don't forget that for now it's strawberry season. Yes" (77). The "yes" reaffirms the endless possibilities of the "prehistory before there was prehistory" (3). The simple word begins and ends Rodrigo's narrative and emphasizes the never-ending silence of *The Hour of the Star*.

Rodrigo demonstrates the burden of word illustration, the process of using words to describe the physical world. Ferdinand de Saussure illustrates the inherent difficulty of this process in his analysis of the connection between the signifier, e.g. a word, and the signified, or the concept a word represents. Not only is the relation between them completely arbitrary, but their correspondence is never exact or precise (9). Moreover, the signified attached to the signifier varies from person to person, even within the same language and culture. For example, the "desk" I am thinking of when I say "desk" may not be the "desk" my listeners will associate with the signifier "desk." When any speaker describes an event, miscommunication occurs because signifieds inevitably vary among language users, if only slightly. In a similar manner, Macabéa herself, the idea of Macabéa that Rodrigo tries to articulate, and the Macabéa whom the reader perceives can only ever be imperfect copies of each other. If Rodrigo cannot adequately represent his own truth, his "interior and inexplicable contact," one sees how easily the image of Macabéa, conveyed by the signifiers he chooses, can blur or alter Macabéa the signified (3).

Even though we communicate and relate with one another through words, they are also a barrier to Rodrigo's truth and to Macabéa. They "separate us and discommunicate" (Ortega y Gasset 107). Language "also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his [the speaker's] reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness" (Steiner 93). While language does inhibit our access to truth, without it we would not be able to articulate our own awareness. We would exist in the present without metaphorical understanding of anything such as the past and the future. We would not be aware of the existence of truth. Like Macabéa, we would exist in silence. Since we have language, however, we can explore Rodrigo's truth, and therefore imperfectly access more truth than we otherwise would.

Clarice Lispector often bent language in order to better access Rodrigo's truth. Speaking of the Portuguese language, Clarice complained, "Sometimes it reacts when confronted by a more complicated process of thought. Sometimes it takes fright at the unexpectedness of a phrase. I love to handle it" (*Discovering the World* 134). As she handled the language, she challenged its grammatical norms. She pushed the language barrier and uncovered strange and abstract signifieds.

In *The Hour of the Star*, Clarice² illustrates silence through the words of an egoistic male narrator. She distances herself from the burden of the inevitable mis-translation of Macabéa. No one, not even Clarice Lispector, can illustrate the truth of such an elusive character who lives so completely beyond the world of words. She creates Rodrigo to fail to create Macabéa. "Instead of inviting the reader to equate the narrator with the author, thereby empowering her own female voice, Lispector exploits

² Most academic literature, especially literature written in Brazil, refers to her as simply 'Clarice.'

her narrator in all his ‘maleness,’ making it clear that he is the creator of Macabéa” (Sloan 92). Rodrigo’s constant narration of male features and male activities emphasizes the burden of language. We recognize Rodrigo’s narration as a barrier, enabling us to distinguish the silence beyond words where Macabéa exists.

Rodrigo’s word portrait of Macabéa and translation between different languages share similar difficulties and barriers. As Rodrigo narrates and interprets Macabéa, a part of himself is in the narration. Likewise, as translators translate, a part of themselves combines with the author and infiltrates the text. Translators, like authors, select signifiers based on their interpretation of the foreign text in another language. In 1992, Giovanni Pontiero attempted to translate *The Hour of the Star* into English, but Clarice’s language often evaded translation. Once Pontiero finished, his editor, Robyn Marsack, argued for revisions to force the English translation into the rules of the English language. She often insisted on “mak[ing] one sentence out of two where the second began with a participle; otherwise it seemed so ungrammatical in English” (103). Clarice’s language, however, is ungrammatical in Portuguese, and the editor, by adjusting the translation, normalized Clarice’s style. The translation diluted the truth of her work even more than usual. In 2011, Benjamin Moser made a new translation of *The Hour of the Star*. After he rejected the majority of Barbara Epler’s edits to his version, Epler admitted in an interview with Scott Esposito that the outcome was “truly transporting.” Unlike Pontiero, Moser defended grammatical errors and strange structures in the resulting English to remain true to Clarice’s voice.

Macabéa is to Rodrigo as *The Hour of the Star* is to the translator. As Rodrigo attempts to illustrate the character Macabéa, both translators attempt to translate

Claricean Portuguese into English. They make Clarice available for an audience that could not normally read her works nor access her unique voice. To some extent, they both must invent within English as they attempt to mimic Clarice's voice. Moser's translation challenges English conventions as he struggles to approximate Clarice's unique use of language. In his afterword, in which he discusses his own methods of translation, he maintains that the translator must "resist the temptation to explain or rearrange her prose, which can only flatten it and remove from it that 'foreign aura that is its hallmark, and its glory'" (80). Moser does not oversimplify, over-explain, or compensate for the difficulty of Clarice's words. Instead, Moser allows his translation to be *strange*. As he says, he attempts "to restore the spines to the cactus" (81). Pontiero, however, normalizes Clarice's style and does not explain his translation choices. As we analyze Moser's translation and Rodrigo's narration, we will see that as they identify themselves and their weaknesses, they allow the reader to look beyond words to the silence and indescribable essence of *The Hour of the Star* — to "the imminence in those bells that almost-almost ring."

II. GLIMPSING SILENCE

Throughout *The Hour of the Star*, Macabéa “has trouble understanding spoken Portuguese. She cannot get a handle on metaphors, because she takes in all her signs as what they are, literally, and they can be nothing else. She lives in a static, fixed world” (Merrell 122). For example, she struggles to conceive her own past and future. As already cited, she would probably say that she “sprouted from the soil of the Alagoas Backlands like an instantly molded mushroom” (21). Time is a metaphor of language — “It is our syntax [...] which is full of tomorrows” (Steiner 238). Thus alien to both language and time, she exists solely in the present and evades description. Rodrigo complains that any word she says “slips through [his] fingers” (21). Macabéa exists in a world that words, not to mention a novel, cannot describe.

