

Nordestina Modernity in the Novels of Freitas, Queiroz, and Lispector

Fernanda Patricia Fuentes Muñoz
University of Brasília

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Fernanda Patricia Fuentes Muñoz,
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Abstract: In her article "Nordestina Modernity in the Novels of Freitas, Queiroz, and Lispector" Fernanda Patricia Fuentes Muñoz discusses aspects of the Nordeste — the northeastern region of Brazil — in Emília de Freitas's *A Rainha do Ignoto* (1899), Rachel de Queiroz's *O Quinze* (1930), and Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela* (1977; *The Hour of the Star*, 1992, Trans. Giovanni Pontiero). The region has traditionally been seen as located on the margins of modernity and as a site of underdevelopment in the Brazilian imaginary in opposition to the affluent Southeastern region. The construction of this binary opposition suggests a model of division of the Brazilian social and cultural world between center and margin. Through creative appropriation of foreign influences Freitas, Queiroz, and Lispector produced narratives with intrinsic Brazilian qualities. They participated in the creation of an authentic national intelligentsia, the nationalization of Brazilian literature while at the same time questioning the arrival of modernity to the "third world," and more specifically, to the northeastern periphery of Brazil and its characteristics.

Fernanda Patricia FUENTES MUÑOZ

Nordestina Modernity in the Novels of Freitas, Queiroz, and Lispector

In the present article I discuss aspects of Brazil's modernization in its Northeast region as captured in three novels by women writers: Emília de Freitas's *A Rainha do Ignoto. Romance psicológico* (1899), Rachel de Queiroz's *O Quinze: Romance* (1930), and Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela* (1977; *The Hour of the Star*, 1992, Trans. Giovanni Pontiero). The Northeast of Brazil was a region during colonialism where most of the national income and population came from, mainly as a result of sugar cane plantations. During the nineteenth century, however, wealth came from the Southeast, primarily from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and the Northeast has since been considered a region of underdevelopment. By offering an interpretation of modernity from the standpoint of those excluded, silenced, and marginalized in modern social relations, these novels allow a critical reading of Brazil's process of modernization. Despite belonging to different socio-historical moments, all three novels were written by northeastern women, who one way or another reflected on the experiences of modernity in northeastern society. They invite the reader to share in the intimacy of the Other and the subaltern, while questioning the relationship between universal and local experiences, as well as the deficiencies of the national project of modernization. It is significant that the authors are women, who themselves had to struggle for the right to publish in a predominantly male universe. The fact that these novels were written at different historical moments highlights how appreciations on modernity and subalterity in the Northeast have depended on the intellectual climate of the period they were written.

Brazilian modernity has frequently been considered a product of foreign influence and Brazil's intelligentsia has oscillated between the acceptance and rejection of these ideas and practices (see, e.g., McClennen and Fitz). During the nineteenth century, after the country's independence in 1822, the creation of a national conscience, capable of integrating a population within a unified territory and governed by a sovereign State, became imperative. The creation of a modern nation and national identity challenged the intelligentsia, who considered the nation dislocated, behind its time, when compared to universal parameters of Occidental civilization (see, e.g., Veloso and Madeira; Oliven; Ianni). Literature has a prominent role in the elaboration of a national conscience and identity, producing symbols and representations capable of evoking, in the collective imagination and sensitivity, a sense of national belonging (see, e.g., Sommer; Coutinho). It was with Romanticism that the Brazilian intelligentsia achieved literary independence and began creating a Brazilian literature with autochthonous qualities (see, e.g., Coutinho). However, by the second half of the century, these utopian and romantic ideals for a new nation were faced with new social, economical, and political challenges, among others by the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the instauration of the Republic in 1889. In a society where physical labor was considered a subordinate activity, the abolition required a redefinition of work ethics, as well as new sources of labor. As a result, European immigration was intensified, substituting slave labor, and creating colonies in wastelands providing workers for the emerging industries, as well as the whitening of the Brazilian population and Occidentalizing its culture (see, e.g., Ianni). Influenced by European theories on evolutionism, environmental determinism, and scientific eugenics, intellectuals identified race and environment as obstacles for the creation of a civilization capable of achieving universal parameters of modernization. These theories of a Eurocentric understanding of the world resulted in pessimistic readings of the possibilities of a modern civilization in Brazil. Society's division into White, Black, and Indian and considered biologically and culturally distinct races, did not generate synthesis but a subdivision of crossbred and distinct sub-races classified as *caboclo*, *mulato*, *mameluco*, *cafusos*, etc. Brazilians were thought to be fruit of crossbred, inferior people, located in the tropics, and lacking any civilization. This made imperative the mission of civilizing the "savage" through biological and cultural imperialism for the nation to reach the parameters of European civilization and modernization. By the end of the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia began questioning the viability of imposing foreign ideas and practices without taking into consideration national singularity and diversity.

