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**Between the Boom and the Arabesque.  
'Hemispheric Writing' in  
Juan Goytisolo's *Paisajes después de la batalla* and  
Milton Hatoum's *Relato de um certo Oriente***

**1. Introduction: Two Novels**

"Un acontecimiento capital de la historia de las naciones occidentales es el descubrimiento del Oriente. Sería más exacto hablar de una conciencia del Oriente", writes Jorge Luis Borges in the opening paragraph of "Las mil y una noches", his essay on the *Arabian Nights* (Borges 1980: 57).<sup>1</sup> While Sheherazade, whenever she appears in Borges' tales, reminds the reader of the mythic qualities of the Arabic fairy-tales and their charming gesture, Borges as the author of the essay delivers more theoretical observations on the relation between Orient and Occident. More than 50 years after its publication, the essay accrues a twofold, highly suggestive and topical meaning for contemporary readers. From a 'political' perspective, Borges anticipates Edward Said's notion of the Orient as an occidental construction of "otherness" (Said 1978), which simultaneously excludes all hegemonic thought, as it reveals itself, for example, in Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1996).

Borges stresses the fact that the relation of Orient and Occident is undoubtedly one of the most established and at the same time problematic, if not even tragic (Borges 1980: 59) figures of thought in cultural history. Also, as he points out, the idea of the Orient is associated with Islam. As a geographical unit, he continues, 'the Orient' does not exist (except in reference to Uruguay, that Argentineans call the 'Orient', and the official name of the state is "República del Oriente de

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1 "A capital event in the history of Western nations is the discovery of the Orient. It would be more exact to speak about the awareness of the Orient." – The translations of all critical Spanish or Brazilian texts are, unless otherwise mentioned, mine (D. I.); quotations from both novels follow the existing English translations.

Uruguay”). Consequently, approaching the Orient-Occident dichotomy remains merely an ‘approximation’ for Borges (“Busquemos una aproximación”, Borges 1980: 58). And into this “sometimes belligerent love affair between the Orient and the Occident” (Borges 1980: 62),<sup>2</sup> he includes the so-called Discovery of the Americas, “as America was discovered by the desire to find a passage to India” (Borges 1980: 62).<sup>3</sup> Thus, one could read Borges with Ottmar Ette’s concept of the ‘hemispheric construction of cultural processes’.<sup>4</sup> Borges not only understands the Orient and the Occident as complementary and hemispherically constructed, but he includes America into this model. This nexus allows for an ‘ArabAmerican’ concept.

The same is true for both of the novelists and the works that will be presented in the following reflections: Juan Goytisolo’s *Paisajes después de la batalla* (Goytisolo 1982; 1987) and Milton Hatoum’s *Relato de um certo Oriente* (Hatoum 1989; 2004). A special connection to the Arabic world as well as particular intertexts link both works and assure their ‘selective affinity’, even if, at the first glance, the comparison between both authors lacks all evidence – one is Spanish, the other Brazilian, one is a favourite subject of Hispanic criticism, the other known only by a restricted group. I will show that these different novels, however, can be read as paradigms of hemispheric writing in the sense proposed by Ottmar Ette for this volume.

### 1.1 *Paisajes después de la batalla*

In 1982, Juan Goytisolo, probably Spain’s most important living author, published *Paisajes después de la batalla*, a strange narrative, which attained much less success and critical attention than his preceding and following novels and essays. It is an extremely fragmentary text; not only in terms of its narrative structure, but also because it lacks a coherent story. This is why the following summary has to shorten and leave out large parts of the rich plot (if there is any).

The 88 short fragments are connected by a nameless and above all unpleasant mid-age protagonist, an eccentric loner living in the city of

2 “comercio amoroso y a veces belicioso del Oriente y del Occidente”.

3 “ya que América fue descubierta por el deseo de llegar a las Indias”.

4 For details on the concept of the hemispheric construction cf. the dossier dedicated to “Construcciones hemisféricas” in *Iberoamericana* (Braig/Ette 2005).

Paris at the time of the publication of the book. One morning, when waking up, 'our individual' (as he is repeatedly called) notes that the whole city has been 'Arabized' overnight. From the street signs to the title of his preferred newspaper, the communist *L'Humanité*, all the well known French words have been replaced by their Arabic equivalents, – a situation which leads to chaos in traffic and to the silent superiority of immigrants (who are called 'metecos', vaguely recalling the 'métèques' in a popular French chanson of Georges Brassens). The ordinary citizen, however, is more than puzzled:

Numerosos automovilistas de provincias asomaban la cabeza por la ventanilla y trataban de adivinar el significado de un cartel con varias flechas indicadoras: ¿si al menos fuera bilingüe! ¿Qué coño quería decir مرکز بومبيدو اوبرا كنكرد? (Goytisolo 1982: 15).<sup>5</sup>

Within his apartment, 'our individual' urinates into the sink and clips from newspapers not only pornographic ads, but also political information about the battle of the Otekan nation (which had been extinguished centuries ago). He has not seen his wife for months, although she lives next door. Dressed in a raincoat and a hat, he uses the subway to get around the city, goes to cinemas, looks for paedophile adventures, or attends secret meetings of strange minoritarian political groups. Trying to 'read' the city and the particular structure of the 'semiotic' spread of information, he is sort of a negative and post-modern version of Balzac's *flâneur*.

