











# Studies in the Contemporary Spanish-American Short Story

David William Foster

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## Preface

This work deals with selected Latin-American writers of short stories and, in the case of each author, with only one or a limited number of texts. No attempt has been made to write a history of the contemporary short story in Latin America or even to deal with a canon of representative authors. Each of the texts studied has been chosen because it is indicative of a facet of the short story that parallels the so-called Latin-American new novel.

The reader may well ask to what extent the issues discussed in this study uniquely differentiate the short story from the novel, whether in universal terms or in terms of forms of Spanish-American fiction. My answer, as the student of the poetics of fiction must agree, is that they do not. No claim is made that the features identified in the chapter titles constitute a structural primer for the Spanish-American short story. It is probable that, from a theoretical point of view, any attempt to define unique structural principles for the short story beyond traditional and vague references to its length would be unsuccessful. More fruitful is to acknowledge in advance that a particular text may be considered to exemplify a particular form of literature and to proceed to detail what is noteworthy about that form or its salient aspect. Such a metatheoretical approach to the Spanish-American short story is the one adopted in this study.

Indeed, in place of an introductory chapter providing the literary historical backgrounds for the texts examined—the evolution of local-color proto-realism into the abstract structures that currently dominate—I have chosen instead to propose an explicit theoretical framework for the study of the texts selected. This framework, which dwells on the concept of narrative *écriture*, establishes a focus whereby the stories are examined as particular strategies in the production of verbal art. For if *écriture* has any one abiding sense, it is that of textual production, a phrase that implies the need to study literature as a problem in defining and evaluating the unique structuring given language and semantics within the context of the ideological postulates with which any text necessarily functions. The Latin-American short story as it is being written today is the response to particular literary traditions, both hemispheric and international. But it is also the response to metaliterary demands that define the goals and the limitations of verbal expression. What this study maintains is that the identification of a range of those metaliterary demands is just as important in terms of current literary

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scholarship, as the more traditional sociohistorical identification of contributions in terms of constellations of themes and techniques that define a putative intrinsic originality and an extrinsic parallel with international literature. While a historical perspective may suffer, my hope is that the particular structural strategies of the texts described will characterize the contemporary Latin-American short story in a register that, although it may be more audacious, is as equally important as the historical one.

It is easy for a preface to become an apologia for what has not been included. Although some might miss a total characterization of Rulfo's or Cortázar's or García Márquez's stories, and others may wish some other authors had been included, the choices made here have as their best defense what I hope is the reasonableness of the analyses themselves.

A good part of this monograph has grown out of seminars with graduate students, whose forbearance in the evolution of the positions that are taken is greatly appreciated. I am particularly grateful to the assistance of my two research associates, Terry Enfield and René Jara, and, above all, to Roberto Reis, whose chronic dissatisfaction with the limitations of literary criticism has goaded me into whatever precision as rational discourse this study possesses.

D. W. F.  
Tempe, Arizona  
December 1978



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## *Spanish-American Short Story*





## Chapter I.

# Introduction: The *Écriture* of Literary Texts

*Isaac Luria declara que la eterna Escritura  
Tiene tantos sentidos como lectores.  
Cada Versión es verdadera y ha sido prefijada  
Por quien es el lector, el libro y la lectura.*

(Jorge Luis Borges, "A Manuel Mujica Láinez," in *La moneda de hierro* [1976]:49.)

Thus, the distinction between speech and writing becomes the source of the fundamental paradox of literature: we are attracted to literature because it is obviously something other than ordinary communication; its formal and fictional qualities bespeak a strangeness, a power, an organization, a permanence which is foreign to ordinary speech. Yet the urge to assimilate that power and permanence or to let that formal organization work upon us requires us to make literature into communication, to reduce its strangeness, and to draw upon supplementary conventions which enable it, as we say, to speak to us. The difference which seemed the source of value becomes a distance to be bridged by the activity of reading and interpretation. The strange, the formal, the fictional, must be recuperated or naturalized, brought within our ken, if we do not want to remain gaping before monumental inscriptions.

(Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist poetics*, p. 134.)

### I

Mid-twentieth-century structuralism is the doctrine that symbolic phenomena—and natural phenomena given symbolic representation—are characterized by innate and discoverable patterns of semiotic relationships that hold between constituent elements. Structuralism has laid claim to a privileged place in contemporary literary studies because it seeks to establish a model of the system of literature itself as the external reference for the individual works it considers. The theoretician moves from the study of language to the study of literature as a subsystem of symbolic language and seeks to define the principles of structuralization that operate not only

through individual works, but through the relationships among works over the whole field of literature.

At the heart of theories of structuralism is the idea of system, a complete, self-regulating entity that evolves (that is, moves from beginning to end, by transforming or rearranging its features) within its systematic structure. Every literary unit, from the individual sentence to the whole order of words as text, can be seen in relation to the concept of system. To say that a work has structure and that its structure is intrinsic or inherent is to say more than that it has an inner logic. It is to say that the work possesses a unique architecture that both identifies it vis-à-vis all other works and serves as the basis for the integration of all of its elements into a unified systematic whole. The structuralist critic thus sees the work as an assembly of units that exist on several different levels of integration. The act of reading a literary work becomes, in turn, a sort of discovery process whereby we learn to perceive these units first in a linear fashion and then in terms of their abstract pattern of assembly. A literary work is understood when its overall structural integration is recognized.

In literature, there are clearly certain formal or structural features that are basically static, such as the division of the work into parts or the material form of the narrative voice. But as the critic takes up more and more abstract questions of structure, like the relationship between the various characters or the several potential temporal planes of the narrative, it is more difficult to speak of explicit constituents. Ironically, criticism becomes more interesting and rewarding in direct proportion to its treatment of phenomena that are not perceivable to the "ordinary" reader. If criticism is best defended as an accessory tool to the reading of literature, it cannot be satisfied to deal only with aspects of the work readily accessible to the superficial reader. Thus, "higher" criticism emerges not as the *identification* of the elements inherent to a literary structure, but as the *proposition* that certain elements or relationships between them be accepted as existing when, in fact, there is scant overt evidence that it is so. Proposition then becomes *interpretation* in the sense of a unique understanding of the literary work, accompanied by appropriate arguments designed to convince us of its priority over other legitimately possible interpretations.

## II

The crucial point of departure for an intrinsic literary criticism is the *textuality* of literature: the fact that it is a text the critic can identify and study. The *texture* confronted by the reader in his initial contact with a work of literature is the most permanent quality of that work.



Texture—the materiality of the text—is, in turn, the manifestation of a series of underlying premises that may be alleged to generate the text and to be the foundation of its nature as literary textuality. *Text* is what we read; *textuality* is the irreducible nature of the literary phenomenon, that is, to say, of its very existence as text; and *texture* is the hallmark of that phenomenon.

The following concepts will be used to illustrate the structure of the contemporary Spanish-American short story.

**Écriture.** *Écriture* (which is the French equivalent for the more general English word *writing*) refers to the series of structural premises that underlie a literary work as a written text. These premises constitute the abstract or “deep” level of a text, and an adequate structural analysis of a literary work must involve the discovery of the conventions of rules of its underlying *écriture*. The comprehension of any symbolic phenomenon, literary or otherwise, is an abstraction to the extent that it is the abstract organization of overt elements into a code that makes understanding possible. Thus, *écriture* is identified as that abstract level of a literary text where an organizing principle is operant that enables the formulation of a structural code, recoverable by the reader, for the text.

**Inscription.** Inscription refers to the various material realizations in the text of the underlying principles of *écriture*, that is, their actualization as a literary text. Both text and *écriture* are static phenomena: the text that we read cannot be altered without thereby creating a different text. It is assumed that the *écriture* of a text is also unmodifiable to the extent that it is the abstract formulation that generates the specific text we read. Nevertheless, inscription involves a shifting phenomenon in that when we read a literary text we perceive a range of possible structures and multiple overlapping patterns for the overt elements of that text.

In this way, we observe different potential relationships between the inalterable materiality of the text and the equally static base that, as generating *écriture*, underlies it. Since there are no two readings of a text that are exactly identical, each successive reading, whether by one or several readers, will see the inscription of *écriture* in a different way. Yet no matter how unvarying this abstract level of an underlying text may seem to be, since it is abstract it is only partially accessible for even the most skilled reader. The purpose of the structural analysis of the text becomes then the attempt to formulate as explicitly as possible a description of its abstract generating principles. What is problematical in the process of making such an explicit description is precisely, on the one hand, the distance be-

tween multifaceted inscription and, on the other, the *écriture* to be discovered. When we find ambiguity in a literary text, we are identifying that more than one structure holds between the constituent elements of the text. Expressed simply, the primary goal of the sort of criticism proposed here is to postulate ways of seeing literary texts as organized patterns rather than as merely a flow of words with a discrete beginning and ending. Furthermore, that goal should also address itself, if only by implication, to the concern of metacommentary as to criticism's need to discover and reveal such patterns, that is, why are they not self-evident?

### III

The *écriture* of a literary text then is roughly analogous to the abstract or deep level that transformational-generative linguistics identifies for languages. By this I mean that, like deep linguistic structures, *écriture*—the deep structure of a literary text—is wholly abstract and only accessible by a theoretical model of reading. This theoretical model, like linguistic analysis, is capable of organizing surface phenomena in terms of an underlying system that provides them with an interdependent order and that explains their structural function.

If the surface phenomena of linguistic utterances possess a semiological importance only in terms of an abstract system that specifies hierarchical and interdependent function, the same may be said about the higher-order discourse structures we call literary texts. Literary structuralism has discovered, along with generative linguistics, that structural units virtually cannot be said to possess independent functional meanings. Rather, this meaning is a correlative of the structural context in which they are ordered. This context can only be detailed fully in abstract terms because of the way in which surface order and relationships fail to be adequately explicit, for cognitive reasons that are not yet comprehensible to us. Thus, when we speak of the need for literary analysis to posit the existence of abstract structures, we are, like the linguist, acknowledging the need to postulate functional relationships between structural components that are not directly apparent superficially.

Nevertheless, and in contrast to colloquial communication, where we assume that the meaning-message and its transmission are primary, literary theory recognizes the premise that meaning, or meanings, is less basic and perhaps even less interesting than the way in which it is realized, structured, and inscribed in the texture of a literary work. What this means as a consequence is that in a literary work, although meaning is not trivial, the form in which it is con-

veyed is primary, while in colloquial communication the form of communication is relatively unimportant and its meaning is paramount. On this basis, one speaks of the “foregrounding” of the “defamiliarized” language of literary discourse.

The foregoing principles yield the hypothesis that texture—or texturalization, which is the inscription that gives form to a work’s *écriture*—is a mark rather than a mirror of meaning. Meaning cannot be presumed to underlie a literary work in the sense of a semantic nucleus to which we gain access simply by peeling away the layers of textual signifiers. Such emphasis on the unavailability of underlying meaning stresses, first of all, the nature of a literary text as verbal artifact and how the uniqueness of the text makes difficult the quest for meaning when the latter is conceived of in strictly communicational terms. The attempt to arrive at a meaning presumed to underlie a text thus becomes an operation that inevitably challenges its status as a literary work, since critical theory begins with the axiom that the impossibility of reductive meaning is an inherent feature of literary texts.

The textuality of the work is what is responsible for making the meaning it seems to be conveying ambiguous or elusive, and we sense the presence of an underlying meaning while direct access to it, nevertheless, remains blocked by the special nature of the literary text. This nature stems from the fact that language functions as a counterpoint (if not, on occasion, an outright challenge) to the conventional expression of meaning via linguistic structures. Colloquial language is conventional, although literary language is not, nor can it be without losing its identity as such. (This is not the place to raise concern over whether it is valid or not that literary language enjoys such a status, an issue that is more germane to a sociopolitical discussion of literary expression.) As a result, it is acknowledged that literary language is in categorical opposition to purely communicational or conventional language. Since it is not conventional, literary language, and the texts that it embodies, breaks with normal linguistic processes such that the resulting work becomes a “difficult” communication. If a literary work is an act of communication, as it has often been called, so much so that a reading in terms of its “philosophical” or “sociopolitical” meaning is virtually inevitable in Western culture, it is a highly problematical act. It is for this reason that the text becomes a linguistic artifact that calls attention to itself as verbal text, and this nature as artifact attracts our most immediate attention as critical readers.

The following diagram portrays schematically the opposition between a model for colloquial communication and one for literary textuality:

*Model for Unidirectional Colloquial Communication*Semantics  $\longrightarrow$  Syntax  $\longrightarrow$  Material Discourse*Model for Interdependent Literary Textuality*Semantics  $\longleftrightarrow$  Syntax  $\longleftrightarrow$  Material Discourse

In the colloquial model, it is emphasized that one begins with semantic meaning and that the linguistic structures, or the syntax of the language, give material form to this meaning. A material manifestation is what we perceive in the structured sentences of a discourse in a specific language. This manifest level is called the surface structure, since it is what we grasp directly in a linguistic act. In short, one can say that semantics attains, in a unidirectional process, an overt representation via the structuring rules of the syntax of a language.

In place of the model for colloquial communication, I propose a model for literary textuality in which a unidimensional relationship between underlying meaning and surface realization is inadequate for describing literary phenomena. Rather, what we have in the literary model is a circularity between the most immediate level and the most abstract one. Therefore, the constituent elements of non-colloquial discourse serve as much to propose or create meanings as merely to convey them, the latter being the case in colloquial communication. Thus, the linguistic forms of surface structure—words, morphemes, and their syntactic combinations—transmit meanings at the same time that, by virtue of the richness and the openness of linguistic structures, they suggest new meanings in an unending process.

## IV

It is possible to state that the mode of textualization as a working hypothesis of textual analysis is a result of the actualization of a series of principles that can be formulated in abstract terms. (These modes are the textual *style* in the sense of lexical-verbal selection, and *structure* in the sense of the organization of the constituent and conventional material elements of literature, such as tone, narrative person, and devices for metacommentary.) The terms of this formulation must be considered abstract, to be "discovered" by the critic's textual analysis, to the extent that they are not materially present in the work.

These principles, in turn, correspond to an ideology of literature in the sense that they involve a self-concept of the text that comments implicitly on what should or should not be done, what may or may not be done, and what is permissible and not permissible in

literary discourse. We can say, therefore, that *écriture* is a point of convergence for the formulation of metatextual decisions that attain material representation in the process of textual inscription. Hence we arrive at the premise that the level of *écriture* mediates between the immediate textuality of a work and its status as an example of the literary phenomenon.

The principles of textual organization are not found on the level of surface structure nor on the level of surface texture. Therefore, a text's materiality, although a concrete manifestation, can be no more than the indirect or oblique representation of its underlying *écriture*. As a consequence, the text will appear to be unstable, fluctuating, and elusive. On the one hand, we experience its extensive richness and density of multiple meanings. On the other hand, we attempt to construct, or reconstruct, the underlying premises that generate its inscription. Reading a text must therefore become a process not of penetrating it in order to attain its alleged abstract meaning, nor of "partaking" indiscriminately of its verbal riches, but of reconstructing its *écriture*. In this way, *reading* comes to mean approaching a text as a dialectic between its *écriture* and the overt features of its inscription. Reading emerges as an ideological process also to the extent that it undertakes the identification of the value principles on which the text is based.

Thus, we have the hypothesis that the *écriture* of a text will be circumscribed by a series of potentialities and typologies that derive ultimately from literary *écriture* as a general culture and linguistic phenomenon. Such a series of principles may be identified in abstract or generic terms since they serve to define that genre of grammatological *écriture* that we call literature. Thus, we may undertake to calculate possible textual *écritures* on the basis of an abstract *écriture* underlying literature as a semiological archiphenomenon. Or we may attempt to understand literary *écriture* as part of a larger field, semiological *écriture*, which is concerned in the last instance with the use of language to generate texts as fundamental artifacts of human culture.

The way in which literary texts are produced—that is to say, the way in which a generating *écriture* motivates their material inscription—is of metaliterary importance. This is so because it indicates the adherence by the writer to a coherent plan that speaks to the issue of the text as text and to how the text is a specific example of literature in a generic sense.

## V

The level of abstract *écriture* is subdivided into presuppositions and structure. The presuppositions specify the basic conditions for

the generation of the text, that is, its relationship with other semiological and grammatological systems, with sociocultural values, with a general conception of literature, with other specifically linguistic systems. Structure, at least on the level of *écriture*, is the abstract configuration of surface textuality in parasyntactic terms. What this means, when seen in its most basic aspects, is that a literary text is somehow homologous to an elementary linguistic structure, to a "sentence" in the most general sense. Since a spoken utterance has an overt syntactic structure, literary texts likewise possess literary (para)syntax: the structural and hierarchical configurations that we perceive through a formal analysis of its materiality. Structure, on a deep, abstract level, stipulates as a consequence the bases of this material configuration as discourse, a discourse that is coherent to the degree that we recover and formulate—unconsciously as we read, explicitly as we practice serious criticism—these generating bases.

It is necessary that we take into account how the elements of a discourse may be linear, regressive, parallel, redundant and repetitive, antithetical, and a whole host of possibilities that emphasize the manner in which the constituent elements of a text enjoy a configuration or hierarchy of configurations that go far beyond their immediate tactic position in the chain of discourse utterance. An interrelationship characterized as simply tactic loses any real significance alongside the vast potential for abstract and fluctuating configurations that are conceivable in terms of a generating *écriture* whose very nature demands an adequate reading and an adequate criticism. Hence, the structure of a literary work, like the structure of any semiological text, cannot be understood as merely the order of its constituent elements, whether these be directly linguistic or paralinguistic (like, for example, the characters in a story, who on a higher level are as much constituent elements as the words they are seen to speak). Rather, the critical analysis of a literary text can only be valued to the degree to which it puts forth a strategy for the study of the abstract principles and the degree to which it is able to carry out that strategy and expose those principles that in the last analysis control an adequate comprehension of literary discourse.

## VI

To illustrate my argument, I will now analyze the microtext "Borges y yo" by Jorge Luis Borges, who is the virtual progenitor of the microtext in contemporary Latin-American literature:

Al otro, a Borges, es a quien le ocurren las cosas. Yo camino por Buenos Aires y me demoro, acaso ya mecánicamente, para mirar el arco de un zaguán y la puerta cancel; de Borges tengo

noticias por el correo y veo su nombre en una terna de profesores o en un diccionario biográfico. Me gustan los relojes de arena, los mapas, la tipografía del siglo XVIII, el sabor del café y la prosa de Stevenson; el otro comparte esas preferencias, pero de un modo vanidoso que las convierte en atributos de un actor. Sería exagerado afirmar que nuestra relación es hostil; yo vivo, yo me dejo vivir, para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica. Nada me cuesta confesar que ha logrado ciertas páginas válidas, pero esas páginas no me pueden salvar, quizá porque lo bueno ya no es de nadie, ni siquiera del otro, sino del lenguaje o la tradición. Por lo demás, yo estoy destinado a perderme, definitivamente, y sólo algún instante de mí podrá sobrevivir en el otro. Poco a poco voy cediéndole todo, aunque me consta su perversa costumbre de falsear y magnificar. Spinoza entendió que todas las cosas quieren perseverar en su ser; la piedra eternamente quiere ser piedra y el tigre un tigre. Yo he de quedar en Borges, no en mí (si es que alguien soy), pero me reconozco menos en sus libros que en muchos otros o que en el laborioso rasgueo de una guitarra. Hace años yo traté de librarme de él y pasé de las mitologías del arrabal a los juegos con el tiempo y con lo infinito, pero esos juegos son de Borges ahora y tendré que idear otras cosas. Así mi vida es una fuga y todo lo pierdo y todo es del olvido, o del otro.

No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página.

(*El hacedor* [Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960]:50-51.)

The following features of the text must be accounted for in any reasonable analysis:

1. The title of the text is initially misleading and ultimately ironic, for it implies the conjunction of Borges's name with an, as yet, unidentified first-person narrator. Moreover, it evokes intertextually those autobiographical writings wherein the confidant of a public person pretends to reveal to us aspects of the latter's character that he, as a bystander, has had privileged access to. As we shall see, this simultaneously is and is not quite the case with "Borges y yo."

2. The text, seen in terms of the specific verbal structures and the semantic meanings they encode, is characterized by a series of devices that contrast *el otro* (Borges) and *yo*. Stylistically the text depends on linguistic markers to categorize the features attributable to *el otro* and the feature attributable to *yo*: "Me gustan . . ." versus "el otro comparte esas preferencias, *pero* . . ." (my emphasis). Each one of the twelve sentences of the text could be rewritten schematically in terms of this A versus B relationships, and one could study the specific morpho-syntactic markers that identify first A, then B.

For example, it is possible to stress how, despite the apparent primacy given to Borges (the explicit identification by name, the



first-place status in the title, the acknowledgment of his importance), the markers related to *yo* not only dominate stylistically but they are also foregrounded by being given sentence-initial placement: "*Yo vivo, yo me dejo vivir, para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica*"; "*Yo he de quedar en Borges* (my emphasis); and so forth. While these markers maintain the illusion of two entities, Borges versus *yo*, they are noteworthy for the overt direction of our attention toward the speaker and his "problem"; this emphasis is identifiable in a number of concrete verbal features.

3. We may carry the identification of linguistic features a step further and attempt to classify the concepts related to *el otro* and those related to the anonymous but insistent *yo*. The following is a key passage in this regard: "*Me gustan los relojes de arena, los mapas, la tipografía del siglo XVIII, el sabor del café y la prosa de Stevenson; el otro comparte esas preferencias, pero de un modo vanidoso que las convierte en atributos de un actor.*" Clearly, the odds are against *el otro*: not only does he not have any truly unique preferences, sharing the same ones as the narrator, but his claim to them is *vanidoso* and *de un actor*. This semantic weighting occurs on two levels, both related to the fact that the first-person narrator controls the text and, therefore, our access to the truth concerning *el otro*: (1) he employs prejudicial modifiers in what is ostensibly a neutral characterization (that is, the title does not overtly announce any prejudice toward Borges, and the speaker explicitly disclaims to have any); (2) the narrator, by foregrounding himself, directs our attention away from Borges. See also in this latter regard the first two sentences of the text.

Thus, we have an intersection between, on the one hand, a stylistic patterning that apparently juxtaposes features of A versus B, and, on the other hand, a rhetoric, deriving from the intrinsic nature of the privileged first-person narration that attempts to weight our estimation of the two parties involved. This is, of course, a further intertextual echo of "him and me" narratives in that the narrator, by controlling the discourse situation, can attempt to set the record straight in his favor.

4. The bulk of the text is juxtaposed to the closing sentence, which constitutes an independent paragraph and, hence, suggests a rupture or an antiphony vis-à-vis what has gone before. And, whatever else it may be, the final sentence is an emphatic verbal gesture because it is set off graphically from the rest of the text.

However, it is important to see how this closing statement may be viewed in terms of the overall *écriture* of Borges's microtext. As I have claimed, the text is fundamentally ironic in that it maintains



seriously a dichotomy between Borges and the narrator that is literally false, no matter how inviting it may be as a stratagem for self-evaluation and the romantic Doppelgängerei between the artist and the human being.