And it is precisely during this historical moment that Freitas publishes her novel. Born in Aracati, in the State of Ceara in 1855, Freitas died in Manaus, state capital of the Amazon in 1908. She was a teacher, poet, abolitionist, and collaborated with various literary magazines. *A Rainha do Ignoto. Ro-*

mance psicológico — as of yet not translated to English — is the first fantastic novel written in Brazil, with elements of gothic, naturalist, and regionalist narrative. The novel begins with the arrival of Dr. Edmundo at Passagem das Pedras, a small town in the hinterlands of the Northeast. He epitomizes the modern Brazilian man of his time; wealthy, with a degree in Law, who has traveled to Europe, and who possesses all the elegance of the cultural elite. Dr. Edmundo is told of the legend of the Fairy of Arere, a woman dressed in white, who sails the Jaguaribe River accompanied by a dog and an orangutan. Unable to accept the fantastic and mysterious, he becomes obsessed with revealing the enigma behind the woman in white. What he discovers is a secret society of women paladins, ruled by a queen, who have their headquarters on Fog Island. Disguised as a female paladin, Edmundo is able to witness the queen's crusade to fight injustice and protect the weak. The novel has two parallel story lines: the life in Passagem das Pedras and the queen's crusade for justice. By describing the activities in Passagem das Pedras, Freitas captures the way of life in a small town, in the hinterlands. Documenting habits, temperaments, paroles, local customs, legends, and myths, Freitas gives a positive description of regional life. The lifestyle of the inhabitants of the hinterlands is represented as simple, sincere, honest, yet disdained by urbanites. She develops a dichotomy between rural and urban lifestyles demonstrating how rural customs are judged inferior; on the other hand, modern lifestyles are considered product of foreign influences, "falsified like the conserves that come to us from abroad" (171; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). They are subject to interests of power, money, and social position where men and women are pretentious, fake, disloyal, futile, and driven by ambition. Modern social relations attend to a social and cultural system where moral and virtuous qualities are punished and economic interests rewarded. Freitas unveils modern lifestyles as a form of foreign imperialism, questioning the universality of the parameters of civilization and its impact on local societies. The narrative expresses doubts held by the Brazilian intelligentsia about the imposition and importation of foreign parameters of culture while ignoring Brazilian reality and regional diversity. The other story line developed is that of the queen's quest for justice. Proper of the historical moment, the novel is full of republican, abolitionist, and feminist concerns. Freitas describes a secret society of women, ruled by a queen, who governs a network of female paladins that defend the weak. This utopian society has in its power all of modernity's advantages (ships, underground train lines, factories, workshops, laboratories, commercial offices, orphanages, charity organizations, etc.), the women have different professional activities (generals, doctors, sailors, train conductors, teachers, artists, etc.), and are knowledgeable in all sciences, industries, and arts. Freitas's text answers to feminist ideals placing women in positions of power and agency, rehearsing what national modernity would be like if women were in control.

Dr. Edmundo, being a modern young man of culture, has a rational, inquisitive, and analytical understanding of the world. He belongs to the age of reason where only observable facts are explicable. Unable to accept the fantastic and mysterious, he considers the inhabitants of the hinterlands superstitious and ignorant and becomes obsessed with finding a rational explanation for the legend of the Fairy of the Arere. Wishing to penetrate the world of the queen, Dr. Edmundo disguises himself as a mute female paladin called Odette, which allows him to witness the queen's effort to help and protect the weak. He never unveils fully the mystery of the queen, but what he sees, transforms him, and upon his return to Passagem das Pedras, he marries Carlotinha, a local girl who has been in love with him and after his experience in the queen's world, witnessing the lives of the humble, the marginal, those who lack power, changes Dr. Edmundo's understanding of the world. Aware of the intellectual spirit of her time, Freitas captures society's disillusionment with utopian romantic ideals when confronted with social, economical, and political reality and she presents a critical and pessimistic reading of Brazilian modernity and a sense of defeatism.

