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THE GARDEN AS A PLACE OF RAPTURE: READING VIRGINIA WOOLF, KATHERINE MANSFIELD, AND CLARICE LISPECTOR[1]

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Abstract

This paper investigates four moments in modernist literature where female characters encounter non-human spaces, which can be read as a reimagining of the patriarchal narrative of origin in the Book of Genesis. In two of Virginia Woolf's novels, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Between the Acts* (1941), as well as in Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss" (1920), the characters face a pear tree, while in the short story "Love" (1960), by Brazilian author Clarice Lispector, a moment of surprise takes the main character to the Botanical Garden. These experiences of rapture lead to a displacement in their lives and a creative opening to the reader through art.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf; Katherine Mansfield; Clarice Lispector; Genesis; feminism.

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It is widely known in Western culture that the Book of Genesis begins with God's declaration, "Let there be light," followed by other founding dichotomies, such as human and non-human, male and female, and, finally, good and evil, when Eve tastes the forbidden fruit. As the serpent incites the woman to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, the creature indicates that the fruit will open her eyes, and thus she will know good and evil.

In *Modernism, 1910–1945: image to apocalypse* (2004), Jane Goldman examines the construction of gendered subjectivity, highlighting a reversal of the moment of creation of light in two of Virginia Woolf's novels. Her first example occurs in the interlude of *To the Lighthouse* (1927) when the darkness of World War I (1914-1918) falls upon the characters and the summer house. The second one derives from the final scene of Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts*, published posthumously in 1941, where husband and wife, Giles and Isa Oliver, despite their conflicts throughout the narrative, eventually are open to the possibility of conversation as darkness also looms in the face of World War II (1939-1945). The gloominess instilled by war plays a part in a worldview that pits civilization and rationality against darkness. In contrast, the reversal proposed by Goldman points to what Verena Conley (2012) underscores as "an invention, an opening, an area in-between, intermediary, a continuum in perpetual transition" (4-5). We encounter a world of contiguity and indistinguishability that is not opposed to light but rather an opening to another mode of thought and sight that Marcia Schuback (2022) calls "seeing blindly [which] is seeing with the whole body" (my trans. 59). This suggestion regarding the creation story can be extended to the binary of good and evil presented by the Tree of Knowledge as an opening of Eve's eyes and the entering of humans into language. What kind of knowledge is gained by Eve in a story marked by the patriarchal I or God's eye? When rewriting this narrative to reinsert women in a world governed by men, how would the encounter with the Tree of Knowledge or the forbidden fruit be?

In this paper, I will argue for another understanding of sight found in four scenes of encounters between female characters and the non-human, written by modernist authors Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Clarice Lispector. In both *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts,* there is a moment when characters Lily Briscoe and Isa Oliver, respectively, face a pear tree, which is an image that provokes a shift in the narrative of origin found in the Bible as it substitutes the apple—popularized in later readings and representations of Genesis as the forbidden fruit—with the pear. If, in the Western imaginary, the apple became known as the fruit of knowledge even though the fruit is not named in the Bible, the change to the pear, which is somewhat similar to the apple but not identical, suggests other kinds of knowledge that differ from a binary one. As I see it, the pear references the apple and the Garden of Eden, but instead of an opening of the eyes that separates things, it questions and reimagines a way to see the world and, therefore, to be part of it. Following this image, in Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss," which was first published in 1918 in the literary magazine *The English Review* and later republished in *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920), there is also

a pear tree, marking the realization of a woman's attraction for another woman, even if not reciprocated. A fourth moment of rapture when surrounded by nature is presented in the short story "Amor" (Love), written by Brazilian author Clarice Lispector and published in the compilation *Laços de Família* (1960) (Family Ties), where the main character finds herself in an encounter so vibrant she has difficulty in returning to her familial life afterward. Other works by Lispector also delve into a reinterpretation of the creation story, such as the novel *A maçã no escuro* (The Apple in the Dark), originally published in 1961. Since the narrative, which is divided into three parts—"How a Man Is Made," "Birth of the Hero," and "The Apple in the Dark"—, focuses on the male character Martim, albeit through his interactions with female characters, and on his existential journey after fleeing from a crime he supposedly committed, I will not elaborate on it, even though one could argue for a feminine reading of Martim, as Hélène Cixous does in "*The Apple in the Dark*: The Temptation of Understanding" (1990). What I would emphasize in both stories is Lispector's interest in another way of seeing: "It is with closed eyes that one sees better" (Cixous 78).

