Is the text readable? One may have to find other modes, other ways of approaching it: one can sing it. One is in another world. The text does not keep, hold back, and one cannot retain it. Does this mean it is only water? Absolutely not. It is living water, full water. It escapes the first rule of text. It is not linear, not formally constructed whereas most other texts by Clarice Lispector are somehow constructed. As there is no story, one can start anywhere, in the middle, at the end. There is no exterior border. But there are a good many interior borders; there are some very precise ones that could be drawn. They have to do with the infinite line of separation between moments, epiphanies. There are no borders of montage, as in Joyce. The text is without ruse. It is always a question of beginnings. It is hard to imagine a text that would be more violently real, more faithfully natural, more contrary to classical narration. Classical narration is made of appearances,
caught in codes. Here there are no codes. Yet Clarice is not mad; there are living codes with a beginning and an end. She says it: Now I begin, now I close, I leave and I come back. The text follows movements of the body and enunciation, but it also follows thematics. Rather than a narrative order, there is an organic order.

There are keys for reading. In *Close to the Savage Heart*, Clarice Lispector says that she continues to open and close circles of life. In *Agua viva (The Stream of Life)*, she performs this statement. The question, constantly raised—because there is no life without somebody to live it—is: Who lives? Who lives there? “To pray, is to throw yourself in this transfiguring arch of light which spans from what goes by to what is about to happen. It is to melt in it in order to lodge one’s infinite light in the fragile little cradle of individual existence.” To pray is to call for Clarice. It is to throw oneself into this arch of light. That is what renders a reading so difficult. One cannot talk about *Agua viva*. One has to take a leap at the very moment at which what could be called “a now-instant” or “an instant-already” is about to reveal itself. The only thing to do is to delve into the luminous arch. One has to give oneself to that which gives itself.

In *Close to the Savage Heart*, Clarice had recourse to the geometric form of the circle of life. *Agua viva* is its realization and its representation, which in style is rendered through the ubiquitous gerunds and present participles. The problem is that to delve into “the instant-already” is complicated by the fact that we deal with depth and that the latter cannot be measured by the watch alone. Themes relate to life: there is the constant inscription of birth in innumerable ways. It is a process that recurs from circle to circle, often dealing with the birth of the subject itself, the birth of moments of the subject. First, there are moments of gestation during all the moments of gestation.

The subject is yet to come, and in place of a subject, one has that which constitutes itself, a pre-subject. It is stated all the time that “I write” or “I live” before she or he, before the subject differentiates itself, becomes personal, determines itself. Clarice dwells inside those moments, Heideggerian moments of coming onto being, in the space of the not yet and the already. There, in those moments, it is a question of pleasure, though Clarice does not say it. One can raise the question of saying-having pleasure-prohibiting (*dire-jouir-interdire*). *Agua viva* is the inscription of a certain kind of pleasure, of a pleasure which does not keep itself for itself. Generally, one holds back one’s pleasure: I am having pleasure but I do not say it. This brings one back to the Lacanian predicament: she has pleasure but she does not know she has pleasure. She is incapable of saying it. Lacan said about women: They have nothing to say about their pleasure. This is not true. Pleasure is all *Agua viva* is talking about. It is caught between two prohibitions which are not the same. One is that about which *Agua viva* talks all the time. It is that to say and to have pleasure are not simultaneous. To say something always betrays something. That is the very theme of *Agua viva*. What is tragic is that the word separates. There is a difference in language between the subject who has pleasure and the one who says it. That is the theme of *Agua viva* where Clarice writes incessantly: “I’m trying to capture the fourth dimension of the now-instant,” “I want to take possession of the thing’s is,” “I want to possess the atoms of time,” “I want to capture the present,” “at the same time I live (the instant), I hurl myself into its passage to another instant.” That is all she says. I want to capture my essence. I want to capture, not I capture. She knows it is a struggle. Beings resist being captured. Femininity always resists capture. Women know that something between having pleasure and capturing that
pleasure is lost in the act of love. Says Clarice: “Time” is something “that one can’t count.” That is the point of departure. What will she do? She will struggle against the drive to capture to which she so strongly opens herself. Generally, culturally, women do not capture pleasure; they do not say it the way Lacan does. It is in their interest not to say it in a Lacanian scene where there are no sexual relations, because at that moment it is heard through a masculine ear which captures, which is dressed to capture on a mode which would not be a feminine way of capturing it. One must think of another way of capturing it, without appropriation. That is what Clarice tries in Agua viva.

The word separates, but that is not its only function. One must also struggle between truth and lie. When one is on the side of truth, one knows it, absolutely. But one is always carried off, delayed, seduced, and forbidden. As soon as prohibition comes from the outside, it is all over. At a certain level, Agua viva is a triumph. Clarice never drops the theme of the fault that the word itself constitutes. The text is tragic but without despair. She manages to produce a place where to have pleasure and to say it would not be absolutely antagonistic, where pleasure would flow into saying it, would not be extinguished through the act of saying it. As soon as the words come out, she lets go. They are words of thanks, words that say thank you. But to thank is a difficult task because it is possible to lie; one can thank when one has no gratitude. But here, she does say thank you, and with good cause.