"Borges y yo" is, to put it bluntly, an ironically self-defeating text, which is one of the hallmarks of Borges's fictions, and it is in these terms that we must view the functional significance of the textual features that I have cursorily enumerated above. For what is involved is a series of false allegations: (1) there exists a person I call Borges and there exists a person I call *yo*; (2) we are to be distinguished by a series of mutually exclusive or at least incompatible features; (3) I yield to Borges, whose writings and fame dominate me, but I go on record as to the differences between us through this text, which I control as first-person narrator; (4) I affirm, if not my autonomy from Borges, my superiority by my values and by my control of the text setting forth the dichotomy "Borges y yo."

All of these allegations are brusquely set aside by the closing line of the text. By confessing that he does not know whether A or B is writing the text, the narrator both contradicts (paradoxically: can self-designated A nevertheless not know if he is A or B?) the dichotomy that he has set out to affirm and undercuts the justification and the advantage of a first-person narrative: behold me versus the other(s). What we have then is an entire textual apparatus that is fundamentally contradictory. As I have maintained, "Borges y yo" not only sets out to juxtapose *el otro* and *yo*, but ostensibly weights the case of the latter through a series of syntactic and semantic markers that constitute the concrete stylistic texture of the narrative. Yet, all of this is denied by the final statement, which so effectively vitiates the distinction the foregoing text was at pains to maintain.

From the viewpoint of my analysis, it is not enough to note the juxtaposition between A and B, between *Borges* and *yo* in the text, nor is it enough to identify the presence of certain stylistic features and a particular narrative voice (as well as other discourse features that one may want to stress). Rather, it is necessary to see the narrative in terms of a specific textual strategy and to see the features of that narrative as functional parts of that strategy, that is, to see the textual features as the reflection of a controlling strategy that we call the text's *écriture* and that those features serve to "inscribe" and give discourse form to. What could be more ironic than a first-person narrator who in the end cannot distinguish himself from his rival as a strategy for signifying the precariousness of the Western tradition's antithesis between the writer as a human being and the writer as a figure of public notoriety (*un actor*)? Or to generate a text that uses a number of rhetorical ploys to enhance A at the expense of B,

only to dramatically deny the distinction?

"Borges y yo" is a clever text; it is also a text that is a key to so many aspects of Borges's writings. The sort of analysis that I have proposed focuses on overt stylistic features in order to discover an organizing principle that underlies them and justifies them from the point of view of discourse structure and coherence as functioning elements in a unique literary text.

## VII

The concept of *écriture* is admittedly a flexible one, but it is not necessarily eclectic or vaguely defined. Rather than the underpinning for a methodology of textual analysis—and modern criticism is rightly skeptical of programmatic methodologies—it is a way of viewing literary phenomena that attempts to provide a principled basis for explaining the relationship between the structural components of texts. Thus, the analysis of a particular text may focus on one of those components, like plot structure or the role of the reader, that is especially prominent, with the goal of demonstrating how that component in fact achieves its prominence by virtue of its integrated role in the overall structure of the text. By interfacing the concept of *écriture* and certain highly, selectively chosen examples of the Spanish-American short story, my goal is both to validate the way of seeing texts through the concept of *écriture* and to provide some acceptable analyses of important stories. If the latter are reasonably accurate, *écriture* as a metacritical notion, although it will not have been defined in all of its ramifications, will hopefully emerge as a valuable global concept that brings together a number of important emphases in the analysis of literary texts.

## Chapter II.

# Toward a Characterization of *Écriture* in the Stories of Borges

No hay ejercicio intelectual que no sea finalmente inútil. Una doctrina filosófica es al principio una descripción verosímil del universo; giran los años y es un mero capítulo—cuando no un párrafo o un nombre—de la historia de la filosofía. En la literatura, esa caducidad final es aun más notoria. El Quijote—me dijo Menard—fue ante todo un libro agradable; ahora es una ocasión de brindis patrióticos, de soberbia gramatical, de obscenas ediciones de lujo. La gloria es una incomprensión y quizá la peor.<sup>1</sup>

### I

*Écriture* has yet to become as widely used in Hispanic literary criticism as it has among European theorists and American adherents. Although Buenos Aires has been a focal point for the translation of structuralist writings,<sup>2</sup> it is curious to note the lack of any sustained application of structuralist concepts to the major works of Latin-American literature. A number of critics and journals have shown an interest in the "new criticism," but there continues to be a considerable number of essays in which the use of structuralist jargon is a substitute for the serious assimilation of structuralist models.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the foregoing circumstance—to which one might add the relative disinterest among U.S. Hispanists in paying much attention to structuralist theories—explains why a writer like Jorge Luis Borges continues to be approached from the point of view of themes

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), pp. 449–50. All quotes from Borges's works are from this edition, and the pagination is given with the quote.

2. Particularly the materials published by *Nueva Visión* beginning in the mid-sixties.

3. See David William Foster, "La nueva narrativa vista por la nueva crítica," *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* 4 (1974):227–50.

and ideas in his works, rather than from the perspectives suggested by the panoply of structuralist concepts. I have written elsewhere of how Borges's stories can be studied as the realization of a structuralist poetics—the sort of program for producing literature, as opposed to studying it, implied by the basic concerns of structuralism.<sup>4</sup> But only a few critics have shown any interest in focusing on Borges through the lens of structuralism. Not surprisingly, the few that have done so are French critics, and Emir Rodríguez Monegal has shown how their partial knowledge of Borges's works or their deficient grasp of Spanish has resulted in some rather curious distortions.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, we must give credit to those critics for having studied Borges from perspectives with which a good many English- and Spanish-language critics still seem to be ill at ease.

*Écriture* is only one of the structuralist concepts that could profitably enrich Borgean criticism. To the best of my knowledge, only three papers have done so. Jaime Giordano includes a discussion of "La escritura del Dios" in a larger—and very important—study on a typology of generational *écritures* in Latin-American fiction.<sup>6</sup> Walter Mignolo and Jorge Aguilar Mora speak of the motif of the book as a principle of *écriture* in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," although their treatment is vaguely tentative and partial (Borges criticism, even that which subscribes to specific analytical principles, has a tendency to suffer from a mimetic vagueness, a "contamination" by the texts being examined).<sup>7</sup> Noé Jitrik, in one of the best studies available on Borges, studies the intertextuality of *Ficciones*.<sup>8</sup> Although he does not base his study on the concept of *écriture*, it is clear that his interest in the underlying structures of *Ficciones* and in the implied principles concerning the production of literary texts is, in effect, the

4. David William Foster, "Borges and Structuralism: Toward an Implied Poetics," *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 (1973):341–51.

5. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Borges y nouvelle critique," *Revista iberoamericana* No. 80 (1972):367–90.

6. Jaime Giordano, "El nivel de la escritura en la narrativa hispanoamericana contemporánea," *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* 4 (1974):299–306. See also his "Forma y sentido de 'La escritura del Dios' de Jorge Luis Borges," in *Revista iberoamericana* No. 78 (1972):105–15.

7. Walter Mignolo and Jorge Aguilar Mora, "Borges, el libro y la escritura," *Caravelle* No. 17 (1971):187–94.

8. Noé Jitrik, "Estructura y significación en *Ficciones*, de Jorge Luis Borges," in *El fuego de la especie, ensayos sobre seis escritores argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Argentina, 1971), pp. 129–50. Note should also be taken of the study by Nicolás Rosa, "Borges y la ficción laberíntica," in Jorge Lafforgue, *Nueva novela latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1969–1972), 2:140–73, although it is not always clear when he is speaking of *écriture* and when he is speaking of *thematics*.

attempt to lay bare the motivating *écriture* of a clearly unified body of texts.<sup>9</sup>

## II

This chapter concerns itself with a partial characterization of *écriture* in a few of the major stories by Borges. No pretense will be made that a generic *écriture* has been discovered that could be used in a valid *lecture* ("reading") of his fiction as an organic whole. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the stories have been chosen for their exemplariness in the canon of Borges's writings and that, although the emphasis is on the motivating principles in individual texts, one could legitimately attempt to undercover a macro-*écriture*. Although the stories are taken from Borges's four major collections,<sup>10</sup> they are not treated in a chronological fashion.<sup>11</sup> (There is a large bulk of criticism on Borges, much of it dating from the sixties. Some of it is repetitive and superficial, while the best of the studies have dealt in excellent detail with such questions as themes, influences, philosophical matters, and, more recently, with Borges's explicit ties to the *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*. However, although some of the truly exceptional papers deal with issues raised in this article, to the best of my knowledge none has attempted to approach Borges in terms of a coherent *écriture*.)

The following principal characteristics of a Borgean *écriture* will be discussed:

1. Literary texts are paradoxical attempts to record accurately the vastness of the universe and the chaos of personal experience: the latter are infinite, while the literary text is finite. Thus, the text can only lapse into a partial record of the chaotic and infinite, or it can betray them by imposing a perceptual order that is merely solipsistic and convenient. In either case, the literary text is, as pragmatic

9. Although David Maldavsky does not specifically discuss *écriture*, his paper on the semiotic structure of Borges's stories follows Barthean concepts closely: "Un enfoque semiótico de la narrativa de J. L. Borges," *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* 3:2 (1973):105-19.

10. Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1944); *El aleph* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1949); *El informe de Brodie* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1970); *El libro de arena* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975).

11. Ana María Barrenechea, "Borges y la narración que se autoanaliza," *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* 24 (1975):515-27, speaks of what is one essential feature of this *écriture*—the self-conscious text; see point 6 in the following description of the premises of an *écriture* for Borges's fiction. Nevertheless, Barrenechea does not avail herself of the concept of *écriture*, and the autoanalytic features she describes are attributed to a new concept of narrative rhetoric, which limits them to the superficial level of compositional strategies rather than assigning them to the level of abstract *écriture* where they belong by virtue of their text-generating nature.

message, rendered useless. In "El aleph," the pretense of synthesis unsuccessfully masks the chaotic and the unorderable, with ironies generated by a bewildered and frustrated narrator.

2. The falseness of system is inevitable. A "philosophy" imposes a perceptual order that makes the banal dreadful (the incidental and the insignificant are given a "transcendent meaning" within a vast and overwhelming interpretation of the universe) and makes the dreadful banal (the infinite and the chaotic, the contemplation of which are occasions for profound horror for finite man, are rendered banal by their reductionist assimilation to a mere man-made [para] philosophy). In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the narrator, after reviewing these complementary processes in terms of one gratuitous attempt at the formulation of an all-encompassing system, seeks to neutralize the dreadfulness of the system and its menacing impositions on reality by retreating into a banal literary activity as gratuitous as the system itself.

3. Man inevitably flees from "alephic" truths that he believes to have discovered. Man seeks the aleph, the perfect synthesis of the infinite and chaotic universe. Although such alephs do not and cannot exist, man seeks them and, on occasion, believes to have discovered them. Philosophic systems are quasi-alephs, while literary texts are pseudo-alephs). Their pseudo-ness is made apparent by the inevitable irony of the text that arises naturally from the paradox of the text—the finite versus the infinite—and predisposes the appropriate *lecture* of the text. There are, however, alephs (necessarily false) in the form of objects: a point in space ("El aleph"), a book (the one sought in "La biblioteca de Babel" and one encountered in "El libro de arena"). The contemplation of the presumed aleph, because it confronts finite man with a vision of the elusive universe—a vision he may attempt to see as a synthesis, but which he discovers to be only an unordered and explosive jumble of details—compels him to flee the vision it offers to him. In "El libro de arena," the narrator is obliged to "lose" the alephic book in the Biblioteca Nacional in order to rid himself of an object that compromises his sanity because it provides him (or so he believes) with knowledge that is more than his human limitations can handle. If the text is alephic, it too must be rejected, for it lies beyond our ability to comprehend or to assimilate it. In "La escritura del Dios," the discovery of the *écriture*—the coincidence of the word for Holy Writ in Borges's story and the critical term for underlying structuring principles can be taken as indicative of a homology between literary texts and other Gnostic systems—leads not to articulation, but to silence. Either the discovered truth is too profound to be spoken or it is too banal, but with the equalizing consequences of

silence that denies the text and the text on the text (that is, Borges's story on the nature of the Writ).

4. Contemplation of the infinite (because it is horrible) or its pseudo-synthesis as system (because it is trivial) may threaten the sanity of the individual and compel him to back away into an equalizing refusal to contemplate the universe and to reduce it to a distorting system. But adherence to system can trap man into believing that he is fending off the atrocity of reality by reducing it to an interpretation: the interpreting system, then, becomes a false security that leads us not away from the horror of the infinite and the chaotic, but right back to it. The system cannot avoid the chaos that it vainly pretends to reduce to ordered cosmos. In "La muerte y la brújula," the gratuitous system elaborated by the overly intellectual detective is matched by a reality equally gratuitous and transcendently insignificant. But, rather than warding off reality by his systematic interpretation, Lönnrot abets it: in the end, the systematic solution meant to prevent a crime only results in that crime, which happens to have Lönnrot as its victim.

5. The necessary confrontation with an excess of meanings is the unavoidable result of the inadequacy of any and all ordered perceptions of experience. Thus, no event or circumstance possesses any one meaning, but rather there is a fundamental ambiguity induced by the vast range of possibilities of the infinite and the chaotic. Of course, the impossibility of unitary meaning is only a problem when man feels compelled to demand it of his own experience and of the universe that he confronts. Unfortunately, this demand is a veritable mania of man and, as a consequence, is the direct cause of his despairful frustration with meaningful systems and, on a more specific level, with literary texts. To the extent that texts aspire to be meaningful systems, they are caught in the same trap of distorting and biasing the infinite by reducing it to the finite system of the bounded text. The attempt to penetrate the mystery of meaning can, therefore, only result in a compounding rather than a resolution of the fundamental ambiguity of experience. In "El aleph," the attempts to penetrate the mystery of meaning only result in a text that oscillates between the partial and trivial detailing of the infinite (reductionist representation) and the distorting interpretation of meaning (falsificational representation). In both cases, the meaning of what is being presented remains as elusive and impenetrable—as unmeaningful, in the last analysis—as it was prior to the attempts at exegesis. In "Guayaquil," the problem of the ambiguity of meaning that underlies a number of Borges's stories becomes the major structural principle of the text, and event and text are homologized in terms of their fundamental overmeaningfulness/unmeaning-

fulness. Such too is the case with "La escritura del Dios." The literary text interprets a text that in turn interprets event and circumstance, with a regressive reduction and falsification of meaning.

6. All of the foregoing notwithstanding, man's mania for interpretive systems justifies those systems and justifies literature. The proper emphasis of a concern for philosophy and literature must fall not on the adequacy of the systems/texts generated, but on their diversity and the inherently curious nature of their details. Both the diversity and curious detail make up the fabric of civilization and are worthy of study to the extent that they bespeak a fundamental "drive" of mankind. But at the same time, the richness of this fabric is, in the final analysis, only a repetition of the infinite and chaotic vastness of the universe. Once we admit the proliferation of systems and texts, we are according recognition to a process that can only have as its final outcome the exact repetition of the universe, as in "El Congreso." The result is a distracting but deliberate proliferation of both circumstantial detail and intertextual references (direct allusions to and accommodation of universal literary phenomena) in Borges's writings.<sup>12</sup> In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" or in "El aleph," to give only two outstanding examples, there is a wealth of minutiae that threaten to choke the presentation of interpretive systems: this detail is only a partial repetition of the

12. Although Tzvetan Todorov's chronological limitations on the fantastic would seem to exclude Borges, many of his comments on that genre fit the Argentine perfectly. Moreover, the closing words of his study are directly pertinent to the aspect of Borges's *écriture* that I have been describing:

[ . . . ] Words are not labels pasted to things that exist as such independently of them. When we write, we do merely that—the importance of the gesture is such that it leaves room for no other experience. At the same time, if I write, I write about something, even if this something is writing. For writing to be possible, it must be born out of the death of what it speaks about; but this death makes writing itself impossible, for there is no longer anything to write. Literature can become possible only insofar as it makes itself impossible. Either what we say is actually here, in which case there is no room for literature; or else there is room for literature, in which case there is no longer anything to say. As Blanchot writes in *La Part du Feu*: "If language, and in particular literary language, were not constantly advancing toward its death, it would not be possible, for it is this movement toward its impossibility which is its condition and its basis."

The operation which consists of reconciling the possible with the impossible accurately illustrates the word "impossible" itself. And yet literature exists; that is its greatest paradox.

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975 [originally published in French in 1970; English translation originally published in 1973]), p. 175.



infinite and chaotic features of the universe that cannot, after all, be subordinated in an ordered fashion. Thus, the pretense of order in, for example, a literary text is directly refuted by the inevitable disorder of the details it is forced to include in its commitment to systematizing them.

The foregoing principles of *écriture* in a series of Borges's stories can easily be mistaken for thematic paradigms. To a certain extent, they are aspects of theme in his texts, for they are the questions of meaning to which the texts attempt to refer. But one will note that meaning as such is not being referred to: the universe is not reduced to an interpretation, unless it is the impossibility of reducing the universe to an interpretation.<sup>13</sup> Rather, these paradigms that appear to be so close to thematic aspects deal with the processes of meaning, and, therefore, they have a direct bearing on the structural, textual, representation of meaning and on its limitations. In this sense, then, they deal with the principles concerning meaning with which Borges's stories operate. The stories proceed to be stories—literary texts that function in terms of the Western tradition of literature as representation, signification, and interpretation—on the basis of these principles.

Is there any principled way of distinguishing between an author's thematics and structural primes that constitute his textual *écriture*? Probably not in any absolute fashion. On the one hand, there is a merger between thematics and *écriture* when the former deals precisely with the latter. That is, when the texts of an author like Borges deal implicitly and often overtly with the question of writing and reading texts. How to deal with literature—its mysteries and its highly problematic nature—is one of the constant topics of Borges's stories. On this basis, there is a natural coming together of thematics and the principles of textual production.

But, from another point of view, one that concerns a metatheory of literary scholarship, principles such as those I have outlined belong to the domain of thematics or to the domain of *écriture*, depending on the way in which the critic views textual analysis. If texts are analyzed primarily for their content, a principle like the "opacity" of writing will be looked upon as a *topos* to be fleshed out in terms of a narrative pattern. But if texts are considered examples of structured discourse, the same concept will be considered as a problem that impinges upon the mechanics of textual production,

13. For a presentation of thematic, symbolic constants in Borges's work, see Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Símbolos en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges," *Studies in Short Fiction* 8 (Winter 1971):64–77. Carter Wheelock comes closer to bridging the gap between themes and *écriture* in *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

with inevitable repercussions in the way in which the narrative discourse exists as a material text. It is only in this way that the principles I have presented can be viewed to concern the very nature of narrative structure in Borges's *ficciones*.

The actual material aspects of the stories—questions of rhetoric, style, form, narrative voice (it is no accident that so many of Borges's stories contain first-person "ignorant" or "bewildered" narrators), and even to a great extent more specific issues of theme and commonplaces—are the direct reflection of the underlying structuring principles detailed above. The latter define the nature of experience upon which literature is based, and, therefore, they in turn define the nature of literature, providing the immediate parameters of accomplishment and failure as literature on which the texts must base themselves. In *The Fantastic*, Todorov distinguishes between interpretation and "poetics," which, as he uses it, is clearly a category, if not a synonym, of *écriture*:

Two different objects, *structure* and *meaning*, are implied here by two distinct activities: *poetics* and *interpretation*. Every work possesses a structure, which is the articulation of elements derived from the different categories of literary discourse; and this structure is at the same time the locus of the meaning. In poetics, one rests content with establishing the presence of certain elements within a literary work. But it is possible to achieve a high degree of certainty, for such knowledge may be verified by a series of procedures. The interpretive critic undertakes a more ambitious task: that of specifying—or it might be said of *naming*—the work's meaning. But the result of this activity cannot claim to be either scientific or "objective." There are, of course, some interpretations that are more justified than others; but none can assert itself as the only right one. Poetics and criticism are therefore but instances of a more general opposition, between science and interpretation. This opposition, both terms of which, moreover, are equally worthy of interest, is never pure in practice; only an emphasis on one or the other activity permits us to keep them distinct. . . .

We have therefore tried to undertake a study of themes [= semantic constants] which would place them on the same level of generality as poetic rhythms; with that end in view we have established [for the study of fantastic literature] two thematic systems without claiming thereby to give an interpretation of these themes, as they appear in each particular work.<sup>14</sup>

14. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, pp. 141–43.

### III

"El aleph," if it is possible to accord any one of the texts of the Borges canon such a privilege, may be considered a pivotal story within the framework established in the preceding section. Perhaps more explicitly than any other story, "El aleph" addresses itself to the problems of literary composition and to the limitations on man's ability to organize, to synthesize, and to capture via the faulty medium of language knowledge and experience (which, perhaps, may be only aspects of the same phenomenon). Unquestionably, the aleph—the object in space that synthesizes all spatial and temporal points: the perfect order of the cosmic chaos—is the goal of the multiple quests to subject the universe to an objective synthesis.

In Borges's story, there are three "alephic" quests, all of which are doomed inherently to failure. All three quests are linked to an *aleph* that is understood to contain them, an *aleph* that is denounced as the mere simulacrum of a true aleph. The three quests are: the attempts by the narrator-participant—Borges the character—to describe the "essence" of his dead love, Beatriz Viterbo; the attempts by her cousin, Carlos Argentino Daneri, to compose a long poem, *La tierra*, "una descripción del planeta" (p. 619); and, finally, the attempts by Borges the narrator (that is, the character becomes author) to describe the nature of the *aleph* that is presented to him: its consequences, its falseness, and the frustration of all three attempts at possession through writing. Writing—the composition of the poem, the composition of the story *El aleph*, the composition of a satisfactory eulogy of Beatriz Viterbo—is seen as an act of possession, that is, promises, falsely to be sure, to enshrine event and knowledge in an alephic monument. This monument will withstand the erosion of both faulty memory and the annihilating qualities of the reality beyond the object that moves by indifferently as a chaotic jumble of events.

Against the three attempts at synthesis are pitted those circumstances that lead to their negation:

*Reality Itself* (the inevitable chaos of time and event): La candente mañana de febrero en que Beatriz Viterbo murió, después de una imperiosa agonía que no se rebajó un solo instante ni al sentimentalismo ni al miedo, noté que las carteleras de hierro de la Plaza Constitución habían renovado no sé qué aviso de cigarrillos rubios; el hecho me dolió, pues comprendí que el incesante y vasto universo ya se apartaba de ella y que ese cambio era el primero de una serie infinita (p. 617; the opening words of the text).

*Individual Memory* (note the irony of the following passages): Cambiará el universo pero yo no, pensé con melancólica vanidad; alguna vez, lo sé, mi vana devoción la había

exasperado; muerta yo podía consagrarme a su memoria, sin esperanza, pero también sin humillación [. . .]. De nuevo aguardaría en el crepúsculo de la abarrotada salita, de nuevo estudiaría las circunstancias de sus muchos retratos. Beatriz Viterbo, de perfil, en colores; Beatriz, con antifaz, en los carnavales de 1921; la primera comunión de Beatriz; Beatriz, el día de su boda con Roberto Alessandri; Beatriz, poco después del divorcio, en un almuerzo del Club Hípico; Beatriz, en Quilmes, con Delia San Marco Porcel y Carlos Argentino; Beatriz, con el pekinés que le regaló Villegas Haedo; Beatriz, de frente y de tres cuartos, sonriendo, la mano en el mentón . . . (pp. 617–18; closing ellipsis in text. The reader, confronted with this enumeration of fragments of Beatriz, naturally wonders if the narrator has any clear image of the woman.)