It is a decisive characteristic of the novel that it displays its own fragmentary character. Similar to the action, also the protagonist and, as we shall see later, the narrator are fragmented. The sum of the pieces turns against all causal logic, for there is neither temporal nor 'narrative' coherence. Neither is there any relation of probability between the elements or mini-stories. Instead the reader discovers spatial connections (such as the cinema, the subway) or thematic blocks: the battle of the vanished Otekan nation, the perverse and paedophile activities of the protagonist, the ironic treatment of doctrinarian Marxism (still of some political influence in the early 1980s). At one point the protagonist himself will be torn to pieces by a bomb that appears

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5 "Countless drivers from the provinces stuck their heads out of the windows of their cars, trying to figure out the meaning of a street sign and its pointing arrows: it should at least be bilingual! What the hell did مرکز بومبيدو اوبرا كنكرد mean?" (Goytisolo 1987: 6).

in the course of the plot and live on normally in the next fragment. This structure of collage affects the language of the novel and its large range from scientific expressions to the slang of pornographic ads, lyrics and epistolary style.

Critics have described this as the interplay of fictions of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, stressing that the fictional levels require, according to their status of reality, a vertical reading (*lectura vertical*), as persons and episodes that we take to be real are declared fictitious later (Martín Morán (1987). Just like the concepts of reality, probability and logic, the status of the narrator himself has to be questioned, and the text itself reminds the readers to do so:

Cuidado, lector: el narrador no es fiable. Bajo una apariencia desgarrada de franqueza y honradez –mientras multiplica los mea culpa y cargos contra sí mismo– no deja de engañarte un instante (Goytisolo 1982: 177).<sup>6</sup>

Repeatedly, the reader is addressed:

El sufrido lector de esta narración confusa y alambicada tiene perfecta razón en plantearse una serie de preguntas sobre sus silencios, ambigüedades y escamoteos y, según tememos, se las está planteando ya (Goytisolo 1982: 145).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the reader turns out to be the (meta-)narrator's confederate, and Martín Morán is right to consider the reader to be the real producer of sense. In his production, he may prove to be limited, however, unless he understands some Arabic, because Goytisolo inserts, as we saw in the first quotation above, some of the Arabic words that appear in the city of Paris and that the 'ordinary' Western reader will fail to comprehend. What seems a ludic trick, a spleen of the Arabophile novelist Goytisolo, recurs over and over again in his fictional writing. It foreshadows in some way his increasing enthusiasm for the Arabic world and his project to create understanding for it, most palpably and systematically in his essays (in *De la Checa a la Meca* [Goytisolo 1997] or *Crónicas sarracenas* [Goytisolo 1998]).

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6 "Reader, beware: the narrator is not trustworthy. Beneath his shameless pose of frankness and forthrightness – as his multiple mea culpas and self-accusations come pouring out – he does not scruple for a moment to dupe you" (Goytisolo 1987: 144).

7 "The patient reader of this confused and complicated narrative has every reason to ask himself certain questions concerning its silences, ambiguities, and artful dodges, if, as we fear, he has not already done so" (Goytisolo 1987: 116).

### 1.2 *Relato de um certo Oriente*

In 1992 – I was teaching at Munich University then – the publisher Reinhard Piper invited me for a dinner with a Brazilian author whose novel *Relato de um certo Oriente* had won the “Jabuti”-prize for the year’s best novel in his country and was going to be published shortly in German translation. The name of the author pointed to his personal history: Milton Hatoum – born in Manaus in 1952 – did not sound very Brazilian to me then; he is the offspring of a family that had immigrated from Lebanon. At that time, European literary criticism had hardly any information about (nor interest for) the Arabic influence within (Latin) America and its literatures. The extent of this influence has recently been demonstrated by the anthologies of Lautaro Ortiz.<sup>8</sup> Lebanon, by the way, is the country of origin of the families of a great number of Latin American authors such as Emir Emín Arslán, George Saydah, Rafael Lahud, the poet Al-Karawy (Rachid Salim Al-Juri) in Brazil, and – as the best known – Raduan Nassar.

*Relato de um certo Oriente* is above all a family saga, a popular and wide-spread genre in Latin America. It evokes the lives and destinies of a family that immigrated from Lebanon to the Brazilian city of Manaus. Motive and beginning of the story is the death of Emilie, the central female protagonist. Some members of the dispersed family return to Manaus for the funeral, among them Hakim, Emilie’s son, and the nameless female narrator of the first chapter (of eight in total). Emilie is shown as a *mater familias*; she used to own the *Parisiense*, a shop for all sorts of imported goods. The female narrator talks to her absent brother who apparently lives in Barcelona; the reader learns that both of them had been adopted and brought up by Emilie, together with her own four children. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter is addressed to a “tu” which is identical with the female first person narrator of chapter 1, while the personal narrator now proves to be Hakim, Emilie’s son. Hakim provides details of the family history (concerning, for example, the suicide of Emir, Emilie’s brother, during the emigration). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, the perspective changes again. The narrator now is Dorner, a German photographer and a good friend of Emilie’s hus-

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8 “Según estimaciones no oficiales, existen en la actualidad cerca de 10 millones de árabes –entre descendientes y nativos– habitando los países de América Latina” (Ortiz 2003).

band (and Hakim's father). This man, nameless throughout the novel, is described as a pious Muslim, attached to the Oriental tradition even in Brazil, reading silently his Koran, isolated from the family. In chapter 4 he is given a voice in the meandering reflections in Dorner's notebooks, revealing – among other things – some secret facts about his immigration. Both Dorner and Hakim function as narrators of the 5<sup>th</sup> part; the German describes in detail everyday life in Manaus (and also comments on Alexander von Humboldt's cosmic wanderings). In chapter 6, the female narrator of the beginning reappears. Roaming through the unknown quarters of Manaus after Emilie's funeral, she meets Dorner, who transcribes German poems to graphic structures. In chapter 7, a new voice appears: Hindié Conceição, the Native American maid. In the closing chapter 8, the female narrator, who is hospitalized in a sanatorium, reveals that she is the person who compiled these different narrations, transcriptions, and fragments, including her own letters. And there is no proper ending to this story without a proper plot.