To read Agua viva requires a double task. On the one hand, one can follow themes. There are themes in Agua viva. There is no harm done by respecting a certain order while remembering that the text is completely organic. One has to follow all that is of the order of truth, of genesis, of fatality. There are thousands of little themes that are of importance. On the other hand, one can follow that which brings pleasure. The text is full of springs. If one has pleasure, it shows that there is something in common between the reader and Clarice, something of a certain type of libidinal structure. If one takes a theme, it does not have to be absolutely isolated. In other words, if one takes a thread, one will see that it is not a thread but that it is going to produce a web. On the first page, Clarice repeats four times “I want,” “I want to capture,” “I want to possess,” “I want to capture.” This linguistic chain crosses the whole text. When Clarice says “I want,” this “I want” is doubled, immediately. It is an enormous drive to take which is inaugural. She takes in fact not to keep. All Clarice does is put into syntax. These chains are of interest to the reader. There is a perpetual phenomenon of overflowing in the text. Agua viva deserves that one dare to let oneself overflow but that, at the same time, one not be afraid to border it.

Clarice talks a lot about flowers. To speak of flowers is such a forbidden thing, that one no longer knows that it is forbidden. We experience pleasure where she says it, but we wonder why. We should smell the flowers without letting go of the track and come back to her strange way of talking about them. What Clarice says about flowers can be put under the sign of a quotation by Kant in which it is a question of a flower. The quote is the flowered heart of Kant’s aesthetics: “But a flower, zum Beispiel eine Tulpe, is held to be beautiful because in perceiving it one encounters a finality which, when judged as we judge it, does not relate to any end” This is inserted in the great general remark concerning the exposé of reflective aesthetic judgments. The story of the tulip does not come about by chance. There are philosophical and imaginary examples in Kant’s work. What he says about the horse does not relate to a specific horse. But the tulip really existed. The tulip was seen during a
walk in the Alps by Mr. Saussure (not the linguist), who was an observer and botanist and who extolled when he saw a wild tulip: "I found in the woods above the hermitage, the wild tulip which I had never seen yet." This is taken up by Jacques Derrida in a work that focuses on the aesthetics of Kant, and which is entitled Parergon, that is to say which is on the side of the work, which constitutes the side of the work, its border, its frame. The page setting of this text is quite singular: the text sits in a system of corner, the text is put in a frame:

But a flower . . .

. . . does not relate to any end

Parergon works on the frame but while working on the frame, it works on the work itself; on the relationship between work and frame and, obviously, the outside of the frame. Therefore it is written with a frame everywhere which leads to something one could call the liberation of flowers. We can work on the following question of aesthetic judgment in Clarice: What is the beautiful? What does it mean? All this in relation to Agua viva. I will try to do something which in my reading perspective can only come afterward, but which according to the behavior of a philosopher or a literary critic would probably be the first step. It will justly be a first do not (ne-pas), a non-step. This is to say that I will attempt to theorize something of a reading practice, in order to work on art, on the art of Clarice Lispector.

Let us remember the story of Gertrude Stein: "A rose is a rose is a rose. . . ." Here one could compare the two techniques, Clarice's and Gertrude Stein's. The hidden message behind Gertrude Stein's sentence would be something about the impossibility of language to be adequate to the object. Gertrude Stein seems to say: my creation escapes me. Obviously, one will never write creation, but one will write the signifier creation. What Gertrude Stein does is to be hyperlinguistic, that is to say through repetition of "a rose is a rose," she subverts something. She subverts something of what might be repressive in the use of language, the fact that the signifier always represses. If by multiplying the signifier she insists on this phenomenon which is the foundation of language, Clarice does almost the opposite. She makes a portrait of the rose, or, as she says, the story of a rose. "I write you this facsimile" is one of the definitions. She gives hundreds of them because she is someone who proceeds by definition. Yet to say "I write you this facsimile" is to refuse the phantasm of the book that is posited as object containing something that would be on the side of knowledge. When she says that, it is a declaration, a confession, it is also ruseful and ironic, because every book is a facsimile of expression, of representation, of reality, etc. In other words, she writes the books of books. Besides, that is true. Now, I will take it at the letter: in English, simile is a comparison or a metaphor.