Describing Macabéa, then, is impossible, but Clarice Lispector creates a male narrator, Rodrigo, to bear the burden of language. Rodrigo acknowledges language’s burden as he begins to describe Macabéa. “I’m sure of one thing: this narrative will deal with something delicate: the creation of a whole person who surely is as alive as I am. Take care of her because all I can do is show her so you can recognize her on the street, walking lightly because of her quivering thinness” (11). However, although Rodrigo begs his reader to try to recognize her, he cannot resist describing himself within the narrative as well. By drawing attention to his own selfish self, he disrupts his description of Macabéa and therefore impedes the readers’ access to her. He demonstrates his own personality as much as, if not more than, he illustrates Macabéa. He claims that if she knew he existed, “she’d have someone to pray to and that would mean salvation” (25). By writing so much about himself, Rodrigo demonstrates his own egoism and identity.

Nevertheless, by so doing, he allows the reader to more easily recognize his presence in the narrative and therefore identify the inadequate portrayal of Macabéa as his own failure. This section will show that as Rodrigo narrates his process of narration, he identifies the burden of language and realizes that the Macabéa he creates is not the Macabéa who lives in silence.

Rodrigo: Failure to Illustrate Silence

Despite the pride and self-righteousness in Rodrigo's voice, he subconsciously knows he will fail to describe Macabéa. He prepares for his own exit and failure from the very beginning: "But I'm prepared to slip out discreetly through the back exit" (11). Yet, he continues to describe her because she has what he does not: "I've experienced almost everything, including passion and its despair. And now I'd only like to have what I would have been and never was" (13). He has never been able to experience the static non-being of Macabéa. Since he already lives in the world of words, he can never leave it.

Macabéa can exist without money and possessions. She exists within herself. "She lived off herself as if eating her own entrails [. . .] These dreams, because of all that interiority, were empty because they lacked the essential nucleus of — of ecstasy, let's say" (29). Rodrigo both desires and rejects this existence. He wants it because he lacks it, but he cannot have it because possessing material wealth is a part of his middle-class identity. Macabéa, unlike most members of society, has mastered the saintly art of possessing without actually possessing: "Most of the time she possessed without knowing it the void that fills the soul of saints" (29). As Peixoto explains: "It is through her inner emptiness that she approaches saintliness" (94). Rodrigo lacks this emptiness; he cannot follow Macabéa and approach sainthood.

Rodrigo hopes because of his account, readers will recognize a lack within themselves. He prays, “May everyone recognize it inside himself because all of us are one and he who is not poor in Money is poor in spirit or longing because he lacks something more precious than gold — there are those who lack the delicate essential” (4). Rodrigo recognizes such a lack within himself and wants to exist in her world. Rodrigo, in mediating Macabéa for his readers, desires to leave the world of words and capitalism, if only for a short time. To attempt to mediate her, he changes his lifestyle:

To draw the girl I have to get a grip on myself and to capture her soul I have to feed myself frugally with fruits and drink iced white wine because it’s hot in this cubbyhole I’ve locked myself into and from which I’m inclined to want to see the world. I’ve also had to give up sex and soccer. Not to mention that I avoid all human contact. Will I someday return to my former way of life? I very much doubt it. I now see that I forgot to mention that for the time being I read nothing for fear of polluting the simplicity of my language with luxuries. (Lispector 15)

He leaves his material desires behind and resists the world language has created for him. He attempts to escape the middle class, his past, future, and linguistic system. He wants to become like Macabéa. He aspires to be so far beyond language that he is transformed: “The action of this story will end up with my transfiguration into somebody else and my materialization finally as an object” (12). He does not want to self-narrate or self-think. He desires to be even as Macabéa is.

He likewise challenges his readers to step outside themselves and embrace Macabéa, their opposite. He invites them to leave the middle class experience.

If the reader possesses any wealth and a comfortable life, he’ll step out of himself to see how the other sometimes lives. If he’s poor, he won’t be reading me because reading me is superfluous for anyone who has a slight permanent hunger. Here I’m playing the role of a safety valve for you and from the massacring life of the average middle class. I’m well aware that

it's frightening to step out of oneself, but everything new is frightening.
(22)

Rodrigo is not simply asking his readers to step into the working class for a moment — a member of the working class may still be a part of the readers' world. For example, Glória and Olímpico participate in Rodrigo's world because they understand how to use language metaphorically. They dream of their future and attempt to manipulate their own lives. Olímpico wants to be a butcher and Glória wants to marry a rich man. Glória prides herself on her identity: "I was born and bred in Rio!" (50). Macabéa, meanwhile, is beyond the metaphorical world of language and self-identity. Although Rodrigo and his readers may want to escape their wealth and comfortable lives, they cannot exist in silence, without language, so Rodrigo cannot narrate the silence of Macabéa.

Macabéa: Existing in Silence

"That girl didn't know she was what she was, just as a dog doesn't know it's a dog. So she didn't feel unhappy. The only thing she wanted was to live. She didn't know for what, she didn't ask questions" (19). Macabéa simply exists and has no awareness of herself and no self-reflective identity. As she eats only hot dogs and drinks only Coca-Cola, she is happy because that is the way she is supposed to be. She cannot even ask herself who she is: "if she was dumb enough to ask herself 'who am I?' she would fall full on her face. Because 'who am I?' creates a need. And how can you satisfy that need? Those who wonder are incomplete" (7). Instead, since she does not "wonder," she lives happily and completely in the present, unaware that she should feel or ask anything else.

Macabéa is complete in a way that Rodrigo cannot be because he writes to define himself. After calling Macabéa a fluke, Rodrigo says of himself "As for me, I've only

escaped from being just a fluke because I write. . . That's when I enter into contact with inner powers of mine" (28). As much as he aspires to be like Macabéa, he can block neither language nor thought because they have made him what he is. Language has not developed Macabéa's identity nor shaped her past or future; she does not even conceive of past and future. Rodrigo's own words, the very instruments he uses to describe Macabéa, are the barrier between Macabéa and her mediator.

Any words applied to Macabéa will fail. She has no words to describe her identity and therefore the few words she speaks are words others give her. She did not produce the words Rodrigo uses to describe her. Rodrigo even admits to inventing a lot of the story, even though Macabéa does exist. "Of course the story is true though invented" (4). Macabéa is true, but Rodrigo must invent words to describe her because she does not have any of her own. Every word of *The Hour of the Star* is Rodrigo's, and therefore he stands between Macabéa and the reader.

