

The horses in Clarice Lispector's writing

I read Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) the way I read as a child. Fumbling and as if in rage. I read because reading saves me. As a child I had a love: horses. The bodies that frightened me were the only thing I could love unlimitedly. I read with the horses. Every time the word appeared on the page: HORSE HORSE HORSE. It sharpened my attention. I read with the horses. I read Lispector, with the horses, through the horses, as if the horses were EVERYTHING.

They, the horses, move through her texts. I follow them. They help me understand. They teach me something about heartbeats

Why horses and why Lispector, and theoretical background

So I read with the horses in focus, from a childish and nerdy perspective. But also because the horse is at the intersection of nature and culture. Moa Matthis, Anne Hedén and Ulrika Milles call their book of essays on horses and horse culture *Over all obstacles - a history of*

civilisation history (2000). It is telling that it is a history of civilisation, while the horse is also the epitome of wildness. The Rolling Stones sing: 'Wild horses couldn't drag me away, Wild wild horses couldn't drag me away'. Patti Smith sings: "When suddenly Johnny gets the feeling he's being surrounded by horses, horses, horses, horses coming in all directions white shining silver studs with their nose in flames". I want to that the horse is a central figure in the story of wildness and civilisation. When I read Clarice Lispector's books, I realise that horses are everywhere there. Perhaps precisely because Lispector moves in the borderlands of civilisation.

Susan McHugh in her book *Animal Stories. Narrating across Species Lines* (2011) has a chapter called "Velvet Revolutions: Girl-Horse Stories". Here McHugh draws on Enid Bagnold's novel *National Velvet* (1935), and its film adaptation. From there, she does a historical deep dive, with a British focus, into how women, mainly in an upper-class position, were given the opportunity to

to ride and what this has done to the image of the horse-girl relationship. She points out how media and mediation, often visual narratives, create images of horse girls, and thereby also desires.

Desire can be heterosexual - McHugh emphasises how throughout history there is often sexualisation of both girls and horses and the combination of both.

For example, the horse has been seen as a substitute for men, whereby the girl is seen as if she is riding a man.

man. But desires can also be lesbian, and McHugh clearly points out how the horse-girl narrative can simultaneously reinforce a patriarchal order and disrupt or distort it. The horse-girl relationship can be queer in that it harbours a kind of anarchist desire, characterised by erotic and social forces such as power and nurturing, hardness and softness, wildness and control, danger and

control, danger and pleasure. All this is in the body, the horse body and the girl body. And the relationship between them can be described as a 'deviant passion', as something that goes beyond a heterosexual pattern of desire. I think it's very much about the gaze - is it 'the malegaze' or "a queer eye"? Maybe both at the same time. McHugh argues that the texts and phenomena she examines, when read alongside each other, contribute to a breakdown of the the subject, in favour of an intersubjective existence - the human being, the girl, is no longer alone at the at the centre, she lives together with the horse, they act together. This opens up for a way of thinking that does not see the human being as a self-evident centre, but shows the possibilities of a for a collective to make a revolution.

In my reading, I channel Jenny Jarlsdotter Wikström's dissertation *Materiella vändningar* (Material Turns). (2020) a Swedish-language and contemporary reading of Lispector's texts, in which an attentive growth in *Living Water* is highlighted. Jarlsdotter Wikström writes about the the material turn, a movement that makes the body and the materiality of things visible, and how these

these become (and already are) literary. The material turn, I argue, is by its "nature" queer (the word "queer" appears in JW's thesis 231 times) in that it decentralises the (male) human subject, emphasises a non-autonomous agency, and otherwise fucks up the ideas about what a text, a narrative, a life can be. Jarlsdotter Wikström argues that what Lispector does is to: "affirming the feeling of not belonging to the human race that the novel's protagonist describes. This strange feeling is, in fact, something the narrator seeks out rather than mourning." (127) I read a text that affirms desire, that finds a desire without lack, a desire not for what will make you whole, but for what will make you everything. JW writes that: "cross-species connections are made specifically through language and writing." (128) I am reading a text that is a writing movement, in which the writing movement is the specifically human that in its specific humanity becomes, per se, trans-normative, trans-species, a possible impossibility. JW emphasises that among previous Lispector researchers, "Here we can see what Hélène Cixous says characterises writing.