This tentative summary leaves out many branches of the stories and emphasizes mainly one characteristic of the novel: the uncertainty of the narrative voices, a feature which it shares with Goytisolo's *Paisajes después de la batalla*. In order to discover the hemispheric potential of both novels, we will have to look at different complementary contexts: at the historic conditions ("The boom"), the implicit poetics ("The arabesque") and the particular aesthetics ("Remapping the Orient") of both works.

## 2. The boom

The boom of Latin American literature is a phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>9</sup> When the first crucial *nuevas novelas* found their way to the readers, it did not take long for first critical comments on the 'new' Latin American literature to appear. One of the most important voices among these is Carlos Fuentes with his *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (Fuentes 1969). Fuentes' study is the first attempt at a systematical description of those 'new' novels which – following upon the success of *Cien años de soledad* – found their way, conquer-

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9 For comments on the boom under the perspective proposed here cf. Vidal (1976) and Levinson (2001).

ing the international book market, press reviews, and finally the universities. Taking a stance against Alberto Moravia's concept of the death of the novel, Fuentes' essay was born out of the linguistic spirit of the 1960s insofar as it places the *nueva novela hispanoamericana* at the intersection of structure and change, diachronics and synchronics. To illustrate the spectrum of these innovations, the Mexican critic recurs to four paradigmatic Latin American authors (Mario Vargas Llosa, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, and Julio Cortázar); the fifth author he uses to prove the impact of Latin American literary innovation lacks one essential requirement: he is not Latin American, but Spanish. He is Juan Goytisolo.

### 2.1 Goytisolo – not an author of the boom

One may wonder why Fuentes included Goytisolo in this honourable pantheon of new Latin American writers. In fact his grandfather used to live in Cuba for a long time, where he acquired wealth as the owner of a sugar factory. More convincing may be Fuentes' own explication that with and in Goytisolo's works the Spanish language had ceased to be the idiom of the colonizers and had become that of the oppressed and the colonized. With a shot of bad intention I have proposed elsewhere that the insight in the inevitable success of Goytisolo's *Señas de identidad* – this is the novel to which Fuentes refers – had motivated the Mexican critic to declare the Catalan writer a Latin American *honoris causa* (Ingenschay 2002). If I am right, his speculation turned out to be true insofar as Goytisolo is considered the most important figure in the renovation process of Spanish narrative literature of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the same time the most severe critic of colonial and postcolonial hegemony in Spain. Yet the speculation is false in relation to that particular aspect of the boom which its critics in particular have underlined: in relation to the literary market. Some authors (Latin Americans, among them Miguel Angel Asturias or – less pronounced – José Donoso) have criticized the boom as a mere strategic plot of the cultural industry of awakening globalisation. The premature identification of boom and magic realism (in the wake of the enormous success of *Cien años de soledad*) lead internationally to the expectation that **all** Latin American literature had to mix real and magic elements with a shot of social critique to get

easy narratives full of overwhelming nature and appealing Third-World autobiographies. This expectation has been caricaturised as *McOndismo* by a group of young Latin American writers who published a programmatic anthology called *McOndo*.<sup>10</sup> We shall see that Goytisolo and Hatoum, in a way very different from that movement, react against a position of cultural hegemony which Néstor García Canclini calls the “macondist fundamentalism” (“fundamentalismo macondista”) (García Canclini 1995).

When locating Goytisolo, the presumable Latin American of the first hour, in this context, it is striking that his works do not comply with the demand for ‘magic realities’. Indeed, his great novel *Señas de identidad* has questioned – according to Fuentes – the “language of the colonizers” and developed a critical position towards Spanish history. In his novels after *Señas de identidad*, Goytisolo reads Spanish history as a heritage of the Arabic Al Andalus (Goytisolo 1975; 1977; 1983). More recently (and intensely after September 11) he has been dedicating himself to the political and cultural aspects of the ‘Orient’ in present time on the basis of the traumas of the past (from the expulsion of the Arabic and Jewish population in 1492 up to Franco). And yet his work has remained a hermetic literature for a specialized readership and the very opposite of what characterizes the boom. Goytisolo became Spain’s ‘national conscience’ in Oriental affairs only after the Latin American boom was over. This is a reason why he treats the boom so ironically in a passage of *Paisajes después de la batalla* titled “Revelations Galore” (“Revelaciones a granel”). In this fragment the narrator speculates whether the wife of the protagonist (who – among so many other things – dedicates himself to a disturbing [and financially unsuccessful] rewriting of Sufi mystic poetry) has not abandoned him meanwhile for a successful Latin American writer.

Tal vez le abandonó hace muchos años por un popular autor latinoamericano que acumula fabulosos royaltis de ocho cifras gracias a su empleo mañoso de la receta narrativa del siglo: el realismo mágico (Goytisolo 1982: 179).<sup>11</sup>

10 The pun of the title was invented by Alberto Fuguet, Sergio Gómez and the group of authors who in the spirit of getting rid of these expectations published the anthology *McOndo*; cf. Fuguet/Gómez (1996).

11 “Perhaps she has abandoned him long since for an extremely popular Latin American author who has garnered fabulous eight-figure royalties by his clever



The ironic treatment of Latin American literature and its success in selling Magic Realism as a registered trade mark proves that Goytisolo has distanced himself from the boom by the 1980s. He manifested his distinction by an increasing (and increasingly courageous) Arabization of his own coordinates.

