

Alternative titles in the hour of the star



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In *The Hour of the Star*, Clarice Lispector includes a page prior to the story providing alternative titles that she was considering for the book. These titles are significant in the analysis of the novel as several of them originate from references within the text, and the chosen title emphasizes those aspects of the story. Had *The Hour of the Star* been entitled *The Right to Scream*, or *She Doesn't Know How to Scream*, the interpretation of the novel would change; rather than having the story culminate at the end of Macabéa's life - her hour of the star - these alternative titles highlight the themes of expression and creation. The idea that Rodrigo speaks for Macabéa and tells her story gives insight into her troubled and unspoken personality; she who truly has earned the right to scream is unable to express herself. In *The Hour of the Star*, Lispector incorporates the themes of creation and perspective as well as the motif of sound to demonstrate how Rodrigo's narration of Macabéa's life forms an entity that serves to represent much more than just an individual.

Throughout the novel, Lispector incorporates the theme of creation, suggesting that Rodrigo creates Macabéa's character, and the idea that writing can form an existence represents how Rodrigo's narration serves to expose her life in a way she could not do herself. Although Rodrigo is the narrator, he does not reveal much about himself; the purpose of his novel is to tell Macabéa's story of poverty and misfortune in an absolutely authentic and truthful manner. Lispector demonstrates how he views his writing as more than merely fiction when he says, " This isn't just narrative it's above all primary life that breathes, breathes, breathes" (5), and later, " this story will be made of words that gather in sentences and from these a secret

meaning emanates that goes beyond words and sentences” (6). It is almost as if the story is writing itself and Rodrigo is merely the outlet; he is merely the source that exposes Macabéa and the entire social class that she serves to represent. When he says, “ the story is true though invented” (4), he insinuates that although perhaps Macabéa’s individual character does not exist, her story is true, because it epitomizes a life of hardship within her social class. In the beginning of the novel, Rodrigo speaks about how he is afraid of idealizing Macabéa’s life; since Rodrigo belongs in the upper/middle class, it is challenging for him to see the world from her perspective. When he says, “ To speak of the girl I can’t shave for days and must acquire dark circles under my eyes from lack of sleep, nodding off from sheer exhaustion, I am a manual laborer” (11), Lispector is demonstrating how Rodrigo diminishes himself to her level in order to properly narrate her life. Rodrigo’s obsession with telling Macabéa’s story in the most honest way suggests that she has a story to tell, but one she could not tell herself, and this is directly connected to both alternative titles; Macabéa has suffered extensively throughout her life and has therefore earned “ the right to scream,” however due to her ignorance and passivity she does not know how - and Rodrigo, the intellectual, must therefore, through his writing, scream for her; he writes, “ It’s my obligation to tell about this one girl out of the thousands like her. And my duty, however artlessly, to reveal her life. Because there’s the right to scream. So I scream” (5).

However, Rodrigo does not only tell Macabéa’s story in order to give her a voice - he also does it for himself - he is searching for meaning in his life, and by metaphorically transfiguring himself into her and allowing her to ‘

scream,' he commences on a journey of his own self-discovery. Rodrigo portrays Macabéa as having practically no self-awareness and no thoughts, saying, " She was incompetent. Incompetent for life. She had never figured out how to figure things out" (17). He suggests that Macabéa's ignorance is a psychological consequence of her poverty, as that she is too uneducated and weak to stop and think about existence, " Maca, however, never said sentences, first of all because she was a person of few words. And it so happens that she had no consciousness of herself and didn't complain at all, she even thought she was happy" (60). However, when describing himself he appears insecure about the nature of existence; he is desperate and cynical, " Am I a monster? Is this what it means to be a person?" (7). Thus, by attempting to view the world through the perspective of the polar opposite of himself, a woman who never questions anything but rather, " just lives, inhaling and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling" (15), perhaps he finds a sense of relief. He demonstrates this desire when he says, " Why should I write about a young girl whose poverty isn't even adorned? Maybe because within her there's a seclusion and also because in the poverty of body and spirit I touch holiness, I who want to feel the breath of my beyond" (12). Through Macabéa, Rodrigo is able to realize something that he doesn't have in his personal life, something " beyond," and Lispector ties this to the theme of creation, because perhaps by creating Macabéa's character, Rodrigo is able to access an entity larger than life itself. Lispector expands on this idea when Rodrigo says, " I'm fully aware of her: through this young person I scream my horror of life" (25). By becoming fully aware of her, he screams, referencing the alternative titles, and by doing so he finds an outlet for his own pain as well as exposing hers. Thus, by providing these alternative titles

in cohesion with Rodrigo narration, Lispector changes the effect of the novel by emphasizing the dependent character relationship - she needs him for existence and he needs her for contentment - a dynamic that is not as evident from the title *The Hour of the Star*.

In the novel, Lispector incorporates the motif of sound and music to demonstrate that the nature of the story goes beyond words and sentences, and perhaps the melody that seems to accompany the storyline is an expression of Macabéa's suppressed emotions, because "She Doesn't Know How to Scream." Rodrigo conveys the significance of music in his narrative when he says, "I forgot to say that everything I'm not writing is accompanied by the emphatic ruffle of a drum being beaten by a soldier. The moment I start my story - suddenly the drum will cease" (14). He demonstrates not only the importance of sound but also the lack of it; silence is extremely significant throughout the novel, because Macabéa is described as "a struggling mute" (71). Rodrigo must speak for her, and he incorporates the music to help him do so. Additionally, the word "explosion" in parentheses is used consistently throughout the novel after every momentous event in Macabéa's life. The use of this word ties into the idea of the drum accompanying the text, and Rodrigo further supports the idea that the music serves to give insight to Macabéa's emotions when he says, "I'm hearing the chords of a cheerful piano - could that be the symbol that the girl's life might have a splendid future?" (22). By incorporating several instruments within the motif of music, Rodrigo alludes to a symphony, an additional artwork within his literature that serves as another outlet for Macabéa, another way in which she can scream. At the end of the novel,

after Macabéa dies, Rodrigo references music for the last time through metaphor when he says, “ In the end she was no more than a music box that was slightly out of tune” (77). The image of a music box being out of tune, an object that can only play one melody, is a rather pathetic one, and so perhaps Macabéa’s story is also somewhat pathetic, but nevertheless she deserves for it to be told – she still has the right to scream.

In the end of the novel, Macabéa is hit by the mercedes and dies, and Rodrigo utilizes this instant to fully portray the tragedy in Macabéa’s character. She is a tiny young woman in an utterly unfortunate circumstance who despite all of that is stubborn and even strong, perhaps, because she retains the will to survive. Her death is ironic, because it is the only moment in her life where she becomes self aware, and Rodrigo references the alternative title at the very end of the novel when he demonstrates her pitiable entity in her dying moment, “ Despite everything she belonged to a stubborn race of dwarves that one day might reclaim the right to scream” (70). In this sense, one can see why Lispector ended up choosing *The Hour of the Star* as the title of the book, because although the theme of expression and the character dynamic is greatly important, all of Lispector’s ideas and techniques coalesce in this final moment, Macabéa’s death.