If there is a subject of this text, or an object, it is on the question of writing. Agua viva is about writing, as a verbal activity. I write you. This is something active. The circulation of blood in this text, the vital theme of this text, is writing, all the questions of writing. Everything is organized around the mystery of writing. This mystery has to be read at the level of: why I write, how I write, from where I write, to whom I write, with what I write, of what I write,
about what, toward what. All the questions of writing are right here. Its thematization can be regrouped. The question of silence, for example, is the silence in the spacing of music, but silence is the ground, the earth itself, where there is soil for the plant and where there is a surging of the plant from the ground. It is silence itself which becomes the ground for verbalization. When she throws her voice up into the air—there is always something very corporeal that is being described—and at the same time the words are taken from silence as matter, silence is matter. At that moment the question of saying comes from somewhere else. Silence is matter whence the effects of voice are surging. But to speak becomes another story: to speak is the great battle with language; it is to speak in spite of language; to speak though language has already said everything. Clarice does not want to say what has not yet been said. It is not the inédit, which in any event the already said of language makes impossible. Her endeavor consists of speaking in such a way that what is normally condemned to mutism comes onto expression. Example: the flowers. Do flowers speak? They speak to us but generally one does not let them speak. This raises the question of: who speaks? Who has the word? Who takes the word in the text? What does the word take? What comes to be text? To speak comes in any case back to writing. The fact of writing is to withdraw the bodily voice from something that has been said. Clarice fights against the silence of the text, of paper, of the text. But to speak is what one does. As she says: “above all, I don’t know how to speak to you in writing, I, who have become used to your being the audience.” It is evident that when one speaks, it is in the present. As her strongest desire is to make things present themselves, it is to bring into presence. And since, by definition, when one writes, it is past, Clarice is constantly trying to reanimate, to recall what there may be of an immediacy in the word: “To speak to you in writing.”

One can ask the question: why the flowers in this text? I would ask the question in a slightly different way: how to write after the rose. In Agua viva, there is a whole parade of flowers, there is not only one. Why flowers? What does it mean? Is the question “why” pertinent? It is always pertinent, because, in a certain way, it is in a very general way impertinent in this text: this is a text which does not reveal its reason. In other words, it relegates to the past the question: “why?” At the same time, the question “why” makes texts grow, it is called upon by the text itself. Where one has a feeling of irrationality, and where one is in the position of the little child who says “why”? even if the text answers: “because.” Which in fact is a very good answer. Why? I would say that this is the question “flower.” So why some flowers? First, there are ready-made expressions. One has dried flowers in the form of rhetorical flowers. Our memory system cannot say flower in the proximity of books and paper—in a field that is another story—without thinking of rhetorical flowers. Everything that deals with metaphor is vital here. One has to work on the space of inscriptions of this text and on its play with metaphor, on its struggle or play with metaphor. The question of the flowers is the transformation of “with” into “how.” How to say flowers without flowers. How to say it without betraying.

One cannot work on metaphor without working on metonymy. And there is, in Clarice, an abundant use of metaphor and of metonymy. How? Its use is in a system of violent rupture with what might be the forms of language. Language is metaphor and metonymy, one cannot avoid it. Clarice attempts to break this off the way one breaks off a relationship. When one breaks off a relationship, one always keeps traces of attachment. It is never completely dislo-
cated. What she detaches herself from is what may be dead, fixed, gluey in the double system of language. Here, for example, when I say “Why the flowers?” there is an internal answer. I take it at random. I do not need this to answer. When Clarice talks about a tulip—which is a tulip only in Holland—first there is no article: “Tulipa só é tulipa na Holanda.” In other words, one has begun to make a certain way with the flowers. One has been accompanied by flowers long enough to reach this point. The suppression of the definite article signifies the passage from the common noun to the species. But it is more interesting to think that the flower takes on its proper name rather than to say that it took the name of a woman. It so happens that tulip becomes a proper name. But tulip is properly tulip only collectively. In other words, it is a flower; one does not betray the flower. This gesture works on non-uprooting while one is in the midst of the proper, that is to say on the difference between proper and figurative. “A lone tulip... needs an open field to be.” This must be heard in what would still seem literal but is only a facsimile. It must obviously already be understood at an allegorical level. Allegorical of what? The tulip makes sense only in its place. Clarice is very ruseful. Her story about Holland is not a question of natural science. It is not as a botanist that she writes this, though there are passages where there is the influence of botany. Clarice is not afraid—even if, in appearance, she is on the side of origins, of the primary—of associations that are almost clichés. Clichés of what? Not of the imaginary, or of the unconscious. True, all this is part of our immense cultural, symbolic memory which crosses the ensemble tulip-Holland-open field. The tulip carries with it the tulips, takes its full meaning of tulip only in the open field of Holland. At the same time, one cannot not hear it at the level of a textual metaphor. But Clarice does not say this and that is her strength. Because she broke off with metaphor does not mean that there is no metaphor, that there is no “as.”

Why flowers? If one read a story of “I talk to you about a rose, the rose is the feminine flower,” one would function with a whole system of associations about a singular rose that had been pre-selected and caught in an anthropomorphic space. Besides, Clarice’s passage starts with: “The rose is the feminine flower that gives of itself all and so completely...” To liberate the rose from the anthropomorphism which comes from the fact that it is spoken in language, the rose must be reinscribed in the species. What emerges in the passage is the need to bring in flowers in order not to betray the rose. One can think that Clarice proceeds by association as freely as possible. There is no free association because one flower calls, beckons another, but beyond the general fact that one thing calls another. There is an intense, incessant worry (souci) which is the moral of her writing and which consists in giving back the flower to the flower by getting closer to the place of origin. Clarice tries to be as essentialist as possible, even if there is, of course, no essence. Therefore she tries to destroy what would be the singular through isolation, captation, while taking into account that there is somebody who is in touch with the flower. In other words, there is exchange. She can say: I am full of acacias. The flower alone is a flower alone; the flower beheld, is a flower beheld, there are differences, alterations. One is in the relative, one is in relation with, and all these flowers are lived flowers precisely. At no point does she make us think that it is an absolute flower. It is a relative flower, but it is as much flower as possible. On the one hand, there is the beholder who looks at the flower, who thinks it, names it, who throws over it this kind of web of human sensitivity. On the other, there are, as in a counterweight, flowers which come to help the flowers,
which make “flower with the flower.” That is Clarice’s genius. First, she does not philosophize, she simply uses all the means possible. It is on the means that one must work in her text. Means are necessary ruses to be faithful to what is not I.