By indicating the prospect of another consciousness highlighted by gender in these narratives that reimagine the Garden of Eden, how do these instances of rapture in the face of nature as a construct of the self and space point to another mode of thought and literary voice, thus repositioning the human in the fictional realm and hopefully in life itself? I investigate these stories as openings to the non-human and another spatiality since these instants with nature produce a displacement in their lives as spouses or in their imposed roles of femininity. My intent here is not to corroborate a reading of femininity and its relation to nature as opposed to the male inscription in culture and language through a Christian philosophy, which would only highlight yet another dichotomy. On the contrary, considering these encounters as narratives, they dismantle the very founding narrative of the Western world and its patriarchal organization. When these characters face nature in varied forms, we can read the scenes as a rewriting of Genesis, as Christine Froula (1988) suggests, considering "the myth legislates the thinkable by its paradigmatic inscription of the father's law" ("Rewriting Genesis" 197). Although the characters are confronted with themselves in these passages, the experience does not promote a sense of belonging to nature understood as essential or natural to women, thus separating them from an idea of civilization. The encounters complexify and displace perceptions that are solidified in our worldview "governed by the father's law," which makes the female writer "not civilization's legitimate inheritor but its outsider" (Froula, "Rewriting Genesis" 198). Other than merely a space occupied by a female character, the garden or orchard[2] becomes a place of possibility and deconstruction of a modern notion of civilization. It crafts a feminine or, better yet, androgynous—to use Woolf's term from *A Room of One's Own* (1929)—production of knowledge, which is faceless and anonymous as it unites male and female sentences to disrupt the position of subject and object occupied by men and women, respectively, according to

Davi Pinho (2017). This androgynous knowledge highlights the in-betweenness mentioned before and perhaps can be thought of in terms of queer logic nowadays.

As this story is rewritten, Woolf, Mansfield, and Lispector ponder over time and space and how one sees and is placed in life. The garden in these narratives creates a liminal fissure where the linearity of past and present is suspended. The feeling could be described through an idea of queerness in the sense of a disturbing familiarity. To be placed somewhere is something that happens to someone in a position of exclusion or hierarchy, i.e., "the exclusionary *male* culture and civilization" (emphasis in original, "Rewriting Genesis" 198), as Froula reminds us. There is a creative space in these narratives that shows a notion of displacement built by the experience of dissidence or the feeling of queerness faced by these women. Their home, domesticity, and the female role occupied are disturbed when they feel discomfort in places of supposed comfort. Except for Lily Briscoe, the other three characters in this analysis are women inserted into the logic of marriage. Therefore, the encounters with nature, with the pear tree, and ultimately with their bodies open them up to what Jack Halberstam (2005) calls a queer time, outside of heterosexual logic, that puts into question "those conventional milestones that make sense of a life," as Kate Haffey (2016, 159) emphasizes. Do they return to marriage in the end? How does contact with a queer spatiality change their relationship with the world and with the concept of nuclear family? How does it create a displacement?

