

Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector

By Benjamin Moser
(Oxford University Press)

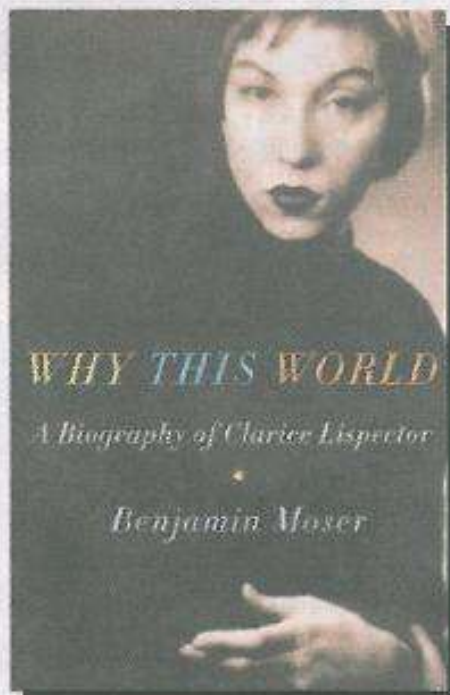
In her adopted home of Brazil, Clarice Lispector (who died in 1977) was and still is a major name in literature – even if her fame elsewhere has been slow in its rise.

Lispector may not be the easiest of writers, but then few of those who really have something serious to share ever are. And there is little doubt that she will become increasingly important as the translations of her oeuvre gain foothold.

In contrast to others who show determination to leave a lasting legacy, Lispector is a writer who in a way seems to have been writing to be forgotten. That is, she was more interested in writing about life as it is, as time that passes, rather than holding it still for examination.

Indeed, she reveals of herself: "I write and that way rid myself of me and then at last I can rest."

In explaining Lispector's life story,



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her biographer Benjamin Moser seemingly hopes to find a more complete picture of how a writer of this complexity could come about.

He tells of her parents' escape from the horrific pogroms in Ukraine, and their search for a secure haven for their family. He also outlines Lispector's childhood in Recife in north east Brazil; her marriage to a diplomat that reluctantly took her around the world yet gave her two sons; her many returns to her beloved Rio; her interests in fortune-telling and Kabbalistic ideas; and the resistance her books often met before a greater audience.

I'm not normally a fan of biographies, but I have to admire Moser's bravery at having dared to take on such a contrary and otherworldly subject. In fact, most of my initial discomforts and irritations about the biography genre were easily laid aside.

Any effort to bring this fabulous writer to a brighter light must be championed. Even if you don't normally read biographies, or indeed never heard of Lispector before, you would do yourself a huge favour by reading this book.



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