This disillusionment of the intelligentsia with the possibility of modernity persisted until the emergence of Brazilian modernism, starting about 1922 when an esthetic movement came about that sought to renew knowledge about national culture in order to create a nexus between subjectivity and history, art, and society. Modernist intellectuals reconciled erudite thinking with popular practices as complementary cultural expressions capable of generating a new cultural synthesis. People and their traditions became central figures to modernist intellectuals and were the harbingers of a national soul, capable of expressing the authenticity and originality of culture. Nevertheless, intellectuals felt they

had to speak on behalf of the people, since the latter were considered immature, infantile, and in need of tutoring, direction, and leadership. This movement was conscious of its ability to transform esthetic sensitivity and, at the same time, promote institutional transformations in the organization of culture (see, e.g., Veloso and Madeira). Mario de Andrade wrote that "we will only be civilized in relation to the civilizations the day we create the ideal, the Brazilian orientation. Then we will pass from the phase of mimetism, to the phase of creation. And then we will be universal, because we are national" (14): the creation of a national culture and identity, capable of constituting a culture and civilization, has to attend to principles of universality, while, at the same time, express the singularity of the Brazilian people. Therefore, an authentic national identity could only be reached by the identification of an intrinsic property, a universal trait contained in Brazilian culture. In the years that followed the said aesthetic movement, artists and intellectuals began to differ on the role of culture, art, tradition and, over all, the Brazilian process of modernization. Yet all had in common the critical examinations of imported models, considered incompatible with the country's peculiarities and a number of manifestos proliferated during the 1920s reflecting these different positions, for example the *Manifesto Antropófago* and the *Manifesto Regionalista*.

The *Manifesto Antropófago* was published in 1928 by Oswald de Andrade, he dated it in the year 374 of the deglutition of Bishop Sardinha, making reference to the Portuguese catholic priest who was shipwrecked in the coast of Brazil and eaten by Indians in 1554. The anthropophagic metaphor reflects the spirit of the modernist movement, the capacity of transforming of imported ideas and practices and thus creating something new (see, e.g., Oliven). According to Andrade, the anthropophagic process of selecting, devouring, and digesting creatively what is foreign, has played itself since the beginning of Brazilian history and is a force capable of creating a new synthesis of modernity for Brazilians. On the other hand, the *Manifesto Regionalista* (1926) by Gilberto Freyre articulates a defense of regional differences, while at the same time recognizing these differences as part of a national organization. Freyre argues that regional differences may coexist in a country of continental dimensions such as Brazil and believes in the conservation of regional and traditional values, in general, and the Northeast, in particular. It is significant that, when making the defense of the values of the Northeast and the necessity of preserving them, Freyre chose elements considered in Brazilian imaginary as underdeveloped. Thus, he compliments the *mocambos* and northeastern cuisine as examples of the Northeast's contribution to Brazilian culture. He defends Brazilian culture from bad cosmopolitanism and false modernism and criticizes the consequences of foreign models imposed without taking into consideration Brazil's peculiarities and physical and social diversity. In spite of ideological differences, modernists felt the necessity of creating literature thorough national themes. They intended to affirm Brazil by integrating culture to narrative. The search for cultural independence in/of national literature was practiced by the regionalist school of literature including *sertanismo* and *caipirismo*. Thus, regionalist literature captured regional particularities exposing the diversity of cultural and racial/ethnic experiences while affirming plurality in universality. Regionalism searches to capture symbols representative of Brazil, obtain what is intrinsically Brazilian through the documentation and description of nature, geography, habits, temperaments, language, artistic expressions, and traditional customs of the diverse regions and its inhabitants. It amalgamates the various contributions of the diverse regions that compose the nation.

Queiroz's *O Quinze: Romance* — published in 1930 and as of yet not translated to English — became a landmark in modernist regional literature, written by Queiroz, then a young Northeastern woman of nineteen. Queiroz was born in Fortaleza, the state capital of Ceara in 1910 and died in Rio de Janeiro in 2003. The daughter of landowners, she worked as a novelist, journalist, dramatist, translator, and held various positions in public office. She was affiliated with the communist party and imprisoned in the 1930s. She was also the first woman writer to be admitted to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, in 1977. Influenced by the nationalization of sources of inspiration, her novel is a modernist novel written in colloquial language and imitating the parole of the region. Adopting third person narrative, it gives a description of the land, habits, temperaments, language, and traditional customs of the Northeast. However, the narrator is also able to penetrate the intimacy of the characters, their thoughts, dreams, and fantasies. Proper of modernist literature, Queiroz's use of introspective and psychological narrative liberated her characters subjectivities, so they could speak and act outside

positivist observation, which until then had dominated regionalist literature. Queiroz denounces the daily struggle of the inhabitants of the northeastern hinterlands during the drought of 1915. Thus, it captures another face of modernity, a backwards and abandoned Brazil, criticizing the modernist project. The novel develops two parallel stories: the relationship between Vicente and Conceição and the saga of Chico Bento and his family. In doing so, Queiroz addresses the impact of the drought both on landowners and on workers, taking into consideration class and social differences.