Towards another vision

In *To the Lighthouse*, as artist Lily Briscoe tries to understand the patriarch Mr. Ramsay's philosophical work, his son explains that it is about "[s]ubject and object and the nature of reality," or simply put, about "a kitchen table then when you're not there" (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 40). So, when Briscoe arrives at the orchard with William Bankes, she sees the kitchen table "lodged now in the fork of a pear tree" (40-41). Instead of noticing the color of the bark or the shape of the leaves, she focuses on "a phantom kitchen table" (41), a symbol of her respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind. The reality contemplated is not separate from her imagination. As she ponders over the character of these two men, Mr. Ramsay and William Bankes, the reader follows her thoughts in an instant of communion and ecstasy, where there is an orgasmic description of the act of thinking, mixing in an androgynous way her thought with that of Bankes and Ramsay just like the table and the pear tree. The action begins with a gesture of Bankes' hand that frees her perception: "Suddenly, as if the movement of his hand had released it, the load of her accumulated impressions of him tilted up, and down poured in a ponderous avalanche all she felt about him" (41-42). The lexicon—"released," "accumulated," "poured," and "avalanche"—, as well as the movement evoked by "up" and "down," suggests an escalation that takes over Lily's mind and body, confounding their separation. The scene culminates in the explosion of thought,

leading to liberation, which, in the narrative, intermingles with the moment a shot sends a flock of birds flying, also reminiscent of an outburst:

> Standing now, apparently transfixed, by the pear tree, impressions poured in upon her of those two men, and to follow her thought was like following a voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil, and the voice was her own voice saying without prompting undeniable, everlasting, contradictory things, so that even the fissures and humps on the bark of the pear tree were irrevocably fixed there for eternity. … All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate but all marvelously controlled in an invisible elastic net—danced up and down in Lily's mind, in and about the branches of the pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind, until her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand, and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive, tumultuous, a flock of starlings. (42-44)

Lily's contemplation in front of the pear tree, seeing the tree and table as a single image, points to circularity and a gradual expansion of thought. It ends with a release, a feminine *jouissance*, or, said in a less binary manner, not limited by male and female, it calls attention to a different way of facing the world and her own desires. There is another grammar at play in this excerpt. Perhaps this is why Mr. Ramsay's philosophical question about the kitchen table changes perspective when Lily Briscoe reflects on it. For him, the erasure of the "I" is the unthinkable issue in the scene. "Does the world remain when I am not there?" seems to be his question. Woolf's answer is given by nature, the house, and Lily Briscoe's painting: they will remain, even if forgotten by men. In Lily's mind, it is no longer an object observed in isolation and without the presence of an "I" but an object that is part of the pear tree and the painter herself. Woolf's character does not need to put herself outside the scene like Mr. Ramsay or to think of a world without an "I," as her dissolution of the self occurs in another way since she is already an outsider. The artist knows that life continues without her, and, as Ann Banfield ponders in *The Phantom Table* (2000), art is the possibility of giving a "timeless form on time's passing" (145-46).

Only outside the thinkable introduced by the episode of Eden can Lily have her vision and finally complete her painting (Froula, "Rewriting Genesis" 197-215). Conversely, the world perceived by Mr. Ramsay is one that he observes from a distance and from above, like the man in the Romantic painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" (1818) by German artist Caspar David Friedrich. While Briscoe's painting highlights a horizontal movement of sight, Mr. Ramsay's view emphasizes a vertical way of seeing. What is noticeable in their differing positions towards the world is the dominance of vision over all other senses. As Paul B. Preciado states in *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018):

> Touch and Sight are marked by a radical epistemological asymmetry: Touch is blind, and Sight touches with his gaze, contaminated by neither

> the singular nor the material. That is to say, Sight implies a superior mode of experience that needs neither the hand nor the skin. (81)

Contrasting with a gaze that does not want to be contaminated, Woolf underscores a form of seeing that invents fables to dream a new world. In Lily Briscoe's encounter with the pear tree, there seems to be what Brazilian scholar Flavia Trocoli (2022) calls an "absolute receptivity" (my trans.). According to her, this world without an "I"—the question posed by Bernard's character at the end of Woolf's 1931 novel *The Waves*, but also present in *To the Lighthouse*—can be understood through Cixous's notion of "dream," a created and creative space where authorship and authority come undone, for dreams are spaces that cannot be controlled and that call into question a linear temporality of past, present, and future.