Cixous says characterises *écriture féminine*: that writing as a creative act takes place through encounters with other beings, other bodies - in this case the first-person narrator follows "vines, syllables, honeysuckle, colours and words" - and this writing leads to a dissolution of hierarchies or contradictions that surround life." (131) and "The novel *The Passion* according to G.H. creates what Marder calls a "phenomenology of the limit" in that the novel breaks a set of given phenomenological conventions and thereby challenges phenomenological practices, which for Marder are mainly represented by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Marder argues that Lispector develops a phenomenology that is "[a] passionate, non-human, or ahuman existentialism" (137) There is, then, a tradition of Lispector readings that are about writing-reading a dissolution of hierarchies, that desire the the non-human, a kind of "écriture zoïque - the writing of all living things" (138) that skews the idea of the

human, making the human an impossible position that can only be occupied by the ahuman. ahuman. I think this makes every reading of Lispector a queer event. I read Lispector's horses. I desire the warped bodies of horses, their fur and their direction. When I read I read, I am no longer human.

I will now go through Lispector's work, one book at a time, and from a narrow interest in the horses, read what each book says about them, the horses, what it says about the world, wildness, animals and people. The order in which I read the books is random, because I believe that because I believe that chance matters. The choice of Lispector's texts in particular is based on personal interest, her

her work includes short stories and novels, but highly poetic ones, where language becomes the carrier of metaphors that are at the same time anything but metaphors. For example, the horses. My reading is also a poetic reading, a kind of extreme close reading, where I pick out the word "horse" from the text and read the work as if it were the centre, because in my reading it is.

Blowing life

This novel is a dialogue between the fiction of reality and the reality of fiction, about a the writing of survival and the pursuit of a form of transcendence by stripping humanity of its humanity for a future, by peeling off the animal nature to fall into the immanent materiality of things. immanent materiality of things. // "I made a painting that turned out like this: a powerful horse with a long and full-bodied

and plump bright man standing among stalactites in a cave." (p. 72) "I am an abyss of myself. myself. But I will always be askew. And the white horses fill my pupils with burning love. I own seven thoroughbreds. Six white and one black." (p. 107) // The horse is at first a motif for the painting. It's a simple way to paint, you don't even have to know how. Angela is obsessed with the state of things, the purity, the naked and the raw, she imagines painting a painting that represents the painting. The painting she makes is this one. She loves crystals. The horse with

the crystals. The lightness. The whiteness, as colonial in the text, the thoroughbred, six whites, one black. What do the
the white horses. Filling the pupils with burning love. A violent and all-consuming, engulfing love. A love of the world that means conquest. I read the horses as bodies. I read as if the boundary between metaphor and material has collapsed. Out of the painting grows the body of a horse grows like the stalactites grow with the drops of water. It is the bodies that fill the pupils. I am an abyss of myself. It is the self that allows itself to be engulfed by and that engulfs the world. The self that can never be escaped. The subject that must die. I feel the the horses, blowing life, muzzle to nose, the breath of one body into the other. I feel the stillness life.

Family ties

These novellas are a collection of stories that penetrate some of the glossy wrapping around everyday life. around everyday life, revealing a dangerous goodness, a tyrannical love. // "I try to seize the moment to finally see, now that he no longer has a face of his own. [...] With hunger stilled, the big horse rests his head in his hand." (p. 106) "She ate like a centaur. Her face down by the plate, her hair almost in the food." (p. 114) // The horse comes here with the food. It comes as the loss of face, the loss of subject. Eating destabilises humanity. It is something frightening and liberating, frightening precisely because it is liberating. Eating binds the self to the body, the flesh, rather than to thought and consciousness, a new self is created through the animal, the horse. The horse is a future, another stage of life. I am eat. Enjoying. Starving. Hunger as a rage, as a condition. Suddenly it exists. My face, like a horse I eat horse meat. Eating me. Emerges. I feel the bonds tightening, tying together our bodies.

