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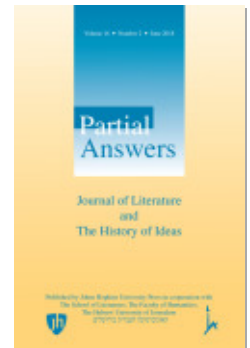
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Clarice Lispector on Jewishness after the Shoah: A Reading of “Perdoando Deus”

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Clarice Lispector’s fame has long since moved beyond the Lusophone canon to secure her a place in the pantheon of world literature. Concomitant with translations of her work into English and her subsequent rise to worldwide canonical status, secondary literature has proliferated, which has even led one critic to speak of a “Lispector Industry” (Williams 1). As a sub-genre of this so-called industry, numerous studies scrutinize the Brazilian writer’s oeuvre for traces of Jewishness, Judaism, and/or the Shoah.¹ Some of these works have offered convincing arguments for specific cases, but the issue calls for more attention. This article presents a reading of Lispector’s short story “Perdoando Deus” (“Forgiving God,” 1970–1971) that has, to our knowledge, to date, not been read as a reflection on the Shoah and on its repercussions for Jewish identity. Our interpretation makes a case for a reevaluation of the widely held view that the Shoah is nearly absent from Lispector’s oeuvre (see Igel 5).

Lispector as a Jewish Writer

Particularly in Brazil, Clarice Lispector’s profile as a Jewish writer remains low. This is largely due to her own insistence on highlighting her Brazilian identity, along with the absence of an explicit, unequivocal recognition of her Jewish descent both in personal accounts and in her published writings. Those scholarly works which, despite the scarcity of direct allusions, do make a case for the central relevance of her Jewish-

¹ See, for example, Wengrover-Schwartz 1991, Vieira 1995, Moser 2009, and Aizenberg 2015.

ness in her oeuvre often refer obscurely to hidden layers of textuality. Consequently, the prevalence of the notion of alterity and of ostensibly Kabbalistic ideas in her writing has resulted in a view of Lispector as a “Jewish mystic” (Vieira 102) or one inclined to “Talmudic thinking” (Moser 5). The question remains, however, to what extent these readings are based on Lispector’s actual texts. In her criticism of works focusing on covert Jewish traces in Lispector’s writings, Naomi Lindstrom impugns the scholarly practice of reading into texts what “range[s] unusually far beyond what may be demonstrated” — in this particular case, some diffuse notion of Jewishness. In other words, she targets those critics who seek “Jewish elements” without being “able to support their assertions by singling out particular features of the text under study” (93). While we agree with Lindstrom’s critique to a large extent, we also believe that a combination of textual analysis and biographical context can corroborate the claims made by those who highlight Lispector’s Jewishness. More recently, Edna Aizenberg has argued for the relevance of the Shoah for Lispector through a biographical reading that accentuates her encounters with the accounts of atrocities in 1944. This attempt has merit but falls short of providing a case against Lindstrom’s argument, because it does not thoroughly engage with Lispector’s texts.

By combining biographical evidence with a close reading of “Perdoando Deus,” we offer an interpretation that takes into account Lindstrom’s critique while at the same time contributing to the debate about whether and to what extent Lispector’s works exhibit “Jewish elements” or “traces.” We believe that her Jewish descent is relevant to at least some of her later writing. We will not argue against the more esoteric approaches to her work and her Jewishness but will complement them through a textual analysis of this particular short story.

Lispector was born in 1920, in the small town of Chechelnyk in the Pale of Settlement (today Ukraine). Her family left Eastern Europe in 1921, during raging pogroms, for Brazil. Upon arrival, the family settled in Recife in the northeast of the country. When Lispector was 17, they moved to Rio de Janeiro, where she would later study law. In 1943, she published her first novel *Perto do Coração Selvagem* (*Near to the Wild Heart*), which brought her instant country-wide recognition and was dubbed “the greatest debut novel a woman had written in all of Brazilian literature” (Moser 125). The same year, she married Maury Gurgel Valente, a career diplomat, whom she would follow on his various appointments overseas before returning to Brazil in 1959. Lispector died

of cancer in 1977 and was buried in the Israelite Cemetery of Cajú, with Orthodox funeral rites (Moser 385).