Conceição is twenty-two years old, works as a teacher in Fortaleza and spends her vacations at her grandmother's, Dona Inacia's estate. She doesn't want to marry, is well read, has socialist and feminist tendencies, writes sonnets and has published a book on pedagogy. Conceição represents the modern woman, "used to thinking for herself" (Queiroz 10), and stemming in the Northeast. She belongs to both worlds, modern and traditional, a hybrid, raised at her grandmother's estate, in the hinterlands, she moved to Fortaleza to work as a teacher. Her character captures the transformations modern influences are having on Brazilian women's lives, during the 1920s. Conceição has a fancy for her cousin Vicente, a rough cowboy who administers his family's estate. He also has a fancy for Conceição, whom he considers a superior and intelligent woman. Vicente is a product of life in the hinterlands. The obstacle to their union is not one of race or class, but spring from conflicts between modern ideas and practices and traditional ways of lives in the hinterlands. Throughout the novel, the relationship between modernity and tradition are developed through Conceição's and Vicente's love affair and it is the difference between their ideas and lifestyles that create the obstacle for their union. Conceição discovers that Vicente has been flirting with another girl and this incident instigates Conceição to question the possibility of a union between herself and Vicente. Conceição has perceived Vicente as nature at its Best: "He was good to listen to and look at, like a beautiful landscape, of which one only demands beauty and color" (79). But the drought's harsh reality has shown nature at its worst, aggressive and inconstant. Conceição realizes the cultural and intellectual differences between herself and her cousin constitute bitter ingredients for an unfulfilling ending. It is as if the drought, responsible for so many tragedies, is also responsible for the end of their love, making visible the depth of the lacuna between modernity and the hinterlands.

Chico Bento and his family represent the *retirantes*, the thousands forced out of their homes, embarking on a march across the hinterlands escaping the drought. Unlike Vicente and Conceição, Chico is a farmhand, has no land of his own, and cares for that which belongs to others. He has been ordered by his employer to free the cattle by Saint Joseph's day and leave the farm if it does not rain. Expelled by the drought, Chico, his wife, five children, and sister-in-law undertake a long and disastrous march, during the journey they lose two children, one poisoned by raw cassava, another disappears, and his sister-in-law is left behind. When Chico Bento arrives in Fortaleza, with what is left of his family, he is forced to give up his youngest son to Conceição, the child's godmother, before he leaves by ship for São Paulo. The exodus and forced exile, the lack of resources, and the faith in a new life motivate the tragic march of Chico Bento and his family. The scenery is apocalyptic, populated by skeletal cattle and carcasses, the land arid and enveloped by waves of fire. There is a strong analogy between the *retirantes'* destinies and that of the cattle: facing hunger and death, human and animal are set to wander the hinterlands. The novel focuses on the human misery of its characters, the breaking of spirits and bodies, and the victory of nature over men and women who must accept their destiny.

Modernist interest in subjectivity allowed the drama of the *retirantes* to be viewed under a new light. Articulating universal, subjective, and objective dimensions of the human condition, *O Quinze* created a locus for the representation of the world from the experience of the *retirantes*, something that had not been done before. The narrative also denounces how the strategies and mechanisms of a modern state and society were unable to cope with ravages of the drought in 1915. As the narrative develops, the lovers' personal drama intensifies with that of the *retirantes*, capturing the feelings of abandonment and the distance between modern Brazil and the hinterlands of the Northeast.