When Macabéa does speak, she defines herself using words already given her: words she did not create. "When she woke up she no longer knew who she was. Only later did she think with satisfaction: I'm a typist and a virgin, and I like Coca-Cola." These three words answer the standard questions the public wants to know: what do you do, what is your sexual status, and what do you like? "Only then did she dress herself in herself, she spent the rest of her day obediently playing the role of being" (27). Even though she defines herself for others using their words, she is completely incapable of defining or changing herself for herself. She thinks these same three words about herself every morning, and nothing ever changes about her identity: "She just lives, inhaling and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling [. . .] Her existence is sparse" (15).

Like this tenuous bridge of words, her boyfriend and coworker also provide Macabéa with a connection to the world: “Her life was a long meditation on the nothing. Except she needed others in order to believe in herself, otherwise she’d get lost in the successive and round emptinesses inside her” (29). She clings to her association with Glória and Olímpico. Olímpico is selfish and abusive. One time, he drops her in the mud on her face — on purpose. She bleeds all over the place and does not complain because “he’d made her somebody” (45). By acting on her, she comes into existence. Olímpico and his actions towards her are her link to humanity (49). Then suddenly, Olímpico dumps her for Glória. He even kisses Glória, though he had never kissed Macabéa. But Macabéa cannot be angry, “because Glória was now her only connection with the world” (53). Glória often talks to Macabéa and sometimes tries to take care of Macabéa. “Toward Macabéa, Glória had a vague feeling of maternity” (55). Other times she is condescending and mean, such as when she asks Macabéa “Does being ugly hurt?” (53), or in another place, “Oh woman, don’t you have a face?” (56). Glória, by simply talking to Macabéa, brings her into existence in language’s world. Macabéa cannot sever her connections to language or else she would float in meditation, lost in herself in the present, simply inhaling and exhaling.

Macabéa: Existing in Language

After Glória starts dating Olímpico, she feels sorry for stealing Macabéa’s boyfriend, so she invites her over for lunch. Macabéa eats the best food she has ever eaten. “It might have been one of the few times that Macabéa saw that for her there was no place in the world and exactly because Glória gave her so much” (57). Glória knows her own place in the world, and her parents care for and about her. Macabéa does not

know what it means to have family and people who care, so when she sees the luxury, the food, and the family, she begins to realize her own lack. She realizes what it might mean to exist in the world of language and communication. Macabéa begins to lose her art of existing without possessing.

Macabéa goes to a fortuneteller to find a place for herself in the world. The fortuneteller, Madame Carlota, gives Macabéa words to describe her past and then gives her a future. She gives Macabéa language and identity. As Madame Carlota describes Macabéa's past, Macabéa begins to think differently about her contented state of existing: "But, little Macabéa dear, what a horrible life! May my friend Jesus take pity on you, my child! How awful!" For the first time, Macabéa truly recognizes her own unhappiness: "Macabéa blanched: it had never occurred to her that her life was that bad." Madame Carlota gives her new words to describe her experiences. She says that Macabéa "was raised by a relative like a wicked stepmother. Macabéa was shocked by the revelation: up till now she'd always thought that what her aunt had done was educate her to make her a nicer girl" (66-67). Macabéa's awareness broadens, and she experiences new feelings. Once Madame Carlota has redefined Macabéa's past through words and incited discontentment within her, she gives Macabéa an unbelievable future with a rich foreigner: "He's the one who's going to marry you! He's got lots of Money, all foreigners are rich. If I'm not mistaken, and I'm never mistaken, he's going to give you lots of love" (68). Macabéa experiences new emotions: "She was learning for the first time what others called passion: she was passionately in love with [the foreigner] Hans" (69). Macabéa begins to change. She prepares for her future — for the moment when she will meet this rich gringo. She asks the fortuneteller, "And what do I do to grow more hair?"

— She dared to ask because she already felt completely different” (69). In this instant, she possesses a presence she did not have before. Now she knows she exists as a human instead of as a dog. She lifts up her head and thinks she deserves things. She has changed because she has words to describe her past and her future. Now she can imagine a place for herself in the world: “Unable to see the destructive energy of those who wish to control her through language,” Macabéa enters the literary sphere (Sloan 41).

This Macabéa, however, is Rodrigo’s Macabéa. He applies words to her wordless identity and mediates between her emptiness and a middle class existence. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the weakness of words to depict. “I just got fearful when I put down words about the northeastern girl” (10). “The story is true though invented” because he only briefly saw her: “On a street in Rio de Janeiro I glimpsed in the air the feeling of perdition on the face of a northeastern girl” (4). Since he barely knows her and makes up a lot of her, the story is his perception and interpretation of Macabéa, and as his creation, it is true. Macabéa herself does not exist in the literary world.

When Rodrigo gives Macabéa a place in the world of language, he creates a different Macabéa. Although Macabéa seems unaware of the words’ power in her life, “Macabéa nonetheless intuits that words are powerful enough to do away with her. Early in the story, we find her lying in bed one evening frightened by the silence of the night. She felt as if the night were about to pronounce [a fatal word]” (Sloan 41). When Rodrigo’s creation of Macabéa enters the world of words, she is so obviously disconnected from the true Macabéa that Rodrigo recognizes his failure and kills her. He releases her from the narration to the world of silence. He kills her with his words because he realizes she is not the Macabéa he glimpsed on the street.

Rodrigo: Narrating the Narration

Rodrigo tells the story of narrating Macabéa. He changes his lifestyle for her. He cries with her. He mourns her poverty. He describes his disgust. Rodrigo interrupts his own description of Macabéa with his self-narration. *The Hour of the Star* is about Rodrigo's narration of Macabéa. In the middle of describing Macabéa, he finds his own identity reflected back at him. "I see the northeastern girl looking in the mirror and — a ruffle of the drum — in the mirror appears my weary and unshaven face. We're that interchangeable" (14). Rodrigo is describing his interpretation of Macabéa. As an interpretation, Macabéa is a part of Rodrigo and therefore interchangeable with him. While he believes he is approximating the real Macabéa, he is merely creating a version of Macabéa within himself.