The passion according to G.H.

This meditation on cleaning and decoration, origin, "origin", humanity, divinity, fear and neutral love. // "I would never again rest: I had stolen the hunting horse of a king of joy's hunting horse. I was now worse than myself! Never again will I rest: I have stolen the hunting horse of the king of the Sabbath. If I slumber for a while, the echo of a whinny will will wake me up. And it is useless not to go. In the darkness of the night, breathing makes me shiver. I pretend pretend to be asleep but in the silence the runner breathes. [...] without ever knowing what I am made, alongside the giant and exhausted horse head. Exhausted by what? What have we done, we who ride at the trot in the hell of pleasure? It is two hundred years since I rode away. The last time I stepped out of that ornate saddle, my human grief was so great that I vowed never again. [...] I want the horse to lead my thoughts once more. It was from the horse that I learnt. [...] When the horse calls me to hell in the evening, I go. [...] steal the knight while time while there is still time, while it is not yet dark, if there is still time, because when I stole the the knight I had to kill the king, and when I murdered the king I stole his death. And the joy of murder makes me devour with pleasure." // There is something about the horse here associated with civilisation (as opposed to the role of the cockroach in the text, the cockroach which in the most unpleasant and inevitable way constitutes a kind of raw life and thing) here is a king and an ornate saddle. The horse is the theft of the self, a rebellion - mother what? against this civilisation or against the horror at the core of life. The horse becomes an attempt at escape, an escape through running, through exhaustion, through murder and pleasure. I read in the horse an (in)possible rescue - from what? from the self. There are traces of evil in the horse - it calls from hell. But perhaps this is also a rescue, from a relentless goodness. The horse gives thought, knowledge. It is a creature with which one can learn, unlearn, relearn, it is a creature that plants a seed. that sows a seed.

The moment of the star

Lispector's most conventional novel, a story about a girl, narrated by a man, revolving around poverty, ugliness and hunger, contains only one horse. // "Yes. I get used to it but I don't get calm. God! I find it easier to socialise with animals than with people. When I see my horse loose and free in the meadow - I feel like resting my face against his supple and velvety neck and tell my life story." // The horse is not even in the story itself, it is as if this it is as if this poor story does not deserve a horse, it is too human.

The author, he can only tell about himself to a horse, he doesn't want to be with the humans. He can't relate to them either. He becomes obsessed, fascinated by the impoverished and tragic girl. tragic girl, he kind of eats her, he can't have a real relationship. Only the horse, which has a kind of freedom, can bring peace, the poverty of man, his way of letting matter become more than matter, is just an endless stress.

Living water

About birth and birth, life and art, about "it", a kind of pure being, a sexless animalising animalising. // "Everything is heavy with dreams and I write to you about it - from the cave comes the clatter of dozens of loose horses trampling the darkness with soundless hooves, and from the friction of the hooves

of the hooves, the cheering is released in sparks: here I am, me and the cave, in the time that will bring us into decay." (p. 16) "I let the free horse run wild. I, who trot nervously and the only thing that limits me is reality." (p. 21) "The beast of prey shows its teeth and in the distant air air, the horses gallop in front of the ornate carnival floats. In my night I worship the secret meaning of the world. Mouth and tongue. And a loose horse with free strength. I keep the horse's hoof in loving fetishism." (p. 48) "I have seen horses running loose in the meadow where the white horse - nature's king - at night has unleashed his magnificent whinny. I have had excellent relations with horses. I remember myself on one occasion standing as proudly as the horse itself

as the horse itself and passed my hand over its naked skin. Through its wild mane. I felt me like this: the woman and the horse." (p. 64) "I ride at a trot back and forth without knowing the boundaries." (p. 99) // Oh. I feel the horse as freedom. It is as if the self (Clarice?) is trying to reach something through

art is trying to reach something, this "it", an existence without humanity, without gender, without civilisation.