## 2.2 *Hatoum – not an author of the boom?*

In contrast to the Spaniard Goytisolo, the Brazilian Hatoum fulfilled all preconditions to become an exemplary author of the boom. The cover text of the German edition of *Relato de um certo Oriente* reads, under the merciless rule of the recipes which turned Macondo into McOndo:

Eine Familiensage vor der farbigen Kulisse des Amazonas, ein Gewebe aus Erinnerungen, vorgetragen von verschiedenen Stimmen: Eindringlich und mit großer Sprachgewalt lässt Milton Hatoum eine “verlorene Melodie” aufleben.<sup>12</sup>

This is not completely wrong, but incomplete and partial. Hatoum's *Relato de um certo Oriente* is not part of Brazil's 'lost melodies', for they rather belong to the important 'regional literature' which flourishes in the North East of the country. And it is definitely not a variation of the numerous 'Amazonas novels'; nor does it belong to the complex and manifold literature of immigration. Francisco Foot Hardman emphasizes this: “A obra de ficção de Milton Hatoum não se encaixa na rubrica da literatura de imigrantes no Brasil, nem tampouco na linhagem do regionalismo amazônico” (Foot Hardman 2001: 5).<sup>13</sup> Up to that point I agree with the critic's opinion. Yet, he admits or even demands another label which I consider to be dangerous (if not further defined): that of eroticisation. Exotic appears, according to Foot Hardman, *Relato de um certo Oriente* “em especial nos países do hemisfério norte (EUA, França, Alemanha, Itália e Portugal [...]) para

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use of the narrative recipe of the century: the magic realism” (Goytisolo 1987: 145).

12 “A family saga, put in the colourful setting of the Amazonas, a texture of remembrances, spoken by different voices. With emphasis and great linguistic power, Milton Hatoum revives a ‘lost melody’” (Hatoum 1992).

13 “Milton Hatoum's fiction does not fit into the rubric of Brazilian immigrant literature, nor into the line of Amazonian regionalism.”

alguma variante do exotismo nos trópicos” (Foot Hardman 2001: 9),<sup>14</sup> and he specifies what he means by this tropical exoticism: “Exotismo não só amazônico, mas também orientalista, nas marcas leves desses arabismos que percorrem o texto” (Foot Hardman 2001: 9).<sup>15</sup>

I do not agree with this view, since I take it to assume two different kinds of readership (one Brazilian and another ‘Northern’), which leads him to disregard the interplay and the hemispheric construction of Orient and Occident in Hatoum’s family saga. ‘Put in the colourful setting of the Amazonas’, is – beyond this ‘orientalist exoticism’ – a literary response to intercultural challenges (with Dorner, the German among the Brazilian protagonists, with references to Barcelona as well as to different Latin American settings, and with the presence of remembrance of the Arabic world as a constitutive part of the family history of both the novel’s personae and the author himself). The ‘slight Arabisms’ in Hatoum are not, like the inserted Arabic words in Goytisolo, foreign matter, but constitute a new aesthetics of its own, beyond that of the Latin American boom novel. While Goytisolo has not become a boom author because of his esoteric anti-mainstream ‘Arabic turn’, Hatoum does not belong to the boom either, and not only because he was late. His exoticism is of a different kind than that of García Márquez and – let us say – Isabel Allende, it is the ‘exoticism’ of a personally constructed Arabic reference system which is no less vigorous here than Goytisolo’s ‘political’ one. Western imagination, criticism (and some popular knowledge, as we will see below) have characterized this poetic system with a word that recalls its origin in the Orient, the notion of the arabesque.

### 3. Arabesque

On the web, there is a geocities-homepage which under the title “arabesquevirtualalcazar” defines for a public presumably not composed of literary scholars what an arabesque is:

Arabesque is a cultural motif, a virtual place, a spiritual labyrinth, the history of a mosaic of cultures.

14 “[...] above all in countries of the Northern hemisphere (U.S.A., France, Germany, Italy and Portugal [...]) for some variation of tropical exoticism”.

15 “Exoticism not only of the Amazonas, but rather orientalist, within the slight marks of those Arabisms all over the text”.

Here is the frame story within the frame story of a splendid blend of lore, science, philosophy, arts and crafts, music and poetry which irradiated from

AL-ANDALUS

on the European continent,

enriching and inspiring the Western world.

Beauty of form and refinement of spirit. [...]

In the beginning was the poem ARABESQUE [...]<sup>16</sup>

Especially in the last line of this quotation the strange character of this explication becomes apparent; here, the Romantic conception of the arabesque (as a poetical force) is mixed with its historical origin in Al-Andalus. Critics in literary and art history have explained the notion of the arabesque through its etymology, stressing that the notion originally referred to the ornamentation of Arabic art. More recent literary studies occasionally return to this aspect: For example, Gerhart von Graevenitz' fundamental study on the arabesque in Goethe (Graevenitz 1994) takes its departure from the *West-Östlicher Diwan*, from that collection that – more than any other literary work – contributed to an appreciation of the Oriental world (even if it was an artificially constructed rather than a personally experienced Orient). Yet it is not Goethe – in spite of his article “On Arabesques” (“Von Arabesken”)<sup>17</sup> – who introduced the arabesque as a crucial category of narrative poetics, but a man obsessed with the spiritual power of the Orient: Friedrich Schlegel. Already in his early critical period,<sup>18</sup> in the famous “Letter about the Novel” (“Brief über den Roman”), he distinguishes between ‘high poetry’ and the arabesque when he argues that Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste* is not high literature, but ‘only’ an arabesque. Nevertheless, these ‘low’ arabesques will occupy Schlegel for decades, and moreover they prove to be ‘true testimonies’, inspiring his entire theory of the novel, as Polheim's exhaustive book on

16 <<http://www.geocities.com/peruzele/arabesquevirtualalcazar.html?200512>> (May 14, 2005).

17 Published in 1798 in Wieland's *Teutscher Merkur*. With his references to Raphael and to Pompeian decorative painting, Goethe still owes much to the idea of the arabesque as a category of visual arts; the same is true for Karl Philipp Moritz' chapter on the arabesques in his *Vorbegriffe zu einer Theorie der Ornamente* (1793).

18 For details on the use of the term and its development and on theoretical implications of the arabesque cf. Polheim (1966).