Since Macabéa has no true voice within the narration, the reader cannot verify her existence. At the same time, Rodrigo's strong presence and constant interruptions create a visible and obvious barrier between the reader and Macabéa:

Lispector constructs a narrative situation that is highly self-referential, giving the reader access to the story's creation, Rodrigo's role in this process, and the story itself. Early in his tale, Rodrigo informs the reader that his story will be comprised of seven characters, of which he will be one of the most important. His efforts to establish his identity and to explain why he is creating Macabéa constitute an intrusive and disruptive presence. (Sloan 94)

As Rodrigo, the obtrusive and annoying narrator, allows us to identify him within the narration, we can understand the impossibility of describing Macabéa. Rodrigo serves to illustrate the inevitable failure of interpreting anything with abstract signifiers called words.

Rodrigo, however, does show us Macabéa's type. As quoted earlier, he says, "all I can do is show her so you can recognize her on the street, walking lightly because of her quivering thinness" (11). Rodrigo claims he wants to paint her so his readers will see her on the street. She could be the homeless man at the corner or the cashier behind the drug counter. Rodrigo prompts us to look for people like her—in vague looks and wandering eyes. Even though Macabéa is Rodrigo's interpretation, if not complete invention, she represents anybody who does not remember the past or dream of the future.

Clarice created Rodrigo to emphasize the disconnect between signifiers and signifieds. He fails to portray Macabéa because of his background, his experiences, and his words in general. Clarice created him to be obviously male and present. Rodrigo claims that only a male writer could write this story "because a woman would make it all weepy and maudlin," when Clarice herself created both Rodrigo and Macabéa (6). Rodrigo must be blatantly present and male so the reader can identify his presence as a narrator and then look beyond him to the Macabéa that exists in the world beyond words. The reader can see her better than if Clarice would have invented any other narrator. Another narrator may have hidden his or her own presence from the reader and allowed Macabéa to show forth, but Macabéa still would have been invented, only less conspicuously so. The reader simply may not have noticed the invention. Rodrigo, by narrating his own opinion and image, emphasizes Macabéa's complete lack of presence in the literary world.

As Rodrigo fails "to collapse social and textual boundaries that distance him from Macabéa, he discovers his inability to relinquish control and his sense of self that this task requires" (Sloan 91). He recognizes exactly how far beyond the middle class world

of identity and language Macabéa is. He kills her because he realizes death is her triumph, her hour of the star. In death, whether literal or metaphorical, Rodrigo finds the silence that is the essence of Macabéa.

From the beginning, Rodrigo knows he must write without words. He wants to evoke silence. "I swear this book is made without words. It is a mute photograph. This book is a silence. This book is a question" (8). The whole narrative is a question. The answer is silence: the impossibility of hearing Macabéa and accessing her truth. By giving her words, Rodrigo constructed a barrier, thwarting any hope of connecting with Macabéa. After realizing that he had merely invented a different Macabéa, Rodrigo discovers the true answer to his own question by killing his invention:

With her dead, the bells were ringing but without their bronzes giving them sound. Now I understand this story. It is the imminence in those bells that almost-almost ring.

The greatness of every one.

Silence.

If one day God comes to earth there will be great silence.

The silence is such that not even thought thinks. (76)

The hour of the star is silence. Macabéa is silence. Macabéa is tangible, but forever beyond the signifiers. She is the imminence of the bells about to ring. She is close but never heard. The narration of *The Hour of the Star* is not silent; it is words and words and more words. By using words, at times even irritating and disgusting descriptions, Rodrigo demonstrates their inefficiencies. The reader can recognize Rodrigo's failed description because he narrates it. He narrates that after a long struggle, he finally accepts the silence and the disconnect between signifiers and signifieds. His acceptance is his death.

“Macabéa killed me” (76). To access Macabéa, he must die in the literary world; his narration must end.

III. THE SILENCE OF TRANSLATION

Macabéa exists in silence, in the sound of the “bells that almost-almost ring” (79). She is reality and represents the essence of Rodrigo’s truth, the “interior and inexplicable contact” (3). While Rodrigo attempts to illustrate Macabéa in Portuguese, a translator likewise struggles to transfer Rodrigo’s depiction of Macabéa to another language, such as English. Like most languages, Portuguese boasts many words that can have numerous meanings when translated — such as *saudade*, *namorados*, or *capim*. Moreover, every language categorizes its signifiers and signifieds differently. According to George Steiner, various linguistic structures organize “reality in [their] own manner and thereby determine the components of reality that are peculiar to [a] given language” (90). Each language’s linguistic uniqueness, eccentricities, and descriptive abilities access overlapping but subtly distinct elements of reality. Moreover, cultures are as different as languages. A translator must translate between cultures as well as languages, an endeavor that will always fail to some degree because an English speaker simply does not structure the world as a Portuguese speaker does.

To compensate for the difference between languages, translators create (and sometimes even explain) alternatives so the English reader understands the Portuguese meaning. As translators interpret and translate, they insert themselves into the text much like the original author. Translators must accept that their translations will fail — that is, a perfect translation is impossible — because they cannot avoid interpreting and creating as they transfer meaning from one language to another. This section will demonstrate that when a translator recognizes his own presence—inventions and compensations—he will

direct the reader to the author's meaning. He will help the reader see the bridge the author built to silence. The reader will feel the "greatness" of the original text.

Translation's Failure

Ortega y Gasset defines the separation caused by different languages — producing different social factions, groups, and cultures — in this way:

Languages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems — in the last instance, from divergent philosophies. Not only do we speak, but we also think in a specific language, and intellectually slide along pre-established rails prescribed by our verbal destiny. (107)

When translators translate, they are switching to a different method of description, a different mode of thought. As readers "slide along pre-established rails prescribed by [their] verbal destiny," the translator must compensate for the inevitable route variations between the author of the source (original) text and the reader of the target (translated) text. Translation is always an imprecise process.

Culture complicates translation. For example, in *The Hour of the Star*, Clarice refers to geographic places an English reader would not identify, such as the "Zona Sul" in Rio, which Giovanni Pontiero renders as "the more fashionable quarters of the city" (34). The translator, then, cannot be completely literal, often using more words or inventing an alternative to access a similar meaning.