. . . Nuestra mente es porosa para el olvido; yo mismo estoy falseando y perdiendo, bajo la trágica erosión de los años, los rasgos de Beatriz (p. 628; the closing words of the text).

*Language-Literature as Language* (the linear nature of language versus the simultaneous nature of experience and event it hopes to report): Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor. Todo lenguaje es un alfabeto de símbolos cuyo ejercicio presupone un pasado que los interlocutores comparten; ¿cómo transmitir a los otros el infinito Aleph, que mi temerosa memoria apenas abarca? Los místicos, en análogo trance, prodigan los emblemas: para significar la divinidad, un persa habla de un pájaro que de algún modo es todos los pájaros . . . [etc.]. Quizá los dioses no me negarían el hallazgo de una imagen equivalente, pero este informe quedaría contaminado de literatura, de falsedad. Por lo demás, el problema central es irresoluble: la enumeración, siquiera parcial, de un conjunto infinito . . . Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es. Algo, sin embargo, recogeré (pp. 624–25; the impression is inescapable that the last sentence is spoken in vain).

*Alephic Symbols* (of which language and literature are specific subcategories): Yo querría saber: ¿Elegió Carlos Argentino ese nombre, o lo leyó, *aplicado a otro punto donde convergen todos los puntos*, en alguno de los textos innumerables que el Aleph de su casa le reveló? Por increíble que parezca, yo creo que hay (o que hubo) otro Aleph, yo creo que el Aleph de la calle Garay [where Argentino's house, now torn down to make way for a dairy-products store, containing the Aleph was located] era un falso Aleph (p. 627).

These quotes reveal a sense of futility in the face of the impossibility of achieving a satisfactory, alephic synthesis. Moreover, there is a

pronounced irony that stresses the realization of the limitations on comprehension ("pensé con melancólica vanidad") while undermining those few assertions of partial accomplishment ("Algo, sin embargo, recogeré").<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether we are to see Borges the character as consciously ironizing his own statements or whether it is a function of the *écriture* of Borges (the latter manifesting itself via rhetoric of irony). Borges's text is, therefore, its own metacommentary. As a narrative, it comments on the failure of the three attempts at controlling knowledge; but as a literary text, it enunciates clearly its own principles of *écriture* to the effect that it too is a failure in its description of failure: "este informe quedará contaminado de literatura, de falsedad" (hence, Borges's use of the word *ficción*—from the verb  *fingir* , "to feign"—as the generic description of his literature), "yo mismo estoy falseando y perdiendo. . . ."

This irony—and it is often clearly an irony directed against the narrator—describes Borges's failure to retain the image of Beatriz and his failure to illustrate adequately the nature of the aleph, in which he sees one hope of experiencing a totalizing image of the woman. It is also present in his comments concerning Carlos Argentino and the cold and distrustful relationship that exists between the two men. Perhaps, in part, the narrator's irony is meant to be taken as a conscious instrument of his description of Carlos Argentino. However, that irony often serves more to characterize negatively the narrator (he communicates a marked jealousy of Argentino, both as a man and as a writer) than his antagonist. The result, then, is the impression that the narrator is describing a relationship that he is unable to control, and, as a consequence, it is difficult if not impossible for him to have the correct perspective. In other words, the relationship between Borges the character and Carlos Argentino is one more phenomenon that eludes an adequate synthesis. From the point of view of narrated action, the relationship concerns the common memory of Beatriz, a competition for literary recognition and the sharing of the aleph that Carlos Argentino shows to Borges. In all three cases, the narrative is marked by an undercurrent of incomprehension and failure: both men have lost Beatriz irremediably; Borges loses out to Argentino in a literary context; Argentino loses the aleph, partly because Borges refuses to assist him in the effort not to have the house in whose basement the aleph exists destroyed.

The aleph, by the same token that it is the structuring motif for the *écriture* of the text in the sense that it bespeaks the illusion of synthetic knowledge, is on the level of narrated action also the central point of reference for the relationship between the two men.

15. Concerning Borgesian narrators, see Thomas E. Lyon, "Borges and the (Somewhat) Personal Narrator," *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 (1973):363–72.

It is introduced at first in an oblique fashion, when Borges describes the poem Argentino is composing; he learns later that the poet's "source of information" is the secret aleph. Thus, in retrospect the narrator's description of that poem becomes significant, for aside from his transparent disdain for personal reasons, it is clear that he sees the poem as a tedious miscellany:

Otras muchas estrofas me leyó que también obtuvieron su aprobación y su comentario profuso [that is, Argentino's own]. Nada memorable había en ellas; ni siquiera las juzgué mucho peores que la anterior. En su escritura habían colaborado la aplicación, la resignación y el azar; las virtudes que Daneri les atribuía eran posteriores. Comprendí que el trabajo del poeta no estaba en la poesía; estaba en la invención de razones para que la poesía fuera admirable . . . . (pp. 619–20)

Only when we learn, along with the narrator, that Argentino Daneri is describing what he sees via the aleph do we understand that his poem is tedious because it is a verbatim record of the infinite chaos of reality. The aleph does not serve to synthesize or to abstract the universe, but only to present it in its awesome detail before our eyes. When Borges finally contemplates the aleph, his own description cannot therefore be anything more than an overwhelming jumble of unordered detail rather than the longed-for synthesis. Covering more than two pages of text in the original edition, the narrator's description concludes with the following note of near-hysteria:

. . . vi el Aleph, desde todos los puntos, vi en el Aleph la tierra, y en la tierra otra vez el Aleph y en el Aleph la tierra, vi mi cara y mis vísceras, vi tu cara, y sentí vértigo y lloré, porque mis ojos habían visto ese objeto secreto y conjetural, cuyo nombre usurpan los hombres, pero que ningún hombre ha mirado: el inconcebible universo.

Sentí infinita veneración, infinita lástima (p. 626; the antecedent of *tú* is not given, although it may be Beatriz Viterbo).

At issue is not the aleph itself nor, on the level of the narrated action, is it the probable deception on Argentino's part. (Therefore, we have here the *vengeanza* whereby the narrator refuses to cooperate in saving the house from demolition and his assertion that the aleph is false at the end of the text.) Rather, of note from the point of view of *écriture* is the flotsam and jetsam of detail. A plethora of detail is characteristic of Argentino's poem, and it is characteristic of the narrator's evocation of Beatriz and his description of the aleph and the vision it brought him. Moreover, the inevitable detail of the former aspects, necessarily embedded in the text that sets out to

recall them, is complemented by the abundance of detail on the level of the text itself. That is, Borges as narrator-character embeds the detail of narrated action within the context of a description that is in itself excessively detailed (the best example of this is the ironic pedantry of the *Posdata del primero de marzo de 1943* [pp. 626–28]). The result is a form of extensive, if not infinite, regression, where the abundance of details figuratively barricades any access to a synthetic notion of what is going on. We are confronted with a morass of details that is a faithful image of the aleph; as such, we are effectively denied access to a totalizing comprehension of what is going on. To extract any sort of meaning from the text itself it is necessary to block out a major share of the details. Alternately, we can extract some vague idea of the literary feud between the two men, some idea of Beatriz and her relationship to the two, some idea of the concept of the aleph and its presence in world literature. What we are hard put to grasp is an ultimate interpretation that integrates these disparate elements and their burden of detail into a unifying meaning. It is in this sense that the aleph, rather than being a symbol for the “meaning” of text, is the organizing motif for an *écriture* that structures the very way in which we are expected to experience the text.

#### IV

Where “El aleph” points, in the end, to the impossibility of literature as organized and privileged knowledge, “Guayaquil”—for this reader the best of the eleven stories in *El informe de Brodie*—is structured in terms of the principle of ambiguity.

In linguistics, which has defined the concept systematically, ambiguity refers to the circumstance whereby a given linguistic utterance represents more than one abstract syntactic-semantic structure. An utterance is ambiguous if it has several discrete meanings, each of which is recoverable (that is, identifiable) once we relate concrete utterance with abstract syntax-semantics. If the discrete meanings are not recoverable, the sentence is vague rather than ambiguous. In Borges’s *écriture*, reality, experience, and event are all essentially ambiguous to the extent that they have a multiplicity of meanings, which may be both complementary and contradictory. Hence, stories like “La muerte y la brújula” or “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” have no stable one-to-one relationship between meaning and its manifestation. In the case of the former story, the false meaning, which is the product of the rational detective’s intellectual exercises, demands that reality conform to it; such a conformity becomes, in turn, the trap that assassinates the smug detective. Since every phenomenon has multiple meanings that do not fall in order of priorities, their importance and identification as meanings



are denied.

As a result, the basic structure of "Guayaquil" is that of a text that describes the mystery of a mystery. On the level of narrated action, the story concerns a contest between two historians to examine and report a new document regarding the mysterious encounter between Bolívar and San Martín that led to the latter's abdication as leader of the revolutionary forces in the Andean area. On the level of text, the description fails to explain the mystery of why the native historian (once again, Borges as narrator-character) yields to the foreign historian (whom the narrator describes in the most disdainful of terms as a seedy Jew). Narrated action and text parallel each other: a mysterious encounter that evokes a past mysterious encounter, remote in time and place; and a text that fails, as the foreign historian prophesies will also be the case with the newly discovered document, to explain the fundamental mystery of the encounter. It should be noted that the document in question, like the text itself, deals with the details of the encounter. However, the document was written by Bolívar, the victor in that remote contest of personalities, while the text "Guayaquil" is narrated ("written") from the viewpoint of the vanquished Borges. On all these levels and in all these details, the *écriture* of the text permits the representation of the external configurations of event, such as language and, in the case of the narrator, unspoken thought. But significantly, what is denied is what must be the fundamental imperative for a literary text: the revelation, the disambiguation, of meaning.

This basic *écriture* of the story—the text that will provide the details of event and circumstance but not its essential meaning—is given its most direct form in the use of the bewildered first-person narrator.<sup>16</sup> As in "El aleph," there is a plethora of details and a paucity of meanings, and there is a first-person narrator who accumulates details but who is incapable of finding in them a satisfactory meaning. This is immediately clear from the opening of the text:

No veré la cumbre del Higuerota duplicarse en las aguas del Golfo Plácido, no iré al Estado Occidental, no descifraré en esa biblioteca que desde Buenos Aires imagino de tantos modos y que tiene sin duda su forma exacta y sus crecientes sombras, la letra de Bolívar.

Releo el párrafo anterior para redactar el siguiente y me sorprende su manera que a un tiempo es malencólica y pomposa. Acaso no se puede hablar de aquella república del

16. Concerning the narrative voices of the stories in *El informe de Brodie*, see Owen L. Kellerman, "Borges y *El informe de Brodie*: juego de voces," *Revista iberoamericana* No. 81 (1972):663-70. The story "Guayaquil" is studied by Lanin A. Gyurko, "Rivalry and the Double in Borges' 'Guayaquil,'" *Romance Notes* 15:i (1974):1-10.



Caribe sin reflejar, siquiera de lejos, el estilo monumental de su historiador más famoso, el capitán Korzeniovski, pero en mi caso hay otra razón. El íntimo propósito de infundir un tono patético a un episodio un tanto penoso y más bien baladí me dictó el párrafo inicial. Referiré con toda probidad lo que sucedió; esto me ayudará tal vez a entenderlo. Además, confesar un hecho es dejar de ser el actor para ser un testigo, para ser alguien que lo mira y lo narra y ya no lo ejecutó. (p. 1062)

Of course, the narration in retrospect of the event does not lead the narrator to the comprehension that he seeks. Indeed, the act of narration leads to a denial of writing. Such a detail, on the level of narrated action, is the result of having been deprived by the foreign historian of the opportunity to examine the Bolívar letter and to prepare a historical essay on it. But on the level of the text, the denial is equally the result of having failed with his own document concerning the conflict with the foreign historian over the original historical document. The historian's prophecy that Bolívar's letter will turn out to be, if not inauthentic, at least a useless falsification of the meeting between the two independence leaders is also implicitly a characterization of Borges's own text concerning the nature of the meeting between the two historians. The closing words of the text emphasize the homology between the two documents and the two encounters, and the sense of futility of the text and its consignment to the fire serve as a double reinforcement of the silence of the mystery of meaning:

Releo estas desordenadas páginas, que no tardaré en entregar al fuego. La entrevista había sido corta.

Presiento que ya no escribiré más. *Mon siècle est fait.* (p. 1067)

The role of the first-person narrator is more subtle than has been indicated. If there is a separation of levels between narrated action and text, between historical document and text, between a previous encounter and a document concerning that encounter, and a recent encounter that repeats its historical antecedent in more than one detail (for example, the description of Zimmerman, the foreign historian, recalls the details of the standard portrait of Bolívar [pp. 1063–64]), there is also a separation of levels for the narrative voice. On the level of the text as we have characterized it, the narrative voice embodies the underlying *écriture* concerning the frustrating inaccessibility of meaning. But on the level of narrated action—the action that allows the text to reflect upon the action itself and that embodies in its structure the nature of the action (mystery, bewilderment, and silence)—the narrator confesses to a deliberate irony and falsification of the encounter. Irony is the reward of the individual who

possesses the true meaning of an event and who underlines the ignorance or the partial knowledge of the other participants in it. The narrator mocks Zimerman's imperfect Spanish, his ludicrous dress and manners (the latter a parody of the servile Jew), and his frequent confusion concerning basic details: ("—¡Mi primer error, que no será el último! Yo me nutro de textos y me trabuco; en usted vive el interesante pasado" [p. 1064]. "—En materia bolivariana (perdón, sanmartiniana) su posición de usted, querido maestro, es harto conocida" [p. 1065]). The narrator's irony pretends to discredit Zimerman in the former's own eyes and to underscore the pathos of his having been defeated by this clearly inferior outsider. But irony too is the direct result of the use of an unreliable first-person narrator. Borges the author establishes an ironic distance between his knowledge of the pathetic self-pity of Borges the narrator and his clearly limited, self-knowledge. On both levels, irony serves to give form to the *écriture* of "epistemological" mystery and bewilderment and of textual inadequacy.

Of course, it is the ultimate realization of the inadequacy of his own knowledge that forces the narrator to confess to a deliberate pathos. He recognizes that he is, in turn, the victim of Zimerman's own irony ("Sospecho que el error fue deliberado" [p. 1064]), and that he is necessarily engaged in a falsification through the act of writing that he hoped would suffice as an explanation: "Lo sucesivo del lenguaje indebidamente exagera los hechos que indicamos, ya que cada palabra abarca un lugar en la página y un instante en la mente del lector . . ." (p. 1064).

The sum total of the characteristics of "Guayaquil" that have been described stresses a self-defeating text. Trivia abounds but meaningful substance is absent. There is an irony that as the pretense of knowledge is ironized, there is a homology between personal and historical event in which both are cloaked in the same mystery of significance, thus becoming bewildering events. Finally, the narrator's official version (which in turn is homologous with the "official" version of Bolívar contained in the pivotal document) is less of an interpretation of meaning than it is a self-justification and a record of defeat. All of these factors that make up the overall configuration of the text, and in terms of which the specific thematic and stylistic features must be understood, are in turn the direct consequence of the underlying *écriture* of "Guayaquil." This *écriture* is unquestionably the result of Borges's conception of narrative art. Part of the conversation between Borges the narrator-participant and Zimerman provides one excellent characterization of such a conception, as well as reminding us once again of the homology between the historical document and the literary text at hand, be-

tween *corresponsal* = *lector* and Bolívar = *escritor-narrador*:

—Que sean de puño y letra de Bolívar—me contestó—no significa que toda la verdad esté en ellas. Bolívar puede haber querido engañar a su *corresponsal* o, simplemente, puede haberse engañado. Usted, un historiador, un meditativo, sabe mejor que yo que el misterio está en nosotros mismos, no en las palabras.

Esas generalidades pomposas me fastidiaron y observé secamente que dentro del enigma que nos rodea, la entrevista de Guayaquil, en la que el general San Martín renunció a la mera ambición y dejó el destino de América en manos de Bolívar, es también un enigma que puede merecer el estudio.

Zimmerman respondió:

—Las explicaciones son tantas. . . . (p. 1066)

"*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*" begins by referring to a conversation between Borges and Bioy Casares regarding first-person narrators who may deceive rather than serve as reliable participant-reporters. But "*La escritura del Dios*" concerns the attempt to arrive at interpretive meaning, a meaning that we are told is attained but that the narrator refuses to share with the reader, thereby vitiating the rationale of his text. Such a denial simply masks the fact that a meaning has not been attained, or that it cannot be expressed in human and linguistic terms, which is the same as not having achieved it. Clearly, there is a continuity between these stories, where one moves from the inaccessibility of meaning, to the multiplicity of meaning, to the attendant inability to communicate meaning, to the subsequent denial of meaning. Although such a continuity may not constitute the one, overwhelming *écriture* in Borges's fictions, it is undeniably a ubiquitous principle for a wide variety of texts that extend from *Ficciones* to his most recent stories.

## V

To study all of Borges's fictions comprehensively would result either in a superficial survey of the dozens of titles he has published or in a compendium that would unconsciously challenge the extensive pedantry of sections of "*El inmortal*," "*El aleph*," and "*Pierre Menard*." It is questionable whether any criticism can successfully portray the entire corpus of an author's work within a single framework. The premise of this study is that criticism can only predispose us toward an appropriate and adequate reading of an author's writings, and that a satisfactory description of a limited number of works is more valuable than brief references to many works or to a total analysis that overwhelms the works themselves. The concept of *écriture* implies a concept of *lecture*, and, as Jitrik has

attempted to demonstrate, it also implies a concept of *trabajo crítico* (a term that he prefers to *crítica* because of the latter's suggestion of judgment and interpretation). In any event, there is the unmistakable understanding among contemporary practitioners of literary commentary that the one legitimate goal of criticism is to identify the rules, the principles, the premises that make literature possible. Rather than provide the reader with facile, tranquilizing interpretations of a literature that is both difficult and disturbing, the critic, in the final analysis, can only pretend to have elaborated partially on Borges's own words in the "Prólogo" to *El informe de Brodie*. They must be read as a summary characterization of his *écriture* as well as of the fundamental enigma of the very texts themselves:

*He intentado, no sé con qué fortuna, la redacción de cuentos directos. No me atrevo a afirmar que son sencillos; no hay en la tierra una sola página, una sola palabra, que lo sea, ya que todas postulan el universo, cuyo más notorio atributo es la complejidad. Sólo quiero aclarar que no soy, no he sido jamás, lo que antes se llamaba un fabulista o un predicador de parábolas y ahora un escritor comprometido. No aspiro a ser Esopo. Mis cuentos, como los de las Mil y Una Noches, quieren distraer o conmover y no persuadir. (p. 1021)*

## Chapter III.

# Rulfo's "Luvina" and Structuring Figures of Diction

### I

If one accepts Roland Barthes's and Jacques Derrida's concept of *écriture*, then we can arrive at a number of immediate consequences for the study of literature:

1. Literature is, above all else, written texts that do not have the transparency of spoken language vis-à-vis the "world/reality of reference." Moreover, written language, insofar as literature is concerned, is not simply a transcription of spoken language. Literary texts are uniquely self-conscious written artifacts whose "rhetoric" corresponds to highly structured organizing principles.

2. The proper study of literature is not interpretation, at least wherever this term refers to "getting at" a reductionist, translanguistic meaning that lies beyond the language structures themselves. Meaning, if it does exist at all, is not independent of linguistic structures, which cannot—at least in literature—be seen as arbitrary symbolizations of an absolutely accessible meaning. Furthermore, meaning must not be seen as a static object to be attained through the dissolution of linguistic-literary structures. Rather, meaning is a dynamic process, and the legitimate analysis of a literary text, instead of substituting for that text an independent, interpreted meaning, involves the study of the activities of meaning that occur within a text. Literary texts are ambiguous, polysemous, and circumscribed by the profoundly frustrating limitations of human communication. Thus, the structure of a literary text constitutes an active network of meaningful elements, rather than a veil that can be safely rended: rending the veil destroys meaning itself.

3. The elements of a literary text—form, style, rhetoric, themes, point of view, techniques, and so on—must be seen as a dialectic whole.<sup>1</sup> This whole, in turn, is animated by (or is the textual realization of) underlying principles that define its boundaries and limita-

1. Gérard Genette, *Figures*, see particularly volume 3. Genette, within a structuralist perspective, is mainly concerned with the interplay between structure and rhetoric in the novel.

tions as a literary text and that set in motion the processes of meaning that give the text its linguistic richness and engage our interest in experiencing it as literature. Those principles, abstract in nature but totalizing in the way that they account for the overall configuration of a text, are what we call *écriture*.

4. *Écriture* can be approached in one sense as the attempt to identify for a literary text a limited number of motivating, "generating," principles that can be used as points of reference in describing the dialectic wholeness of that text.

## II

"Luvina," one of the principal stories—the most commented and anthologized—of *El llano en llamas* is typical of Rulfo's fiction. It entails the strange, almost eerie imprecision of place and time; the combination of an omniscient narrator with a quoted narrator who frequently remains unidentified and whose words are often introduced without any clear transition from those of the third-person narrator; the depiction of a circumstance and events (often skeletal) that remain mysterious in the absence of a clear "explanation" on the part of the narrator; the sense that somehow the story involves a "trap" for the reader to the extent that there is a major feature that he must figure out for himself if he is not to remain completely confused.

Whether or not these features constitute the much vaunted "magical realism" of the *nueva narrativa* is somewhat of a moot point. What they do constitute is a well-defined texture for the stories in which, despite the words and sentences of the text, the reader is permitted only a tenuous grasp of what is being told to him. That is, Rulfo's stories maximize the inherent ambiguities of language and of discourse (here, literary texts). Or to put it differently, the factual imprecisions and the lack of "adequate" explanations and interpretations enhance a conception of literature as the interplay of signs, while denying them the opportunity to congeal into the fixed, transparent orders of texts conceived of as messages, interpretations, and documents. Rulfo's literature reminds us so much of the traditional, hackneyed *costumbrista* literature that has remained so common in a self-consciously Mexican literature. His works include such elements as the language of the people that could almost serve the purposes of dialect studies, the evocation of specific Mexican landscapes, the narrative actions that seem to be taken from historical and sociological casebooks, thus making Rulfo's fiction distinctively and unmistakably Mexican. But despite the frequent critical emphasis on this identification, it remains a superficial one, for these thematic and stylistic constants are conjugated in narrative

structures that separate them dramatically from pseudo-documentary *costumbrista* prose, with its stress on an "interpretation" of *el ser mexicano*, and turn them into the material elements of an interplay of ambiguous meaning. To this extent, the most viable approach to Rulfo's fiction must stress the productive interplay of variable meaning, rather than the reductionist interpretations that substitute for the richness of the literary text as anemic, nonliterary message.