Lispector's birth in the Pale of Settlement and her burial in a Jewish cemetery are the biographical cornerstones that are commonly understood to justify reading her as a Jewish writer. Further contributing factors are her interest in Kabbalistic literature and the philosophy of Spinoza (see Vieira 104; Moser 109–112, 225). In his masterful biography, Benjamin Moser points out Jewish motifs in Lispector's work, which he characterizes as "reworked, disguised, but undeniably present." This, he continues, "beg[s] the question of the extent to which their inclusion was deliberate" (227). Indeed, "Perdoando Deus," rather cryptic at first glance, highlights this question and echoes the only (and therefore much quoted) case of Lispector's directly addressing her Jewishness, as well as the Shoah:

I am Jewish, you know. But I don't believe in that foolishness of the Jews being the chosen people of God. No way are they chosen. The Germans must be because of what they did. What special kind of choice was that for the Jews? In short, I am Brazilian, and that's final, once and for all. (qtd. in Vieira 117)

This quote, from an interview conducted by Edilberto Coutinho in 1976 (see Coutinho 168), addresses the same topoi that, as we believe, were incorporated by Lispector allegorically in "Perdoando Deus," namely, the triangular relation between Jewishness, the Shoah, and the issue of the chosenness of the Jewish people.

"Perdoando Deus": A Chronicle of Lispector's Perception of the Shoah

Like many of Lispector's texts, "Perdoando Deus" has a complex editorial history. It was first published on September 19, 1970, in the *Jornal do Brasil*, one of Brazil's longest running dailies, for which Lispector had been writing a weekly column since 1967 (Moser 286). The following year, the text was included in her collection of short stories, *Felicidade Clandestina (Clandestine Happiness)* and posthumously in the 1984 *A Descoberta do Mundo (Discovering the World)*, in which her columns were collected. In 1979, the text was reprinted in a slightly revised version in *Para não esquecer (Not to Forget)*, also an anthology of the columns she wrote for *Jornal do Brasil*. This new version included minor changes in syntax and punctuation; it had a few insertions and was

provided with a different title: “A Vingança e a Reconciliação Penosa” (“Vengeance and Painful Reconciliation”).²

The plot of the story is easily summarized: the narrator strolls down a street, steps on a dead rat, and then spirals into a jeremiad against God. A closer reading reveals the story’s argumentative character, rooted in its origin as a column (or *crônica*). What may at first appear as a rambling stream of consciousness unleashed by the encounter with a dead rat can be read as a balanced, carefully constructed reflection on a personal perception of God, Jewish identity, and its link with the Shoah. The six paragraphs of the story are ordered following a timeline that can be related to the evolution of the way Lispector addressed these themes in her fiction: from silence and the rejection of her Jewish origins to their acceptance and almost explicit manifestation.

In the first paragraph, the narrator describes a state of pure mental freedom. During a stroll on Avenida Copacabana, she feels “being something quite rare: free” (379). In this first short paragraph, the words “free” and “freedom” appear several times. This feeling culminates in something even rarer in the second paragraph: a motherly tenderness towards God. “Out of pure affection, I felt I was the mother of God, I was the Earth, the world” (379).³ The third paragraph marks a caesura in the emotional development of the narrator. The love, joy, freedom, and plenitude that she has felt disappear abruptly when she almost steps on a huge dead rat. The question of why God would do this to her urges itself in the fourth paragraph. “What was God trying to remind me of?” (380). First, the narrator reacts with silence to the horror she sees. “[C]om a boca infantilizada pela surpresa” (1991: 49) evokes the image of the *infans*, the psychoanalytic term for the child who is not able to speak.⁴ In the next

² When the Portuguese original phrasing is important, we here quote from *Felicidade Clandestina* (1991). For the English translations, we quote, unless otherwise mentioned, from Katrina Dodson’s translation in *The Complete Stories* (2015).

³ In Portuguese: “Por puro carinho, eu me senti a mãe de Deus, que era a Terra, o mundo” (48). In the British translation by Giovanni Pontiero, *Discovering the World*, we find: “Out of sheer affection, I felt myself to be the mother of God Who was both earth and the world” (Lispector 1992: 406). Since the Portuguese “era” can refer to the first or the third person singular, both translations, by Dodson and by Pontiero, are grammatically correct. Pontiero’s quasi-pantheist translation, however, aligns with Lispector’s well-known admiration for Spinoza (see Moser 109–12).