Schlegel's arabesque was the first to show. In "Letter about the Novel", Schlegel writes:

If such examples became known, then I would have the courage for a *theory of the novel* which would be a theory in the original sense of the word; a spiritual viewing of the subject with calm and serene feeling, as it is proper to view in solemn joy the meaningful play of divine images. Such a theory of the novel would have to be itself a novel which would reflect imaginatively every eternal tone of the imagination and would again confound the chaos of the world of the knights. The things of the past would live in it in new forms [...]. These would be true arabesques which, together with confessions, [...] are the only romantic products of nature in our age (Schlegel 2003: 294).

'Product of romantic nature', in Schlegel's diction, is a somewhat chaotic and at the same time reflective world of Romanesque discourse in which theory and practice of the novel merge. Today, we would qualify such a texture as metaliterary and intertextual. 'Arabesque' would be, then, rather than a modern, a post-modern category. Under various aspects, in particular with regard to narrative technique, both novels, Goytisolo's *Paisajes después de la batalla* and Hatoum's *Relato de um certo Oriente*, match such a definition.

### 3.1 Goytisolo's arabesque

The appearance of some Arabic words and signs in the flow of Goytisolo's *Paisajes después de la batalla* is not primarily a characteristic of the arabesque, but rather due to the unreliability of the narrator. Throughout the text, meta-literary reflections interrupt the coherence of the fictional narrative. The novel's systematical variation of polyphony and dialogicity is not a post-modern commonplace, but part of a special poetics which Goytisolo developed himself in his previous novel *Juan sin tierra*. The most convincing argument for calling this poetics arabesque is that Goytisolo explicitly recurs to that notion in its etymological sense, when relating his writing to architecture and to the ornamental combinations of symmetrical configurations:

Eliminar del corpus de la obra novelesca los últimos vestigios de la teatralidad [...] sustituyendo la progresión dramática del relato con un conjunto de agrupaciones textuales movidas por fuerza centrípeta única [...] improvisando la arquitectura del objeto literario, no en un tejido de relaciones de orden lógico-temporal, sino en un ars combinatoria de elemen-

tos (oposiciones, alternancias, juegos simétricos) sobre el blanco rectangular de la página (Goytisolo 1975: 13).<sup>19</sup>

As a post-modern theory of the arabesque meta-novel, *Paisajes después de la batalla* draws on all registers of intertextuality. Hyper-texts are the works of Lewis Carroll, Aragon, Genet, Cortázar; the most important ones for our context are Borges' *Ficciones* and the mystic Sufí poetry of Jalal ad-Din Rumi. More clearly than in *Paisajes después de la batalla*, the Arabic elements inserted into *Juan sin tierra* point to a narrative structure that defines itself explicitly as different from 'Western' forms of thought and discourse. In this sense it is important that the unpleasant hero not only writes pornographic messages and political pamphlets in his mansard, but also dedicates himself to copying 'in finest calligraphy' the divans of Jalal ad-Din Rumi. Whereas Goytisolo later will choose the poems of Ibn al-Farid as a central intertext (in his novel *Las Virtudes del pájaro solitario* [1988 and 1991]), he uses some "Nasibs" (a special form of Sufí love poems) in *Paisajes después de la batalla*. They appear distorted insofar as 'our hero' addresses them to his unloved wife living in the flat next door. The end of the Sufí poem, as it appears rewritten in the novel, unfolds not only the idea of simultaneity, but also that of two lives being lived in two different worlds at the same time:

Todos los pájaros de brillante pluma se morderán  
de envidia el corazón, en el lugar donde reiremos  
tú y yo.  
Esta es la maravilla mayor: que sentados acá, en el mismo  
escondrijo, vivamos simultáneamente en el Irak y en Jorastán  
tú y yo (Goytisolo 1988: 87).<sup>20</sup>

This simultaneous life in two worlds resonates with Hatoum's *Relato de um certo Oriente*, when Hakim, Emilie's son, declares to live in

19 "To eliminate from the corpus of the narrative work the last traces of theatricality [...], replacing the dramatic progression of the story with an assembly of textual groupings moved by unique centripetal force [...] improvising the architecture of the literary object, not in a texture of relations of logical-temporal order, but in an *ars combinatoria* of elements (oppositions, alternations, symmetrical plays) on the rectangular white of the page". The translation of Helen Lane was not accessible, the translation is mine (D. I.).

20 "All the bright-plumed birds will feel in their hearts the bite of envy, in the place where we will laugh,/ you and I.// This is the marvel of marvels: that sitting here, in the same hiding place, we are at one and the same time living in Iraq and Khurasan,/ you and I" (Goytisolo 1991: 68).

two different languages and thus in two worlds: “Desde pequeno convivi com um idioma na escola e nas ruas da cidade, e com um outro na Parisiense. E às vezes tinha a impressão de viver vidas distintas” (Hatoum 1989: 52).<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2 *Hatoum's arabesque*

We saw that Hatoum's novel, too, operates with a multitude of undefined narrators which are unified in the end, in chapter 8, by the voice of the anonymous female narrator.<sup>22</sup> As she fails in controlling the complete narration of this **certain** Orient – *Relato de um certo Oriente* – she corresponds only partly to Sheherazade. Like the narrative voice of the *Arabian Nights*, the power of the narrating persona safeguards her discursive supremacy as well as her survival, yet – unlike the collection of fairy tales – the present novel offers only one out of many possible constellations or stories. Hatoum aims first and foremost at an *approximation* to a *certain* Orient, exactly as Borges described his dedication to the Orient as an approximation to a (geographically) nonexistent place. But instead of discussing Borges' influence in this work, I would like to come back to Foot Hardman's characterization of *Relato de um certo Oriente* as “orientalist exoticism”, a concept for which he does not provide any further definition. The poetics of an open narrative which takes a certain form, but which could also be different, is one central aspect of Hatoum's work, and the reference to the *Arabian Nights* is another. The lack of reliability in this story, again, can be read as a poetics turned against the aesthetics of the boom, more specifically against García Márquez' family saga of the Buendía, where the whole development of the story proves to depend on Melquíades' wise vision, written down in his foundational Sanskrit text. Beginning already on the first pages, *Cien años de soledad* refers to biblical intertexts, from the Garden of Eden to the Apocalypse. In *Relato de um certo Oriente*, however, the decisive

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21 “From the time I was small I inhabited one language in school and on the streets and another in the Parisiense. Sometimes I felt as if I were living two distinct lives” (Hatoum 2004: 56).