As mentioned, in Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts,* the pear tree also figures in a disruptive way in a narrative about a pageant written by queer playwright Miss La Trobe and performed in a small town in England in the imminence of World War II. Following the steps of other works of Woolf, especially the essay *Three Guineas* (1938), the novel links tyranny and imperialism to patriarchy and nationalism in the heart of England as the pageant retells the nation's history.

Both Christine Froula (2005) and Jane Marcus (1983) comment on *Between the Acts* being a rework of Genesis, a motif that can be read throughout Woolf's oeuvre. While in *To the Lighthouse* the pear tree seems to be part of what leads Lily Briscoe to her final vision in a moment of fecundity of thought that opens her sight to another reality, in *Between the Acts,* the tree encountered by Isabella Oliver brings the image of a burden. Isa seems to confront the weight not only of her past as a woman but also the collective weight carried by all women. Isa is a mother and wife who thinks in verses but feels she is not allowed to write poetry. She does so in hidden notebooks so her violent husband will not find out. As the narrator puts it, "'Abortive,' was the word that expressed her" (Woolf, *Between the Acts* 21), thus connecting Isa to a gendered idea of failure.

In the novel, as the character walks towards the stable, lost in thought as she muses over a "harvestless dim field" where "there grows nothing for the eye" (181), she comes across "the great pear tree … whose roots went beneath the flags" (182). The description emanates sexual content as the tree is heavy with fruits characterized as "hard green pears" (182), followed by Isa "[f]ingering one of them" (182). But whereas in *To the Lighthouse* Briscoe pours *jouissance* in an encounter with herself and her thoughts, Isa's encounter tells us a story of rape connected with the history of colonization and patriarchy. After touching the fruit, she says to herself:

> 'How am I burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories; possessions. This is the burden that the past laid on me, last little donkey in the long caravanserai crossing the desert. 'Kneel down,' said the past. 'Fill your pannier from our tree. Rise up, donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack.'

> The pear was hard as stone. She looked down at the cracked flags beneath which the roots spread. 'That was the burden,' she mused, 'laid on me in the cradle; murmured by waves; breathed by restless elm trees; crooned by singing women; what we must remember; what we would forget.' (182)

The movements of going down and then up are similar to the ones in *To the Lighthouse*, but in this novel, Woolf presents them in a scene of aridity and pain instead of a crescendo. Even though the tree is full of fruit, there is something almost lifeless compared to the exuberance and overflow of Lily Briscoe's instant with the pear tree, which points to an androgynous mind. In *Between the Acts*, the pears are "stone-hard" and inedible. Contrary to a fruit symbolizing fertility and knowledge, which can be eaten and is pleasing to the eyes, they are not ripe. Isa also observes the roots extending, overflowing, and cracking the ground, perhaps emphasizing the violence behind the story of the Tree of Knowledge, that is to say, the story of women and their silence in a patriarchal world. The uncovered knowledge in *Between the Acts* is that of a collective memory. As Marcus observes, the novel "tells us that 'what we must remember' is the rape; 'what we must forget' is the male rewriting of women's history" (62). According to Eileen Barrett (1987), Isa's understanding of the rape stories present in the novel is "indicative of the condition of women" (27). Therefore, it does not seem by chance that Isa is at the stables amid these thoughts, which recalls a rape scene read in the *Times* newspaper that appears at the beginning of the novel, where troopers violate a young woman convinced to go into a barrack with the illusion that there was "a horse with a green tail" inside (Woolf, *Between the Acts* 27). This passage of extreme forcefulness is based on a real story, as scholar Gillian Beer (1996, 137-38) clarifies, stating that Woolf followed the appeal of this woman and the accusation of the men. Both fruit and tail are green and false, presenting a world of illusion to women.