⁴ From *in-* and *fari*, Latin for “to speak.” This meaning is inevitably lost in the English translation. Dodson: “my mouth made childish with surprise” (Lispector 2015: 380); Pontiero: “the expression on my lips almost childish, such was my surprise” (Lispector 1992: 407).

paragraph, however, she decides to break her silence: “then I won’t keep any secret, and I’m going to tell” (381), a statement put in doubt again in the final paragraph, where the narrator summarizes all sorts of reasons and hypotheses for why God would have wanted to punish her.

The paragraphs correspond to subsequent phases in Lispector’s confrontation with her Jewishness and trail the evolution from rejecting her Jewish origins and keeping aloof from what happened during World War II, to alluding to the catastrophe of the Shoah in her final works. Lispector’s final novel, the 1977 *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*), re-works many of the motifs that we discuss below. The repetition of specific words, semantic fields, and syntactic structures justifies an allegorical reading of the encounter with the rat as a confrontation with the Shoah, the most traumatic and disruptive event in Jewish history.

The Encounter with the Dead Rat

To date, the image of the rat in “Perdoando Deus” has been only lightly touched upon. In a brief comment on “A Vingança e a Reconciliação Penosa,” the slightly changed later version of the story published in 1979, Hélène Cixous emphasizes the (inter)personal meaning that is, paradoxically, inherent in the tension between the human and the nonhuman subject: “The partner, the other, the one with whom it becomes a question of establishing a love relationship at the end of a very long quest, is the rat in *Vengeance and Painful Reconciliation*” (169). In agreement with Cixous’s subjective reading, the psychoanalyst Dany Al-Behy Kanaan interprets the presence of the animal as everything that has been repressed but whose return can be triggered by a trivial event. According to Al-Behy Kanaan, the encounter with the dead rat “functions as a trigger of subjectification, in which a personal topic, through the reflective process, adopts a universal character” (114).⁵ What this universal character is supposed to mean, however, remains unclear.

Fernando de Mendonça and Maria do Carmo de Siqueira Nino go one step further by viewing the grotesque figure of the dead rat as producing an epiphany that renews the relationship between man and God (244). Posing the question of why it is specifically a rat that prompts the revelation of the truth concerning the divine, they note a loose association with hell and an observation about restoring personal and cosmic harmony (245). In her work on Lispector’s mysticism, Agustina García

⁵ Unless indicated otherwise in Works Cited, the translations are ours.

Manzano (253) associates the rat with pests and disasters but does not specify which catastrophe Lispector may be referring to in her story.

We propose reading the dead rat as a metaphor for the Shoah. None of the discussions of the short story have so far taken this possibility into account, which is surprising, particularly since the association of rats with Jews has a long history and found its repulsive climax in the Nazi propaganda movie *Der Ewige Jude* (see Mulman 89n and Friedman 26). In “Perdoando Deus” this motif may point to the history of anti-Semitism and of dehumanizing the Jewish people. With the premise of the dead rat as a metaphor for the Shoah, certain aspects of the story that may appear opaque accrue significance and allow us to read “Perdoando Deus” as Lispector’s attempt to come to grips with Jewishness in the shadow of the Shoah in general, and with her own Jewishness in particular. These aspects include the setting of the story, the references to blindness, the insistence on the color of the rat, and the recurrence of the word “blood.”

The first sentence sets “Perdoando Deus” in Copacabana. This is the first clue, since this part of Rio de Janeiro houses a large Jewish community of Ashkenazi descent and also the most important Jewish institutions of the city. During World War II this area was, due to the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, often referred to as “Copacabanovich” (Lesser 135).

Second, the narrator describes herself recurrently as blind(ed), a characteristic that distinguishes her from other strollers on the boulevard.⁶ This recalls medieval Christian iconography, which represented the synagogue allegorically as a blindfolded woman (see Barasch 78–84). The image of the blind Jew, incapable of seeing the truth of the teachings of Jesus Christ, often went hand in hand with the charge of stubbornness (see Oberman xi–xxv, xxiv), which the narrator also uses for self-description.⁷

In the description of the rat, there is a striking insistence on color: “um grande rato ruivo, de cauda enorme, com os pés esmagados, e morto, quieto, ruivo” (Lispector 1991: 49).⁸ The reiteration of the word *ruivo* (red-haired) at the beginning and end of the sentence seems to refer to the stereotypical association of red hair with Jews. This can be traced back

⁶ “[B]lind in the midst of all those people” (2015: 380), “violently shutting my eyes, which no longer wanted to see” (380), “chants blindly” (382).