22 Lamentably the English translation ads the names of the persons speaking as headlines to the respective chapters; this does not correspond to the original text nor, I guess, to its intention.

model for the narrative is not the Bible, but the Koran and the family constellation of Mohammed evoked by Emilie's husband:

Emilie e o marido praticavam a religião com fervor. Antes do casamento haviam feito um pacto para respeitar a religião do outro, cabendo aos filhos optarem por uma das duas ou por nenhuma.

—Basta olhar para o templo que abriga os fiéis de cada religião para se ter uma idéia de como uma difere da outra— disse teu pai, ao explicar a árvore genealógica da família do Profeta (Hatoum 1989: 69).<sup>23</sup>

While Mohammed's genealogy seems to be one point of reference for this saga, the Koran is one important intertext, together with the *Arabian Nights*. Dorner establishes a sort of metonymic relation between his friend, Emilie's husband, and the *Arabian nights*, according to Borges the book that stands at the beginning of the awareness of the Orient:

O convívio com teu pai me instigou a ler *As mil e uma noites*, na tradução de Henning. A leitura cuidadosa e morosa desse livro tornou nossa amizade mais íntima; por muito tempo acreditei no que ele me contava, mas aos poucos constatei que havia uma certa alusão àquele livro, e que os episódios de sua vida eram transcrições adulteradas de algumas noites, como se a voz da narradora ecoasse na fala do meu amigo (Hatoum 1989: 79).<sup>24</sup>

Emilie's husband not only appears as the typical unreliable narrator you do not believe, he is so by identification with the Arabic fairy tales. The extent to which Islamic thought is present in his experience of the world becomes apparent in his description of his emigration to Brazil as a "hadji". However, the omnipresence of 'Oriental' elements is not restricted to this character, reading the Koran and smoking his

23 "[Emilie and her husband] were both fervently religious. Before they got married, they made a pact to respect the other's faith and to let their children opt for one or the other or none at all.

'All you have to do is look at the architecture of their places of worship to see the difference between the two religions', said your father in the midst of an explanation of the Prophet's genealogical tree one late afternoon in the Parisienne" (Hatoum 2004: 79).

24 "My friendship with your father prompted me to read *A Thousand and One Nights*, in Henning's translation. My slow and careful reading of that book brought us closer: for a long time I didn't believe what he told me, but gradually I realised there were certain allusions to the book, and that some of the episodes of his life were adulterated transcriptions of certain of the tales, as if the voice of the narrator were echoing in my friend's words" (Hatoum 2004: 93).

*narguilé*. Emilie's entire house is filled with tapestry from Isphahan and pieces of Lebanese cedar wood, and so is her legendary shop, where the conversations are in Arabic ("A conversa era exclusivamente em árabe" [Hatoum 1989: 58]).

Intertextual links and the implied poetics are the two fields where the arabesque becomes palpable. While Goytisolo chooses esoteric Sufi poetry as one of his points of reference, Hatoum refers with the *Arabian Nights*, to a more popular cardinal intertext. Yet both authors use these intertexts to demonstrate the limits of communication, which they question further by multiple unreliable narrators. Both use the novel as means of meta-literary reflection, and both provide a new perspective on the city in which the action is set.

#### 4. 'Oriental' Remappings

##### 4.1 *Moving within the city*

On the inside cover of the 1982 edition of *Paisajes después de la batalla*, we find a reproduction of the Paris Metro map. The city's legendary subway is one of the few reliable means of orientation in the de-Europeanized urban setting. Paris, hybridised by huge immigration movements, is only one paradigm of this postmodern, postcolonial situation, as one of the descriptive and meta-discursive observations in Goytisolo's text shows:

El hormigueo de la calle, su frondosidad creadora, le procuran diariamente un espectáculo continuo, variado y gratuito. En la Rue d'Aboukir o la Place du Caire, como en la Porte de Clignancourt o la Goutte d'Or, saborea la presencia fluida e incesante del gentío, su movilidad desordenada, su diáspora febril por la rosa de los vientos. La paulatina deseuropeización de la ciudad –la emergencia de zocos y hammams, venta ambulante de totems y collares, pintadas en árabe y turco– le colma de regocijo. La complejidad del ámbito urbano –ese territorio denso y cambiante, irreductible a la lógica y programación–, invita a cada paso a trayectos versátiles, a que tejen y destejen, lienzo de Penélope, una misteriosa lección de topografía. [...] Nuestro excéntrico personaje ha advertido que no es necesario coger el avión de Estambul o Marrakech en busca de exotismo: basta salir a estirar las piernas para topar inevitablemente con él (Goytisolo 1982: 108-109).<sup>25</sup>

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25 "The antlike hustle and bustle of the street, its creative vegetable luxuriance offer him each day a continuous, free variety show. In the Rue d'Aboukir or the Place du Caire, as at the Porte de Clignancourt or the Goutte d'Or, he savors the fluid,



Strangely enough, the opening metaphor of the anthill (cf. the original version) can also be found in Hatoum's novel (Hatoum 1989: 128). Even more interesting is the last sentence of the quotation above, as it underlines that exoticism can not only be found in Hatoum's Amazon setting of Manaus, but in every modern metropolis, for example in the city of Paris, described by Benjamin as the prototypical capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The unpleasant *flâneur* in *Paisajes después de la batalla*, roaming through the Arabized quarters, is merely a cipher for any person moving through a metropolis "[e]xaminando el plano, guía de metro o nomenclatura de las calles de alguna ciudad: Paris Nueva York Berlín El Cairo Estambul Ámsterdam" (Goytisoló 1982: 41).<sup>26</sup> This is why I proposed to read *Paisajes después de la batalla* as a specific (provisionally 'ultimate') form of literary discourse on Paris (Ingenschay 1997).