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the final scene of *Between the Acts* positions Isa and Giles as "the first man and woman in a world always beginning" (Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury* 318), for the first time alone "in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night" (Woolf, *Between the Acts* 256), in a moment of blindness and suspension, as we read that "[i]t was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks" (256). With the war to come, no one knows what the future holds. It is a chance to write a new story, for "[s]urely it was time someone invented a new plot" (Woolf, *Between the Acts* 252), one that is not inaugurated in

> [t]he imaginary garden of the Genesis story [which] provides not only an account of a fall from innocence and grace into experience (or knowledge) and mortality but, no less important, a complex paradigm for the relationship between sexual difference and cultural creativity. (Froula, "Rewriting Genesis" 199)

It is not Isa, though, who will write a new story since she is a "domestic prisoner," as Marcus (90) underscores, bound by compulsory heterosexuality (Rich

1980). The potential to rewrite the Book of Genesis lies with queer playwright Miss La Trobe, who "is the sister of the anonymous writers of the Bible" (Marcus 90), referencing *A Room of One's Own*, where Woolf fictionalizes the character of Judith Shakespeare—William Shakespeare's invented sister—to point to the material difficulties faced by women as they wrote fiction. When the curtain goes up in the last lines of *Between the Acts*, both husband and wife speak. Again, we observe the androgynous mind highlighted by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* as the creative possibility of inventing a future, which leads to "an imaginary clearing in which man and woman speak the world into being together, vastly widening the bounds of what we can know as 'civilization'" (Froula, "Rewriting Genesis" 199).

Restlessness and bliss

Another figuration of the pear tree appears in "Bliss," a short story by New Zealander writer Katherine Mansfield, who, upon arriving in England, participated in the gatherings of the Bloomsbury Group, building a relationship with Virginia Woolf herself, but, as Sydney Janet Kaplan (1991) comments, "she remained always an outsider to a considerable extent" (12). Her short story is an ironic portrayal of the bohemian life she encountered (Kaplan 12) as the character Bertha Young and her husband, Harry, host a dinner party.

Mansfield's narrative opens with a description of her character's feeling of bliss, something she cannot contain: "What can you do if you are thirty and, turning the corner of your own street, you are overcome, suddenly, by a feeling of bliss—absolute bliss!" (2006, 69). As Kaplan highlights, Mansfield's female characters are often taken by a feeling of "sexual restlessness" (70) in their relationship with the urban space and sensations brought by city life. Even though Bertha is a thirty-year-old woman, married and with a baby daughter, she has a childish quality about her, underscored by her surname. As the narrator follows Bertha's thoughts and point of view, we realize there is a certain blindness to her in the sense that she seems separated from adult life. She does not know how to name her attraction to women; she describes her marriage as both being in love and "really good pals" (Mansfield 73), and her child is like a doll to her, with whom she "plays" when the nanny allows. Yet her feeling is of an unexplainable rapture, or bliss, as she calls it. According to Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy (1999), one "should not be deluded by the delicately elusive surface of Mansfield's tales" (244). With a satirical tone, Mansfield points to how meaningless and absurd some of Bertha's thoughts are (Kaplan 160). The feelings of perfection and bliss are mirrored by "the lovely pear tree with its wide open blossoms" (Mansfield 73).

The tree also mirrors Pearl Fulton, one of Bertha's guests for dinner, a woman with whom Bertha is in love, "as she always did fall in love with beautiful women who had something strange about them" (72). Both Miss Fulton and the pear tree are described in silvery tones; while the tree is "tall, slender" (72), Miss Fulton has "slender fingers" (76). She carries in her name the fruit—pear—and the rare gem formed within an oyster shell—pearl. In the narrative, Bertha seems to be trying

to understand her feeling of bliss, and though she does not make the connection, the narrator implies it to the reader: the feeling relates to the pear tree "in the back of her mind" and Miss Fulton (76). Believing there is a mutual affection between them, Bertha waits for some kind of sign from the other woman. When Miss Fulton asks to see the garden with the beautiful pear tree, she takes this as the expected sign and believes that the two share a moment as they contemplate the tree. Mansfield writes:

> And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed—almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon.
> How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands?
> For ever—for a moment? And did Miss Fulton murmur: 'Yes. Just *that*.' Or did Bertha dream it? (emphasis in original, 77)

Once again, I argue that there is a displacement of the forbidden fruit when considering Bertha's attraction to Miss Fulton. Instead of marking an encounter where sexual difference is reinforced, what she experiences is an instant of ecstasy towards another woman, which is described with sexual undertones—a long flame that grows almost to the point of touching or penetrating the circular moon. This also occurs in a movement upwards, a growth that seems to culminate with a murmur. The scene does not present a sense of separateness. It emphasizes contiguity between earth and sky through the slender pear tree, which refers to Miss Fulton's slender fingers. Mansfield's description is outside of our understanding of time and space: lasting forever and for an instant, it is suspended in time like a dream. As with Lily Briscoe, there is a sense of fertility or possibility, considering the tree is in bloom. Both Lily and Bertha have fertile imaginations, but in "Bliss," this ends with the discovery of a secret. In the final moments of the narrative, Bertha's imagined connection is shattered when she hears and sees a moment of intimacy between her husband and Miss Fulton as the woman leaves the house. Bertha realizes then that the two are lovers.

The story concludes by reiterating a feeling of separateness and blindness since Bertha Young merely returns to look at the tree, which continues "as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still" (80). Thus, we realize, as Helen E. Nebeker (1972) points out, that "[t]he intense, blissful experience—and all that it meant and might have meant—has been hers alone" (551). Mansfield's final word marks the character's stillness in contrast with the restlessness of the opening lines. Bertha goes back to her normal self and thus does not access the "blissful treasure," which could be understood as knowledge or as an opening of her eyes, though not to good and evil, but to her feelings of sexuality towards women.

The last scene I would like to expound on differs from Woolf's and Mansfield's due to the absence of the pear tree, but I argue that in Clarice Lispector's short story "Love," where the reader follows the character Ana, there is an awakening to life by an all-encompassing feeling of astonishment provoked by a blind man chewing gum, unaware of his surroundings and yet smiling (117). Instants such as these are usually forgotten and silenced by bourgeoisie life, by her duties as a mother and housewife, to which she puts all "her strength" (116), as she occupies herself to escape what she calls a "dangerous" (116) or "unstable hour" (117) when the afternoon comes to an end.

Despite her efforts to contain life after seeing the blind man, "the damage was done" (118) ("o mal estava feito"). According to Evando Nascimento (2012), for the Brazilian writer, the concept of Evil (Mal)—also present in the notion of damage seen in the translation since, in Portuguese, Lispector uses a word that can be translated as evil or damage—"works as a metaphor to understand our relationship with the world … [being] a set of forces that have always harassed humans, on the border of the outside and the inside" (my trans. 259). Ana is taken by feelings of "compassion" and "benevolence," while the rest of the world seems filled with violence. She cannot escape the moment, and the life she had "pacified … so well" (Lispector 119) explodes before her, not necessarily before her eyes, but in close contact with her body, in a very tactile way, experiencing the intensity of smells and sounds around her, because she seems to be taken by the blind man's blindness. Again, it is a movement towards darkness, although with eyes wide open: "She seemed to have stepped off into the middle of the night" (120).