Sometimes translators sacrifice aural effect for meaning or meaning for aural effect. Moser's treatment of a description of Macabéa's childhood is an example of the former. The passage "uma infância sem bola nem boneca" becomes "a childhood without games or dolls" (Lispector 20). Moser opted "for accuracy and the evocation of

sadness, achieved through metonymy,” rather than the rhyme and alliteration of the original (Baubeta 279). The translation sacrifices some of the magic of the Claricean language, but the translator judges that the meaning is more essential in this particular passage. As this example demonstrates, translation is never clean and “adjustments always have to be made to accommodate the black holes that yawn when there is no equivalent in the target language” (Bassnett 3). As translators make these adjustments to compensate for what is lost in translation, they mediate. Where Rodrigo is always present in his narration, translators will be present in their translations through their interpretation.

The Translator’s Presence

Translators and critics often do not acknowledge the role of the translator and instead privilege the language of the translation as if it were the original. As Lawrence Venuti notes,

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text — the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original.” (1)

Readers want a simulation of the experience of reading the original. Since readers seldom know or understand the real experience, they base their expectations on preconceptions formed around their native language. American readers, for example, want to understand the original as if it were written in English and fail to recognize that the source language conceives the world differently than their own.

To please their audience, translators must “insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, [and] fixing a precise meaning” in the target language (1). In the case of English, translators make the text appear English by removing or softening all its non-English elements, further distancing the translated text from its foreign original. To preserve the illusion that the translated text is not translated, translators do not even acknowledge their own deletions and compensations. Effectively, the translator “conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator’s crucial intervention in the foreign text” (1). Translators hide their alterations, their own creative role, and the inevitable violence of the translation process. The text then seems English, and the translator remains invisible. However, this approach obscures the influences of the original culture and language. Walter Benjamin notes in *The Task of the Translator*, “it is not the highest praise of a translation, particularly in the age of its origin, to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language” (Benjamin 77).

Many non-traditional, modern authors, such as Clarice Lispector, challenge the norms of their own language to convey their ideas and illustrate their characters. Translators of Clarice Lispector should also challenge their target language in order to channel her innovative style. Ortega y Gasset explained that the ideal translated text should allow a non-native speaker brief access to another language’s mode of thinking. The translator will carry “the possibilities of their language to the extreme of the intelligible so that the ways of speaking appropriate to the translated author seem to cross into theirs. [...] In this way, the reader effortlessly makes mental turns that are [from the original language]. He relaxes a bit and for a while is amused at being another” (112).

Rodrigo, in portraying Macabéa, wants to give his readers an experience of the “other,” of someone who exists beyond words, but he knows he will probably fail. He pleads with his readers to “take care of her because all I can do is show her so you can recognize her on the street” (11). He hopes his readers will “step out of [themselves] to see how the other sometimes lives” (22). Similar to Ortega y Gasset’s observation, Rodrigo wants his readers to take Macabéan turns. Though she lives so far outside the world of words that both Rodrigo and his readers struggle to comprehend her, Rodrigo does allow his readers a glimpse of Macabéa’s silence. Likewise, if translators of *The Hour of the Star* want their readers to make mental turns that are Portuguese, somehow they must access the inner truth of *The Hour of the Star*. Their readers must glimpse the meaning beyond the signifiers.

George Steiner alleges, “meaning resides ‘inside the words’ of the source text, but to the native reader it is evidently far more than the sum of dictionary definitions” (291). For Steiner, meaning is both inside and beyond the signifiers. Translators interpret what they think is the meaning beyond the words as “the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation” (Venuti 17). As translators attempt to illustrate meaning for the reader, their chosen signifiers imprison the meaning they see in the original text. “Thus translation, ironically, transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary rendering” (Benjamin 77). This imprisonment restricts the many connections a native reader would make and limits the reader of the translation in terms of alternative

meanings and connections — to say nothing of the translation’s creation of a new set of connections not found in the original.

The reader of a translation reads signifiers selected by the translator, traveling to the core of the signified by way of another’s interpretation. Sometimes translators inhibit their readers’ journey to the meaning beyond the words. They may mistranslate where they could have translated better, or they lose words as they carry meaning from one language to another. The translator may misinterpret metaphors. Referring to Giovanni Pontiero’s translation of Clarice Lispector’s short story collection, *Family Ties*, Tace Hedrick argues that “Pontiero’s assumption that Lispector’s animals represent mere materiality [...] drives his translation choices so that, as we will see, he creates an English-language text in which animals merely act to move the story along, toward an allegorical and ‘transcendental’ end” (77). Whether a mistranslated metaphor, concept, or word, these types of losses impede the readers’ access to the core of the signified.

As translators choose signifiers based on their own interpretation, translators become a part of their translation. One translator, Arthur Waley, said, “I have always found that it was I, not the texts, that had to do the talking” (qtd. in Paz 158). By “talking” to attempt to create that elusive meaning, which the native reader potentially understands when he or she reads the source text, the translator carries the burden of their translation. Their own linguistic background, experiences, and perceptions inform their invention and substitution of signifiers as they recreate the author’s meaning in another language. Translators embed themselves in the translation.

The Translator's Process

Where Rodrigo narrates his process of narration, constantly inserting and identifying himself to the readers, the translator does not do so explicitly. “We know next to nothing of the genetic process that has gone into the translator's practice, of the prescriptive or purely empirical principles, devices, routines which have controlled his choice of this equivalent rather than that” (Steiner 288).

At the beginning or end of many literary translations, we often find a translator's note in which they justify certain translation choices and briefly explain their translation process to the reader. Sometimes they include specific notes, as seen in another of Clarice Lispector's novels, *An Apprenticeship or The Book of Delights*, in which the translators include footnotes when they are unable to convey the textual richness of Claricean language. For example, they observe that

The word for “the smell of the sea” in Portuguese, a maresia, is feminine in gender. In her narrative, Clarice Lispector contrasts the gender of the word with its smell, which seems masculine to Lóri. As this distinction cannot be made in English, we have made no reference to gender in our translation, stating simply, “For Lóri, the strong smell of the sea was masculine.” (Mazzara and Parris 78)

While the translators attempt to justify their changes and explain Clarice's richness, they disrupt the readers' experience of their translation even as Rodrigo constantly disrupted his narration of Macabéa. The disruption nevertheless helps provide access to the elusive meaning beyond words.