⁷ “I’m so stubborn” (2015: 382).

⁸ The repetition of the word “red-haired” did not make it into the English translation, likely for stylistic reasons: “a big red-haired rat, with an enormous tail, its feet crushed, and dead, still, tawny” (2015: 380).

to Genesis 25:25, where Esau is first described as red-haired (“And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over. So they called his name Esau”). King David and Judas Iscariot are also often described or depicted as having red hair. Furthermore, in medieval and early modern times, the legend of the “Red Jews” gained popularity and was often linked to apocalyptic expectations (see Gow). Redness thus becomes the color of the Other, perhaps the Jew, recalling the long history of anti-Semitism, of othering and of scapegoating that preceded the Shoah.

Finally, blood has long been imagined as a demarcation of difference between Jews and gentiles. Grounded in “blood libel,” the idea that Jews use Christian blood for rituals, which has been disseminated since medieval times, modern racial anti-Semitism considered blood as what renders Jews fundamentally different from their neighbors (Biale 162n). Many Jewish thinkers and writers have taken up this notion of difference by blood, at times both affirming and subverting the idea. Lispector plays with this image in “Perdoando Deus”:

What was God trying to remind me of? I’m not someone who needs to be reminded that inside everything is blood. Not only do I not forget the blood inside but I allow and desire it, I am too much blood to forget blood, and for me the spiritual word has no meaning, and neither does the earthly word. (380)

Blood is, again, a symbol for otherness, Jewish otherness, which cannot be forgotten. Her insistence that neither the spiritual word (*palavra espiritual*), which points towards Judaism as a religion, nor the earthly word (*palavra terrena*), which may point towards Jewish nationalism and the State of Israel, has any meaning for her allows Lispector to affirm her Jewishness as (solely) an ethnic category, because “I am too much blood to forget blood” (380).

The combination of these motifs points to what we believe to be the “hidden” argument of this allegorical short story, namely, Lispector’s appropriation, at this point in her life, of her Jewishness. “Perdoando Deus” prefigures her breaking of the silence that has surrounded both her descent and the destruction of the communities from which she is descendent. This may explain the apparently exaggerated reaction of the narrator after she almost steps on the rat: “Trembling all over, I managed to keep on living. Utterly bewildered I kept walking” (380). Here again, the repetition, this time of syntactic structure, draws our attention.⁹ Twice in a row, the narrator presents herself as a survivor.

⁹ The repetition is more prominent in Portuguese: “Toda trêmula, consegui continuar a viver. Toda perplexa continuei a andar, com a boca infantilizada pela surpresa” (1991: 49).

Being a survivor is part of the author's own identity. Having left Eastern Europe as a Jewish child and traveled through Europe of World War II with a Brazilian passport, Lispector perceives herself as a survivor of the Shoah, although she never literally came close to the camps. Terribly frightened by the circumstances she had become aware of, Lispector, like the narrator in her story, nonetheless kept on walking and living. In other words, the author seems to assume her Jewish identity here through self-definition as a survivor. Moreover, her insistence on the characterization of the narrator as a survivor appears to be a textual strategy for encouraging a biographical reading of "Perdoando Deus." The enigmatic short story, mostly overlooked due to its obscurity, may then emerge as Lispector's testimony of her Jewishness and the reasons for her previous silence on the subject of the Shoah.

Jewishness as the Nexus between God and the Catastrophe

According to our interpretation, the Shoah made Lispector speechless: "com a boca infantilizada pela surpresa." 25 years prior to writing the short story, the author confirmed this muteness in a letter to her sister, Tanja, to whom she wrote from Berne, Switzerland, shortly after the war:

What bothers me deep down is that the things of this world reached a certain point for me in which I need to know how to face them — the state of war, the situation people are in, those tragedies. I've always faced them with disgust. But at the same time that I feel the need to do something, I feel that I don't have the means. You'll say that I do have them, through my work. I've thought a lot about it and I don't see a way, a real way. Maybe I'm not seeing the whole problem, maybe the solution will come years from now, I don't know. (qtd. in Aizenberg 38)