In "Luvina," the richness of the literary text derives from two principles of *écriture* that serve as the underlying, generative basis for the story. Identification of these principles enables us to understand the text's organization and to justify individual compositional details. These two principles are (1) the juxtaposition of alternate "versions" of circumstance and event via transformations of the rhetorical formula "*no A, sino B*" and the related grammatical structure *como si fuera*, and (2) the illusion of communication through conversational dialogue.

The formula of contradiction, "*no A, sino B*," is a venerable staple of literary rhetoric and is recognized to have enjoyed particular prominence in Renaissance poetry.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is an integral part of the most colloquial of discourse, and I found it useful in characterizing *écriture* in both sections 1 and 2 at the beginning of this chapter. The following examples are some of the occurrences of the formula to be found in "Luvina."

1. Dicen los de Luvina que de aquellas barrancas suben los sueños; pero yo lo único que vi subir fue el viento. . . . (p. 94)<sup>3</sup>
2. Dicen que porque arrastra arena de volcán; pero lo cierto es que es un aire negro. (pp. 94-95)
3. . . . Dicen los de allí que cuando llena la luna, ven de bulto la figura del viento recorriendo las calles de Luvina, llevando a rastras una cobija negra; pero yo siempre lo que

2. Elsewhere I have studied its use as a structuring principle in a major Renaissance poem; see my article "Formulaic Structure in Garcilaso's 'A la flor de Gnido,'" *Language and Style* 4 (1971):144-52.

3. All quotes are from the 7a edition of *El llano en llamas* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), where the story appears on pp. 94-101. All unbracketed ellipses in the quotes are Rulfo's. Lida Aronne Amestoy examines the text in "México. Juan Rulfo: *Luvina*," in her *América en la encrucijada de mito y razón* (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1976), pp. 138-44. Her interest in the monograph is in how myth is given shape in the contemporary Latin-American short story, and the following is her key observation concerning "Luvina": "El cuento entraña una magnífica objetivación de las profundas heridas del alma latinoamericana" (p. 142). She recognizes the use of contrasts in the story but does not focus on them from any point of view other than the thematic.

- llegué a ver, cuando había luna en Luvina, fue la imagen del desconsuelo . . . siempre. (p. 97)
4. Es la costumbre. Allí le dicen la ley, pero es lo mismo. Los hijos se pasan la vida trabajando para los padres como ellos trabajaron para los suyos y como quién sabe cuántos atrás de ellos cumplieron con su ley . . . (p. 102)
  5. San Juan Luvina. Me sonaba a nombre de cielo aquel nombre. Pero aquello es el purgatorio. (p. 104)

The last example is in a certain sense a synthesis of the others; it comes less than half a page before the conclusion of the text. We see that two "versions" of Luvina are being juxtaposed (A versus B). One is a false image of the town that the unidentified speaker—a drunk who is apparently addressing a man younger than himself in a small bar, the latter on his way to Luvina to assume the same position as schoolteacher that the older man had once held—rejects in favor of an image based on his own bitter, disillusioning experience. The false image consists of various claims made by the natives of Luvina (examples 1, 2, 3, and 4) and an idealization that is incorrect (example 5).

In terms of the speaker as he addresses his silent interlocutor, the image of Luvina that he acquired through suffering and despair—the loss of his illusions as a young schoolteacher, the presumed loss of his family, the physical and spiritual privations of life in Luvina—is more accurate than the image that is rejected. Regarding the meanings brought into play, Rulfo structures the drunken and broken man's anti-eulogy of Luvina around two possible images, one false and one authentic in terms of direct, human experience.

A structuring on the basis of the "*no A, sino B*" (for example, "*no lo que ellos dicen, sino lo que yo vi/supe/sentí*") establishes a larger network of meaning than if the man were simply to describe his own image of Luvina without reference to any other one. Moreover, the implied dialogue of the story suggests a juxtaposition of innocence versus experience, of youth versus maturity, of ideals versus cynicism. The man ostensibly addresses himself to a younger man who is setting out to repeat the experience of the former. The implication is that he possesses or will soon possess only the false image, but that in time he will reject the false impression and will adopt the accurate if despairful one: " 'Usted ha de pensar que le estoy dando vueltas a una misma idea. Y así es, sí señor . . . Estar sentado en el umbral de la puerta, mirando la salida y la puesta del sol, subiendo y bajando la cabeza, hasta que acaban aflojándose los resortes y entonces todo se queda quieto, sin tiempo, como si se viviera siempre en la eternidad. Eso hacen allí los viejos' " (p. 101).



### III

The second rhetorical formula that serves as a principle of *écriture* in "Luvina," functioning in conjunction with the one just described, is the syntactic construction *como si fuera*. There must be at least a dozen examples of this formula in the eleven pages of the text:

1. Ya lo verá usted. Se planta en Luvina [el viento] prendiéndose de las cosas como si las mordiera. (p. 95)
2. Y sobran días en que [el viento] se lleva el techo de las casas como si se llevara un sombrero de petate, . . . (p. 95; this example follows the first one immediately)
3. Ud. verá eso: aquellos cerros apagados como si estuvieran muertos y (p. 95)
4. a Luvina en el más alto, coronándolo con su blanco caserío como si fuera una corona de muerto . . . (p. 95; this and the preceding example form a single sentence)
5. Y se fue [el arriero], dejándose caer por la cuesta de la Piedra Cruda, espoleando sus caballos como si se alejara de algún lugar endemoniado. (p. 98)
6. Pero hubo un momento en esa madrugada en que todo se quedó tranquilo, como si el cielo se hubiera juntado con la tierra, aplastando los ruidos con su peso . . . (p. 100)

This formula too expresses a contrast or juxtaposition, although it is not as explicit as in the case of "no A, sino B." In the latter, both possibilities are directly stated. However, in the case of *como si fuera* the contrast is between a literal or normal meaning, implied by the overall semantics of the utterance, and an alternative meaning introduced by *como si*. What is more, although the alternative meaning is meant to replace the original one as somehow more accurate or complete, it is introduced by a syntactic construction that overtly identifies it as hypothetical, contrary-to-fact or potential. If there is a contradiction, it is between a negated fact and an affirmed contrary-to-fact. Thus, in example 3, we "know" that the *cerros* are not dead, but by saying that it is as if they were does, in fact, affirm that such a hypothetical fact has a greater weight as a phenomenological reality: the reality of the mind's eye of the speaker is more important than the literal reality that others might see.

In example 1, the wind, rather than just being a natural circumstance, is seen as a wild beast. One should note that several of the examples are preceded by the phrase that stresses what the young interlocutor will see: the higher perception that will replace obvious reality. To this extent, the *como si fuera* figure is an adjunct of the "no A, sino B" formula. Although they may operate differently, they function homologously: *no A, sino B* / *no es como A, sino es como si fuera B* (the brackets enclose the segment of the formula that

does not appear explicitly but is understood by the normal semantics of the context). Once again, we are obliged to confront an interplay of multiple meanings, to the extent that the ones that are promoted, so to speak, are metaphoric and highly personal. Instead of reality, we witness the overpowering and anguished memory of an individual for whom experience has transformed Luvina, and all that is associated with it, into a destructive hallucination of which drunkenness is the principal indicator:

—Me parece que Ud. me preguntó cuántos años estuve en Luvina, ¿verdad . . . ? La verdad es que no lo sé. Perdí la noción del tiempo, desde que las fiebres me lo enrevesaron; pero debió haber sido una eternidad . . . Y es que allá el tiempo es muy largo. Nadie lleva la cuenta de las horas ni a nadie le preocupa cómo van amontonándose los años. Los días comienzan y se acaban. Luego viene la noche. Solamente el día y la noche hasta el día de la muerte, que para ellos es una esperanza. (p. 101)

#### IV

The second structuring principle of *écriture* in "Luvina" is the illusion of dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Not all dialogue is necessarily communicative. Some dialogue is phatic and serves more to promote human solidarity than to convey messages. But all dialogue is, by definition, an act involving the interplay of speaker(s) and hearer(s), even when the latter do not become speakers. In Rulfo's story, there is the illusion of dialogue: a man, drunk and presumably older, interacts with a young man who is about to go to Luvina to assume the duties of a schoolteacher, just as the former had done years before. The older man tells the younger one about Luvina and the disastrous effect it has had on his life. Thus, his words communicate information, advice, and, above all, a warning that prophesies a repetition of frustration and despair: "Usted lo verá ahora que vaya" (p. 103, along with similar phrases elsewhere). The following quotations indicate that a dialogue is taking place:

1. —Ya mirará usted ese viento que sopla sobre Luvina. (p. 94)
2. El hombre aquel que hablaba se quedó callado un rato mirando hacia afuera.  
Hasta ellos llegaban el sonido del río pasando . . . (p. 95)
3. Luego, dirigiéndose otra vez a la mesa, se sentó y dijo:  
—Pues sí, como le estaba diciendo. (p. 96)
4. Me parece recordar el principio. Me pongo en su lugar y pienso . . . Mire usted, cuando yo llegué por primera vez a Luvina

4. Concerning the rhetoric of dialogue in Rulfo's stories, see Pilar Martínez, "Técnica del 'testigo oyente' en los monólogos de Rulfo," *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana* Nos. 2-3 (1973-1974):555-68.

- na . . . ¿Pero me permite antes que me tome su cerveza? Veo que usted no le hace caso. Y a mí me sirve mucho. Me alivia. (pp. 97-98)
5. " . . . Pero mire las maromas que da el mundo. Usted va para allá ahora, dentro de pocas horas. Tal vez ya se cumplieron quince años que me dijeron a mí lo mismo: 'Usted va a ir a San Juan Luvina'. (p. 103)
6. "Pues sí, como le estaba diciendo. . . ." Pero no dijo nada. Se quedó mirando un punto fijo sobre la mesa [ . . . ]. El hombre que miraba a los comejones se recostó sobre la mesa y se quedó dormido. (p. 104; these are the closing words of the text.)

Although the text is interspersed with information provided by an omniscient narrator (for example, the closing words just cited), there is no reason to believe that he is the drunk's interlocutor. Rather, the *usted* of the old man remains unidentified and unspeaking. As a consequence, there is every reason to believe that he does not exist, that the old man is speaking not to a second party but to himself as a young man about to set out for Luvina. Rather than implying necessarily a cycle of human experience, whereby the young follow in the footsteps of the old and are forewarned of their impending loss of innocence and the affliction of drunken despair, the dialogue points to the Doppelgängerei of memory that allows us to juxtapose one level of experience and consciousness with another. Like the A and B of the formulas discussed previously, these two levels are set against one another, only for the former to be rejected for its innocence and the latter accepted with bitter—and drunken—resignation. Example 4 is perhaps the first real indication that the man is speaking to himself, and the suspicion is only confirmed by example 5, where the old man clearly sees the other as himself a decade and a half ago.<sup>5</sup>

Thus although there is no real dialogue, there is communication: the communication of one man's soul with itself in the attempt to sort out and to alleviate the overpowering burden of memory. In one sense, the interplay of meanings in "Luvina" is denied any communicational function: the speaker's words fall on no ears anxious for the information and wisdom they pretend to convey. But as the characterization of a soul so confused and anguished by the experience implicit in the words the old man speaks, his is indeed a

5. The identification of the nature of the old man's words is not original. Carlos Blanco Aguinaga has already observed that "el diálogo es ya, como siempre en Rulfo, monólogo ensimismado." See his "Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo," *Revista mexicana de literatura* 1:1 (1955):59-86. My description, rather than simply interpretive, concerns the structuring principles of the narrative as verbal texture.

communication in which the self attempts to label and to interpret what it has experienced. The interplay of meanings, enhanced by an *écriture* based on juxtaposition and opposition, underlines the dreadful profundity of that experience: "En esa época tenía yo mis fuerzas. Estaba cargado de ideas . . . Usted sabe que a todos nosotros nos infunden ideas. Y uno va con esa plasta encima para plasmarla en todas partes. Pero en Luvina no cuajó eso. Hice el experimento y se deshizo . . ." (p. 103).

## V

An interpretation of "Luvina"—the reductionist extraction of an inevitable nonliterary meaning—might stress the town as a figure of the mythic Hades from which the Orphic speaker returns to tell his tale of despair. The interpretation might stress the presence of a human cycle of youthful optimism and mature disillusionment, embodied in the narrator and to be reembodied in his shadowy interlocutor (or embodied in the two stages of the one self that speaks). It might emphasize the social implications of the story: the hundreds of Mexican hamlets forgotten by the self-congratulatory and self-perpetuating institutionalized "revolutionary" party, and the bitterness of being a schoolteacher, "one who forms the young," in such an environment. It might also stress the existential and psychoanalytic implications of the speaker as an example of *Doppelgänger*. Undoubtedly, there are many interpretations for "Luvina," and attaching meaning(s) to a literary work is concomitant with the act of reading.<sup>6</sup> However, an analysis of the *écriture* of "Luvina" as it is reflected in a few strategic examples of textual rhetoric provides not for its interpretation but a characterization of the rules, the principles of the text that makes a sense of meaning possible and that explains the function of the concrete elements of the text itself. The latter are elements that constitute our most immediate experience in the reading of literature and the only access we have to whatever we believe the text means to us.

6. See, for example, Graciela B. Coulson, "Observación sobre la visión del mundo en los cuentos de Juan Rulfo: a propósito de *Talpa* y *No oyes ladrar los perros*," *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* 1:2 (1971):159–66. Some of the most questionable interpretive comments on "Luvina" are to be found in Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá, *El arte de Juan Rulfo: historias de vivos y difuntos* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Departamento de Literatura, 1965), pp. 45–60; and see, in particular, his "Digresión," pp. 50–51.

## Chapter IV.

# García Márquez and the *Écriture* of Complicity: "La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar"

### I

García Márquez's enormous popularity has not as of yet become a controversial issue among critics. These critics, however, can be categorized into two groups: the ones who attribute García Márquez's success in both his novels and short stories to his superior manipulation of the structures of the *nueva narrativa* (structures that essentially demand an experienced reader),<sup>1</sup> and the ones who see the sales of García Márquez's works as directly proportional to his clever revival of some of the hoariest tricks of the old-time storyteller—what in American culture has been called the teller of tall tales.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, there is a world of difference between García Márquez's essentially "accessible" stories and those of Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, or Juan Carlos Onetti, where the inexperienced reader is often unaware of what is happening in the narrative. But, by the same token, novels like *Cien años de soledad* or stories like those of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, despite all their surface "charm" and their apparent appeal to the tradition of the skillful raconteur, do involve complex literary structures that permit a profound appreciation of their narrative art to only a reader familiar with the features of the new novel. For example, although García Márquez's stories on "local" Latin-American themes may remind one superficially of the *costumbristic* tradition best exemplified by the Colombian Carrasquilla or the Argentine Payró, features of *Cien años de soledad* like the motif of the undeciphered manuscript are in the best tradition of the contemporary Latin-American "novelist's novel."

Nevertheless and in spite of the questions concerning García

1. Josefina Ludmer, *Cien años de soledad: una interpretación* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1972).

2. Ricardo Gullón, *García Márquez o el olvidado arte de contar* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1970).

Márquez's fiction that the preceding preoccupations imply, there is in reality very little actual criticism of what a proper *lecture* of his fiction should be. That is, given the concrete features of his narratives, what is the legitimate process of decipherment that they demand? The principles of a proper lecture are, it has been maintained, inherent in the textual principles of a work of literature, and lecture is the reader's proper perception of the text's *écriture*. In other words, we need to analyze the relationship of the reader to a narrative that the text implicitly calls for on the basis of its *écriture*. Here, I will discuss one of García Márquez's short stories that identifies this particular relationship by characterizing it as an "*écriture* of complicity."

## II

The nature of the author-reader relationship in "La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar"<sup>3</sup> is immediately evident from the title of the story: the use of the adjective *prodigiosa* establishes a confidential relationship between author and reader that the character named does not enter into.<sup>4</sup> This is so because, in the first place, *prodigiosa* is not likely to figure in the lexicon of a provincial Colombian artisan, at least not with reference to a noun such as *tarde* (although it may occur with reference to human nouns within certain contexts). In this sense, a linguistic token is used to refer to an individual that that individual would not himself be likely to use. As we shall see, this sort of particularizing language is characteristic of the text on a larger level. In the second place, *prodigiosa* is used ironically, or at least in a way that does not quite fit the circumstances and events described. Baltazar's afternoon is prodigious in what he has accomplished artistically and the nobility with which he handles himself in the confrontation with the town's unpleasant big shot: Montiel's son asks Baltazar to build a bird cage, and Baltazar builds an elaborate one that is truly the work of a master carpenter; the town doctor offers to buy it at a handsome price, but Baltazar tells him that he promised it to Montiel's son; however, when Baltazar takes it to Montiel's house, the father, to punish his son (whom he obviously considers spoiled and effete), refuses to honor the commitment; Baltazar magnanimously gives the boy the bird cage, despite the

3. García Márquez, "La prodigiosa tarde del Baltazar," in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, 6th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1969), pp. 63-74.

4. The only other intrinsic study on this story is Rosa Boldori de Baldussi, "Estructura y estilo en 'La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar,'" *Revista de literaturas hispánicas* No. 10 (1970):18-32. Boldori's study is essentially a line-by-line explication of the text, with very little in the way of synthetic structuralist commentary.

father's enraged protestations and assurances that he will not pay the man; to save face, Baltazar pretends to his friends that he has been paid magnificently and treats them all to a ruinous night on the town.

Thus, in the final analysis, Baltazar's prodigious talent has been "wasted" in that (1) he has worked so hard for no material return, so much needed by him and his hard-pressed wife (he ignores his regular work to devote himself completely to the *furor poeticus* that inspires his creation of the bird cage); (2) the bird cage becomes a symbol of his humiliation before Montiel's family: his nobility in giving the bird cage away is considerably diminished by the narrator's references to the boy's ingratitude and the fact that, after all, he has used Baltazar in the same way that his bullying father would; (3) the "party" for his friends with his presumed profit forces him to lose his watch and to have his shoes stolen as he lies on the street in a drunken stupor. The closing words of the text both underline the disaster that his work of art has brought him and stress the complicity that the narrator demands of the reader in viewing the story not from the barely self-conscious perspective of the character, but from the ironically superior one of that narrator:

Había gastado tanto, que tuvo que dejar el reloj como garantía, con el compromiso de pagar al día siguiente. Un momento después, desparrado por la calle, se dio cuenta de que le estaban quitando los zapatos, pero no quiso abandonar el sueño más feliz de su vida. Las mujeres que pasaron para la misa de cinco no se atrevieron a mirarlo, creyendo que estaba muerto. (p. 74)

Baltazar's degradation could not be more complete. To put it in the melodramatic terms that the story seems to call for, it is all the result of his misguided artistic endeavors. Note that the text establishes three levels of perspective, only the latter one of which is that of the author and the reader-accomplice: (1) the "documentary level" of what happens in terms of undisputed fact—this would best be characterized as the perspective of Baltazar's wife; (2) the level of Baltazar's fantasy; and (3) the level of narrator's organization of the representation of circumstances and events and of the texture of his reporting. On the first level, Ursula, who like the eponymic matriarch of *Cien años de soledad*, sees the idealistic fantasies of her menfolk in terms of bedrock practicality. The second level, that of Baltazar's fantasy, includes the "sueño más feliz de su vida," induced perhaps by a combination of satisfaction over his artistic creation, the nobility of his act in the face of Montiel's meanness, pride over what the town believes to have been his success in getting money out of Montiel for an extravagant bird cage, and the drunken revery that,

for the first time in his life, he indulges in. On the third level, Baltazar is depicted as a fool (albeit a noble and honest one) whose artistic pretensions lead him not to acclaim and economic success, but to the debauchery of his revery, placed in the same paragraph in effective counterpoint with his wife's thoughts: "Alguien le dijo que su marido estaba en el salón de billar, loco de felicidad, brindando cerveza a todo el mundo, pero no lo creyó porque Baltazar no se había emborrachado jamás" (p. 74).

In sum, the narrative *écriture* of the story leaves no room for ambiguity. There is a clear and effective attempt on the part of the narrator to establish several levels of perspective for the events described in the story and to weigh one of them—the one that is assignable to the narrative voice—as superior in the extent of what it is able to report and as ironic because of the counterpoint that it establishes between the others and its own, which supersedes them, as it were. Returning to the adjective *prodigiosa*, while the adjective, were they to use it, may fit both Ursula's view of the bird cage (she is proud of it and suggests shrewdly to Baltazar how to sell it) and Baltazar's own humble pride, it is used ironically by the narrator (and the title of a text may be considered the narrator's keynote) to stress the miserable level of frustrated aspirations that Baltazar more properly belongs to. (For example, Baltazar dreams of making a fortune in fantastic bird cages, only to be humiliated by Montiel's refusal to honor the commission his son gave the man.) This is nowhere more brought out than when Baltazar faces his friends after being rebuffed by Montiel. Whatever pride he had in his work of art in his magnanimity toward Pepe Montiel is dispelled by the manner in which he is unconsciously forced to accept pride for a lie, for his friends are more impressed by the sum he is supposed to have received from Montiel than by what he is personally proud of:

En el salón de billar recibieron a Baltazar con una ovación. Hasta ese momento, pensaba que había hecho una jaula mejor que las otras, que había tenido que regalársela al hijo de José Montiel para que no siguiera llorando, y que ninguna de esas cosas tenía nada de particular. Pero luego se dio cuenta de que todo eso tenía una cierta importancia para muchas personas, y se sintió un poco excitado.

—De manera que te dieron cincuenta pesos por la jaula.

—Sesenta—dijo Baltazar.

—Hay que hacer una raya en el cielo—dijo alguien—. Eres el único que ha logrado sacarle ese montón de plata a don Chepe Montiel. Esto hay que celebrarlo.

Le ofrecieron una cerveza, y Baltazar correspondió con una tanda para todos. Como era la primera vez que bebía, al



anochecer estaba completamente borracho, y hablaba de un fabuloso proyecto de mil jaulas de a sesenta pesos, y después de un millón de jaulas hasta completar sesenta millones de poses. (p. 73)

### III

Turning to the specific question of how the *écriture* of complicity is actually inscribed in the story's narrative texture, the preceding passages exemplify the principal linguistic marker of the narrator's involvement of the reader in a level of complicitous knowledge at the expense of the actors in the narrative, who are barely aware of the events in which they are involved, much less the "meaning" of them.<sup>5</sup> This marker is the verbal formula "A pero B." More specifically, including the abstract performative verb (given here in brackets) that characterizes the narrator's control over the account of event, that formula is "X creía/pensaba/decía A, pero [yo digo que más bien] se trata de B." Close scrutiny of this particular structure within the text reveals the following occurrences:

1. [Baltazar] tenía . . . una expresión general de muchacho asustado. Pero era una expresión falsa. (p. 65)
2. . . . [Baltazar] vivía con Ursula desde hacía cuatro [años] . . . y la vida le había dado muchos motivos para estar alerta, pero ninguno para estar asustado. (p. 65)
3. [Pero] ni siquiera sabía que para algunas personas, la jaula que acababa de hacer era la más bella del mundo. Para él,

5. Note should be taken of René Jara's characterization of the narrator in *Cien años de soledad*; he bases his comments on the opening sentence of the novel:

La primera comprobación [sobre la primera frase de la novela] que salta a la vista es que el juego de los niveles cronológicos obliga a situarse en una superficie imaginaria, que, en vez de invitarnos a comprender, nos exige una incorporación en un todo que es coherente desde la partida porque está tensado desde el futuro. La visión desde arriba que adopta el narrador implica un dominio del mundo que garantiza la existencia armónica de un totalidad en que el tiempo es un más allá del tiempo, un presente eternizado que nos compromete porque nos incluye.