Even if Manaus is not Paris, *Relato de um certo Oriente* shares some of the characteristics of a city novel, and Foot Hardman applies the idea of the metropolitan maze also to Manaus and its harbour.<sup>27</sup>

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permanent presence of the crowd, its chaotic Brownian movements, its feverish diaspora toward every point of the compass. The gradual de-Europeanization of the city – the appearance of Oriental souks and hammams, peddlers of African totems and necklaces, graffiti in Arabic and Turkish – fills him with rejoicing. The complexity of the Urban environment – that dense and ever-changing territory irreducible to logic and to programming – invites him on every hand to ever-shifting itineraries that weave and unweave themselves, a Penelope tapestry, a mysterious lesson in topography. [...] Our eccentric character has found that it is not necessary to take a plane to Istanbul or Marrakech in search of exoticism: he need only step outside to stretch his legs for a bit to stumble inevitably upon it" (Goytisoló 1987: 85-86).

26 "Absorbed in contemplation of the map, the subway guide, or the street names of some city: Paris, New York, Berlin, Cairo, Istanbul, Amsterdam" (Goytisoló 1987: 28).

27 Foot Hardman projects the descriptive inventory of the metropolis onto the Manaus:

"[...] laberinto que é dos trens e navios saindo de tão distantes mundos, os novos selvagens invadindo o Tâmis, o Sena, o Solimões, mudando a cara dos habitantes de Londres-Paris ou de Manaus-Belém, ou de San Francisco-Nova Iorque, ou de São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro, ou de Recife-Salvador, cidades cosmopolitas porque talvez também norte-americanas, africanas, asiáticas, árabes, latinas, judaicas, Manaus de Zona Franca e franca falência cristo-maometana, índias putas batizadas, havendo ainda lugar para esses lírios de toda memória melancólica que imita a grande arte roubada dos primeiros contadores de histórias" (Foot Hardman 2001: 12).

When in chapter 6 the female narrator of the first part leaves for a long walk through the unknown districts of the city, Manaus becomes another protagonist of the novel:

Atravessei a ponte metálica sobre o igarapé, e penetrei nas ruelas de um bairro desconhecido. Um cheiro acre e muito forte surgiu com as cores espalhafatosas das fachadas de madeira, com a voz cantada dos curumins, com os rostos recortados no vão das janelas, como se estivessem no limite do interior com o exterior [...]. [...] Havia momentos, no entanto, em que me olhavam com insistência: sentia um pouco de temor e de estranheza, e embora um abismo me separasse daquele mundo, a estranheza era mutua, assim como a ameaça e o medo. E eu não queria ser uma estranha, tendo nascido e vivido aqui. Procurava caminhar sem rumo, não havia ruas paralelas, o traçado era uma geometria confusa, e o rio, sempre o rio, era o ponto de referência, era a praça e a torre da igreja que ali inexistiam. Passei toda a manhã naquele mundo desconhecido, a cidade proibida na nossa infância, porque ali havia duelo entre homens embriagados, ali as mulheres eram ladras ou prostitutas, ali a lâmina afiada do terçado servia para esquarterar homens e animais (Hatoum 1989: 123).<sup>28</sup>

As this passage continues, the gleaming light of the sun dazzles this female *flâneur*, disturbs her perceptions, and she realizes that she has the impression that she is walking on a mountain of garbage (Hatoum 1989: 124). The city appears unreal not only to her, but as well to

(“[...] it is a labyrinth of trains and boats coming from distant worlds, the new savages invading the Thames, the Seine, the Amazon, changing the face of the inhabitants of London-Paris, or of Manaus-Belém, or San Francisco-New York, or São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro, or Recife-Salvador, cosmopolitan cities, perhaps because they are also North American, African, Asian, Arab, Latin and Judaic. Manaus, Free Trade Zone and Christian-Moslem moral bankruptcy, baptized Indian whores, and still with space yet for all those lilies of melancholy memoirs imitating the high art stolen from the first story-tellers”).

- 28 “As soon as I crossed the metal bridge over the creek and entered the narrow streets of an unfamiliar neighbourhood, I was met by the gaudy colours of the wooden houses, a strong, acrid smell, and the singsong voices of street kids, their faces cut-outs in the open window holes, at the very border itself (a warped and colourless frame) meant nothing to those faces staring into space [...]. There were other moments when the faces stared back at me urgently, making me feel shy and a little scared, and even with the abyss that existed between us the strangeness was mutual-likewise the threat and the fear. I didn’t want to feel like an intruder, having been born and grown up here. I was trying to wander aimlessly, but there were no parallel streets; the design was a confused geometry, and the river, always the river, was the point of reference, instead of the square and the church spire of our neighbourhood. – I spent the entire morning in the city forbidden to us as children, where there were duels between drunken men, where the women were either thieves or prostitutes, where blades sharpened on machetes were used to carve men as well as beasts” (Hatoum 2004: 150-151).

Dorner, the photographer. When he comes back from a trip to the inner regions, he perceives Manaus as an ‘urban perversion’ and both the city and the jungle as ‘two lies, separated by the river’ (“e ao retornar afirmava ser Manaus uma perversão urbana. ‘A cidade e a floresta são dois cenários, duas mentiras separadas pelo rio’” [Hatoum 1989: 82]). Dorner and the nameless young woman – in their accounts of a **certain** Orient – and ‘our protagonist’ in Goytisolo’s Arabized Paris share the risk of disorientation in their respective cities, just as the readers get lost in the incoherent fragments of *Paisajes después de la batalla* and the ambiguous narrative voices in *Relato de um certo Oriente*. Would it be too far a stretch to argue that both novels combine the search for orientation with the search for literalising the Orient?

