

**AFFECTIVE MEMORY AND DIGNIFIED CHILDHOOD
IN THE PRODUCTION BY BRAZILIAN WRITER
CLARICE LISPECTOR**

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ABSTRACT: This article aims at analyzing the concept of affective memory as a category in the imaginary of children's rights from the perspective of Law and Literature. The focus are the connections between childhood memories and adult personality, regarding the character Virgínia in the novel *The chandelier (O lustre)*, by Clarice Lispector, in order to exemplify the function of affective memory and the universal right to a dignified childhood. The function of affective memories is an important trace in the process of identity formation, which contributes to the development of a legal theory regarding children's rights. Affection is considered a foundation for dignified life, and literary legal reflections contribute to the rethinking of childhood, in the eyes of Law and social studies.

KEYWORDS: affective memory; Clarice Lispector; right to a dignified childhood.

INITIAL THOUGHTS

Benedito Nunes (1989, p. 105), as an exponent in analyzing the production by Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, indicates the reflexive, uncanny features of the fictional characters created by her, and emphasizes the density of her narrative regarding consciousness. Such a deep attempt of acknowledging the human condition seems linked to legal studies, as it reveals bonds between Law and Literature.

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Warat has paved this analytical path with the concept of significant heteronomy, which indicates the “existence of a plurality of meaning making centers” (1995, p, 247) in legal analysis. Streck, in *O Senhor das Moscas e o Fim da Inocência* (2008, p. 3), emphasizes the importance of Literature for Law. In fact, literary narrative places jurists on different reading levels, and the ease to deal with interdisciplinary matters offers new significances for legal analysis.

Literary narrative by Clarice Lispector gradually creates reflections about legal topics. There are different elements to prove it throughout the novel *O lustre*, written by Lispector in 1946. The narrative has, in the background, a complex network of familiar memories, and it deals with childhood feelings, dreams and the emotional frailty of the character Virgínia.

These traits are dealt with in different moments of the narrative, and relate infancy with the idea of commuting, moving from one life stage to another: the adulthood. Such conception of childhood can be summarized in a sensation described as “facing something that does not exist [...], the future” (Lispector, 1999, p. 25). As Merleau-Ponty thinks, in phenomenology of perception, sensations tell us much about the ways we get affected by experiences (2006, p.23).

Amid this thread, to see childhood as a period of human life means understanding sensations that unfold in order to give the human being the possibility to understand the continuity and the cognition of the world, revealing the imaginative function of human reason, since experiences are intuited and remembered throughout adulthood.

By describing this childhood picture, the novel seeks for the authenticity of familiar relationships and places the main character Virgínia under situations where she faces the possibility of living out her freedom by imagining transformations in her ways of seeing her family’s daily life based on her memory of the chandelier, which was a central object in the mansion she lived as a child.

In such an experimental environment, with basis on ordering models of culture, a connection is established between the narrative and the concept of children's rights, regarding healthy and wholesome development of individuals. The poetical descriptions of the *chandelier* assume the form of a mediator between the thought of a dignified childhood and the memory of a lived childhood.

This perspective makes it possible to understand extra-legal elements that compose the phenomenology of childhood and deepens the dialog between the legal scope and the literary imaginary. Indeed, this conversation is fundamental, as it brings back and emphasizes philosophical studies in Law, which contributes to the increase of authenticity and openness of legal knowledge, since it makes it tangible to discuss the role of the interpreter of Law in the hermeneutic process of realization of fundamental rights.

The literary language used by Lispector observes infancy as a place of belonging. Such register manifests on details and actions of the characters. In the idea of childhood, the concept of being born survives. Virgínia shows that “in order to be born, things need to be alive, because being born is to have movement” (Lispector, 1999, p. 43).

Childhood is a construction of sensations and symbols in which facts are revealed at the will of memory. Thus, memory acts in a process of redemption of family identity and creates the possibility of reflection about internal and paradoxal structures of the human being in different life stages. Along the way, there is a difference between the idea of childhood as something that passes by and the fact that this “passage” makes up a necessary abstraction for the comprehension of the actions by Virgínia when “looking to the tallest trees, waiting in the dawn for the dusk” (Lispector, 1999, p. 26).

Having such characteristic, memory is put as the origin for acknowledging facts and experiences of life and creates psychic conditions for adults to develop their behavior patterns. It is through memory that a set of predominant childhood sensations determines the interactions of adult life. Hence, memory is not an isolated act. It is built by experiences, and it is never complete, because reinventing the past is a constant habit in the human spirit. Nascimento (2012, p. 256) shows that the fictional

narratives by Clarice Lispector can be read taking into account the thoughts and sensations of the author's biography.