George Steiner developed the hermeneutic theory to describe the process of translators as they enter the source language and translate to the target language, leaving a part of themselves in the translation when they compensate for the difference. First, “The poet brings his native tongue into the charged field of force of another language. He

invades and seeks to break open the core of alien meaning. He annihilates his own ego in an attempt, both peremptory and utterly humble, to fuse with another presence” (349).

The translator first tries to access the meaning beyond words in the source text. He attempts to fuse with the author and the author’s intended meaning. Once he has attained this, “he cannot return intact to home ground” (349). The translator changes as he translates. His language and abilities transform if he is truly absorbing the meaning of the source language. As he translates, “the poet comes closest to his own true tongue” (349). Crossing between two different worlds of words, he discovers some element of meaning, something that exists beyond them. As he carries meaning from one language to another, he fuses himself to the author. “Beyond the fusion that comes of great translation — but in a sense which is now concrete and to which the poet has earned legitimate access — lies silence” (349). In the silence beyond the world of words lies the meaning of any text. Words exist as we attempt to access, describe, or illustrate the silence beyond the words. In the ideal translation, the translator experiences Rodrigo’s “inexplicable and interior contact” and accesses the silence of meaning.

Steiner’s ideal translation is impossible. While all translators may attempt the process on some level, very few come close to accessing the elusive silence through the syntax. Mistranslation will always be inevitable, at least to some degree. Sometimes readers simply may not comprehend the lexical importance of a particular phrase by the translator. Other times the translator may not understand the source author’s intentions. Occasionally, important cultural nuances are completely opaque to translator, reader, or both. The inevitable mistranslation will “place the translated author in the prison of normal expression, that is, [the translator] will betray him” (Ortega y Gasset 94). The

translator restricts the author to a different language, a different world of words. As a result, a part of the author remains in the source language and the translator creates and improvises to fill the holes in the target language.

While the author hopes to build a bridge to Rodrigo's truth or "Macabéa's silence," the translator usually only describes the bridge or gives directions to it. However, the purpose of translation is to attempt to access the same silence as the author but with different words. The translator who remembers that the source author was translating from the world beyond words, from the silence — and who follows a process along the lines of what Steiner describes —, will come closer to a translation that invokes the bells that almost ring, the language that almost speaks. In a translation of this kind, the reader will hear similar echoes to those the native reader of the source text would have heard, even if the translation remains imperfect and incomplete.

IV. SILENCE IN STRANGENESS

Giovanni Pontiero, a British translator, completed his translation of *The Hour of the Star* in 1986, while Benjamin Moser, an American translator, published his in 2011. Perhaps one of the biggest difficulties they each faced in translating Clarice was channeling her eccentric syntax. Clarice's "otherness, effected through her transgressive writing strategies, is [...] erased by an androcentric posture on the part of some of her most important English-language translators toward the difficult rhetorical strategies and implications of her writing" (Hedrick 60). Translations of Clarice Lispector are often not transgressive or eccentric enough. For both Moser and Pontiero, the challenge is to convey Clarice's 'otherness' in English.

Clarice's pursuit of the essence of being, embodied by Macabéa, informs the way she challenges Portuguese. Her meaning is "part and parcel of the most minute details of her word choice, rhetorical decisions, and syntax; in this sense, the extent of the 'untranslatability' of the Portuguese into precise English might determine the extent to which the translation must remain strange and difficult" (71). A translator, then, must pay close attention to her meaning on the level of syntax and even consider grammatical errors. This section will demonstrate that if translators standardize Clarice too much, they will lose her strangeness. Instead, if translators strive to convey her linguistic eccentricities to their readers, they will approximate the silence Clarice attempts to illustrate in her work, such as in *The Hour of the Star*.

Too often, translators try to correct Clarice's language. Judith Rosenberg observed that "Lispector's writing is such a radical departure from literature that precedes it that there exists among readers, critics, and translators of her work an effort to

normalize Lispector's text" (75). Benjamin Moser, however, gives Clarice's unusual syntax and lexical choices the benefit of the doubt. The result is, according to Barbara Epler, "more like ingesting the whole sea urchin, spines and all, and yet for all its spikiness a thrill and a joy as it goes down." Moser allows his translation to feel foreign, odd, and unconventional. He accepts the difference between English standards and Clarice's revolutionary Portuguese syntax. We will see that his translation mimics Clarice's voice and accesses the strange silence of *The Hour of the Star*. Pontiero, by contrast, restricts the silence by normalizing Clarice's strangeness. The words he chooses standardize her language and soften her metaphors. He deadens her difference, depriving the reader of some of Clarice's strangest and finest syntactical turns and linguistic structures.

Translation Comparison

Clarice Lispector writes, "Pois tenho que tomar nítido o que está quase apagado e que mal vejo. Com mãos de dedos duros enlameados apalpar o invisível na própria lama" (19). Pontiero translates, "I must render clear something that is almost obliterated and can scarcely be deciphered. With stiff, contaminated fingers I must touch the invisible in its own squalor" (19). In the underlined words, we see Pontiero make a conscious translation deviation from the literal meaning of several Portuguese words. "Apagado" literally means "erased," where Pontiero writes "obliterated"; "mal vejo" is "I barely see," while Pontiero chooses "scarcely be deciphered"; and "duros enlameados" is more precisely "hard muddy," yet Pontiero settles on "stiff, contaminated." Finally, "lama" simply means "mud," but Pontiero changes it to "squalor." Pontiero's word preferences are far more complex than Clarice's, restricting and explaining her meaning. If he had selected

simpler words, the reader could have explored her simple, if unusual, metaphors on their own merits — rather than Pontiero’s interpretation of them. As Tace Hedrick argues, Pontiero’s version “is marking out its own distance from the grittier and more violent effect of the Portuguese original, and rewriting Lispector’s rhetorical strategies” (75).