Una segunda comprobación es que el narrador posee la memoria absoluta del cosmócrata omnisciente, del poseedor del conocimiento por excelencia. El carácter imperativo de la forma "había de recordar" revela su complacencia en la vuelta de lo idéntico que podemos comprobar fácilmente en una lectura rápida de la novela. Esto no significa que el narrador sea un enemigo de la historia. Su regocijo, como puede comprobarse por la frase final de la obra, proviene del carácter severo, admonitorio, ejemplarizador que le asigna a la fabulación. . . .

In René Jara and Jaime Mejía, *Del mito en García Márquez* (Valparaíso, Chile: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1972), pp. 14-15.

- acostumbrado a hacer jaulas desde niño, aquel había sido apenas un trabajo más arduo que los otros. (p. 65)
4. [Ursula] estaba disgustada porque su marido había descuidado el trabajo de carpintería para dedicarse por entero a la jaula. . . . Pero el disgusto se disipó ante la jaula terminada. (p. 66)
  5. En verdad, José Montiel no era tan rico como parecía, pero había sido capaz de todo por llegar a serlo. (p. 69)
  6. Baltazar no era un extraño en la casa de José Montiel. En distintas ocasiones . . . había sido llamado para hacer trabajos de carpintería menor. Pero nunca se sintió bien entre los ricos. (p. 70)
  7. Nada ocurrió en aquel instante, pero Baltazar se sintió como si le hubieran abierto la puerta del baño. (p. 71)
  8. Hasta este momento pensaba que había hecho una jaula mejor que las otras. . . . Pero luego se dio cuenta de que todo eso tenía una cierta importancia para muchas personas. . . . (p. 73)
  9. Todos brindaron por la salud de Baltazar, por su suerte y su fortuna, y por la muerte de los ricos, pero a la hora de la comida lo dejaron solo en el salón. (p. 73)
  10. Alguien le dijo [a Ursula] que su marido estaba en el salón de billar, loco de felicidad, brindando cerveza a todo el mundo, pero no lo creyó porque Baltazar no se había emborrachado jamás. (p. 74)
  11. Un momento después, despatarrado por la calle, se dio cuenta de que le estaban quitando los zapatos, pero no quiso abandonar el sueño más feliz de su vida. (p. 74)

It is not necessary for these examples to manifest the same identical syntactic structure. Example 3 is presented as having the *pero* clause first: other examples (although none are given) might use *sino* (a syntactic synonym of *pero*), *aunque*. Or the A/B order may be observed, but *pero* is implied (represented by a  $\emptyset$  form). In example 3, not only is the order of the clauses reversed, but it is proposed that the first clause contains an implied *pero*. The following examples, along with several unmentioned ones, are discovered in the text:

12. . . . Y agregé [la mujer de Montiel]:—Montiel se está bañado. [Pero] en realidad José Montiel no había tenido tiempo de bañarse . . . . Era un hombre tan prevenido, que dormía sin ventilador eléctrico para vigilar durante el sueño los rumores de la casa. (p. 70)
13. [Baltazar] se acercó al niño, sonriendo, y le tendió la jaula. El niño se incorporó de un salto, abrazó la jaula, que era casi tan grande como él, y se quedó mirando a Baltazar a través del tejido metálico, sin saber qué decir. [Pero] no había deramado una lágrima. (p. 72).

It is important to focus on these two potential examples, because they both concern the relationship between Baltazar and the Montiel family and the way in which Baltazar is exploited by father and son (the father consciously; the son unconsciously, learning the ways of his father through constant example). Baltazar is unaware of that exploitation, but the structure of narrative enables the reader to understand more than Baltazar does, as we are told first of Montiel's wiliness in attending, even in sleep, to what is going on in his house, and second, of the calculated theatrics of Pepe's behavior. The passage makes a point of contrasting Montiel's contemplation of his son [. . . lo miraba impasible . . . (p. 71)] with that of Baltazar's view [. . . observó al niño como hubiera observado la agonía de un animal contagioso. (p. 72)] ; Baltazar's act of compassion in giving the boy the bird cage is likewise, through the implied formula (example 13), contrasted with the boy's feigned hysterics. In this way, a proportion is established that signifies the relationship of conscious exploitation versus unconscious acquiescence: Montiel's contemplation: Baltazar's contemplation::Pepe's theatrics:Baltazar's generosity. Given the importance of this passage in characterizing the structural relationship between Montiel and Baltazar and the key event that will, in the end, lead to Baltazar's degradation, it is not surprising that we can find implied uses of the verbal formula that has been suggested as the dominant inscriptional marker of the underlying *écriture* of the text.

A second observation to be made concerning the recording of examples of the A/B formula is that an analysis of the text must employ a certain amount of normalization of verbal structures. That is, the inscription of the formula need not always take the same identical verbal and lexical form. We have as much as said this by indicating that example 3 may involve an inverted clausal order, and that examples 12 and 13 join example 2 in involving implied occurrences of *pero*. On the most elementary level, the syntax of a language does not lend itself, if exact repetition is to be avoided, to structures that are always identical in form. "Lo recuerdo" and "Me acuerdo de él" are semantically synonymous and could, in a certain text, be examples of the inscription of a principle of *écriture*; *recordar* is used in one example, *acordar* in another, putatively to avoid exact repetition (which is itself a principle of *écriture*; exact repetition, on the other hand, could be used to signal ritualized, incantatory and psychotic expression). However, the syntactic structure of the two synonymous verbs results in two different linguistic sequences.

Thus, we may speak of semantic identity without explicit syntactic—overt verbal—identity; there is, however, a syntactic identity that may be identified on an underlying level, that level that

is defined by the Chomskian generative syntax as deep syntactic structure (as opposed to abstract or deep semantic structure in a semantically based generative model). Examination of a literary text in terms of the inscription of principles of *écriture*, or even in terms of the occurrence of the certain combinatory principles of narration, must be sensitive to the need to juxtapose structures that recur because of exact verbal identity with those that recur because of an identity that is not verbally the same but that can be discerned when the structures have been normalized on the basis of semantic and/or underlying syntactic equivalence. Todorov's study of the narrative formulas in the *Decameron* would not have been possible without the concept of normalization; normalization is treated in detail in Hendricks's work on narrative structure.<sup>6</sup>

In García Márquez's story, we may expand the range of explicit textual markers of the *écriture* of narrator-reader complicity by the inclusion of examples from the text of normalized structures. This becomes particularly valuable when we can show, through normalization, that the markers are present in the key passage of the text.

The third observation to be made about these markers is that not all the occurrences of *pero* structures in the text can be taken as inscriptions of the principle of *écriture* at issue (compare the following: "El doctor Octavio Giraldo, un médico viejo, contento de la vida pero cansado de la profesión, pensaba en la jaula de Baltazar . . . [p. 66]). Care must be exercised in underlining the verbal structures of a text, so as not to overestimate the value of what is said; that is what, in an earlier form of criticism, was called "over-interpretation" or "over-reading." Once a principle of *écriture* has been identified and correlated with a specific verbal marker—or series of diverse markers—that is its textual inscription, there is a natural tendency for every occurrence of the linguistic structure that the marker embodies to be given, at least tentatively, importance as an example of that marker. It is similar to what happens in the *écriture* of personification, which typically makes use of abstract feminine nouns that become in the narrative structure "persons" embodying the abstract value signified by the noun with which they are identified. At what point do we distinguish between abstract feminine nouns that are markers of the *écriture* of personification and other abstract feminine nouns that may occur simply because of the verbal style of the text or the natural frequencies of nouns in the language? It is customary to mark the personifications with initial capitals, but an ambiguous or inconsistent practice is contemplable, particularly in those narratives that may avoid the blatant personifi-

6. See William O. Hendricks, "Methodology of Narrative Structural Analysis," in his *Essays on Semiolinguistics and Verbal Art*, pp. 175–95.

cation of texts like the *Roman de la rose* or *El gran teatro del mundo*. Another example concerns symbolic names: if the names of certain characters in a text are symbolic—that is, the name is, after St. Isidore's dictum, the consequence of the thing—are all of the names equally symbolic? La Maga's name may be symbolic in *Rayuela* (particularly since it is a nickname), but Horacio Oliveira's may not be.

In the text at hand, examples 5 and 7 may not be inscriptions of the principle narrator-reader complicity, and example 4 is less clearly so than examples 10 and 11. However, examples 5 and 7 are listed because they point to the narrator's superior information and control over what is happening. Example 4, on the other hand, also ties in with proposed examples 12 and 13 as part of the complicitous characterization of Montiel and how the event that takes place leads to Baltazar's degradation. Example 4 is included for the way in which the narrator identifies implicitly Ursula's superior knowledge of the potential importance of the object Baltazar has constructed. To her—and this becomes clear when she discusses the price to be put on it—the bird cage is less an object of art, born of the *furor poeticus* that has kept Baltazar from his regular work and has caused him to ramble in his sleep, than it is a commodity to restore some sort of balance to the domestic economy. On the other hand, example 9 obviously demonstrates that Ursula, although she may see things more clearly than Baltazar on the level of their interaction, does not share the full complicity of knowledge that the narrator and reader enjoy, for at this point she is too an unknowing victim of the degradation that has been visited, without his realizing what has happened, on Baltazar.

Finally, examples 1 and 2 become, in retrospect, charged with irony, so much so that it is perhaps the clearest marker of the text's *écriture*. If Baltazar's "expresión general de muchacho asustado" (p. 65) did not originally derive from a true sense of surprise or astonishment, it will when he emerges from the stupor described in example 10. By the same token, if life had given Baltazar more reasons to be alert than astonished, the astonishment that awaits him when he realizes to what extent he lost control of a situation that was, initially, reason for extreme pride in his abilities as a craftsman diminishes necessarily the quality of his alertness (or, alternately, will reinforce the need for alertness, enhanced by the element of astonishment). Note that the use of the future tense does not mean that we are talking about what will happen after the close of the story: we are not projecting the narrative events beyond the closure of the text. Rather what is at issue is the identification of a meaning that inheres in the juxtaposition of examples 1 and 10 in the narrative

itself. Again, a semantic proportion is implied: Baltazar's protective alertness::his lack of astonishment::failure of alertness [the degradation that he becomes victim of so suddenly that he is unaware of what is happening]:production of astonishment. Thus, what we understand is that the expression identified as "false" in example 1 will, by virtue of the knowledge that only we know in examples 10 and 11 but that Ursula and Baltazar can be expected to wake up to, become "true." Or, to put it in terms that exclude taking into account Ursula and Baltazar's subsequent realizations, the adjective given in example 1 is, by implication, reversed in at least the understanding of the reader at the end of the text. Since the narrator knows it will be reversed, his use of it on the first page of the text is ironic. Moreover, although it is the only time in which there is an irony at the expense of the characters that includes the reader (that is, at this point we do not know that it is going to be reversed), it does also serve to mark in passing the ultimate superiority of the narrator vis-à-vis the reader with whom he proposed to share complicitously the knowledge of events.

The importance of the markers of inscription becomes clear when we realize that they are concentrated at the three major points of the story: the initial presentation of circumstance (examples 1-4, pp. 65-66); the visit to Montiel's house, leading to Montiel's humiliation by Baltazar's generosity but, we also see, Baltazar's unknowing humiliation by Pepe's feigned hysterics (examples 5-7 and 12-13, pp. 69-71), and Baltazar's definitive and open humiliation-degradation by the lie that his "success" forces upon him to acknowledge as truth (examples 8-11, pp. 73-74). Although this may appear to be the entire story, there are several segments that are excluded (the discussion with Ursula concerning the bird cage, Baltazar's preparation to go to Montiel's house, the appearance of the doctor to buy it for his invalid wife). Within the scene involving the visit to Montiel's house, the markers are concentrated at two out of four points in the events: arrival (examples 6-7), confrontation with Montiel, Pepe's hysterics (examples 12-13), departure with Montiel's rage. The high point of the *écriture* of complicity occurs at two crucial points: the characterization of the wiliness of both Montiel and his son—the one refusing to honor his son's commitments, the latter feigning hysteria with the result of awakening Baltazar's magnanimity (examples 5-7, 12-13)—and the characterization of the way in which Baltazar falls almost unconsciously into the lie of his sale, propagated unknowingly by his admiring friends (examples 8-9). The combined result of these two high points—exploitation and lie—is the degradation of the innocent and magnanimous artist; the characterization of this degradation is underlined by the concen-

trated appearance once again of the markers of complicitous knowledge (examples 8–11).

#### IV

There are a number of directions that a discussion of the nature of this degradation could take, but they would seem to involve more of an interpretation of the story than a characterization of its *écriture*, the bases for its *significance*.<sup>7</sup> But let us suggest two obvious ones in a cursory manner. In the first place, the story seems to pit the innocent artist, a man from the humble sector of society for whom his artistry is not a creative gesture but for whom it vies for attention with "legitimate" means of earning a living, against the exploitive rich, Montiel the man who owns the town, which he controls with unremitting meanness (specifically, it is mean of him not to buy the bird cage from Baltazar in order not to satisfy his son's caprice, but to save Baltazar from heavy personal loss). In this way, art, which Western culture has traditionally approved of as a spiritually ennobling and liberating force, becomes the direct cause of a profound degradation: Baltazar, "como era la primera vez que bebía," is reduced to a gutter drunk on the occasion of his prodigious artistic triumph. What is more, in his drunken stupor he continues to revel in "el sueño más feliz de su vida." The abyss between this *sueño* and the narrator-reader's sense of the true dimensions of the event—with its implication concerning the exploitation of art and degradation through art—is, in turn, the complicity to which we have been referring.

The second line of interpretive analysis could concern Baltazar as an oblique Christ figure: the name, his physical appearance, and age (compare p. 65), his essential innocence, his magnanimity that arouses Montiel's philistine rage, his acquiescence in the sacrificial lie of his friend's jubilation over his presumed conquest, his degradation, the theft of his clothes (that is, his shoes), and his final

7. Perhaps the best interpretive comments on the story are to be found in Mario Vargas Llosa, *García Márquez, historia de un deicidio* (Barcelona-Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 1971), pp. 372–79. Vargas Llosa speaks directly to the issue of art for Baltazar and his "adversaries": "Baltazar . . . viene lo imaginario a través de una praxis que es tolerada dentro de cierto límites: sus productos han sido asimilados, transformados en real objetivos [sic]. Por vía del arte lo imaginario encuentra un acomodo en lo real objetivo. Ese acomodo, sin embargo, no resuelve una contradicción: el significado distinto que tiene la jaula para Baltazar y para los otros" (p. 378). See also Alberto J. Carlos, "Approximaciones a los cuentos de Gabriel García Márquez," in Helmy F. Giacomani, ed., *Homenaje a G. García Márquez: variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra* (Long Island City, N.Y.: Las Américas-Anaya, 1972), pp. 213–33.



abandonment by even the *beatas* on their way to church. Baltazar's empty sacrifice occurs in the context of a presumed defeat of the rich by the humble: "—Hay que hacer muchos cosas para vendérselas a los ricos antes que se mueran—decía, ciego de la borrachera—. Todos están enfermos y se van a morir. Cómo estarán de jodidos que ya ni siquiera pueden coger rabia" (p. 73). Once again, the reader's grasp of the *écriture* of complicity leads to an understanding of the pathetic foolishness of Baltazar's sentiments. If Baltazar is a Christ figure, his truth is that of innocence and artistic accomplishment, virtues that make him, not Montiel and the rich, the one who is *jodido*.<sup>8</sup>

It is unquestionable that García Márquez's *écriture* of complicity excludes his characters from self-knowledge and lends an aura of woeful futility to the innocence that, at first glance, appears to be their essential charm and virtue as human beings. The ironic pathos of this circumstance is nowhere more evident than in the short novel *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada* (1972): Eréndira is Baltazar and her grandmother is Montiel, and so much for the family as the true image of human solidarity. This circumstance cannot be taken to mean that García Márquez has a patronizing attitude toward his characters and their plight, or that he takes pride in the superiority of his (our) own view of them. Rather, the abyss between useful human knowledge and ingenuous charm is what is effectively highlighted by the *écriture* of complicity. Where an earlier local-color literature utilized this abyss to delimit charming but outdated customs or to denounce the ignorance of the masses, García Márquez's calculated use of it—at the expense of appearing to indulge in a cavalier disregard for the deep plight of his characters as oppressed human beings—becomes, instead, a particularly eloquent denunciation of the final degradation that these individuals are compelled to experience. It is a degradation of which they are—at least in Baltazar's case—not truly aware and, therefore, one which can be tragic and experientially useful not from their point of view, but only from that of the complicitously involved reader. In the end, it is the reader—we alone—who can make use of the knowledge in which the text is structured to have us participate. This is the true value of García Márquez's *écriture* of complicity.

8. Boldori comments briefly on the Christological symbolism of Baltazar on page 20. Reference is also made by George R. McMurray to Baltazar as a figure of the exploited artist, in *Gabriel García Márquez* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1977), pp. 55–57: "As the story's central motif, the cage symbolizes artistic creation and illuminates the conflict between the ideal world of fantasy and imagination and that of objective reality. . . . The dichotomy between the realms of creative imagination and sordid, everyday reality are set forth, not only by the two leading characters [that is, Baltazar and Montiel], but also by the series of events that bring the story to its end."



## Chapter V.

# The Double Inscription of the *Narrataire* in "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande"

Por primera vez se habló de ella y se la concibió sin su mecedor de bejuco, sus sopores a las dos de la tarde y sus cataplasmas de mostaza, y se la vio pura y sin edad, destilada por la leyenda. (p. 141)<sup>1</sup>

### I

If "La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar" may be characterized in terms of narrative irony at the expense of the characters with a concomitant complicity between narrator and implied reader, the title story of "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande" takes a step further in developing a complex image of the *narrataire* or receiver of García Márquez's narratives. Although the story has been analyzed from many points of view—the use of exaggeration for satiric-comic effect; the distillation of the Colombian writer's denunciation of feudal society as embodied in the legendary frame of the all-powerful Mother Earth figure;<sup>2</sup> the use of a tone and devices that remind us of the traditional folktale, the interplay between history, legend, and

1. García Márquez, "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande," in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, 6th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1969), pp. 125–47. All quotes are from this edition.

2. Although the last segment of his essay deals with "la sociedad feudal," Mario Vargas Llosa places greater emphasis on the mythic-lengendary quality of the story: "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande: exageración y perspectiva mítica," in his *García Márquez: historia de un deicidio* (Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1971), pp. 398–419. The title of Vargas Llosa's monograph certainly stresses García Márquez's literature as implicitly demythification. Judith Goetzinger, "The Emergence of Folk Myth in 'Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,'" *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 6 (1972): 237–48, despite the title of her paper, also realizes that the narrator is interested not in comic entertainment but in presenting a "powerful apocalyptic vision of total decay" (p. 248). It is, unfortunately, Ricardo Gullón's monograph that has done the most to suggest the image of García Márquez as a *narrador ameno*. See his *García Márquez o el olvidado arte de contar* (Madrid: Taurus, 1970);

fiction—no one has studied one of the most salient features of the text: the explicit projection of an image of the reader and the bifurcation of that image into two conflicting and non-complementary modes.

## II

It is possible to study all narratives in terms of the structural markers that identify the implied reader—the *narrataire*, as Gerald Prince has called him. These markers may range from specific vocabulary choices that suggest a particular type of reader, perhaps one far different in sociocultural formation from the characters being described (this is, in fact, an option that we associate with naturalistic fiction, which involves its own form of narrator-reader complicity), to overt asides to or invocations of the reader. (I will use "reader" to refer to someone actually addressed, *narrataire* to refer to the implied—and therefore ideal—reader of a text; clearly, the two may be one and the same in terms of the *écriture* of a particular narrative).

In García Márquez's fiction, the *narrataire* is particularly prominent structurally, and a novel like *Cien años de soledad* can only function on the basis of an implied reader who will, in his decoding of the structurally complex novel, identify himself (if only subconsciously at first) with the many characters who undertake to decipher Melquiades's manuscript. When manuscript and novel become the same text, character and narrative become the same entity, engaged in reading the same retrospective prophecy of their sociohistorical experience.

Yet, few of García Márquez's stories are explicitly addressed to a reader, and the fact that "Los funerales" does involve an audience is perhaps why this one text has received attention in terms of the conventions of the traditional folk raconteur. Actually, the explicit address occurs only in the opening lines of the story:

Esta es, incrédulos del mundo entero, la verídica historia de la Mamá Grande, soberana absoluta del reino de Macondo, que vivió en función de dominio durante 92 años y murió en olor de santidad un martes del setiembre pasado, y a cuyos funerales vino el Sumo Pontífice. (p. 127)

Indeed, one could argue that such a delivery to a presumed public is merely conventional and serves more to specify the self-image of the storyteller than that of the *narrataire*. In any case, what we can say is

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María Delia Rasetti, "Análisis del 'motivo' en *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*," *Revista de literaturas hispánicas* 10 (1970):88-98; and Robert Sims, "The Creation of Myth in García Márquez' 'Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,'" *Hispania* 61 (1978): 14-23.

that there is unquestionably the implied specification of a single kind of *narrataire*: the openmouthed ingenue who will be impressed by the verbal flourishes that accompany the marvelous, extraordinary tale the *raconteur* is about to unfold: his wisdom and his superior talent will provide us with an instructive entertainment. Yet, any serious reading of the story (and García Márquez's texts are just entertaining enough as farfetched yarns to threaten cunningly the serious intent of determined reader-critics) quickly reveals that the story is meaningless if the *narrataire* is left identified exclusively with the reader who is overtly addressed in the first sentence.

The *écriture* of "Los funerales" depends on the interaction of two kinds of *narrataires*. One is the receptor of the folk narrative, one of the *incrédulos* for whom the details of the story are simply too far beyond his everyday experience to be assimilated in terms other than the fantastic and the marvelous. For this reader, the legend of Mamá Grande is palpable reality because it is simply his daily experience with the feudal society in which he lives, written in the grander terms of Mamá Grande as told impressively by a *raconteur* with superior information. In short, the "folktale *narrataire*" comes close to the implied reader of official writings—history books, constitutions, newspapers, self-serving speeches—that is, the reader of official myths and lies that become guiding truths by virtue of their cunning rhetoric.