As Schuback reminds us in her reading of Lispector, blindness gives one "the experience of how life is greater than 'my' life, of how life is being lived in each living thing" (my trans. 58). Ana's encounter is similar to Lily Briscoe's since both acknowledge how everything is connected. There is no self and the world, but a sense of continuity, like the kitchen table merged with the pear tree. When Ana misses her stop on the tram and gets off near the Botanical Garden, she finds a dreamlike scene, one of "pure life" (my trans.) that can also be "heartbreaking" (my trans.), as Trocoli comments. The experience of the Garden displaces her, and she falls into the space of danger that she was so afraid of at the beginning of the narrative. Something in Ana's encounter with life is unbearable to the point that she needs to return home and put an end to "the dizziness of benevolence" (126), as Lispector writes, she needs to put an end to love mixed with nausea when facing a world "so rich it was rotting" (121).

At the end of the story, while Ana is combing her hair in front of the mirror, she comes back to herself "with no world at all in her heart" (126). After living this experience of an unsustainable world, Lispector's character needs to return to her home and family, which seems like an imposition on women that Ana sustains while creating her adult life: "What had happened to Ana before she had a home was forever out of reach: a restless exaltation so often mistaken for unbearable happiness. In exchange she had created something at least comprehensible, an adult life" (116). The words used by Lispector echo Mansfield's "Bliss" as childlike

Bertha also feels restless in her sense of ecstasy. Both endings seem to point to a return to routine, where life is quiet and without excitement, as they fulfill their roles as housewives.

Literature and the experience of rapture

Nascimento states that, etymologically, the word "experience" still carries the idea of fear or danger or risk in it—this trace persists in "peri," deriving from the Latin word *periculum* (28). Experience as risk is, I believe, highlighted in all the scenes analyzed here. For Lispector, the feeling of love is one of otherness, which displaces the subject (Nascimento 153-54)—or one of stepping into the night, as suggested. In that case, the same might be said of all the characters. Ana's love for the blind man, Isa's love for all women violated by patriarchy, Bertha's queer love, and Lily Briscoe's love for art and women's ability to paint are all experiences of rapture if we consider the Latin roots of the word, where *raptura* means seizing or being taken over, even if the feeling is momentary. The narratives represent these instances by the different encounters with nature that produce in the characters a sense of *raptus*, i.e., of being abducted. In Lispector and Mansfield, we find a garden in bloom, full of fruits or flowers to the point the reader can almost smell them; in contrast, Woolf presents two very different pear trees. The one in *To the Lighthouse* seems almost like a surrealist painting with the image of the kitchen table entangled there and a description that focuses mostly on the texture of the branches and the shape of the leaves, which Lily Briscoe does not even notice. Meanwhile, the tree is full of fruit in *Between the Acts*, but the pears are hard and inedible. The scene differs from Eve in the Garden of Eden, where the fruit looks pleasant and inviting.

All these characters, except for Lily Briscoe, represent married middle-class women with children. Although their lives exhibit a potential for disruptiveness that points to a space in-between, highlighting and deviating from a biblical encounter of sexual difference, their experience of rapture and displacement cannot be sustained. As they return to their familial and societal obligations, the feeling is carried on through literature and art: an experience that puts us, readers, apart and a part of it. Perhaps that is why the only character who can prolong this moment of otherness is Lily Briscoe—and, in a sense, Miss La Trobe as she writes her new play. When faced with a world that explodes, where everything is interconnected like the kitchen table placed on the pear tree in the orchard, Lily Briscoe paints, thus being able to make something of this displacement, of her "moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt" (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 245).

In "The Leaning Tower" (1966), a paper read to the Workers' Educational Association in 1940, Virginia Woolf says: "Literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves" (181). This

seems to be Woolf's, Mansfield's, and Lispector's bet: thought and mind as places of rapture. It is a belief in art and literature as another way to view the world and create displacements. Failure and tentativeness are part of their bet, but so is love.

Notes

1. I would like to thank both anonymous reviewers of this essay for their generous comments, which certainly helped me to clarify and further develop some of my ideas.
2. I will use both "garden" and "orchard" throughout this essay since some of the narratives analyzed describe the space as a garden and others as an orchard. The word "garden" holds a more powerful meaning because of the Garden of Eden and, therefore, is used in a general sense in the title.

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