The researcher emphasizes the fact that evil is a recurrent theme in Lispector's literature, through metaphor and the representation of human nature facing difficult relations. He also indicates that one cannot conceive "a world without evilness" (2012, p. 256). In the production by Clarice, evil experiences are apparent in childhood and in the motivations for characters, in the way internal and external conflicts are perceived and in the resources they use to deal with anguished behavior as evidenced via poetical imagination.

Memory comes in a scenario of multiplicity of senses, around which many fundamental questions appear, usually regarding existential paradigms. To begin with, the singularity character of subjective experience of affective memory repeats itself in social relations and materializes in the legal expression of childhood. These memories are, thus, a topic of analysis for legal studies, considering children's rights for a healthy development.

By considering children's rights from the access to affective memory, it is possible to realize that a lack of good sensations in childhood as well as a majority of conflicting, aggressive, violent sensations in family relations are of great importance in building children's personality and a healthy development.

The environments in which facts happen also have a special connection to children's development. Considering that, the mountain is a symptomatic setting, necessary for the character Virgínia to grow up, and it marks her return to her home town in adulthood, after some time living in the city. Santos considers that Lispector uses certain melancholy aesthetics when writing, which brings together a "configuration of a preparation for enlightening [...] that is intrinsically related to the process of going up the mountain" (2000, p. 98).

The alternance between dusk and dawn intensifies the relations between two life periods: childhood / adult life, as well as represents binary conditions of what is allowed and forbidden. It is also possible to recognize the presence of a family hierarchy and, based on it, observing the idea of belonging. Vesting (2015, p. 90) indicates that this idea is inserted in the

traditional origins of sources for law studies and contemporarily in the constitutional implications of family law in the relations between the civil code and the Statute of Children and Adolescents.

As for the examples, Clarice Lispector reaches subtly the comprehension of dignity in childhood, by expressing the need for integration in a family and by demonstrating how palpable these memories are in childhood resonances conducted by images, such as the chandelier in the hall of the mansion Virgínia, Daniel and Esmeralda lived in as children. In the childhood of these siblings, the chandelier marks the mix of family welcoming sensations, which reveals that during this life time, sweet and light feelings coexist with harsh, cruel ones.

By accompanying Virgínia's point of view, the sense of childhood can be understood as a constant search for subtle desires of reaching for the world. In adulthood, Virgínia faces frustrations of her childhood dreams in an unfriendly world. In other words, Virgínia's memories when describing conflicting situations are based on her relationship with her mother and father. From her father, Virgínia remembers the figure of a quiet man, who had dominion over the home, "ignored, going up the stairs" (Lispector, 1999, p. 87).

The diverse childhood forms reveal philosophically, as studied by Santos, that "if the colors of (concrete) facts were the same, it would be impossible to even understand there are colors" (2015, p. 54). This means that the facts which make up her childhood history create an impact over the reality in which family interaction happened, pointing out the various forms of interactions (colorings) in the family, the memory structures and the modulations of the effects on each family member. Similarly, Freud, describing the cultural sexual morality towards women, shows that they are usually guided by family authority. Thus many times the corresponding psychic function to the state of falling in love is linked to family feelings hindering the development of feeling itself (Freud, 1995, p. 1995).

As for the subjective dimension of memory, Sarlo (2007) considers it in a scientific approach. The Convention of Children's Rights and personality development leads attention to dignity conditions in the context of family relations.

On the other hand, Ariès (1973) investigates childhood in the historical construction of European daily life. He emphasizes the fact that education in childhood used to be connected to future actions regarding the formation of adults in social and political life. Narratives and examples are brought to enlighten the thesis, with details on children's lives throughout the history of France, from Middle Ages to Modern Times. As an example, the author makes it clear that the act of giving names to people is connected to the need for civil identification within the modern state pattern.

Hence, cultural memory occupies an important place in the formation of a childhood category, which leads to historical elements that created the imaginary of children and youngsters. The narrative creation by Clarice Lispector, filled with her own biographical childhood experiences, incorporates perceptions about the nature of objects and activities which are part of a child's daily life in Brazil. Gotlib (1995), analyzing how children's stories made themselves present in the life of young Clarice Lispector, emphasizes the importance of reading as an imaginary exercise of real life. In an article entitled *The first book of every one of my lives (O primeiro livro de cada uma de minhas vidas)* (1992), Lispector reveals that the short stories *Aladdin* and *The ugly duckling* were the first narratives that influenced her.