The second *narrataire* of García Márquez's story is the reader who is supposed to be able to gauge the distance between official history, folk legend, and demythifying literature. In short, the reader who is able implicitly to discover the ways in which the purported *raconteur's* tale is not the exegesis of legend, with its own particular supplements to it, but the demythification of both legend and official history and the denunciation of the way in which the two intersect to the advantage of official myths.<sup>3</sup> Although this *narrataire* is never spoken to explicitly, both the closing comment of the narrator's introduction and the closing remarks of his story may be taken as postulating the need for the emergence of the "critical *narrataire*" as opposed to the passive receptor of folk legends:

Ahora que la nación sacudida en sus entrañas ha recobrado el equilibrio; ahora que los gaiteros de San Jacinto, los contrabandistas de la Guajira, los arroceros del Sinú, las prostitutas de Guacamayal, los hechiceros de la Sierpe y los bananeros de Aracataca han colgado sus toldos para restablecerse de la ex-

3. One of the major points made by René Jara in his essay on *Cien años de soledad* concerns the creation of an image of myth as a demythificational force. René Jara and Jaime Mejía, *Las claves del mito en García Márquez* (Valparaíso, Chile: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1972), part 1.

tenuante vigilia, y que han recuperado la serenidad y vuelto a tomar posesión de sus estados el presidente de la república y sus ministros y todos aquellos que representaron al poder público y a las potencias sobrenaturales en la más espléndida ocasión funeraria que registren los anales históricos; ahora que el Sumo Pontífice ha subido a los Cielos en cuerpo y alma, y que es imposible transitar en Macondo a causa de las botellas vacías, las colillas de cigarrillos, los huesos roídos, las latas y trapos y excrementos que dejó la muchedumbre que vino al entierro, ahora es la hora de recostar un taburete a la puerta de la calle y empezar a contar desde el principio los pormenores de esta conmoción nacional, antes de que tengan tiempo de llegar los historiadores. (p. 127)

[ . . . ] Ahora podía el Sumo Pontífice subir al cielo en cuerpo y alma, cumplida su misión en la tierra, y podía el presidente de la república sentarse a gobernar según su buen criterio, y podían las reinas de todo lo habido y por haber casarse y ser felices y engendrar y parir muchos hijos, y podían las muchedumbres colgar sus toldos según su leal modo de saber y entender en los desmesurados dominios de la Mamá Grande, porque la única que podía oponerse a ello y tenía suficiente poder para hacerlo había empezado a pudrirse bajo una plataforma de plomo. Sólo faltaba entonces que alguien recostara un taburete en la puerta para contar esta historia, lección y escarmiento de las generaciones futuras, y que ninguno de los incrédulos del mundo se quedara sin conocer la noticia de la Mamá Grande, que mañana miércoles vendrán los barrenderos y barrerán la basura de sus funerales, por todo los siglos de los siglos. (pp. 146-47)

In this sense, "Los funerales" may be viewed as a metanarrative that functions on two levels, one straightforward and one that is self-ironizing and, therefore, self-critical. Since these two levels are contained within the same narrative, they cannot be easily separated and must be identified as present in the form of certain markers or features that signal the underlying tension between two *narrataires* of the same overt utterances. The insistence on the need for this text, on the need for someone to "recostar un taburete a la puerta de la calle y empezar a contar," as opposed to the already existing legend on the one hand and the oblique suggestion of what the historian will do with the material on the other, results in two strategic insistences on story versus legend-history in addition to the juxtaposition established in the opening paragraphs of the text. On the occasion of the description of the repercussions at the highest levels of government of Mamá Grande's death, the narrator notes how the event must be assimilated into official history:

Los acontecimientos de aquella noche y las siguientes serían más tarde definidos como una lección histórica. No sólo por el

espíritu cristiano que inspiró a los más elevados personeros del poder público, sino por la abnegación con que se conciliaron intereses disímiles y criterios contrapuestos, en el propósito común de enterrar un cadáver ilustre. Durante muchos años la Mamá Grande había garantizado la paz social y la concordia política de su imperio, en virtud de los tres baúles de cédulas electorales falsas que formaban parte de su patrimonio secreto. (p. 139)

Indeed, it is only when the lawyers and constitutional lawmakers have succeeded in harmonizing Mamá Grande's death, which had occurred months before, with the highest purposes of the state that the funeral is allowed to proceed with all due ceremony:

[ . . . ] Entonces [el Presidente] adquirió plena conciencia de su destino histórico, y decretó nueve días de duelo nacional, y honores póstumos a la Mamá Grande en la categoría de heroína muerta por la patria en el campo de batalla. Como lo expresó en la dramática alocución que aquella madrugada dirigió a sus compatriotas a través de la cadena nacional de radio y televisión, el primer magistrado de la nación confiaba en que los funerales de la Mamá Grande constituyeran un nuevo ejemplo para el mundo. (p. 140)

Clearly, the event, which is part of legend on the narrative legend of the people, who live on the margin (and at the mercy of) officialdom, has been made into history to serve the demands of the latter. The text, as literature (*historia literaria* versus *historia oficial*), is able to challenge that process through the creation of a secondary, critical *narrataire*. It is the latter, of course, who is able to gauge the ironic incongruency of the following segment of narrative:

Tanto se había hablado, que los parloteos transpusieron las fronteras, transpasaron el océano y atravesaron como un presentimiento por las habitaciones pontificias de Castelgandolfo. Re- puesto de la modorra del ferragosto reciente, el Sumo Pontífice estaba en la ventana, viendo en el lago sumergirse los buzos que buscaban la cabeza de la doncella decapitada. En las últimas semanas los periódicos de la tarde no se habían ocupado de otra cosa, y el Sumo Pontífice no podía ser indiferente a un enigma planteado a tan corta distancia de su residencia de verano. Pero aquella tarde, en una sustitución imprevista, los periódicos cambiaron las fotografías de las posibles víctimas, por la de una sola mujer de veinte años, señalada con una blonda de luto. "La Mamá Grande", exclamó el Sumo Pontífice, reconociendo al instante el borroso daguerrotipo que muchos años antes le había sido ofrendado con ocasión de su ascenso a la Silla de San Pedro. "La Mamá Grande", exclamaron a coro en sus habitaciones privadas los miembros del Colegio Cardenalicio, y por tercera vez en veinte

siglos hubo una hora de desconciertos, sofoquines y correndillas en el imperio sin límites de la cristiandad, hasta que el Sumo Pontífice estuvo instalado en su larga góndola negra, rumbo a los fantásticos y remotos funerales de la Mamá Grande. (pp. 141-42)

The third occasion on which the narrator refers to the tension between history, legend, and story is in the closing paragraph of the text, the last lines of which have already been quoted. What has not been quoted is the long period that proceeds the sentence (itself a "majestic" period) that begins "Ahora podía el Sumo Pontífice. . . ." This period, which is structured in terms of a series of phrases beginning with *Nadie* and followed by verbs of perception (*vio*, *reparó*, *advirtió*) definitively established the juxtaposition between the receptors of legend—the masses of people who are able only to experience the sense of relief in the fact that, at last, it is all over—and the critical *narrataire* who, because he is the receptor of "esta historia, lección y escarmiento de las generaciones futuros," is able, precisely, to see how the *historia* [*literaria*] is, in fact, a legitimate *lección y escarmiento*. It may well be that García Márquez, like many a committed Latin-American writer who would want the audience of legend retold with the flourishes of folktale to become the critical reader able to perceive the dreadful sense of an extraordinary event, would want his literature and the image of narrative that it embodies to function as a process for the formation of the latter out of the former. Nevertheless, the text, while it does incorporate a metacommentary on the nature of narrative, does not do so regarding textual *narrataires*, and the only way in which we can speak of the interplay between the folk receptor and the critical reader is by projecting the narrative circuit suggested by what metacommentary is included in "Los funerales." To the extent that the verbal texture of García Márquez's text is stylistically bivalent—an echo of traditional, entertaining folktales versus explicit references to the story as a gesture of demythification—we may speak of the presence of dual *narrataires*, one for each level of style. To the extent that the image of narrative as demythification in the end asserts itself at the expense of innocuous popular legend (and oppressive official history), we may speak equally of the suppression of the first type of *narrataire* by the second, critical one. It is only in this sense that we can maintain that García Márquez's story, despite the presence of traits taken from the "charming" tradition of popular folk narratives, does in fact conclude by postulating the bases of its own appropriate demythifying readings and the image of the critical reader capable of undertaking the process. At the same time, both *narrataires* allow García Márquez to relate his story in terms of innocuous tales that, because they reduce historical events to legend, deprive events of the opportunity

to serve as "lección y escarmiento de las generaciones futuras," a function that is alleged necessary if the people are ever to attain any significant degree of revolutionary self-knowledge. Thus, the writer both mocks a form of ineffectual narrative on significant "epic" events (in both a routine and a Brechtian sense of the word) and proposes, through the medium of his parody, what he considers to be an appropriately critical telling—and, hence, reading—of historical occurrences.

### III

It remains, then, to describe the *écriture* of "Los funerales" by which the image of one type of *narrataire*—the openmouthed *incrédulo*—is supplanted by another, the critical *incrédulo*. In short, how does the story mock its own pseudo-folktale format to suggest a more appropriate level of narrative story?

There appear to be at least five rhetorical processes by which it is possible to gauge the implied rejection of one reader in favor of another: (1) exaggeration, (2) incredible circumstances, (3) remote or unusual practices, (4) ironic language, and (5) pejorative or satiric insinuations. It is notable that the most overt process is lacking: the overt address of one reader at the expense of the other. Since there is no direct address ever made to the proposed implied "appropriate" reader, it is necessary to identify him through the functional presence of the rhetorical processes listed. At the same time, it should be evident that these processes overlap in nature and presumed effect. The only reason that we are justified in speaking of different types is because we acknowledge that a literary text, for reasons of stylistic variety, is going to modulate its rhetorical pattern. Thus, rather than speaking of one basic device, we recognize several related but slightly different processes working together to accomplish an overall structural goal: the signalling of the two levels of implied *narrataires*.

*Exaggeration* is recognized as one of García Márquez's stock rhetorical plays, particularly when it is based on chaotic enumeration, coupled with what is essentially comic because of the inappropriateness of detail or the juxtaposition of unassociated details. Exaggeration in "Los funerales" helps to identify the alternate reader to the extent that, by distorting the details of the superficial narrative (the folktale), it suggests the absurdity of taking it at its face value. Throughout, the face value of the text is the folktale homage to the grandeur of Mamá Grande and an epic paeon to her majestic death. The implied "secret" text is the demythification of such a homage and the laying bare of how the legendary matriarch was the powerful embodiment of an oppressive social system, a woman to



inspire hate rather than awe. The explicit text, when read by the implied folk *narrataire*, is marked by dignified respect. When read by the aroused *narrataire*, it is characterized by derisive ridicule. Exaggeration, like the other rhetorical processes that have been identified, functions as a key postulate of the text's *écriture* to signal the necessary, imperative transition from one reader to another. One example of exaggeration is the following passage, which speaks of the extent of Mamá Grande's domain:

La inminencia de la muerte removió la extenuante expectativa. La voz de la moribunda, acostumbrada al homenaje y a la obediencia, no fue más sonora que un bajo de órgano en la pieza cerrada, pero resonó en los más apartados rincones de la hacienda. Nadie era indiferente a esa muerte. Durante el presente siglo, la Mamá Grande había sido el centro de gravedad de Macondo, como sus hermanos, sus padres y los padres de sus padres lo fueron en el pasado, en una hegemonía que colmaba dos siglos. La aldea se fundó alrededor de su apellido. Nadie conocía el origen, ni los límites ni el valor real del patrimonio, pero todo el mundo se había acostumbrado a creer que la Mamá Grande era dueña de las aguas corrientes y estancadas, llovidas y por llover, y de los caminos vecinales, los postes del telégrafo, los años bisieftos y el calor, y que tenía además un derecho heredado sobre vida y haciendas. Cuando se sentaba a tomar el fresco de la tarde en el balcón de su casa, con todo el peso de sus vísceras y su autoridad aplastado en su viejo mecedor de bejuco, parecía en verdad infinitamente rica y poderosa, la matrona más rica y poderosa del mundo. (pp. 129-30)

Or, in this passage, where the conjunction of details is incongruous and therefore self-mocking:

La riqueza del subsuelo, las aguas territoriales, los colores de la bandera, la soberanía nacional, los partidos tradicionales, los derechos del hombre, las libertades ciudadanas, el primer magistrado, la segunda instancia, el tercer debate, las cartas de recomendación, las constancias históricas, las elecciones libres, las reinas de la belleza, los discursos trascendentales, las grandiosas manifestaciones, las distinguidas señoritas, los correctos caballeros, los pundonorosos militares, su señoría ilustrísima, la carta suprema de justicia, los artículos de prohibida importación, las damas liberales, el problema de la carne, la pureza del lenguaje, los ejemplos para el mundo, el orden jurídico, la prensa libre pero responsable, la Atenas sudamericana, la opinión pública, las elecciones democráticas, la moral cristiana, la escasez de divisas, el derecho de asilo, el peligro comunista, la nave del estado, la carestía de la vida, las tradiciones republicanas, las clases desfavorecidas, los mensajes de adhesión.



No alcanzó a terminar. La labriosa enumeración tronchó su último vahaje. Ahogándose en el mare mágnium de fórmulas abstractas que durante dos siglos constituyeron la justificación moral del poderío de la familia, la Mamá Grande emitió un sonoro eructo, y expiró. (p. 137)

Many other passages could be cited (for example, the physician's remedies [p. 131], the legislator's deliberations [pp. 140-41], and the funeral procession [pp. 144-46]). Since comic exaggeration is one of the Colombian writer's stock devices, one that he takes from those folktales that likewise mock what they pretend to report seriously, it is not surprising that the text is replete with strategic—and effective—examples.

By *incredible circumstance* one refers to those conjunctions of incongruous detail whereby the particular need to demythify legend—at least when that legend can be seen by the *narrataire* to deviate significantly from a civilized norm—may be stressed. For example, the attendance at Mamá Grande's funeral by both the President of the Republic (made possible by only the most lengthly of constitutional "adjustments") and by the Holy Father (made possible by only the most arduous of transatlantic crossings in his *larga góndola negra* [the Pope's traditional black Mercedes Benz 600?]) is an outrageous inflation of the honors due a local matriarch, no matter how symbolic of a feudal status quo. Hence, the description that has already been transcribed of how the Pontiff learns of the woman's death and undertakes his unheard of journey to the New World, a journey that the forewarned reader will immediately correlate with the visit by Pope Paul to Colombia in the mid-sixties, the first visit to the New World by a pope.

On the other hand, *remote or unusual practices* refers to a circumstance that, by its very nature, demands a reaction of incredulity. For example, we learn that the venerable matriarch, although endowed with the mammary attributes of a fecund Mother Earth figure, in fact, dies a virgin:

Su hora era llegada. En su cama de lienzo, embadurnada de áloes hasta las orejas, bajo la marquesina de polvorienta espumilla, apenas se adviniaba la vida en la tenue respiración de sus tetas matriarcales. La Mamá Grande, que hasta los cincuenta años rechazó a los más apasionados pretendientes, y que fue dorada por la naturaleza para amamantar ella sola a toda su especie, agonizaba virgen y sin hijos. En el momento de la extremaunción, el padres Antonio Isabel tuvo que pedir ayuda para aplicarle los óleos en la palma de las manos, pues desde el principio de su agonía la Mamá Grande tenía los puños cerrados. De nada valió el concurso de las sobrinas. En el forcejeo, por primera vez en una semana, la moribunda apretó contra su pecho la mano constelada

de piedras: preciosas, y fijó en las sobrinas su mirada sin olor, diciendo: "Salteadoras". Luego vio al padre Antonio Isabel en indumentaria litúrgica y al monaguillo con los instrumentos sacramentales, y murmuró con una convicción apacible: "Me estoy muriendo". Entonces se quitó el anillo con el Diamante Mayor y se lo dio a Magdalena, la novicia, a quien correspondía por ser la heredera menor. Aquel era el final de una tradición: Magdalena había renunciado a su herencia en favor de la Iglesia. (pp. 133-34)

The significance to a sociologically committed reader of the self-enforced sterility of the "mother" figure and her bestowal of the symbols of her matriarchy upon a niece who, by taking the nun's veil, has also denied herself a legitimate biological role is too obvious to require belaboring. Unlike Ursula but like the bitch-woman Fernanda in *Cien años de soledad*, Mamá Grande exercises power despite an illegitimate repudiation of a productive role in society: she controls the reins of material wealth without contributing to their production as either a human being or a woman. (This is not to be taken as a sexist assignment of a predetermined role to María del Rosario Castañeda y Montero: it is her "title" and her assumed role as supreme matriarch that defines a social role that she refuses to honor. Mamá Grande is, therefore, a false mother figure, as is the Virgin Mary by the implications of Mamá Grande's endowment to her niece.)<sup>4</sup>

*Ironical language*, which unquestionably is a correlative of exaggeration and the signalling of incredible circumstances, deserves specific identification as the verbal marker of the link between the overt and the secret text. It tells us, in essence, to contradict semantically what is being explicitly signified by the verbal signs of the text. The conclusion of the story is perhaps the best example of the functional use of irony in "Los funerales," for it is here that the narrator, although reaffirming the folk nature of his tale, delineates an underlying meaning—the attainment of a structure-breaking millenium in the debt of Mamá Grande that is to be set against both innocuous legend and oppressive official history. It is this delineation that most directly evokes what I have called the "appropriate narrative" demanded by the text, and irony is a particularly effective instrument in the process. At other places in the text, like for example when the importance of Mamá Grande's death is elevated to the status of a national crisis ("El orden social había sido rozado por la muerte" [p. 138]), verbal irony is useful for marking the disjuncture between the meanness of Mamá Grande's domain and the terms in which it is

4. The best material concerning García Márquez's portrayal of a sterile feudal society is Josefina Ludmer's *Cien años de soledad: una interpretación* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1972).

viewed by her partners in capricious power.<sup>5</sup> This disjuncture is particularly emphasized by the following type of irony, based as it is on the juxtaposition of the glorious and the mundane:

Tan altos propósitos debían tropezar sin embargo con graves inconvenientes. La estructura jurídica del país, construida por remotos ascendientes de la Mamá Grande, no estaba preparada para acontecimientos como los que empezaban a producirse. Sabios doctores de la ley, probados alquimistas del derecho ahondaron en hermenéuticas y silogismos, en busca de la fórmula que permitiera al presidente de la república asistir a los funerales. Se vivieron días de sobresalto en las altas esferas de la política, el clero y las finanzas. En el vasto hemicírculo del Congreso, enrarecido por un siglo de legislación abstracta, entre óleos de próceres nacionales y bustos de pensadores griegos, la evocación de la Mamá Grande alcanzó proporciones insospechables, mientras su cadáver se llenaba de burbujas en el duro setiembre de Macondo. (pp. 140–41)

*Pejorative or satiric insinuations* are, in a sense, the culmination of the foregoing elements in that they overtly refer to the demand for demythification. Appropriately, they allude specifically to matters concerning the social and political order incarnate in Mamá Grande's person. The long period that is the second paragraph of the story (p. 127) is full of indirect meanings. The series of clauses introduced by *ahora que* establishes a counterpoint between a present circumstance and an absent one, alternately past and future. Whether the past is at issue (presumably the one of the secure and inalterable legend, of the belief that Mamá Grande was immortal) or the future (the order to be built out of the collapse of a feudal autocracy held together by only the allegedly eternal matriarchy; compare the closing paragraph of the text) is of secondary importance. What is important is that it is not that of the present, defined in terms of streets clogged by empty bottles and the memory of a hubbub reminiscent of a raunchy medieval fair. The text sardonically defines an alternate order by virtue of its not being what is explicitly described. Against the backdrop of the interplay between the text that speaks and the secret text that is silent, the narrator undertakes to weave his story. Ostensibly framed by the present circumstance, that story, in fact, elaborates a counterpoint between what can be stated openly (legend and official history) and what can be stated in absentia (demythificational narrative). It is also, by extension, a counterpoint between the two *narrataires*, the charac-

5. For the writer's political concepts, see Gregory Lawrence, "Marx in Macondo," *Latin American Literary Review* 2:4 (1974):49–57.

terization of which has been the central concern of this study of the narrative *écriture* of "Los funerales."

#### IV

In closing his ecphrasis on Mamá Grande's funeral cortege, the narrator observes the following:

En su féretro con vueltas de púrpura, separada de la realidad por ocho torniquetes de cobre, la Mamá Grande estaba entonces demasiado embebida en su eternidad de formaldehído para darse cuenta de la magnitud de su grandeza. Todo el esplendor con que ella había soñado en el balcón de su casa durante las vigiliás del calor, se cumplió con aquellas cuarenta y ocho gloriosas en que todos los símbolos de la época rindieron homenaje a su memoria. El propio Sumo Pontífice, a quien ella imaginó en sus delirios suspendido en una carroza resplandeciente sobre los jardines del Vaticano, se sobrepuso al calor con un abanico de palma trenzada y honró con su dignidad suprema los funerales más grandes del mundo. (pp. 145-46)

It is clear that the series of events has been perceived in terms of two orders separated by an imbreachable abyss: on the one hand, Mamá Grande and the ego-centered legend that surrounds her and that she has in large measure created and perpetuated; on the other hand, the "reality" of the narrator, who is obliged to the series of events because of its oppressive sway as a sociopolitical occurrence, but who is committed also to exorcising its oppressive weight through the medium of his demythifying narrative. Once again, we can speak of the fundamental opposition postulated by the *écriture* of "Los funerales": the *narrataire* who accepts the legend in all of its eccentric array (for example, Mamá Grande's mighty burp as she expires, the Italian candies distributed to the children of the matriarch's fiefdom by the Holy Father) versus the *narrataire* who prevails in his understanding of the tragic absurdity of such a social order. The "shock of recognition," which reminds readers that few social orders if any are better than tragically absurd—and that Macondo's is so only to an extreme if accurate degree—is effected through the *écriture* of the dual implied *narrataires*. As I have already suggested, the use of a folktale style that validates the passive *narrataire* as the most immediate sense of the text only enhances the shock of recognition when unspoken text and the *narrataire* that it demands begin to emerge via the specific details of rhetorical inscription that have been discussed in this analysis.

## Chapter VI.

# The *Écriture* of Rupture and Subversion of Language in Cortázar's *Historias de cronopios y famas*

*Apretar una cucharita entre los dedos y sentir su latido de metal, su advertencia sospechosa. Cómo duele negar una cucharita, negar una puerta, negar todo lo que el hábito lame hasta darle suavidad satisfactoria. Tanto más simple aceptar la fácil solitud de la cuchara, emplearla para revolver el café.*<sup>1</sup>

### I

It has been widely recognized that one of the salient characteristics of Julio Cortázar's fiction—and therefore one of his most enduring contributions to the development of the *nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*—has been his manipulation of language. This manipulation, rather than creating a special "poetic" language, involves a program for the demythification of "official" literary language and the context to which it refers. Moreover, such a foregrounding of language is the fundamental element in the creation of a self-defining literary structure. Summarizing a list of numerous features to be found in the novel *Rayuela*, Angela B. Dellepiane asserts that:

La lista podría ser aún más detallada, pero estos son los elementos nucleares del esfuerzo lingüístico de Cortázar enderezados a obtener una *palabra prima* no ya en el plano estético sino—lo que es más primordial en Cortázar—en el ético y ontológico en el que se inscribe, por lo demás, toda su búsqueda. Pienso que esta actitud de Cortázar con respecto al lenguaje se puede calificar de poética, pero entendiendo este adjetivo en el sentido de que el lenguaje tiene no ya una "función intelectual, mediadora y nominativa" sino una función trascendente, creativa, totalizadora hasta mágica

1. Julio Cortázar, *Historias de cronopios y famas*, 3d ed. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Minotaur, 1966), pp. 11–12. All subsequent quotes are from this edition.

porque impacta no sólo el intelecto sino lo intuitivo e irracional del ser. No se trata de comunicar información sino de explorar ese 'espacio' particular que es el lenguaje.