The technique of reading must be structured here. Let us come back to the little sentence by Kant: “But a flower, for example a tulip,” in the third part of Derrida’s Parergon which bears as subtitle, Le sans de la coupure pure. If one says “sans” (without, blood), the ear does not know what the eye would say. At that moment one obeys associations. It is obvious that the pure cut demands or breathes blood. One could also say that, if there is a cut, it breathes a s’en aller, a going away. It so happens that in Derrida it is written sans, without. The sans of the coupure pure was therefore not blood, it was a cut without blood, but with without, that is to say, without blood. In a certain way, the text by Clarice is without blood and with without. It is written like this and that makes it hard to read. I do not consider this difference negative but as indicative of something in the text that does not give itself to be read without escaping, drowning, submerging, retreating. This is due to its fictional form. Kant’s quote with reference to the tulip talks about a certain without which is a without without-blood, that is to say a finality without end, without purpose. A finality without end may be paradoxical, but it signifies something very important: without is not on the side of the negative but on the side of blood, because blood circulates. Kant’s little sentence describes the non-rapport, the non-return, and not the interminable or the infinite. There is finality but finality without end. It is not a negative without. It is not, because when there is without, and a cut, one cannot not be drawn into a phantasm of castration, of lack. At some point, Derrida’s text says, repeating a sentence by Kant: “On this sans which is not a lack, science has nothing to say.” Kant’s sentence reads: “There is no science of the beautiful, only a critique of the beautiful.” This does not mean that there is no beautiful, or that we cannot say anything about it. It means that there is no science of the beautiful, or that the beautiful cannot be related to an epistemology. There is positively a non-savoir of the beautiful. For example, in front of his wild tulip, Sausure stood with his mouth open, which does not mean without voice. But at that moment, if there is a cry, it is not cut, it is breath. In front of the tulip, one will exclaim: How beautiful it is. Go and find out later what it meant. That is what phenomena of open mouths are about. It is beautiful! But then what? How? What is there to say? Well, perhaps, the difficulty of saying it, of linking this perception to an énoncé. The fear of losing pleasure while theorizing is one of the questions evoked by Clarice. However, I do not think that one “loses pleasure.” Such a statement is taken in the vast and vague risk of castration. One does not “lose pleasure,” nor does one keep it: one scans it. And to scan it while trying to say it is what Clarice does. Her book is about the scansion of pleasure. The tulip is completely philosophical but it is enhanced with poetic charm when one has in one’s bodily memory Clarice’s tulip. If one proceeds philosophically before proceeding poetically, and this is central to the philosopher, pleasure is crushed. But if one begins by having pleasure, it is like knowing how to swim: one never forgets it.

A few words on what presents itself as what one could call at the same time ‘the most and the least’ in this text. What does this mean? The least is that which does not announce itself. For example: “Now I’m going to speak to you about... flowers.” It is a thread. It is inscribed over and again. It is also the earth of all that grows or of all that
swims in *Agua viva*. That is to say, it is a question of style. One has to laugh when one reads a sentence like: "I write you, seated by an open window." The only thing that Clarice did not deal with is grammar. Examples like I write you, I'm writing to you, I write, I write to you abound, yet the text is put together with few words. There are many repetitions, as in musical scales. The text practices its scales without stopping. There are also variations. I have the vertiginous impression never to know which page I am on. All these relations of false anteriority, posteriority are something of a *déjà vu* which is not *déjà vu*. There are recurrences, like chair or apples. This contributes to disorienting the reader. Disorientation is the orient of this text. It is not pure repetition of the identical. The same theme resurges, draws a little flower, simply because there is never a radical cut. Because, on a vegetal mode, there is interminable ramification, with burial and resurgence. I am still in metaphors; I do not fear them; I obey what this text suggests. The text is metaphor itself, a metaphor which is not a metaphor but *água viva*, living water, a metaphor without stop, a gigantic metaphor, a facsimile of a book, which permanently works with the counter-metaphor "with." If, for example, one says that one is going to work on a fragment, if one takes the text one is going to work on a priori, visibly, it becomes a very cut up text. Here, one could say, it is a coast. On the level of signification one cannot find a whole. One could find one on the level of form. Again, one must ask the question: what is form? It is what marks articulation. It is not the beginning or the end of an image, though that can happen. Clarice's gesture which listens to itself write does not hide it. It says it continually. The means of locomotion of this text are inscribed everywhere. The text is its own echo, like a person or a plant. Like a plant it buries itself and surges up, or like a person it reflects upon itself.