The horse takes her there. The horses are free. But there is something else in them, they are complex. They belong

part of the royal, the ruling, the powerful. They are wild and they rule. Under the horse, you have to you have to submit. Then you can get to the carnival, that's where the horse rules. That's where where you can become wild and free.

Biography and the need for wildness

In the Lispector biography *Why This World* (2014), Benjamin Moser writes about Clarice's first cities, Ukrainian Chechelnyk and Brazilian São Geraldo, both populated by wild horses, both growing cities which, with their expansion, exterminate the horses, and with the extermination of the horses

horses, the language of the city emerges. This, Moser argues, is related to Lispector's contempt for the domesticated, her search for an authentic language, other than the bourgeois one, her need for freedom. The horses become something to be identified with, for Clarice and for her fictional characters. It is a search for a union of expressions and impressions. Moser quotes Lispector: "I would say: given the choice I would have been born a horse." She also writes the short story *Dry Point of Horses* (in the collection *Soulstorm*), an abstract reflection on the horse's being in the world. "The horse - naked. [...] It is freedom so indomitable that it becomes useless to imprison it to serve man [...] I have a horse within me who rarely reveals himself [...].

His form speaks. [...] It's just that when he looks, he sees outside himself what is inside himself. He is an animal who expresses himself through form. [...] The horse tells me what I am. [...] You could see the warm moist breath - the radiant and peaceful breath that came from the tremulous, life-filled, flaring nostrils of stallions and mares in the cold of certain dawns. [...] In my mouth and on his hooves the mark of great blood. What is it we have sacrificed? [...] Free me, quickly steal the jennet while there is time, before it is too late, while there is still day without darkness, if indeed there still is time [...] And the orgiastic joy of our murder consumes me in terrible pleasure." --- As in G.H., the evil is close to the haste. It is a collapse of evil and goodness, for in the animality of haste there is no such thing. To murder brings infinite happiness, for death is needed for life to exist, theft is needed for freedom to be achieved. The horse is an infinite fusion of body and mind, metaphor and matter. Lispector loves the horse, loves the horse inside her, because it takes her away from humanity. humanity. But it is not just a symbolic body of freedom, it is a real horse body, with breath and fur and muscles. It is something that is everything.

Secret happiness

The collection of short stories, which is mainly concerned with the surface layers of situations and the flesh, does however contain a few horses; // "... rather than staying at the station, rather than having to rein in the horse that was would run with beating heart to other, other horses." (p. 116) "We ate. Like the one who gives the horse water. The cut up meat." (p. 118) "He would escape any earthquake by moving freely forward any earthquake by a free movement forward, with the same proud inconsistency that makes the horse whinny." (p. 169) // Here the horses exist as cracks in reality, cracks where something of mystery and otherness leak out. The horse is a body with a beating heart. It is a fragile and exposed physicality, always close to the flesh and the risk of being eaten. It is cared for, given water, must exist on the border between the wild and the beloved. It is a sound and a movement, a possible escape.