Nada hay de nuevo en los planteamientos de Cortázar excepto que él supo ver, antes que muchos otros en la Argentina y en el continente, el valor de nuevas teorías lingüísticas, estéticas y filosóficas. Teorías que le fueron particularmente atractivas dado que Cortázar percibió agudamente hasta qué punto el lenguaje de la narrativa hispanoamericana, su signo lingüístico, era cómplice de una realidad falseada y escamoteada y cómo se hacía indispensable devolver la verdad a un yo profundo sin traicionarlo. Percibió, pues, la a un yo profundo sin traicionarlo. Percibió, pues, la mitificación de la lengua literaria y se propuso acabar con ella: no más 'encubrimiento' por el lenguaje sino 'descubrimiento' por y con él. De ahí sus esfuerzos para revivir el lenguaje rechazando lo tradicional y hecho, "extrañando" (en el sentido brechtiano) la palabra para que pudiera ser capaz de instaurar esa realidad diferente que no se quería dejar ver.<sup>2</sup>

Critics have dealt extensively with *Rayuela*. Additionally, Cortázar's short stories have attracted considerable attention, and the extant analyses of individual stories are some of the best on *nueva narrativa* texts.<sup>3</sup> However, one of Cortázar's earliest and most original collections of texts has received relatively meager attention. Published in 1962, *Historias de cronopios y famas* is divided into four parts: "Manual de instrucciones," "Ocupaciones raras," "Material plástico," and the title section, "Historias de cronopios y famas."

While critics have commented on thematic elements of these texts, including the often bizarre and outlandish sense of humor

2. Angela B. Dellepiane, "La novela del lenguaje," in Donald W. Bleznick, ed., *Variaciones interpretativas en torno a la nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1972), pp. 63-75. The quote is from pp. 64-65. See also Nélida Donni de Miranda, "Notas sobre la lengua de Cortázar," *Boletín de literaturas hispánicas* No. 6 (1966):71-83. Regarding the specific language phenomena in Cortázar, see Angela B. Dellepiane, "Algunas conclusiones acerca del lenguaje en Cortázar," *Sin nombre* 2:2 (1971):24-35. Note also the essay by Jesús Mañú Iragui, which is more descriptive than structuralist, despite the title of his monograph: "Lenguaje y rebeldía en *Rayuela*," in *Estructuralismo en cuatro tiempos* (Caracas: Equinoccio, Ediciones de la Universidad Simón Bolívar, 1974), pp. 57-104.

3. See, for example, the studies gathered together by David Lagmanovich, *Estudios sobre los cuentos de Cortázar* (Barcelona: Ediciones Hispam, 1975). However, the single best study on Cortázar's stories, one which stresses plot rupture, is Noé Jitrik, "Notas sobre la 'zona sagrada' y el mundo de los 'otros' en *Bestiario*, de Julio Cortázar," in *El fuego de la especie* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Argentina, 1971), pp. 47-63. However, *Historias de cronopios y famas* is not discussed.

they reveal, the present chapter will examine "rupture" and the "subversion of language," two structural-textual features that have not been dealt with. Within a semiological context, one understands rupture to be the phenomenon whereby the established structural system of a text is "ruptured" by the intrusions of another system that, in effect, displaces the former. All texts have a unique structure that operates implicitly to organize the reader's perception of the text: whatever patterns are perceived—whether homogeneous, overlapping, complementary, antithetical—derive from the structural system that underlies the text implicitly. If at a particular point in the unfolding of a text, an abrupt or sudden shift in the interrelationships of the signs of a text occurs, we may speak of rupture: a new system emerges and installs itself, creating a pronounced rejection of the previous system.

In Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, when the paradigmatic epic hero is suddenly transformed into a woman, we have moved from a structural system that parallels traditional epic formulas to one that mocks them outrageously. Or, in García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* the constant movement between a structural system in which the narrative reads like a reworking of chronicles and *costumbristic* fiction and local folkloric tall tales, and one in which these elements become unified in an overall structure that demythifies accepted Latin-American reality by proposing an antiphonic literary myth—the novel as an organic vision—establishes rupture as the very basis of the novel's *écriture*. For example, Melquíades is shown not as the legendary itinerant peddler, the purveyor of useless but wonderful baubles to an ignorant provincial populace, but rather as the author of the strange manuscript that turns out to be text of the novel itself. This is only one specific instance of the pervasive use of rupture in a major work of *nueva narrativa*.

Clearly, language may—must—be a primary agent of rupture, to the extent that language is the immediate substance of a literary text, the only explicit manifestation of its underlying system. Yet, we may distinguish between a rupture that occurs on the level of the abstract system of a text and that manifests itself in terms of a shift in language, without that language itself deviating from a loosely defined general norm, and a rupture that, although it too involves a shift in the underlying structural bases of a text, requires a distortion of language itself. In this latter instance, the integrity of language is threatened to the extent that we can see undermined a communicational standard: language as a secure means of dealing with reality on a day-to-day level of social interaction, language as a ready instrument for saying what we want to say and for hanging onto our tangible world and our abstract thoughts. When Cortázar intro-



duces the new lexical items *cronopios*, *famas*, and *esperanzas* (the latter two exist in Spanish, but not with the meaning Cortázar attaches to them nor with the morphosyntax that he gives them), we tread a fine line between easy, quotidian reality, and a challenging realm of the possibility for fantasy. On the one hand, Cortázar's rupture of the lexicon of Spanish, through the seemingly unconcerned introduction of these three new items, gives the impression that he has simply coined some new pseudo-sociological jargon to refine our perception of human types that exist among us but have not hitherto been described in quite adequate enough detail: the welcome precision of Cortázar's analysis may comfortably permit the new jargon. On the other hand, we are obliged to entertain the suspicion that Cortázar is not simply bringing our daily reality into sharper focus by identifying some assorted human types. Rather, he is challenging our perception of it by defamiliarizing it, by introducing a panoply of types and behaviors that really does not quite fit. By doing so, he is asking us to see it in a way that *breaks* with our normal, secure perception. In so doing, he ruptures the instrument most closely identified with perception, the code of social communication, language, through his introduction of elements alien to it.

Although Cortázar is known for the nonsense *glíglico* with which characters in *Rayuela* play, the sort of rupture represented by the subversion of an apparently normally meaningful code is much more effective in that it obliges the primary code to expand the fossilized boundaries of meaning; with *glíglico*, meaning is simply denied altogether. By subverting language as one form of structural rupture, Cortázar is responding implicitly to the demands of one of this century's most provocative writers on the limits of language as an instrument for communication and as a meaning for "hanging" onto a reality that we know is elusive, ephemeral. Jacques Derrida speaks of the necessity to put language and individual components of language *sous rature*, "under erasure."<sup>4</sup> This is particularly necessary in the case of culturally encrusted lexical items. By placing language under erasure—by foregrounding its use in even the most trivial and colloquial of contexts—we call into question its adequacy. We may, as a consequence, recognize how language must be expanded, supplemented if it is to be used as an instrument of meaning. By the same token, language must be demythified, demonumentalized as the allegedly transparent embodiment of rational man's self-deluding perception of himself and his universe.

4. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). The structuralist concepts in this chapter are best pursued in Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*.



Manuel Durán, in one of the best introductory studies on *Historias*, observes the following:

Sin prisa, mediante toques sucesivos, mediante acumulacion de pequeños detalles, de pequeños incidentes dramáticos, Cortázar nos va haciendo penetrar en el extraño mundo de cronopios, famas y esperanzas. Los personajes reaparecen una y otra vez, siempre en accion, en una serie de viñetas dramáticas: poco a poco empezamos a comprender que nos hallamos ante un mundo estable, bien definido, con relaciones sociables, con sus fórmulas para el saludo, sus alegrías y sus peligros. Quizá el mayor interés que estilísticamente presentan estos relatos reside en la utilización por parte del autor de dos estilos, diferentes—incluso opuestos—pero íntimamente enlazados y complementarios. El primero es un estilo que pudiéramos definir como “normal”, “lógicocientífico”, destinado a establecer la coherencia del ambiente descrito, a *ganar la confianza del lector* ante lo que está leyendo. El segundo es un conjunto de fórmulas fantásticas, irracionales, imposibles de reducción a términos de experiencia cotidiana.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of the present paper is to extend Durán's statements by focusing more closely on the structural systems that underlie the texts, with particular attention to rupture and subversion of language in the terms already put forth.

## II

By examining one of the four independent fragments of the text “Instrucciones-ejemplos sobre la forma de tener miedo,” we arrive at a better understanding of what has been mentioned previously:

El médico termina de examinarnos y nos tranquiliza. Su voz grave y cordial precede los medicamentos cuya receta escribe ahora, sentado ante su mesa. De cuando en cuando alza la cabeza y sonríe, alentándonos. No es de cuidado, en una semana estaremos bien. Nos arrellanamos en nuestro sillón, felices, y miramos distraídamente en torno. De pronto, en la penumbra

5. Manuel Durand (Durán) [sic], “Julio Cortázar y su pequeño mundo de cronopios y famas,” in *La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Pérez Editor, 1968), pp. 31–49. The quote is from p. 36. See also Antonio Pagés Larraya, “Cotidianidad y fantasía en una obra de Cortázar,” in Helmy F. Giacomani, *Homenaje a Julio Cortázar* (Long Island City, N.Y.: Las Américas-Anaya, 1972), pp. 277–87; Pagés Larraya focuses on the highlighted intersection of the mundane and the fantastic in *Historias de cronopios y famas*. Graciela Coulson stresses the foregrounding of language and certain parallelisms with modern poetry in “‘Instrucciones para matar hormigas en Roma’ o la dinámica de la palabra,” *Revista iberoamericana* No. 95 (1976):233–37.

debajo de la mesa vemos las piernas del médico. Se ha subido los pantalones hasta los muslos, y tiene medias de mujer. (p. 17)

Although the text is deceptively simple, a number of features should be closely scrutinized:

1. The first element of the cover title, "Instrucciones-ejemplos," presents us with a neologism in Spanish, although one that is syntactically possible in terms of current generative rules for the production of exocentric noun compounds, particularly in Argentine Spanish. Nevertheless, we might expect something more standard like "instrucciones típicas" or even "instrucciones ejemplares." While perhaps no great weight should be attached to the unusual nature of "instrucciones-ejemplos," it is only the first of a series of language deviations in the text.

2. More significant is the second principal constituent of the title, "la forma de tener miedo." In Spanish, the phrase *tener miedo* cannot be agentive, that is, it cannot take as subject a noun that instigates or carries out the action. This restriction is, of course, one of universal semantics, and the Spanish phrase simply represents a semantic structure that, in universal terms, cannot be agentive.<sup>6</sup> Thus, we may not expect any language to permit an agentive subject with its equivalent to *tener miedo* or "be afraid." Rather, this structure requires as subject a noun that is semantically neutral or, as a more traditional term puts it, a patient: an individual for whom the circumstance described obtains. Such structures cannot take a positive imperative—since one cannot command someone to instigate what he can only experience passively—which is why "Tenga/Ten miedo" is nonoccurring (because it is ungrammatical) in Spanish. Or why "Be afraid!" is impossible in English. Although the title does not use the imperative, it does embed *tener miedo* in a syntactic construction that, like the positive imperative, may only occur with agentive verbals. Thus, *la forma de ( = cómo) escribir una novela* is possible for the same reason that *Escriba/Escribe una novela* is. Conversely, *la forma de ( = cómo) ser alto* is unlikely for the same reason that *sea/Sé alto* is. Although we cannot go into a complete linguistic analysis here that would explain the obvious exceptions that one could think of to what has been stated (why, for example, is the following title possible: *Cómo ser argentino?*), it does capture a basic linguistic principle that affects the title in question: "Instrucciones la

6. For a work dealing with similar semantic questions, see George L. Dillon, *Introduction to Contemporary Linguistic Semantics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

7. One reason is that the sentence conceives of the adjective *argentino* not as the passive one of nationality but as an active one referring to a voluntarily attainable state of mind.

noun that involves an implied imperative] sobre la forma de tener miedo" strikes us as odd because you do not [need to] explain to someone how to be afraid. One does not, normally, set out to be afraid, since fear is something that happens to one, not something one self-induces.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the title, while not grammatically impossible, is, if one considers it closely, semantically anomalous. This sort of anomaly is one of the elements of language rupture that abounds in *Historias*. By casually suggesting that one can and ought to self-induce fear, Cortázar is breaking with the "normal" semantic structures represented by language. These structures are sensed to be normal, and departures from them are deviant (anomalous) because we feel they correspond to the world as it is and should be. Cortázar's process of rupturing this supposition, through a localized departure from acceptable rhetoric, is one example of the sort of questioning, of putting under erasure, what we hold to be a stable and well-defined reality.

3. Turning to the text fragment in question, it should be clear that its semantic structures rest, precisely, on what we consider to be a self-evident reality. One of the reasons that the texts in *Historias* can be so brief is that basically they evoke with one or two key phrases a familiar and acceptable circumstance. To be more specific, these texts depend, at least for their initial point of departure, on a reader-shared referential or cultural code that will immediately identify a widely known experience or context.<sup>9</sup> That the ease of such an identification will become subsequently (and very rapidly in a text of barely one hundred words) the point of rupture only reinforces the importance of the reference to recognition in the first place: we are only able to identify the abnormal if we have a norm against which to measure it.

4. The tense forms of the fragment are unusual: since essentially a "story" is being told—a context is established and something happened within the context—we would expect past-tense verbs. However, we note immediately the use of present-tense forms. Two explanations are possible, neither of which is particularly satisfactory (the other three fragments of the text are also narrated with present-tense forms). We might say that the author has chosen the "historic present" to make his surprising tale more vivid: it is frequent for oral stories to make use of such an option. However, Cortázar's story is not oral, and one can discover no particular reason why it might want to be taken as an example of oral storytelling.

8. Of course, we have an utterance like: "¿Quiere Ud. tener miedo? Vea *King Kong*." Such a structure is possible only in the (pseudo) poetic context of fear as a sought-after emotion.

9. This is one of the five codes of reading that Roland Barthes introduces in *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 18–20.

ing. Alternately, we might say that the verb forms are not really indicative of either a present or a past tense, but are tenseless, as in the case of so-called durative affirmations: when we say that the sun is a sphere, or that two plus two *equals* four, we are not making a statement about something true in the present. Rather, these are "eternal verities" and as such are tenseless, which is why we cannot use any other tense to formulate them (when and if we do, we are practicing the same sort of sardonic rupture we might find in Cortázar: "two plus two *used to equal* four, but with the new math there is no telling what equals what!"). Western languages often use the present tense to indicate what is aspectually durative or what is customary. Compare the textbook distinction between *Juan canta* (or *Juan es cantante*) and *Juan está cantando*: only the latter is truly semantically present, for the former describes a durative quality concerning Juan and not what he is doing at the moment of the utterance.

If Cortázar's fragment is to be taken as "durative" rather than as a past action described with the historic present, then we would be obliged to say that it describes a "normal, natural, customary" event and not something bizarre that is related as having occurred but once. Perhaps the basis of the fear that the event ought to evoke resides not in its bizarre yet limited occurrence, but rather in its being (metonymically?) a generalizable circumstance. We might say, in rather puerile thematic terms, that there is always some surprise lurking in the corner of our eye that will destroy our confidence in a familiar and assuring setting. Neither of these explanations is particularly satisfactory, as has already been said. That they are unsatisfactory is perhaps another measure of the anomaly that we are able to discover in an apparently innocent text (or in the text's apparently innocent rhetoric). There is no overwhelming linguistic or stylistic deviance at issue in the use of the present tense in the fragment. But like other features, it is just another small element that does not fit. In the end, these casual anomalies coalesce into a basic pattern of structural rupture.

5. Syntactically, the narrative structure of the fragment may be represented as follows: A(a a a a a) B(b b [b' c]).<sup>10</sup> A represents the first five sentences of the discourse; all are basic declarative sentences and, although a more detailed description would underline differences (for example, those in which *el médico* is the subject

10. Concerning the syntactic analysis of literary discourse, see the essays in *Análisis estructural del relato* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1972), and Robert E. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*. For a more technical example of discourse analysis with reference to a text of Cortázar, see Francis M. Aid, "Case Grammar Applied: Spanish Language and Literature," in Don L. F. Nilsen, *Meaning: A Common Ground of Linguistics and Literature* (Cedar Falls, Iowa: 1973), pp. 90-99.

and those in which *nosotros* is), we can homologize them by the sign *a. B* represents the last two sentences. The connective *De pronto* in reality is a prelude to rupture to the extent that, semantically, it alludes to a detail or circumstance that stands out against the background of the larger context that has been established. In terms of what was said in section 3 above, it is at this point that a departure can be noted from the familiar context ("routine treatment by a trusted physician") that *A* establishes by deft identification with an entire referential code concerning that context: "el médico . . . nos tranquiliza"; "su voz grave y cordial"; "cuya receta escribe ahora"; "no es de cuidado"; and so on.

These phrases evoke an entire ethos associated with medical treatment in Western culture. *De pronto* marks, potentially, the initiation of a departure from the familiar. The rather complex structure given for *B*, alongside *A*, reflects the attempt to chart the working out of that departure. The fulfillment of the rupture inaugurated by *De pronto*, *B* consists of two sentences, *b b*. Although at first nothing startling is reported, what is related departs from the familiar context *A*. However, the rupture as such does not occur until the final word of the last sentence, which is thus represented in terms of a concatenation of an extended *b* structure plus the element of rupture (*c*). This element is represented by the one word *mujer*. It must be borne in mind that, in Argentine Spanish, the word *medias*, unlike in other dialects of Spanish, may mean either "men's socks" or "women's stockings"; it may, of course, also mean "women's socks." Since *medias* is unmarked for the gender of the possessor/user in Argentine Spanish, the modifying prepositional phrase is necessary to make a distinction and thus may not be considered redundant (in standard Mexican Spanish, for example, *medias de hombre* would be anomalous, and it would be sufficient to say *El hombre llevaba medias* to elicit a broad smirk; by the same token, the latter phrase would be unnoteworthy in Buenos Aires and would simply mean that the man's feet were acceptably clothed).

All this means is that the full import of the rupture implicitly foreshadowed by the introduction of the connective *De pronto* comes at the point of maximum impact, the very last words of the text. Since "silence," non-text, follows, we are left in the complete suspension that such a rupture induces. Once again, if we refer to the importance of the referential code we may understand the degree of this impact: the stereotyped image of the suave, professional physician, impeccably dressed under the white coat he presumably is wearing, suddenly turns out to be wearing women's hose. The implications of such a sartorial preference do not beg explanation. And if fear is involved as the result of the discovery of this prefer-

ence, it stems from the stunning loss of faith in one of the unquestioned authorities, one of the few remaining mythic father figures in our culture. We are reminded of the visual effects Buñuel derives from the exploitation in a full-length motion picture, *The Discreet Charms of the Bourgeoisie*, of this sort of demythificational rupture (one recalls in particular the figure of the venerable village priest).

By the same token, observe what would have been the result of concluding with the phrase "... y tiene medias" or with the (redundant) "medias de hombre." Rather than the outrageous rupture we have just described—and it is again stressed that it is only comprehensible within the context of the referential code concerning contemporary Western veneration of the medical man—we would have at best a mildly amusing "rupture of the rupture" implied by the connective that shifts the text from A to B: a rupture is foreshadowed but does not occur and we seem to have a case of an anticlimactic shaggy-dog story. At worst, the text would simply be confusing, for we would be unable to grasp the point being made. This observation is an important one: the text is of interest only if it departs from the elements of the referential code that it evokes. If it simply plays out certain elements of that code, we see no point in the narrative text at all: it would be natural but insignificant that, were the doctor's pants to move a bit up his leg, we discover him to be wearing socks.

If the foregoing analysis pays excruciatingly close attention to verbal features of Cortázar's text, finding it necessary to go into a certain amount of detail concerning the nature of syntactic and semantic structures and specific lexical items, it is because the effect of the text depends on the exploitation of deviation of varying degrees from colloquial, expected linguistic patterns. Clearly, the entire point of the one fragment of "Instrucciones-ejemplos . . ." that has been examined turns on a lexical choice that dramatically ruptures the semantic norm established by the text.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that subversion and manipulation of language are essential vehicles for the inscription of the *écriture* of rupture in Cortázar's texts, a

11. For a survey of the issues associated with literature and norm, see the chapters in Raymond Chapman, *Linguistics and Literature* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1973). One of the best single papers on norms and literary deviations is by Samuel R. Levin, "Internal and External Deviation in Poetry," *Word* 21 (1965): 225–37. The work of Teun A. Van Dijk on the logical structures of action narratives, of which literary narratives are an artistic subcategory, is especially important in speaking of the "expected" and the "unexpected" in discourse structures. See his "Narrative Macrostructures: Logical and Cognitive Foundations," *PTL* 1 (1976): 547–68, and "Action, Action Description, and Narrative," *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 273–94.

careful analysis of the full implications of his language is indispensable.<sup>12</sup>

### III

Defamiliarization is unquestionably the basis of the *écriture* of the following text: to a certain extent it reminds one of those exercises that attempt to promote verbalization among youngsters by demanding that they explain, in logical order and in detail, the function of an everyday item that goes virtually unnoticed—and, therefore, unanalyzed—because it is so familiar.<sup>13</sup>

Nadie habrá dejado de observar que con frecuencia el suelo se pliega de manera tal que una parte sube en ángulo recto con el plano del suelo, y luego la parte siguiente se coloca paralela a este plano, para dar paso a una nueva perpendicular, conducta que se repite en espiral o en línea quebrada hasta alturas sumamente variables. Agachándose y poniendo la mano izquierda en una de las partes verticales, y la derecha en la horizontal correspondiente, se está en posesión momentánea de un peldaño o escalón. Cada uno de estos peldaños, formados como se ve por dos elementos, se sitúa un tanto más arriba y más adelante que el anterior, principio que da sentido a la escalera, ya que cualquier otra combinación produciría formas quizá más bellas o pintorescas, pero incapaces de trasladar de una planta baja a un primer piso.

Las escaleras se suben de frente, pues hacia atrás o de costado resultan particularmente incómodas. La actitud natural consiste en mantenerse de pie, los brazos colgando sin esfuerzo, la cabeza erguida aunque no tanto que los ojos dejen de ver los peldaños inmediatamente superiores al que se pisa, y respirando lenta y regularmente. Para subir una escalera se comienza por levantar esa parte del cuerpo situada a la derecha abajo, envuelta casi siempre en cuero o gamuza, y que salvo excepciones cabe exactamente en el escalón. Puesta en el primer peldaño dicha parte,

12. Roland Barthes speaks precisely of "abrupt movement" in his *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) when he discusses the text that goes beyond (mere) pleasure: "Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomfits (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (p. 14).