Rodolfo Mata reminds us of a short text Borges wrote in the 1930s (“Del rigor de la ciencia”, “The rigor of science”), in which imperial cartographers develop their craft of drawing maps to such a degree of perfection that their models finally become coextensive with the land itself. Mata compares this parábola to Hatoum’s novel and to the need for orientation already indicated in its very title (Mata 1996: 101). Yet, it is not Hatoum, but Goytisolo who in his literary remapping of Paris refers directly to Borges. The fragment in which the metro net is used to explain utopia, literary fiction, and fabulation, is entitled “En el París de los trayectos que se bifurcan” (“In the Paris of the Forking Paths”), a clear pastiche of Borges’ famous story “El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan”: The description of the concrete ‘forking paths’ in Paris (“Ramificaciones, encrucijadas, pasajes, trayectos de una sola dirección, desvíos, parábolas, media vueltas, elipses, cuppos di sacco” [Goytisolo 1982: 110]),<sup>29</sup> shifts immediately to the meta-level of the constitution of fictional discourse:

Examinar el plano del metro es ceder al recuerdo, evasión, desvarío; abrirse a la utopía, la ficción y la fábula: recorrer los monumentos, abominaciones y horrores de la ciudad, los monumentos, abominaciones y horrores propios, sin necesidad de moverse de casa (Goytisolo 1982: 110).<sup>30</sup>

29 “Ramifications, intersections, connecting points, one-way-journeys, roundabout itineraries, parabolas, half circles, ellipses, dead ends” (Goytisolo 1987: 87).

30 “To examine the map of the metro system is to yield to memory, to escape, to delirium; to accept utopia, fiction, fable: to visit the monuments, the abomina-

Borges' theory of selection and orientation inspire Goytisolo's perception of the city, and in a very concrete way the *Ficciones*, with their puzzles and game-like quality, are the model behind Goytisolo's arabesque poetics.

Though Hatoum does not very explicitly refer to the stories of the Argentinean author as intertext,<sup>31</sup> he declares his entire novel to be the approximation to a certain Orient, and thus it seems to be justified to read it as a direct comment on Borges' essay on the *Arabian Nights*.

#### 4.2 Major or minor hemispheric constructions?

Even if Goytisolo includes, besides the Arabic text lines, some Turkish fragments in *Paisajes después de la batalla*,<sup>32</sup> and even if Emilie is said to invent her own hybrid language,<sup>33</sup> both novels are written in widespread and well-known languages. This is also true for Kafka's work, and yet Deleuze/Guattari use him as the paradigm for their theory of a "minor literature", defined as the writing of a minority in a major language. When Deleuze/Guattari argue that in such a minor literature everything is political, they refer to the 'Scheme of minor literatures' that Kafka wrote down in his diary in 1911. Here, the young author writes about the conflict between father and son and that he might turn this conflict into a literary subject. The parallel to Goytisolo's increasing distance to Spain and the tension between the Christian mother and the Islamic father in *Relato de um certo Oriente* are decisive aspects for a reading of these works as minor literature. Deleuze/Guattari understand the family conflict mentioned by Kafka not as a reference to an oedipal fantasy, but as the expression of a political program. Seen from this perspective, we notice that Goytisolo in his political discussion of Spanish history since *Señas de identidad* has increasingly turned away from Eurocentric thought and discourse. Fuentes' characterization of Goytisolo's writing matches in a significant way the definition of the revolutionary power of the minor

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tions, the horrors of the city, one's own monuments, abominations, and horrors, without ever having to leave home" (Goytisolo 1987: 87).

31 For the very few and hidden hints cf. Mata (1996).

32 The text was written while Goytisolo stayed in Berlin with a fellowship of the German Academic Exchange Service; it alludes to the multicultural "Istanbul on Spree".

33 Cf. Hatoum (1989: 166); about this: Martin (1993).

literature in Deleuze/Guattari. When they state that “[t]here is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of masters” (Deleuze/Guattari 1986: 26), Fuentes writes in a similar gesture: “Con Goytisolo, el español escrito en España deja de ser el lenguaje de los señores para revelarse, [...] como el lenguaje de los parias” (Fuentes 1969: 82).<sup>34</sup>

As parias, or rather as marginalized writers in the current literary landscape, Goytisolo and Hatoum, as we stated above, have not become writers of the boom. The reason for this is their orientation towards the Arabic world, with the consequence that the discourse they invented and cultivated does not fit into any cultural imagination that separates continents. The success story of Latin American literature has fought against centuries of hegemonic cultural Eurocentrism, but in doing so it has privileged a monolithic image of Latin America. Yet it would be completely erroneous not to recognize that the Orient and its artistic/cultural appropriations occupy traditionally a far more prominent place in Western imagination than Latin America. Again: Goytisolo and Hatoum are not ‘orientalists’ in the Saidian sense, they are rather reacting against the Western construction of the Orient. Recently, Christina von Braun modified Said’s historic arguments, explaining that the so-called Occident needs and will need in future times the Orient for its own permanent self-definition (Braun forthcoming). ‘Identity by exclusion’ seems to be the working principle then. Against such an ‘exclusive’ orientalism, Goytisolo and Hatoum create their hemispheric construction of a discourse that unmasks Western thought as merely another alterity. Their ArabAmerican projects seek to deterritorialize both the European hegemony and the Latin American exclusiveness.

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34 “With Goytisolo, the Spanish written in Spain ceases to be the language of the masters and proves to be [...] the language of the parias”.

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