Moser’s translation reads in a different register: “Since I have to make clear something that’s almost erased and that I can hardly see. With hands with muddy hard fingers to feel for the invisible in the mud itself” (11). Moser not only retains the strange metaphor but also preserves the strange syntax that we do not see in Pontiero’s translation. The repetition of “that” in the first sentence and “with” in the second sentence breaks up the flow of meaning, encouraging the reader to pause briefly. Pontiero may have shied from this effect, but Moser embraces it. He lets his translation of Clarice speak English in strangeness.

Where Clarice Lispector writes, “uma pessoa grávida de futuro” (79), Pontiero translates, “A person enriched with the future” (79). Clarice’s words literally mean “a person pregnant of future,” but Pontiero softens Clarice’s metaphor. At this point in the story, Macabéa has just heard the fortuneteller tell her future and believes she will marry a rich foreigner. She believes in this future and asks the fortuneteller what she should do to make her hair prettier. She is preparing to give birth to her future. It has not simply *enriched* her. She lives her future in her death. By choosing “enriched,” Pontiero undermines the whole effect of the metaphor of “pregnant.”

Benjamin Moser also uses his translator’s license, but he only changes the preposition from “of” to “with” simply because “de,” in this context, coincides more closely with the English “with.” He translates, “A person pregnant with the future” (70).

Where Moser's translation preserves as much of Clarice's authenticity and strangeness as possible, "Pontiero's [...] weakens almost to the point of invisibility the important emphasis on repetition, irony, and play which characterizes the ambiguity and hesitation of her meditations on the female body, fecund and deathbound 'film star' of this text" (Hedrick 74-75). Pontiero conveys the general idea but fails the symbolism and the inner meaning of the text.

Another example of Pontiero's dilution of Clarice's language is evident in his translation of "É que a vida lhe era tão insossa que nem pão velho sem manteiga" (58) to "Her life was duller than plain bread and butter" (58). Clarice meant old bread without butter, but Pontiero evokes the image of bread *with* butter as an avatar of the ordinary. Pontiero used the bread and butter idiom to convey the blandness of Macabéa's life, but he fails the metaphor of bread without butter. Old bread without butter is far more tasteless and even unusual than bread with butter. By translating according to English norms, Pontiero loses the unusual strangeness. In Baubeta's words, "What we have here is a preference for dynamic translation over literal translation: the translator has opted for idiomaticity so that the English will read well. But the translation has the effect of distorting the meanings contained in the original text" (262). Moser more accurately translates, "Because life was more tasteless to her than old bread with no butter" (50).

Pontiero significantly changes the format of his translation. In several places throughout the novel, Clarice leaves white space between paragraphs, such as on pages 23 and 70. Moser more accurately translates these white spaces and surrounding passages as seen below:

I have to interrupt this story for about three days.

For the last three days, alone, without characters, I depersonalize myself and take myself off as if taking off clothes. I depersonalize myself so much that I fall asleep.

And now I emerge and miss Macabéa. Let's continue. (61-62)

Pontiero's translation skips an entire sentence and both breaks:

I must interrupt this story for three days.

Now I awaken to find that I miss Macabéa. Let's take up the threads again.
(70)

Perhaps Pontiero hoped to enhance the text's flow and readability; but whatever his reasons, he clearly fails to portray Clarice to his English-speaking audience.

Beyond skipping sentences and standardizing the layout of *The Hour of the Star*, Pontiero meddles too much with the punctuation. For example, Clarice writes "Este livro é um silêncio. Este livro é uma pergunta" (17), and Moser accurately translates, "This book is a silence. This book is a question" (8). Pontiero mistranslates a word, removes others, combines the sentences, and changes the punctuation: "This book is a silence: an interrogation" (17). Baubeta offers an explanation as to why he deviated so much from the original: "The punctuation is changed, perhaps to meet English expectations, perhaps in order to make the rupture less abrupt. This translational strategy may stem from a perceived need to produce a text that does not read like a 'bad' translation, or indeed, like any kind of translation at all" (280). Pontiero tried to make his translation seem as if it were originally written in English. He sacrificed Clarice's strange diction, spacing, and metaphors. His translation fails to grasp how *The Hour of the Star* "is a silence. [And how] this book is a question."

Translating Clarice

As we have seen in *The Hour of the Star*, Clarice Lispector challenges the Portuguese language to access the silence of life or the essence of being. She pushes against the wall of language. Her syntax frequently “bend[s] known forms nearly to the breaking point, yet almost always making them sound right if not correct, as if they ought to exist, or somewhere already do” (Dodson 631). Her style is unique and extremely difficult to replicate. The task of her English translators is not to make her fit into English, but to bend the boundaries of the language to conform to her strangeness.

A translator of Clarice must first understand how strangely she reads in Portuguese. Even Brazilians find her strange and attempt to fix her grammar. When Benjamin Moser published the Portuguese translation of his biography of Clarice, *Why this World* (translated as *Clarice*), “No fewer than five [Brazilian] copyeditors examined the lengthy manuscript. And every one of them tried to correct Clarice’s own prose” in Moser’s quotes from her work (“Translator’s Afterword” 80). Like these copyeditors, Pontiero’s translation corrects her, losing the foreignness, the strangeness, and the essence of Clarice in the process. According to Moser,

Clarice Lispector’s weird word choices, strange syntax, and lack of interest in conventional grammar produces sentences — often fragments of sentences — that veer toward abstraction without ever quite reaching it. Her goal, mystical as well as artistic, was to rearrange conventional language to find meaning but never to discard it completely. (80)

Therefore, a translation of Clarice Lispector should do for English what she did for Portuguese. It should “rearrange conventional” English while not quite discarding the meaning. If in the Portuguese, “a comma trips up the pace where it doesn’t seem to belong, like hair she’s placed in your soup,” then the comma should also be found in the

English translation (Dodson 630). While Moser attempts to retain such commas, Pontiero does not.

Pontiero's editor, Robyn Marsack, did not encourage him to challenge English conventions. She smoothed out "some places where [she] could not grasp the tenses used (or often the subjunctive), but the verb forms and the general meaning were inextricable and one alteration caused others" (104). We have already seen that Pontiero altered the form of the text by deleting spaces and even sentences. He substituted Clarice's radical word choices for softer, more elevated alternatives — such as the aforementioned "grávida" (pregnant) and "enriched." Robyn Marsack admits, "While I realized that this and other alterations to punctuation had the effect of making the structure more conventional, the book seemed so strange that removing a few obstacles did not constitute a great betrayal. On the whole, Giovanni accepted such changes" (103). While Pontiero's translation choices had already conventionalized Clarice's prose to a great degree, his editor encouraged him to normalize it even further.