In "Perdoando Deus" Lispector tries to overcome her disgust and again confront "the whole problem," which she summarizes in barely four and a half pages. "I tried to sever the connection between the two facts: what I'd felt minutes earlier and the rat," says the narrator, "[b]ut it was no use. At least contiguity linked them. The two facts illogically had one nexus" (380). The nexus between, on the one hand, the sensation of plenitude, freedom, and motherly tenderness towards God's creation, and, on the other, the catastrophe of the Shoah, lies in Lispector's Jewishness. If she first felt as if she could celebrate creation freely ("I thought that, in adding up everything I understood, I loved"), without being bothered by the restraints of Jewish religion, described as "solemn love [that] ritualizes

incomprehension and transforms it into an offering” (381), she is then thrown back violently to her roots, which cannot be seen separately from the Shoah.

In the final and most enigmatic paragraph, Lispector rephrases the problem that haunts her:

So, then, let me resort to the *Magnificat* that chants blindly about whatever is not known or seen. And let me resort to the formalism that pushes me away. Because formalism hasn't wounded my simplicity, but my pride, since it's through the pride of being born that I feel so intimate with the world, but this world that I nevertheless extracted from myself with a mute scream. (382)

The first two sentences refer again to the antithetic relationship between the two moments, described allegorically at the beginning of the story: on the one hand, the song in which Maria praises the Lord for having chosen her to become the Mother of God and for the mercies shown to Israel; on the other hand, the formalism of the Jewish religion, which has been imposed on her by being born into a Jewish family and from which she has tried to escape “with a mute scream.” During Lispector’s entire life, however, the destruction of European Jewry and the permanent reminder of this through everyday anti-Semitism forced her to see her own identity as inseparable from her Jewish roots.

Lispector finally reaches out to “the things of this world,” “the state of war, the situation people are in, those tragedies” mentioned in her letter to her sister, but only manages to integrate them in her own work by looking inward and, as a consequence, turning away from the outside world. The reasons the narrator suggests for the appearance of the dead rat are all very personal: her weakness, her blindness, her stubbornness, her naïveté, her pugnacity, her pride, her inability to be content with the given reality. There is not a single reference to any form of collectivity, like a shared Jewish ethnicity, in the vertiginous final paragraph; everything gravitates around the first person singular, around “my soul” (*minha alma*, 1991: 51) and “my nature” (*minha natureza*, 52).¹⁰ The rat becomes in the end as much an image of the Other (“my counterpart,” 2015: 380) as of herself — “Because the rat exists as much as I do, and perhaps neither I nor the rat are meant to be seen by our own selves, distance makes us equal” (382).

¹⁰Dodson translated both *alma* (soul, essence) and *natureza* (nature) as “nature.” “This nature of mine . . . my nature” (2015: 382).

"As long as I invent God, He doesn't exist:" Love and Theodicy after the Shoah

Due to the excessive focus in the final and longest paragraph on the narrator's self, some interpretations of the story, e.g. those by Cixous and Lowe,¹¹ foreground its affective content. In line with Cixous's brief comment on "A Vingança e a Reconciliação Penosa" quoted above, one could associate both God and the rat in "Perdoando Deus" with the partner in a love relationship, and read the story as the narrator's struggle for maintaining her independence after having fallen madly in love with someone (Cixous 169). Viewed from this perspective, the solemn, formalized love would have nothing to do with (Jewish) religion, but would simply refer to the social constraints (marriage) that are imposed upon a love relationship. "As long as I invent God, He doesn't exist" (2015: 383), the final sentence of the story, then becomes merely an incentive for the narrator to stop looking for the ideal partner.

Yet this interpretation does not align with the narrator's depiction of herself as a survivor, or with the references to her childhood in the fourth paragraph. Despite the subjective turn that the story takes at the end, the final paragraph may be read in more collective terms, namely, as a meditation on the notion of the Jews as the chosen people.