The text says what it says which makes reading very difficult. One has to read the very phenomena of writing, reading oneself.

Elsewhere, there is something of a first point, a first sentence. "It's with such intense joy." In Portuguese, the *é*, 'is,' has only one letter. At the limit, this would be the unit of reading of the text, a sentence-word, one and only word. A word of one letter alone. This first sentence is deceptive. It propels the text: "It's with such intense joy." One waits for a proposition to come: that this text is born, for example. The sentence triggers a wait, a wait for something that is already there. The sentence does violence to the classical sentence. It sets the tone for what is to come. There are only beginnings, hundreds of them. We take off, without end. It is impossible to divide the text into fragments. There is no narrative, no story, none of the instruments of narrative functions here, so one can only obey the text. One reads in a circle. One obeys a breathing rhythm. All this explodes the temporal reference marks completely. It is put in place from the beginning by the systematic recourse to the present tense. The present imposes itself. One cannot not write this text in the present. Let us come back to the sentence: "I think I'm going to have to ask permission to die." One has two possibilities with such a sentence. Either one looks for where it comes from, in what kind of causal chain the expression is inscribed. But here I cannot, it is too late: "I listened to *Firebird*—and passed utterly away." This is quite an event. Here, if one goes back to see where this abrupt announcement of death comes from, one comes across the chrysanthemum: "The chrysanthemum is profoundly happy. It speaks through color and dishevelment. It's a flower that impetuously controls its own savagery." That is a finality without end, a wild tulip. It is a flower which, being disheveled, controls its own wildness. What
is the relationship with the following sentence? None, but the two are not without rapport. There is a without rapport. In a certain way one goes abruptly from the chrysanthemum to “I think I’m going to die.” Are these two different worlds? There is a hidden rapport. One has to retake the path across the flowers. But if one looks at the passage of the flowers from close up, it too jumps all the time. True, there is a regrouping, there is an ensemble: the ensemble flower. Yet inside the ensemble, there are incessant breakages. There I pick up something again. Every reader is struck by the story of flowers, and this is not by chance. In the passage on the victoria regia, there is the phrase: “é de ser morrer delas” literally “one could die” of the pleasure they give. This is the rule of the text. It consists of a release, of a setting in motion. There is an insistence until—I stay in metaphors—one arrives at the acme, at the incandescence of something that is orgiastic, but in a feminine mode, at something that goes over to the limit and then one can say no and everything starts up again. One needs to see the system of starting up again (relance). At times, the mechanism of pleasure can be read clearly. It may be the mechanism of breathing or else it may be called music. It always corresponds to bodily rhythms, but of a body that produces a reading of the world. The body is worldly, not brute. It makes love, it is taken in moments of exchange, of making love with the other, hence the rhythmic variations. It is not always the same rhythm. Yet, on the level of logic or of discourse, there is no plot, no evident causality. It makes reading difficult. If one takes the book as an ensemble, it openly declares that it does not interrupt itself. There are no chapters. True, the first thing, other than obviously writing itself, is: it is about. That is active. What this leads to on the level of the body is non-interruption. I will come back to this. First, let us return to the proof of non-interruption which is continuous, but which is inscribed in most obvious fashion at a certain moment. There is the sentence: “I think I’m going to have to ask permission to die. But I can’t, it’s too late.” A few paragraphs later, we read: “I’m tired. I tire easily because I’m an extremely busy person.” Now, if one works on this passage, for example on the sequence of sentences introducing the paragraphs: “I think I’m going to have to ask for permission to die,” “I have to interrupt this because—didn’t I tell you? didn’t I tell you that one day something was going to happen to me?” and “I’m tired,” if one reads these three introits, these three incipits of paragraphs, it so happens that they do inscribe interruption: “I think I’m going to have to ask permission to die . . . stop,” “I must interrupt . . . interruption;” “I’m tired . . .” that is to say I’m tired . . . I’m going to rest. Perhaps one goes toward an interruption, but more exactly: my fatigue comes, my fatigue is going to be put to work, and I’m going to work on the fatigue that overcomes me and makes me interrupt. If one looks at the temporal shuttle that this constitutes, one has: “I think I’m going to have to ask permission to die”: one advances. “I can’t, I can’t, it’s too late”: it is already past. The time of interruption is the third moment of this paragraph which explains without giving an explanation. One never is in what would be of the order of liaison, of heavy binding: Period. “I listened to Firebird”—one has the impression that this is juxtaposed—and if we followed the pun on “fire” in the Portuguese verb “afoguei,” “I became enflamed entirely.” First there is something like a premonition or preparation. It does not happen in the text, therefore we are told: “I can’t.” Truly, one could read: I am no longer. It is too late, but it has already happened. Obviously, death cannot “happen” other than in this way. Clarice died between two sentences: “It’s too late,” “I listened to Firebird and I became enflamed entirely.” There
are all the themes of *Agua viva* at once. One has: “First I listened,” there has been sublation of “to be dying” through music and not through any kind of music: “I became the Firebird.” I became music again by going through fire, through the ear and of course through writing. All this happens on the theme which is not mentioned, because that would be vulgar, the theme of the phoenix. The firebird in Brazilian is the sparrow of fire. At the level of the signifier, there is another very subtle play on the passage through fire and water because “afogou” literally means “I drowned.”