After Clarice Lispector read a French translation of her work, she warned her translators:

The sentences do not reflect the usual manner of speaking, but I assure you that it is the same in Portuguese. [...] The punctuation I employed in the book is not accidental and does not result from an ignorance of the rules of grammar. You will agree that the elementary principles of punctuation are taught in every school. I am fully aware of the reasons that led me to choose this punctuation and insist that it be respected. (qtd. in Moser, "Translator's Afterword" 79)

Well before Pontiero even began his translation, Clarice had already urged everyone to respect her strangeness and accurately translate it. Unfortunately, neither he nor Marsack heeded her advice. Benjamin Moser did. He captured Clarice's strange language and

syntax in his 2009 biography, *Why This World*, in which he translated all the quotes from Clarice's work himself. Referring to these snippets, he told his Brazilian audiences,

that by reading it [*Why this World*] in Portuguese, they are getting closer to her voice, but they're also missing one of the things that I am proudest of, which is that I think I managed to create an English sound for her. [...] Doing it [translating Clarice] well requires knowing what she means when she uses certain words in certain contexts. A lot of them wouldn't be obvious if you weren't familiar with the rest of her work — but it's very important to keep the echoes there. (Epler, Moser, and Randall)

As Moser discusses Claricean “echoes” and “what she means when she uses certain words in certain contexts,” he seems as if he is speaking of a separate language, and he is. Moser, through his extensive study of Clarice Lispector, better understands her syntax and language.

In 2011, Moser translated *The Hour of the Star* in a mere three weeks. His editor, Barbara Epler — like Marsack —, attempted to normalize his translation, but Moser justified every non-standard comma, syntactical oddity, and “mistake.” He rejected 95% of his editor's suggestions. In an interview with Scott Esposito, Epler related:

I am bent on fixing grammar and addressing various rough spots and making the English read as smoothly as possible (up to a point, of course, especially with a writer as radical as Clarice). So, while I loved the energy and verve of his new translation, I still had many little fixes. And then I had to unbend my mind and, yes, bend my backbone. Because 95 percent of my edits were rejected: as we spent a couple of hours on the telephone (after he'd read my scanned edit), a colleague was in my office as I gave up point after point; Ben would reply when I fixed a point of grammar: “Barbara, Clarice knew proper Portuguese; she chose to splinter that construction” or “Barbara, Clarice could have made that grammatically correct: she *chose* not to!” I'd concede, muttering, “OK, OK...” and I well remember how my co-worker looked at me with pity as I was swatted down again and again.

Unlike Pontiero, Moser did not restrict Clarice to Standard English expectations. He lets his readers consciously feel the foreignness of the text, contemplate its essence, and attempt to hear its silence.

The Translator's Hope

Still, even those most in tune with Clarice's eccentricities cannot completely convey them in another language. As Katrina Dodson put it, she can only present "the Clarice that I hear best" (635). Every person who reads Clarice hears something a little different, and so even the most conscientious translation includes the translator's interpretation to some degree. Some of Clarice's essence will always be lost in translation, but translators hope their readers will see beyond their translations to her essence and greatness.

Where Dodson demonstrates her understanding of Clarice's language as well as an acute awareness of her own role in her "Translator's Note" to *The Complete Stories*, Giovanni Pontiero's afterword to *The Hour of the Star* merely reads like any other scholarly addendum to a novel in English. He briefly discusses Clarice's life and addresses common themes and literary elements. Not once does he allude to his own role as a translator. He does not mention anything about his translation choices.

Moser, like Dodson, writes a translator's afterword in which he acknowledges his role as translator and discusses his process. He narrates it even as Rodrigo narrates the process of illustrating Macabéa, of translating her from the world without words to the world of words. Both Rodrigo and Moser study their subjects, and both attempt to access, with varying degrees of success, the truth of their subjects. By allowing his translation to feel foreign, Moser imitates Clarice's voice and hopes he restores "the spines to the

cactus” (81). He hopes he reminds the reader of Clarice’s presence and invokes the silence of *The Hour of the Star*—“the imminence in those bells that almost-almost ring” (79).

V. CONCLUSION

As Rodrigo mediates Macabéa, he is illustrating a person who exists entirely beyond the world of words; she cannot even describe herself to herself. She is the embodiment of bells that almost-almost ring “without their bronzes giving them sound.” As Marta Peixoto observed, “Macabéa lives unaware that she even has a self” (94). Clarice created Rodrigo to draw attention to the failure to capture Macabéa, and by so doing, points to the silence, the signified that exists beyond the words.

Just as imperfectly, translators strive to allow the English reader access to the author’s truth. They must translate from one language and culture to another, and will always fail. Like Rodrigo, they create and invent to fill the holes. They add their own voice to Clarice’s. In Giovanni Pontiero’s case, this normalizes the text and restricts the reader’s experience. Conversely, Benjamin Moser developed a convincing Claricean English voice, accessing both the Portuguese and Clarice’s silence and greatness.

Nevertheless, even a brilliant translation “conceals far more than it confides; it blurs much more than it defines; it [...] is unstable, full of mirage and pitfalls” (Steiner 241). Not even Benjamin Moser’s version of *The Hour of the Star* is excepted. The voice he gives Clarice, while convincing, is not really her voice. It is merely a “mirage.” His translation approaches her like the bells that almost-almost ring approach ringing.

However, mediators remain necessary for us to be able to access subjects in another world. Rodrigo must mediate Macabéa for her to exist in the literate and literary sphere. Moser must translate Clarice for her to exist in the English-speaking arena. Moreover, successful mediators highlight their subjects’ existence beyond their own world. They recognize that “the greatness of every one” can never exist in their

mediation. Rather, the greatness will always remain, untranslated, in the indescribable silence where “not even thought thinks.”

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Name of Candidate: Hillary Jan Hermansen

Birth date: September 1, 1993

Birth place: Murray, Utah

Address: 1162 East 400 So Apt. 7
Salt Lake City, Utah 84102