The Brazilian military dictatorship installed with the coup d'état of 1964 and that lasted for twenty-one years is the stage of Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela*. It is a period of intense industrialization, the establishment of multinationals, expansion of international capitalism, and lack of political freedom. Artistic expressions of the 1960s and 1970s were reactions to the military dictatorship and required that cultural production be related directly to political militancy (see Veloso and Madeira). It made im-

perative that art capture the universal, the spirit of the masses, while individual themes were rejected by the authorities systematically as inconsequential politically and socially. During this era of Brazilian history a growing sense of nationalism permeated cultural expressions while foreign ideas and practices were regarded as impure and dangerous. Tradition was seen as a continuity of the past and as such, would be susceptible to disappear under the threat of modern foreign influences. The Brazilian intelligentsia embarked in a struggle for the preservation of cultural traditions and manifestations of Brazilian popular culture. An important cultural movement of the period was tropicalism, created in 1968 by the Northeastern artists Caetano Veloso and Gilbert Gil. It was inspired by the modernist movement of 1922, as well as contemporary international pop culture. Through allegorical imagery they emphasized the paradoxes and controversies of modernity (where the archaic and the modern coexist, as well as wealth and misery), urban culture, and Latin America's development. They created a counterculture which shocked with improper conduct, the subversion of values, embracing eroticism or any behavior that would shock and manifest their dissatisfaction with the current dictatorial regime. Tropicalists supported multiple and diversified forms of protest, from different loci of speech, guerilla like, countering the master discourses produced by the orthodox left and the state. Another artistic movement of the time was New Cinema, which renewed cinematographic language and depicted raw images of Brazilian and Latin American reality. Movies such as *Dry Lives* (1964) by Nelson Pereira Dos Santos and *Land in Trance* (1967) by Glauber Rocha, are examples of numerous films that thematized the contradictions of Brazilian modernity.

Clarice Lispector was born in Tchetelnik, Ukraine, in 1920, and died in Rio de Janeiro in 1977. Escaping religious persecution, her family arrived in Brazil when she was two months old. She was raised in the northeastern cities of Maceio and Recife and in 1935 moved to Rio de Janeiro. A law graduate, journalist and translator, she wrote plays, short stories, children's books and novels. During the 1940s and 1950s, she lived in Italy, Switzerland, England, and the United States. She returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1959 where she stayed until her death. *A Hora da Estrela* is the only novel written by Lispector that deals with contemporary Brazilian social and economic problems (on Lispector, see, e.g., Jordão <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol11/iss3/8>>). In this novel, Lispector departs from her customary thematic centered on middle-class urban women attempting to find a place in the contemporary world. Instead, her theme is the condition of marginality and subalterity — a condition shared by most Brazilians — in the process of Brazil's modernization by telling the story of a poor Northeastern woman in Rio de Janeiro. Lispector's novel is about a fictional writer called Rodrigo S.M, who narrates the story of Macabea, a young woman from the Northeast living in the slums of Rio de Janeiro. There is nothing special about her and the slums are filled with thousands like her, invisible, silent, and superfluous to society. Their existence is a mere biological fact, they have nothing to look forward to, and as Macabea believes, she should be happy that she is alive. Although Rodrigo attempts to maintain a neutral stance concerning his character, he is often conflicted by his own perceptions and feelings. He even comes to declare that this story could only have been written by a man, "since the woman writer might weep her heart out" (14). Rodrigo briefly describes Macabea's background: she was born in the hinterlands of Alagoas and when orphaned at the age of two, she was sent to Maceió to live with an aunt who beats her but also teaches her to type. She moves to Rio de Janeiro where she works as a typist and lives in a room she shares with four other girls, all named Maria. She is nineteen years old, ugly, ignorant, a virgin, has tuberculoses, eats hot dogs, drinks coca cola, and scarcely has a body. No one desires or needs her, she simply exists. Then, on a rainy day she meets her first boyfriend, Olimpico de Jesus Moreira Chaves. They recognize each other immediately as Northeasterners. Olimpico is from the state of Paraiba, works as a steel worker in Rio de Janeiro, has killed a man, and dreams of becoming a politician. He ends up leaving Macabea for her workmate Gloria. Macabea then goes to a fortune teller, a former prostitute, who opens her eyes to the terrible life she has lead (until that moment Macabea had thought of herself as happy), but comforts her by predicting that her boyfriend will return and ask her to marry him, her employer will change his mind about firing her, and a handsome rich foreigner called Hans will fall in love with her and shower her with unimagined luxuries. On leaving the fortune teller, conscious of something beyond the present, she is run over by a yellow Mercedes-Benz (a German car and a reference to Hans, a German first name). For a while the writer narrator toys with the idea of killing her but finally decides that she must die.