Clarice is the champion of the sublime metaphor. Generally, one cannot undo her mechanism which is so fast and so subtle that one is caught in it and carried off into the general motif of the text which is nothing but transport. A statement seemingly as banal as: “I’m tired. I tire easily because I’m an extremely busy person,” could be read from the point of view of the technique of writing as “to go on while following oneself.” Clarice accompanies herself and follows herself. One could define her thus: She follows herself, she follows herself. “I’m tired.” This leads to a paragraph on fatigue. She follows her own remarks which she remarks.

The middle paragraph of those three begins with “I have to interrupt this because.” There is a staging of interruption. She effectuates the “didn’t I tell you? didn’t I tell you that one day something was going to happen to me?” I want to insist on the formulation, “didn’t I tell?” because it is one of the most frequent marks of the text. There are a certain number of questions and the question is part of the general technique of the text. There are questions which at times are followed by answers and there are questions which remain without answer. If I distinguish between the two, it is because in the ensemble of the play questions/answers, the convention calls for real questions, not rhetorical ques-

tions. The questions here address themselves sometimes to you sometimes to herself. A question like “And what if dying tastes like food when you’re really hungry?” has no answer. Another “What am I in this instant? I’m a typewriter,” has an answer. “Or is the portal already the church, and when you’re in front of it you’ve already arrived?” No answer. “Will my song of the it never end?” No answer. These questions inscribe the generality of a theme that could be called the “I don’t know.” Sometimes the question mark is the answer. One could talk of the putting into question of this text, as one could talk about its staging. “Didn’t I tell you that one day something was going to happen to me?” What is inscribed in the interruption is the event. One has to interrupt so that something can happen. “Didn’t I tell you,” also inscribes the movement of retrospective anticipation. And then there is a kind of textual genesis: “A man named João just spoke to me over the phone. He grew up (literally “created himself”) deep in the Amazon jungle.” This can be read as a real event or as an imbedded allegory of some kind of a displaced genesis related to the verb. Here a man called João, a man already called, called. One has a narrative after the creation. “He says that there’s a legend there about a talking plant.” One finds again the thread of plants, of flowers. Now, the person who created himself tells something. We are still in the mode of the one: one word, one man, one thing, once. All this is a very distant displacement of genesis. It is unique. “One night he came home very late and as he was walking along the corridor where the plant was he heard the word ‘João.’” He thought it was his mother calling him and he answered: “I’m coming.” We come back to a naming through the mother, that is to say through Clarice. And he answered: “I’m coming.” This reminds us of the Bible. But when João went upstairs, he found his parents fast asleep. There is a return to a kind of realistic scene.
There was a little narrative, a tiny little short story. That is a myth of the origin of the world. It is cosmogonical and minuscule. Of interest is that the paragraph started with "I have to interrupt this because," but what happens? Is it this story? Or did João tell the story? If one looks closely at the tenses, it is impossible to decide what the order is. It does not matter, because the reader becomes accustomed to being in a completely "fantasticated" tense, as Clarice would say. Here, one can be absolutely contemporary with Genesis. The text works on the notion of "contemporary," not "simultaneous," with time periods that are dislocated in relation to each other. Here there is a little bit of narrative time, that is to say a past tense, and that is noticeable. Here and there in the text we have these pseudo-narratives in the past, the man with one foot, the story of Zerbino. They deserve our attention because they are uprooted in relation to the classical space of narrative and re-inserted in a microscopic form in the vast elementary text of Agua viva. They are no longer simple narratives but are closer to plants or animals. In this passage, on João, there is a mass of associations since there is interruption and the opposite of interruption. The telephone re-establishes something: a non-cut between plant and man since the plant speaks. There is a whole system of relays, of callings. Through the system of relays of narration, of callings, everything is always bound.

Let us go back a few paragraphs: "The chrysanthemum is profoundly happy." It produces deep joy, comes from deep joy, distances itself, takes off. One is left not with death but with the life of the chrysanthemum: "It speaks through color and dishevelment." Afterward, one has the other system of the plant which speaks, the disheveled part. This is rather banal. It has been over-exploited by Georges Bataille in relation to the hair of flowers: there is growth, overabundance of the hair, excess, something uninterrupted, as one knows. Interestingly, it is a flower which is "descabeladamente," which is there, on the page, like a disheveled chrysanthemum. The word contains so many letters that it is through its dishevelment that the chrysanthemum controls its own wildness. In other words, it is through its wildness that it controls its own wildness. That is the text itself, its model of spending; it is because it is disheveled that something of the dishevelment becomes proper. When Clarice says proper, she introduces a tension between wild and proper. Wild is detached and proper comes back to the same. It also functions as a textual metaphor, hence the violent surging, while one is in full dishevelment, of "I'm going to have to ask permission to die." This is moving because it deals in addition with the problem of dying. Again, there is the whole question of interruption, of the recharging of energy which is going to be spent, hence a whole circuit of energies. But there is also the relation to human dying and that brings across what can be called passion, because it implies a calling of the other. In Brazilian, permission is license. One should work on license because in Latin it is liect, and that means: "does that please you?" It is not simply permission, it is "may I please die?" In other words, it still puts into question the system of pleasure: I need to die of pleasure, but perhaps you will not like it; my pleasure may perhaps bar your pleasure.