According to Lispector's statements on this topic in her interview with Coutinho, the Jews were never chosen in the first place, because the historical fact of the Shoah would mean that the Germans had in fact been chosen too, by God, namely to destroy the Jewish people. Along these lines, "Perdoando Deus" mentions the possibility of a mean-spirited God, who is responsible for evil and capable of such a devious scheme. The narrator complains: "God's coarseness hurt and insulted me. God was a brute" (2015: 381). As Lispector did in the 1976 interview, the text shapes this complaint as questioning theodicy: "As long as I imagine that 'God' is good just because I am bad, I won't be loving anything: that will merely be my way of denouncing myself" (2015: 383). This suggests that if God is good, then the Shoah must be considered a punishment inflicted on the Jewish people. The Germans then become "chosen" as an instrument of punishment effected by God. The narrator is haunted by this choice: either to love God and accept the Shoah as punishment or to

¹¹ "Forgiving God" (September 19, 1970) is a Kafkaesque story of a woman who [. . .] comes around to the realization that she must 'love what there is to love,' instead of what she chooses to love. This new way of loving includes loving herself and the discovery through this questioning narrative is that one has to love oneself before it is possible to love God" (Lowe 165).

love oneself, to accept oneself, and see the Shoah as the abnegation of God's existence. In the final sentence, the narrator makes a choice and reassures herself: "As long as I invent God, he doesn't exist." Assuming that God is simply an invention allows her to circumvent the theological repercussions of the Shoah. Accepting (or "loving," as the narrator calls it) oneself after the Shoah as a Jew means freedom from God. Jewish people are no longer defined by chosenness or their God, but rather by the Shoah; not as a religion but as a people, a collectivity of survivors. At the same time, pushing aside communal religion allows Lispector to open up a space for personal religious experience. Indeed, unable to negate her Jewish descent, she nevertheless sought to replace (the God of) Judaism with her own mix of Jewish mysticism, Catholic popular belief, and allegorical esotericism.

"Perdoando Deus" can be read as a historical, philosophical, and personal (anti)theological process. The "terror that has hounded me and made me delirious since childhood" (2015: 380) alludes in this sense to the Shoah and the persistence of its driving force, anti-Semitism. The text seems also clairvoyant in this regard: in 1973, only a few years after "Perdoando Deus" was published in *Jornal do Brasil* for the first time, Lispector and several other Jewish journalists were dismissed from that journal, which clearly suggested anti-Semitism (see Vieira 4). Therefore, historical circumstances, such as a wave of anti-Semitism in the early seventies following a period of relative flourishing of the Jewish community and its integration into Brazilian society, may explain Lispector's sudden preoccupation with her roots and her connection with the Shoah. This link between life and work remains, of course, hypothetical. Nevertheless, a few years after her dismissal from *Jornal do Brasil*, in her last novel, *A hora da estrela*, Lispector addresses the question of Jewish identity in a similar way. Here, too, the notion of survival becomes a pillar of Jewishness. The previously unnamed main character, a young impoverished girl from Northeast Brazil, where Lispector grew up, is introduced to us by the name Macabea, which evokes Jewish history:

- If you don't mind me asking, what's your name?
- Macabéa.
- Maca — what?
- Béa, she was forced to repeat.
- Gosh, it sounds like the name of a disease...a skin disease.
- I agree but it's the name my mother gave me because of a vow she made to Our Lady of Sorrows if I should survive. For the first year of my

life, I wasn't called anything because I didn't have a name. I'd have preferred to go on being called nothing instead of having a name that nobody has ever heard of, yet it seems to suit me. (1986: 43)

In this passage, Lispector outlines a process of the construction of Jewish identity. For the first part of the novel, the protagonist is nameless. The giving of her name, on the basis of survival and a vow to a Catholic figure, Our Lady of Sorrows, marks her as the Other.¹² As in "Perdoando Deus," the protagonist's change can be read alongside Lispector's own biography. The author survived the Shoah because she was granted immigration to a majoritarian Catholic country in which she, because of her name, her demeanor, her voice, and her foreign descent, always remained the Other.

Macabea will later indeed yearn for her namelessness, her freedom at a time before she was confronted with her otherness. At the end of the novel, as a reminder of the enduring reality of the Shoah, she is run over by a German car. For Lispector, too, the Shoah was a reality she could not escape. "Perdoando Deus" can be read as allegorically depicting the struggle that leads to this realization and anticipates Lispector's final novel. The themes of the short story — muteness, survival, and otherness — are inextricably bound to the author's Jewish roots and to a Judaism in crisis (Waldman 104). In this sense, "Perdoando Deus" marks a watershed in Lispector's works: it captures the final recognition that her history, her descent, prevented her from the complete fulfillment of her desire to appear Brazilian.

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¹² The reference to skin diseases supports our reading of this passage as referring to Jewish identity construction, as the association of Jews with skin disease is a common anti-Semitic trope (see Gilman 100).

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