One of the experiences described by Lispector is that of subalterity and marginality. Both the fictional author Rodrigo S.M. and Macabea find themselves on the margins of society, for both respond to a feeling that they mean nothing to the world. With the character development of Macabea and her story the reader experiences Lispector's struggles to approach and know this Other. In an attempt to identify with his subject, Rodrigo decides to share her condition as closely as possible; wearing tattered clothes, lacking in sleep, neglecting to shave, giving up sex and football, and avoiding any human contact, he immerses himself in nothingness. Macabea's marginality is also captured in her lack of communication with the world around her. Her incapacity of expression, her scarcity of language and inability to manipulate words, exiles her from herself. In contrast, Rodrigo uses language and words as instruments of self-knowledge, in counterpoint to Macabea's almost complete lack of self-awareness. Her inability to participate in language, use language as an instrument of self-awareness, leads her to drift through life aimlessly. Macabea has no consciousness of her own existence, or its finitude; she is an empty vessel, so devoid of a place in the world, she merely exists, inhaling and exhaling. Language has been elaborated by another, to express a perception of reality that is not Macabea's; it is foreign and incomprehensible to her. She is forever lost in translation. Her lack of self-awareness goes on until the moment of her death, her hour of the star, when she becomes self-conscious. While lying on the pavement, after being run over, Macabea thinks "today is the dawn of my existence: I am Born" (80). According to Lispector, death is the ultimate encounter with the self, intimately linked to rebirth and the many changes of the being. Macabea gathers herself into a fetal embrace and utters her final words: "As for the future" (84). Thus, Macabea has become the star of her own death, hinting to her fascination with Marilyn Monroe and the American dream. As she lies dying alone on the street, her lips are reddened by blood, and for a moment she becomes a star, finds love and riches, and reaches the subjectivity that had until then eluded her.

In conclusion, the novels I discuss in my study represent the Brazilian hinterlands as the outsider within the national project of modernization, marginalized in modern social and cultural relations. By articulating marginal northeastern subjectivities into existence, these novels create new loci from where the authors could problematize Brazilian modernity through fiction. All three novels perceive the process of modernization as the product of foreign ideas and practices (mainly Europe and later on the United States) and analyze their impact, or lack of, in the lives of those excluded. However, these novels were written at different moments in history and influenced by different intellectual generations, which framed the possibilities of their representations of the northeastern hinterlands, modernity and subalterity. Freitas captures the collective disappointment with the promises of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite modernity's scientific and technological advances, society is unable to cure its ills and poverty, the abuse of power, corruption, and violence continue to persist. After utopian ideals of creating a nation, according to Eurocentric parameters of civilization, intellectuals began to question the validity of foreign models when confronted with social, political, cultural, and economic national reality and diversity. Freitas's novel suggests the implantation of these foreign models of civility and their disqualification of local lifestyles, while vindicating the hinterlands and the habits and customs of its inhabitants. Queiroz's novel captures the Brazilian modernist literary intelligentsia's interest in national themes, as well as the creation of a national esthetic. The use of modernist narrative allows Queiroz to create a vision of national reality from a regional point of view and denounces the abandonment of the hinterlands and its inhabitants by the Brazilian project of modernization. Lispector examines social problems set during the height of Brazil's industrialization. Influenced by tropicalism and international pop culture she employs allegory juxtaposing aspects of modernity and underdevelopment, while disclosing the contradiction of Brazilian modernization. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Western modernity in postcolonial Brazil has constituted a challenge for different generations of the intelligentsia and writers. When thinking the nation, national identity, and the conditions for modernity, intellectuals have sought to transform foreign ideas and practices, while creating their own authentic manifestations. The novels I analyze elucidate how foreign influences are perceived and adapted when creating national reality. They display different strategies in examining northeastern marginal experiences in Brazilian modernity be it by witnessing the life of Others, analyzing the process of dehumanization, or examining the existential condition of subalterity, these strategies were influenced by the intellectual generation to which they belonged. Through creative appropriation

of foreign influences Freitas, Queiroz, and Lispector produced narratives with intrinsic Brazilian qualities. They participated in the creation of an authentic national intelligentsia, the nationalization of Brazilian literature while at the same time questioning the arrival of modernity to the "third world," and more specifically, to the northeastern periphery of Brazil and its characteristics.

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Author's profile: Fernanda Patricia Fuentes Muñoz is working towards her doctorate in sociology at the University of Brasília. Fuentes Muñoz's areas of research include feminist epistemologies, literature by women, and Brazilian social and cultural thought. E-mail: <fernyfu@yahoo.com>