To continue on the "I continue." As already said, one cannot interrupt this text. The last three pages are indicative of this. We read: "What I write you is a this. It won't stop: it continues on. Look at me and love me. No: look at yourself and love yourself. That's what's right. What I write you continues on and I am bewitched." The text stops saying "I continue" just as to die is only the pulse of life, the passage of my pleasure to your pleasure. But if we read
the last lines: "What I write to you is a this." This' is between quotation marks. "It won't stop:" colon, I stop, "continues." This is exactly the mise en scène of the sliding between a stop and continuity. You must have noticed that the text is strewn with colons. There are also dashes. What is the use of the colon? What is a colon? Generally, it opens onto an explanation, but it is always done with the help of an interruption. It can be said that the colon is not the period, it is the period of the period, the canceling of the period. It is a moment mute and marked; it is the most delicate tattoo of the text. It is also in place of, instead of, everything that would be causal. For example, when we read: "It's simply that: secret." "Secret," is a sentence, it is the shortest sentence perhaps. But it is a sentence in one word. It is a sentence that is secret and that at the same time says its name. One could invert and say: "Secret: it is simply that." This is secret, the secret is the secret of the this, it is a word which makes infinite sense all by itself, it is a sentence which performs the secret itself. It is the greatest economy, waiting is once again deceived. Clarice makes massive use of "this" throughout the text. For example: "This isn't a story." "I paint a this." "I write with this, it's all I can do." "This" is often taken between quotation marks and in those instances becomes a substantive. There is an interminable substitution between demonstrative and substantive, between verb and substantive. They are substitutions of grammatical categories, a disturbance of grammatical categories in such a way that there is a continuity which is being produced in the ensemble of sentences at the grammatical level and this incessantly doubles the value of the present tense.

Let us come back to the question of reading, to the question of bordering. We are told, repeatedly, that the text continues whatever may happen. It is we who stop. One must say that life has an underlying style that does not depend on the human rhythm: "I'm unexpectedly fragmentary." Let us point out the paradox and comical effect of the juxtaposition of these words "inopinadamente fragmentaria." The length of the word undoes the meaning. To read it, one must be "unexpectedly fragmentary." True, one cannot do anything else but surrender to the flow of the text, accept its play of continuities. If we want to become aware of it with an instrument other than writing, that is to say with speech, we may indeed feel out of breath or anguished. The text has its punctuation at the level of themes. Instead of a plot or a narration which would formalize something of an interruption, of cutting, of pure cutting, one has the most simple thing in the world, therefore barely visible: the paragraph.

There is the story of the chair and two apples. Chairs and apples can never be added. This is exactly like the text itself that never amounts to a sum, to a whole. What can be found everywhere, like a series of callings, new beginnings, are little words. For example, toward the end, there is a rhythmic precipitation and Clarice writes: "Ah, this flash of instants never ends. Will my song of the it never end? I'm going to end it deliberately, with a voluntary act. But it continues on in constant improvisation, creating always and forever the present which is the future: This improvisation is. Do you want to see how it continues on?" What has to be noted is: "but it continues." Oh, living is so uncomfortable." "This improvisation is," is the law of the text. "My song of the it never ends," I must stop it somewhere, so I stop it deliberately, but it stops in constant improvisation, period, onto the next line. "This improvisation is," signifies the presentation of the present. It is a sentence which leaves us hungry. It is a sentence which has a finality without end, be it affirmative on the mode of the
Bible, or of the most classical form in Clarice, on the mode of subversion of the classical sentence, the basic sentence, with subject, verb, and predicate. One would expect: “this improvisation is beautiful or tiring,” but we have: “this improvisation is.” We have a construction that is so condensed, interrupted and still complete, with only the subject and the verb “to be” that is the predicate. It qualifies itself. It insists on the theme. It could be both at once. There are repetitions which give the feeling of a déjà vu. There is a massive recourse to the verb on this complex mode which doubles the effects of the present. In addition, there is recourse to demonstratives, to a deictic usage that points and underlines.