The apple in the dark

A loving crime drama set in a symbolic countryside. // "What confused him was the ant. him was the ant that was so much bigger than the house where it sat on the leaf close to his eyes and lined his field of vision - horse-like and reddish, a statue of a moment." (p. 75) "The horse senses when the rider is afraid" (p. 99) "...did not prevent Ermelinda from being strong as a horse" (p. 99). 103) "Then, like a woman who at critical moments becomes carelessly active, she increased the force against the corn cob, several grains fell, a horse's whinny travelled across the plain and Francisco ordered it to it to stop" (p. 125) "Vitória had never been so happy, and the one who suffered was the horse, who was whipped and opened his mouth in horror. When the horse was spurred, it reared back and off at a gallop - the woman was taken by surprise, lost her balance and clung wildly to the horse's neck. [...] She stayed as still as she could and closed her eyes, letting the maroon horse have free reins free rein and take her to the pasture where it bent its indomitable head down to eat. The whole of the woman's body humbly followed the horse's head to the grass, closing her eyes she felt it eating, it was a strange peace to be guided by the horse's confusion" (p. 148) "... this unclear sign of the a transition to the unknown made him uneasy and his anxiety was transferred to the horse, which kicked the air, darkly concerned, with the rapturous look of a horse." (s. 168) "... the heart beat big, generously, the horses moved their hooves gracefully and skilfully." (p. 170) "And where he sat on horseback, he too, with the amused expression of someone who can do mistakes, carefully copied the living creature he was in reality" (p. 171) "Martim had really only in a very sharp way become physically aware of both of them elevated by the horses, and through an even more acute perception he had felt the horses floating freely in the air." (p. 175) "... and imagining himself as a large horse that one has at home and that now and then

made wild excursions in the neighbourhood, free with impunity, guided by the beauty of the spiritual beauty of spiritual restraint, which can be compared to the way the body does not dissolve." (s. 216) "- as soon as Vitória had sat on the horse and the dust of the hooves had barely had time to settle again" (p. 225) ""One should not look a given horse in the mouth"" (p. 248) "The rose that he had accidentally accidentally touched in the garden had made him stand and stamp like a horse that has been stopped in its stopped in its gallop." (p. 269) "... what he wanted with the predatory scream was the black heart of the forest. heart of the forest, the branches prevented him from running freely, but he ran and he scratched himself and broke branches like a wild horse." (p. 327) "And as if not one step had been taken, he would now could tell the difference between himself and a frightened horse in the dark." (p. 330) "The man seemed actually seemed for a moment to have lost his relativity, just as a horse sometimes becomes helplessly absolute." (p. 343) "- or the horse's head, which she promptly discovered on the horse, the head that was added like a frightening mask to the stable body" (p. 366) // The horses are here. They are in the language, in the parables, in how people understand the world. The horses exist as concrete everyday life, their bodies as bodies, as tools, as things, as something to live with. The horses exist as opposites and similarities to humans, because this is a text that is so preoccupied with human life, with bread. ///// gender, human body, body, death. The horses are there, as a presence. As an everyday connection between symbol and physics.

Close to the wild heart

The debut; which is closest to my heart. // "The horse I had fallen off was waiting for me by the the river. I sat on the horse's back and flew over the slopes where the shadows were already cooling. coolly began to spread. [...] I felt the living horse near me, an extension of my body. my body. We both breathed young and with beating hearts." (p. 83) "A horse just then ran freely across the silent plain, the movement of its legs barely visible. [...] Shaken, she had thought: everything, everything." (p. 236) "... and then nothing will be able to stop me as I walk towards death without fear, from every battle or rest I will rise strong and beautiful like a young horse." (s. 244) // The horses are here, like a heart. Here is the body of the horse, an animal body that the the human body can become an animal together with, can become one with - here she can be free, from the human love and problems. I read the horse as: everything, everything. The last quotation is the last line of the book. Here the horse is a phoenix. It comes after death, a death that is almost euphoric. Rest and battle are the same, sleep and wakefulness equally exhausting. When the self becomes horse, becoming strong and beautiful, she can be something other than a woman and a girl, she can be other than human, she can no longer be judged and condemned, let down or betrayed. That is, everything.

Conclusion

I have written about the horses in Clarice Lispector's books. I have read the horses in them. I have read the horses in the books because they are there. Because they connect thought with body and feeling. I could have written about the birds, about the chickens. But horses have a utopian quality. Horses have a body that is more than a body. The horses are more than human and in contact with the horses, humans step closer to the heart. For Lispector, humanity is porous, and in the encounter with the horses something of pure and raw life leaks into the people. I think that's how I feel about horses, the real horses. That they make me suffer from such a strong fear, anger and happiness, that I feel so close to life, that everything is at stake and only in this vulnerability can I be safe. I read and feel this, intensely. A serious and vicious happiness.