I was asked once which had been the first book of my life. I'd rather talk about the first book of each one of my lives. Searching in my memory, I have an almost physical feeling in my hands when holding such treasure: a very thin book that told the story of the Ugly duckling and the lamp of Aladdin (Lispector, 1992, p. 72).

As seen by Gotlib “the attractive aspect of the first story is ugliness becoming beauty. It is also attractive to feel a sense of revealing a mystery of things: suddenly become *another*” (Gotlib, 1995, p. 104). In *Aladdin*, the imaginary appeal follows a different direction, “as the fog from the lamp which, out in the air, enters the impossibility that becomes possible” (Gotlib, 1995, p. 104). Then, the epistemological conditions based on children literature refer to the understanding of the childhood phenomenon. Telling and narrating stories connected to oral tradition is a part of children's literacy and incorporate resources to help them understand reality.

Virgínia is clearly a reference for creating Macabea, one of the most known characters by the readers of Clarice Lispector, from the novel *The hour of the star (A hora da estrela)*, which also presents to the reader many anguished feelings of family life.

Based on a Law and Literature point of view, the social reach of infancy is inserted in the access to reality and echoes determined cultural structures. In this context, the construction of subjectivity in childhood reveals literature as an indicative of social behaviors, considering that imaginary attributes of childhood characters are used in learning processes and children identify with them and learn many possible worlds where values of justice and injustice are shared.

THE IMAGINATIVE FUNCTION OF AFFECTIVE MEMORY AND THE RIGHT FOR A DIGNIFIED CHILDHOOD

In *The chandelier*, affectivity is narrated based on psychic intuitions about objects that besides being a part of the family daily life also acquire an imaginary condition of affection. Thus, Virgínia, as previously stated, lives under the image of the chandelier, an object from her childhood home. When saying good-bye to Granja Quieta (the family farm), she lives in constant nostalgia, as her past remains present in a complex way as an imaginative link of such a vital space that needs to return.

The character makes it possible to infer that the structure of memories has a selectivity character, “the child, for example, learns firstly to see similarities” (Santos, 2015, p. 54). Such similarities have dynamic and continuous aspects, which can be seen in the dialog between the siblings Daniel and Virgínia when they question each other in a playful tone about spiders, ants and colors in the yard of the family farm, discovering senses in the world and their function in the reality of the context they live in. Childhood has a “knowledge” that moves and transforms itself, making evident some concepts from Law that identify the *full and healthy development*, as well as limitations of damage to the integrity of children.

Based on that, the presence of affective memory creates arguments and recovers the evocation of a dignified childhood in the hermeneutic forms of legal construction. In Virgínia’s affective memory, “the chandelier is sprinkled by chrysanthemums and joy” (Lispector, 1998, p. 15) amid the games, the running and passing through the hall, the look that constantly

faced that tall object that marked the presence of its familiar atmosphere: the chandelier. Through it, “at night the hall was enlightened in flashing sweet lights” (Lispector, 1998, p. 15).

As a matter of fact, playing is one of the bases for children’s development (Winnicott, 1975). The memories of playing games reorder the facts created by extended sensations of childhood in adult life. For instance, the memory of the red velvet carpet in Virgínia’s grandmother’s wedding marks in the character a sensation of safety and density at home.

Clarice Lispector institutes intuition as the immediate perception of presence and announces over the personality of Virgínia many sensations created by the image of the chandelier, which assume to the narrator a characteristic of Virgínia’s personality. “She would ever be fluid throughout her whole life. However, the trace that was dominant around her figure [...], the one which illumined her against the world and had given her intimate power was the secret” (Lispector, 1999, p. 9).

The sensation of secret keeping that permeates this novel is noticeable. Secrecy is the instrument of family power which appears in different forms because of the sensation of mystery. Recognizing it shows that memory is created from the movements of feelings of unveiling (Dias G, 2012, p. 94). Affective bonds of the character Virgínia generate a psychism that develops around a secret identified as the shadows projected by the chandelier.