Here is another example of Clarice’s syntax: “Oh, living is so uncomfortable. Everything presses in: the body demands, the spirit never ceases, living is like being weary but being unable to sleep—living is upsetting. You can’t walk around naked, either in body or in spirit. Didn’t I tell you life presses in?” There is a repetition of the verbal system of nouns as subject. The verb functions as noun. There is a double activity. These are pseudo-definitions. One has this strange expression: “living presses in” or “constricts.” There is no subject. “Constrict” has a strong verbal value, as if to live did not depend on a self, on a subject. To live has become a noun. There is a passage to the nominal, as if the ordinary mass of words were attracted to the nouns, and as if there were an ascension from the banalized common toward the proper. In the absence, in the effacement of the personal subject of enunciation, everything in the énoncé becomes subject. One has great masses of subjects: to live is subject, apple is subject, so is tiger. Never have there been fewer personal subjects. There are subjects said to be impersonal but attracted toward the personal through such grammatical play. If one followed those grammatical systems, one would be led to the question of: who writes? who speaks? but at the most refined level since the question of the author is still here, though obviously reversed into that of without-author. Clarice can leave from elsewhere, as she says toward the end: “Now I am free.” The text continues; it is like the story of the man João and the plant. “This improvisation is.” The source of the improvisation is cut at the end.

At one point, there is an element of plot: “The ring you gave me was made of glass and it broke and love ended. But sometimes in its place there comes the beautiful hatred of those who loved each other and who devoured each other. The chair in front is an object for me.” One is caught in a long pseudo-narrative, which starts with an interruption, with the breaking of the glass ring. The ring is the link; it links; then comes the chair: “The chair in front is an object for me. Useless while I’m looking at it.” The work on objects is very important. There one of the major messages of the text disengages itself. It is the displacement of the value from subject onto object: “The object-chair interests me. I love objects insofar as they do not love me. But if I don’t understand what I write the fault isn’t mine. I have to speak because speaking saves. But I have no word to say.” “But it would be salvation.” The series of conjunctions, “but,” comes instead of the broken ring. “What would a person say to himself in the madness of candor? “but . . .”

A little further on, Clarice writes: “Who could have invented the chair,” “Behind my own thought is the truth that is the word’s. The illogic of nature.” Illogical is what is without logos, which is silence. “‘God’ is such an enormous silence that it terrifies me. Who could have invented the chair? You need courage to write what comes to me: one never knows what could come and frighten. The sacred monster has died. In its place was born a girl orphaned of
her mother. I know full well that I must stop.” One must look at the braiding between interruption and non-interruption, which, in addition, has at stake the creation of a world without subject, without author. It began earlier, at a moment when there was no more subjectivity because the latter had been interrupted. The ring broke; there was no more love; then, given Clarice’s writing, when one arrives at the one who has invented the chair, one is effectively projected toward the chair: “The record player is broken.” I look at the chair and this time it’s as if it too had looked and seen,” instead of the scene of love, there is a scene of love with the chair, that is not announced. It is inscribed as it produces itself: “This time it’s as if it too had looked and seen. The future is mine—while I am living. I see...” Now one begins to take off in a new relation between subject and object, in a nonsubjective world. Here one finds all the themes of The Passion According to G. H.

Agua viva is not calculated in mathematical fashion. It is, as Clarice constantly reminds us, a text that follows itself, which lets itself be led, which takes risks with the acacias and which is not afraid to let itself go. It is not an unconscious populated with Freudian scenes. True, it always takes place “behind something,” as Clarice says. It is pre-logical, pre-discursive. It happens because there is, because there takes place. This place is largely that which would be delimited by the range of the body: within reach of hand, ear, or the senses. It always goes through something concrete. There is a propagation that does not allow for the imaginary or phantasm. A reading that works on themes must work on big, large themes. For example, on all that turns, takes root, is source of the act of writing. These are acts, always. They all led toward the final episodes, because there is a progression. It is not by chance that the final scenes are scenes of grace, because, as Clarice says, grace is without object, without subject. Those scenes are the most naked. In this strange corps-à-corps, one does not know if it is one of love or struggle; she stops at the end and the text continues. Something disengages itself and even if there is no story, there will have been a movement, a movement of liberation, of interminable propulsion, which effectuates itself, which insists, and which performs at the end.

When Clarice writes: “What I write you is a this,” to whom does she address herself? To the reader, to you to whom she spoke in permanence, to whom she did write this letter. The “this” orders, orders the reader, shows a direction. “Do not stop, continue; do not stop; it is no longer she but a you, transparent, that continues; it may be the text. Then, this extraordinary sentence: “Look at me and love me. No: look at yourself and love yourself.” What does one hear? “Look at me and love me” is an imperative, an order given, an injunction spoken. One has in return: “No: look at yourself and love yourself.” It inscribes something that the grammar would perhaps negate, but the order has been executed. In other words: you look at me and love me, no: interruption, substitution, while you look at me and love me, in fact in the act of writing, the truth let us say, of the first sentence is in the second: “Look at yourself and love yourself.” That is to say you think you read me, but what you do is look at yourself and love yourself. Once again, there is a relay of you. It is caught in a general problematic of the not I—and there is no more humble way of saying I. But in the meantime, there has been all the work on effacing the subject I, as in The Passion According to G.H. and given the fact that there are only objects, now “I” is an object among objects.