While describing family life, Virgínia’s memories show that “her father would never talk to Esmeralda and nobody mentioned even slightly about what had happened to her” (Lispector, 1999, p. 17). Something that had happened to Virgínia’s sister, Esmeralda, is mentioned. Tension and secrecy in the family are apparent when Virgínia realizes that “her father looked at Esmeralda as if she was dead” (Lispector, 1999, p. 18). Tracking these sensations in the novel, regarding Esmeralda, it seems that Virgínia has conscience that the existence of affective relations is molded by family morality.

While listening to what the character has to say, the reader is inserted in the act of recovering individual and collective origins of the very memories. According to Alves (2001, p. 23) infancy is a process of building amidst social layers in different spaces (family, school, church). This vital

space recreates imaginaries and makes it possible to comprehend the responsibilities of adult life.

Assis Brasil (1969, p. 62) analyzes the creative process of Clarice Lispector. His studies indicate that the author has a tendency of generalizing in every character the space and the point of view of the central character. When going out to play, for instance, Virgínia has the feeling that “all the house was floating, floating among the clouds, unattached of Brejo Alto” (Lispector, 1999, p. 16, highlighted).

This generalization tendency is recurrent in the production by Lispector. Thus, as with the principle of integral protection, the need for reaching prime forms of affective support is acknowledged. Teubner (2000) evidences common knowledge as an interpretative source for Law and emphasizes the role of paradox and symbols for the rationality of law. So, identifying the origin of such bonds is fundamental for understanding the most effective lines of thought for preventing situations which could cause emotional damage for children.

In turn, the Report for worldwide situation of childhood from 2015 highlights perspectives for facing situations of children’s rights violation, through integrated, transversal systems which could make it possible to contemplate local contexts facing global experiences (Unicef, 2015).

Such measures are analyzed in projects developed from sharing experiences and inside a scenario in which education is a fundamental point for children development and integrates the Objectives of Sustainable Development (OSD). In a production entitles *Fearless testimonials (?) – non-revitimizing cultures and practices: a cartography of experiences (Depoimento sem medo (?) - culturas e práticas não-revitimizantes: uma cartografia das experiências)*, Santos, dealing with aspects of interviewing children and teenagers who had suffered sexual harassment, points out the necessity of respecting diversity and particularities in which these children are inserted.

Considering that, it is clear that remembering good facts from the past has a positive effect and the search for deleting or forgetting traumatic situations and violations selectively must be taking into account. Trindade, reflecting about *the role of emotions in the origins of law* highlights the

psychic content of laws (2010, p. 44) and delineates that emotions are related to approval or disapproval of conducts in cultural practices.

Familiar memory questions affect in a peculiar way the process of mediating conflicts. It is also important to pay attention to the reconstruction of familiar autonomy that is limited by circumstances such as economy and law itself. There are ethical and legal limitations regarding the degrees of diversity and the differences that exist in each specific family context. As time passes by, family memories change and rebuild family ties.

In this line of thought, the so-called children's legal rights reflect the state of the development process in the formulation and implementation of public policies that are in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution regarding Brazilian children.

CONCLUSION

From the memory of Virgínia, writer Clarice Lispector builds infancy narratives and images in the novel *The chandelier*. The connection of images comprising Virgínia's reality exerts an imaginative function that sharpens understanding of her anguished feelings and brings elements to handle phenomenological aspects of childhood.

Clarice Lispector posits the dense questioning of living that structure the narrative thread of Virginia's childhood, linked to access to life and death. In this regard, it should be noted the symbolic view of the right to a dignified childhood considering the family space and imaginary forms of affection.

Virginia expresses the experience of emotional memory and brings readers reflections on memory formation in the family context. The exercise of awareness points to readers' legal ways to reflect on the fundamental rights of the child. This causes the reader as an interpreter to see in the text dynamics significant ingredients of the function of emotional memory of the family.

This experience is a fill of recognition of sensations that memory reaches is a personal and collective dimension. It therefore redefines the emotional feelings and mental states, selectively reproducing elements of intersubjectivity. Thus, children's rights go through an imaginative function of emotional memory in the apprehension of the childhood phenomenon.

Recognition incorporates wills, rights, obligations and runs through possible scenarios in which the fundamental rights of children are inserted, working from levels at which collective memory interacts with propitiate legislative discourse of public policy and states full protection awareness horizons for children.

Thus, the phenomenal consciousness of the childhood category, under the force of the paradigms of the principle of full protection to the child is rethought in terms of human rights. Hence, the reading of Clarice Lispector awakens innovative visions for the understanding of memory, in listening to the child's fundamental rights and in the light of the symbolic force of fictional narrative.

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