13. Mireya Camurati categorizes this text and the other "Instrucciones" in *Historias de cronopios y famas* within the Bergson's concepts of *Le rire* and Vanguard art of rupture in general: "El absurdo, la risa y la invitación a la aventura: 'Instrucciones para subir una escalera'," in David Lagmanovich, *Estudios sobre los cuentos de Julio Cortázar*, pp. 73–81. However, he does not deal with any of the issues of textual rupture that have been discussed so far.



que para abreviar llamaremos pie, se recoge la parte equivalente de la izquierda (también llamada pie, pero que no ha de confundirse con el pie antes citado), y llevándola a la altura del pie, se la hace seguir hasta colocarla en el segundo peldaño, con lo cual en éste descansará el pie, y en el primero descansará el pie. (Los primeros peldaños son siempre los más difíciles, hasta adquirir la coordinación necesaria. La coincidencia de nombres entre el pie y el pie hace difícil la explicación. Cuídese especialmente de no levantar al mismo tiempo el pie y el pie.)

Llegado en esta forma al segundo peldaño, basta repetir alternadamente los movimientos hasta encontrarse con el final de la escalera. Se sale de ella fácilmente, con un ligero golpe de talón que la fija en su sitio, del que no se moverá hasta el momento del descenso. (pp. 25-26)

Hence, the term *defamiliarization* involves making the familiar unfamiliar through a (predominantly) verbal analysis that would ordinarily be considered superfluous.<sup>14</sup> Here it is climbing stairs, which seems so natural and familiar that it hardly deserves a second thought, much less an atomized scrutiny. As a consequence of the application of such a scrutiny—which we may describe as an ecphrasis on the simple command, *Suba Ud. la escalera*, much like the ecphrasis that we would accept as absolutely necessary were the imperative *Haga Ud. milanesas a la napolitana* directed at a non-Argentine housewife/cook—the text involves a fundamental rupture in the automatized language we associate with daily life and experience.

Automatized language, a concept originally proposed by the Prague School theoreticians of language, refers to those language forms that are unforegrounded, unnoticed in day-to-day oral communication because they are so familiar, so automatic: words, phrases, whole blocks of discourse (compare the so-called phatic speech).<sup>15</sup> A Spanish-speaking native automatically makes proper

14. Concerning defamiliarization (Viktor Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, a term adopted by Russian formalism), see Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, pp. 50-54; and Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, pp. 83-85.

15. See Jan Mukařovský, "Standard Language and Poetic Language," in Paul L. Garvin, *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1964), pp. 17-30. A more recent study of the phenomenon is R. H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1977). Ariel Dorfman has spoken of "la violencia narrativa" in modern Latin-American fiction, a term that surely captures synthetically the devices of defamiliarization, rupture, and norm-deviation, and the semiological ends they are made to serve. See his *Imaginación y violencia en América* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1970), section 4 of chapter 1, "La violencia en la novela hispanoamericana actual."



gender selection, proper noun-adjective agreement, and proper noun-verb concordance; an English-speaking native automatically gets verbs and verb particles in their proper order (for example, "Call the girl *up*" versus "Look *at* the girl"). Although these are both "difficult" processes for the speaker of another language, they are so automatic as to pass unnoticed by the native speaker, which is why we teach descriptive grammar to native speakers: to enable them to be consciously aware of what, in daily speech, they perform automatically.

This phenomenon extends, of course, to individual word choices, so much so that to call a rose by any other name does, indeed, seem strange. Hence, one might add, the seeming belief among the linguistically naive that the names for things are inherent to them, a consequence of them, as St. Isidore once claimed. And on an even higher plane, the phenomenon of automatization extends to our perception of accounting for experience via the resources of language: automatized speech aims to convey a reality that is perceived as equally automatized: climbing stairs is, like falling off a ladder, so easy, so natural, so automatic, that it suffices to express it with the automatized phrase.

Once we choose to foreground the language, we foreground equally the semantics that it represents. Or, vice versa, should we choose to foreground the semantics, we can only accomplish such a rupture verbally by foregrounding language. Simply to decide to say *para trepar una escalera*, we rupture the conditions of automatization. While *trepar* enjoys a certain semantic overlay with *subir*, it is both more specialized as to the type of action involved (that is, more careful and deliberate climbing, hazardous to one degree or another such as *subir* is not) and refers to a noun complement that customarily is not *escalera* (for example, it may be a catwalk, a ship's rigging, or any other object that combines semantically with the associated semes of deliberateness and relative hazard). Thus in *trepar . . . escalera*, both verb and object are foregrounded; the former because of the specialized nature of climbing that is not associated with *escalera*, the latter because it has "thrust upon" it the semantic range of the nouns that do combine with *trepar* in an automatized fashion.

Cortázar's text, of course, maintains the colloquial phrase *subir una escalera*. However, we can observe the following when analyzing its verbal texture:

1. By inserting the phrase in question within the context of *Instrucciones para*, attention is called to an implied necessity for such instructions. By contrast to the deviant use of *instrucciones* in the first text analyzed, deviance here is based not on the misfit between the implied jussive and a predicate that cannot colloquially take an

imperative: clearly, *subir*, as a verb taking an agentive subject, can be imperative. Rather, what is at issue is the curiousness of the so-called happiness conditions that dominate the phrase *Instrucciones para . . .* "Happiness conditions" is one of those deliberately un-subtle terms used by generative linguists to refer to an abstract linguistic principle: in order for an item or construction to be used properly, certain conditions of the pragmatic linguistic context must be met.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in order for one to order a door shut, we must acknowledge tacitly that it is open, which is why "close the sealed door" is, if not ungrammatical, infelicitous. The major happiness condition that dominates *Instrucciones para . . .* (in addition to the necessary agentive-admitting property of the verb complement) requires that those instructions be in fact necessary in the real, pragmatic world in which the phrase is uttered. On this basis, *Instrucciones para subir una escalera* would appear to violate a controlling happiness condition, which is why such a completely normal syntactic combination of modest lexical items seems to one so unusual—foregrounded in a word.

But more specifically, Cortázar's title, occurring in isolation, would be simply unusual or facetious for the reasons adduced. Occurring within the context of the texts being described and heading the specific text that has been quoted, what in fact transpires linguistically is double-edged. For while, on the one hand, the deautomatization of the phrase *subir una escalera*, achieved by incorporating it into the larger context of *Instrucciones para . . .*, would seem to imply a need to defamiliarize the event signified by the phrase in question, the text proper reveals that quite the opposite is true. Semantic defamiliarization does not really take place (as it does in the following text, "Preámbulo a las instrucciones para dar cuerda al reloj": "No te regalan un reloj, tú eres el regalado, a ti te ofrecen para el cumpleaños del reloj" [p. 28]). Semantic defamiliarization leads to the expressionistic (Kafka, Borges), the surreal (Dalí), the absurd (Ionesco, Beckett), the magical real (Asturias, Guimarães Rosa), and, clearly, language or any other semiotic structure must be defamiliarized in order to convey or portray semantic defamiliarization. But the opposite is not necessarily true. Although some of Cortázar's *Instrucciones* texts involve semantic defamiliarization with concomitant linguistic defamiliarization (and the passage just quoted is manifestly deviant in ways that can be quickly demonstrated through a linguistic analysis), the one at hand does not. The detailed instructions that are revealed, upon analysis, to describe in minute but unstrange terms what is in fact the totally *familiar* process

16. Dillon uses the more neutral term *pragmatic conditions*. See pp. 36–37 and chapter 7.

of climbing stairs. An apparent defamiliarization remains on the level of the linguistic sign and thus serves only to foreground what is a completely natural activity.

2. There are, of course, a few details that suggest a tentative degree of semantic defamiliarization, without actually constituting an overall semantic dislocation. Consider:

a. The use of *se pliega*, *sube*, *se coloca* is ambiguous, since it may describe either an action (*el hombre se coloca a la izquierda de la mujer*) or a circumstance (*Los precios de la carne suben de mes a mes*). While we would "expect" the description of the physical layout of a set of stairs to contain semantically nonaction verbs, the use of semantically ambiguous ones in an already overtly defamiliarized context is suggestive of a more open reading of verbs than would normally be the case. The semantically unambiguous nonactive constructions are clearly avoided, although the stylistic focus of the text may not easily lend itself to them: *la parte siguiente está colocadase encuentra paralela a este plano* would be an acceptably unambiguous alternative.

b. Similarly, the closing phrase implies, perhaps even declares, an agentive quality for the verb *no se moverá*, as though the stairs could undertake to move themselves, or as though the fixed set of stairs were an escalator ingeniously shut off by the sharp rap of the shoe heel as it steps off the moving train onto the top, covering platform (and stepping back on them reverses their direction).

c. The conclusion of the description of a typical staircase at the end of the first paragraph establishes a contrast between what could be (semantic defamiliarization) and what in reality is (reaffirmation of the familiar). This juxtaposition is effected via the rhetorical formula "(quizás) A, pero (más bien) B": A is the suggestion of the unknown ("cualquier otra combinación produciría formas quizás más bellas o pintorescas"), while B is the insistence on the known quality of staircases ("pero incapaces de trasladar de una planta baja a un primer piso").

Although these examples threaten the implicit denial of semantic defamiliarization that underlies the text, despite repeated examples of language structure defamiliarization, they do not coalesce into a dominating pattern. Rather, they remain as semantically unstable elements within the text and constitute, one could say, a parenthetical questioning of the "familiar" semantic base that is basically at issue.

3. Textual, as opposed to semantic, defamiliarization takes many forms in the text: retardation of lexical utilization, accompanied by what in terms of an automatized standard can only be called gratuitous ecphrasis, ironic complication or compounding of the routinely ambiguous structure of language, the introduction of in-

formation that is misleading because it is superfluous.

a. The latter feature is a concomitant characteristic of the text's basic *écriture*, founded as it is on linguistic defamiliarization of a natural and trivial linguistic message. A prominent component of that defamiliarization is the use of the para-technical language of explanation such as is used in directions for mechanical assembly or any other routine context involving constituent combination and utilization like recipes or household chemicals. But let us consider carefully what such a language register involves with reference to both colloquial and literary expression. Technical and para-technical language is an automatized level of expression only within a pragmatic context appropriate to it. That is, while automatized levels of language structure are the expected norm (the unmarked register), it is necessary to establish a well-defined context in order for technical language—jargon—to be used without being foregrounded. In such a context, which is marked because it is not the norm, the jargon remains foregrounded. Yet, it is foregrounded neither by its internal features (which are automatic) nor by the nature of its users (the users of technical language seek automatized expression, while those of literary language aspire to complex forms of foregrounding) but by the pragmatic context in which it is deployed. Technical jargon, like colloquial expression and unlike truly foregrounded literary expression, is ruled by precise constraints on the types of lexical items and syntactic patterns that may be used.

Thus, technical jargon (including both lexical items, syntactic structures, and discourse structure: the types of logical coordination that rule the succession of constituents in the explanation) would be automatized were we dealing with instructions in a handicraftsman's manual on how to lay a carpet up the stairway. However, this same register becomes a part of the overall process of literary foregrounding (and one recalls the use of "mechanical" language in some futurist poetry) in Cortázar's text not only by the simple virtue of appearing in a "literary" context, but more specifically because it is used to describe a process that, pragmatically, neither calls for explanation in the first place nor could conceivably require a technical one anyway.

Let us give just one example of the patterns of para-technical jargon used in Cortázar's text. (It is interesting to note that the author eschews the infinitive imperative that is a clear marker of impersonal instructions in favor of the equally frequent formal imperative that is, however, not restricted to instructions. Curiously, in other texts—"Instrucciones para matar hormigas en Roma"—he uses an imperative form that is not normally found in instructions, the future imperative.) The second sentence of the first paragraph,

beginning with the participial "Agachándose . . ." and continuing in the main clause with the impersonal "se está es posesión momentánea . . .," is typical of the language of instructions. It is impersonal semantically because reference is avoided, via markers provided by the syntax of Spanish like the *se* pseudo-subject, to any specific subject in the pragmatic context. In terms of the rules for constituent coordination, it can also be called a "situational preface" in that it describes a situation necessary for the actual instruction itself. Later, in the second paragraph, the instruction is given, once again making use of impersonal subject markers: "Para subir [= para que *se* suba] una escalera se comienza por levantar. . . ." The use of *se comienza*, the polite indicative imperative that also opens the final sentence of the text, "Se sale de ella . . .," is another syntactic trait of the language of technical instructions without being exclusive to it.

In summary, Cortázar heightens the foregrounding of the language of this set of instructions by using a register that is, when employed in the proper pragmatic context, nonliterary and, with reference to an appropriately technical subject, automatized. The foregrounded automatized jargon becomes, therefore, a major element in the text's *écriture* of defamiliarization.

b. The retardation of lexical utilization—the "refusal" to use the right item in the right place and its postponement by inserting a diversionary, gratuitous ecphrasis<sup>17</sup>—is most noticeable midway through the directions on stair utilization in the second paragraph: the text delays, avoids as though a euphemism were in order, the use of the word *pie*: ". . . se comienza por levantar esa parte del cuerpo situada a la derecha abajo, [and so forth]." Only after a description of the foot that is clumsy both in the manner of describing it—compare a precise dictionary definition of *pie*—and in the constituent with which that description is joined ("envuelta [*sic*] casi siempre en cuero o gamuza") does the author resort gratuitously to the proper lexical item: "que para abreviar llamaremos *pie*. . . ." It is as though he were describing an unfamiliar device or component, only then to give it its equally unfamiliar technical term. This is a particularly ingenious ploy for defamiliarization, and the clumsiness of the explanation only contributes to its ridiculous effectiveness.

Another less involved example of gratuitous information that retards the explanation at hand is the reference in the beginning of

17. Retardation is another of Shklovsky's basic concepts concerning literary structure. See his "The Connection Between Devices of *Syuzhet* Construction and General Stylistic Devices," in Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlit, *Russian Formalism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), pp. 48–72.

the second paragraph to incorrect body positions for climbing stairs. Or, later in the following sentence, the comment concerning eye level. These examples clearly are part of the *écriture* of defamiliarization not only because retardation is an important feature of textual elaboration but also because they contribute to the general sense that the text is dealing with an unfamiliar phenomenon. It is only when the reader correlates these textual features with their underlying semantic structure and with the real world to which the latter, because it is comprehensible, has reference that we are able to gauge the exaggerated degree of retardation and gratuitous ecphrasis involved.

c. The "definition" of *pie* provides the opportunity for exploitation of ambiguous or, more properly, under-differentiated structures in Spanish. Despite what we sense to be the clear differences between phenomena in the real world, our languages do not always embody them in their lexical and syntactic structures.<sup>18</sup> If necessary, we may explicitly distinguish between A and B, which are not routinely differentiated structurally, by the addition of restrictive words or phrases. Thus, *planta* covers both "garden plant" and "sole of the foot" in Spanish; *planta de jardín* and *planta del pie* are attempts at overcoming under-differentiation. Although English differentiates between fingers and toes, Spanish does not, although both languages differentiate hands and feet. However, no Western language at least differentiates between left and right limbs: *pie/foot*, *mano/hand* may belong to either side of the body. Differentiation, of course, is achieved, when and where necessary (otherwise it is considered redundant and stylistically inelegant), by the use of left-side versus right-side adjectives, which come in various registers: *left/southpaw*, *izquierdo/zurdo*.

Cortázar plays with the universal feature of linguistic under-differentiation and the Spanish-language mechanisms to overcome it in his handling of the interaction of the two feet in the process of climbing a set of stairs. Although he distinguishes right from left, noting implicitly that most people begin to climb with their right foot, he goes on to ignore the concepts for the purpose of distinguishing between the two feet. Hence, the wackiness of the parenthetical expression beginning "(también llamada pie . . .)." And later in a further parenthetical observation, he uses this maximization of an integral under-differentiation in the language to deny, in effect, the economy of this technical explanation: "La coincidencia

18. Several sections of Geoffrey Leech's *Semantics* (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1974) discuss this sort of semantic phenomena. See in particular chapter 3 entitled "'Bony-Structured Concepts.'" See also Robert J. Di Pietro, *Language Structures in Contrast* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1971), especially chapter 6 entitled "The Structure of Lexicon."

de nombres entre el pie y el pie hace difícil la explicación." What is more, by violating an obligatory rule for the fusion to two repeated nouns into one plural noun (*el pie y el pie* must, colloquially, be expressed as *los (dos) pies*), Cortázar only foregrounds more his defamiliarization of language. To put it in forthright terms, the text has created a semantic problem for itself—the difficulty of distinguishing between the two feet—by refusing to take advantage of normal devices in the language, the lexical pair *izquierdo/derecho* that have already been used. The use of *el pie y el pie* without these restrictive adjectives, therefore, becomes an added anomaly; *el pie izquierdo y el pie derecho* is, of course, not an anomalous construction.

But there is even more. After insisting on the under-differentiation of *pie* and *pie* and the difficulties created thereby for the presumably carefully wrought explanation, Cortázar goes on to caution: "Cuidese especialmente de no levantar al mismo tiempo el pie y el pie." In an explanation in which the realization of the process is questionable and the physical safety of the individual who undertakes it, the concept of *pie* is crucial. By insisting on the alleged difficulty in distinguishing between the members of the pair of limbs involved, Cortázar in a real sense denies the efficacy of his own "technical" explanation and instructions. This denial constitutes, in turn, a rupture with the system that the text sets up: precise technical description → denial of necessary precision → denial of efficacy of description. The text itself and the privileged register that inscribes it have been effectively placed *sous rature*.

#### IV

Although we have dealt with only two highly selective examples of Cortázar's texts, and two concentrated in only one of four sections of *Historias de cronopios y famas*, the sort of extended analysis that has been provided can serve as the starting point for an examination of the processes of rupture and language subversion that are operant in his writings as a whole. It is only possible to undertake such an examination and to perceive the processes at work if we have a clearly detailed characterization of how some of them work. It is for this reason that the highly selective analysis of this essay is appropriate. At the same time, if we accept the challenge to delve seriously into the language processes that characterize a particular textual *écriture*, we can only do it effectively with the sort of microscopic scrutiny brought to bear in the preceding pages, a scrutiny that recognizes the pressing need, if it is to be both precise and explicit, to make use of the full array of concepts concerning language structure that we currently have at our disposal. It is only in this fashion that the critic may specify with any degree of acceptable accuracy the

clever jousts with everyday language that so strike the fancy of Cortázar's readers.



## Chapter VII.

# Cortázar's "Las armas secretas" and Structurally Anomalous Narratives

"No puede ser que todo sea tan absurdo . . . " (p. 189)  
. . . todo tiene una explicación si se la busca. . . . (p. 208)<sup>1</sup>

### I

A reading of the body of Cortázar's short fiction, including both the short stories and the "microtexts" of *Historias de cronopios y famas*, leaves one with the impression, above all, of a world in which things are not as they are "supposed to be." What is involved is not exactly fantasy, for this mode or genre of fiction implies the systematic substitution of the known by the unknown, usually with the implication that the former is far more profound or "richer" in meaning than our pedestrian minds had assumed, or that the latter is in some way a more valid image of experience than what we routinely call reality. True, in the case of some of Cortázar's fiction or in the case of some of the ways in which it may be focused, fantasy may seem like a viable denomination, particularly if we accept Todorov's suggestion that fantastic literature is a corollary of a creative and critical poetics that refuses to reduce texts—or the events and experiences on which they are ostensibly based—to discrete and single-minded interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

1. Julio Cortázar, "Las armas secretas," in *Las armas secretas*, 5th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1966 [original 1964]), pp. 185–222. Also in his *Relatos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1970), pp. 488–519.

2. Although there are subsequent studies that take exception to its premises and conclusions, the major point of departure for a structuralist investigation of the fantastic remains Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975 [original published in French in 1970]). See, for example, Roberto Reis, "Para uma definição do fantástico," *Chasqui* 6:3 (1977):37–43. There is no comprehensive, systematic study of fantasy in Cortázar's writings, although there are many references to it in the abundant criticism now

To be sure, Cortázar's stories deal insistently with the texture of daily events, often within the context of the Argentine middle class in which he lived or the constellations of Latin-American emigrés in Paris among which he has moved during most of his later life.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the humorous note that is so pervasive in his stories, running parallel to or abetting the sense of horror over a secure world gone awry, derives directly from a degree of caricature and mockery at the expense of these two contexts. In the literature of fantasy, typically the structure of the known is displaced, replaced by the structure of the unknown, a structure that has its own "higher" meaning that we are obliged to accept, if we want the sequence of events to possess any sense. Literature characteristically depends upon such a desire, as somehow superior to the initial postulates of reality. In Cortázar's stories, however, such a mechanism of displacement is rarely carried out completely. Although some of the texts in *Historias de cronopios y famas* are based directly on an "unreal," that is, unfamiliar, premise (typically, those texts dealing with *cronopios* and *famas*) and some of the short stories proper do, in fact, conclude by substituting an extensively revised order of the known (those in which the unknown intrudes violently on the known, such as "Cartas de mamá" or "Carta a una señorita en París"), some of the best examples of Cortázar's short fiction cannot really be described as fantasy in the sense that has been stipulated: "El perseguidor," "Las babas diablo," "La salud de los enfermos," "Final del juego," "Las puertas del cielo." If these stories are not examples of fantasy, of the systematic displacement of the structure of the known by that of the unknown, how might we describe them so as to capture the particular nature of their narrative?

*Structural anomaly*, which will be used to manifest the particular nature of Cortázar's narratives, is a term taken from contemporary linguistics because it concerns the proper description of syntactic structure, semantic structure, and their interrelationship.<sup>4</sup> Dealing with utterances that are less than categorically ungrammatical (ut-

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available on the writer. Categorizing all of Cortázar's stories under a single denomination such as the "fantastic" is typical of the many superficial commentaries on his work. See, for example, Roberto Escamilla Molina, *Julio Cortázar: visión de conjunto* (México, D.F.: Editorial Novaro, 1970). His chapter 2 entitled "La invención fantástica . . ." does little more than summarize plots under the poorly defined term *fantastic*. See also Rosa Boldori, "La irrealidad en la narrativa de Cortázar," *Boletín de literaturas hispánicas* No. 6 (1966):13-27.

3. On the social context of Cortázar's fiction, see Joaquín Roy, *Julio Cortázar ante su sociedad* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1974).

4. The theoretical aspects of the concept may be pursued in Janet Dean Fodor, *Semantics: Theories of Meaning in Generative Grammar* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977). See particularly pp. 194-97.

terances that possess no semantic meaning and/or no syntactic coherence), the work on anomaly involves structures that appear to be only partially defective. Meaning and conventional syntactic cohesion are recoverable to varying degrees, and what may be fundamentally wrong with the anomalous sentence is that, because it does not seem to be "just right," we are uncertain as to which of a number of well-formed possibilities we should choose. For example, *The boys is here* is neither ungrammatical or meaningless; it is simply structurally deficient or anomalous. But which is the "correct" reading: *The boys are* or *The boy is*? Save from surrounding context, the utterance itself does not indicate the normalization to be selected (unless, of course, we base ourselves on statistical principles: there are more errors of incorrect verb agreement in normal English usage than of incorrect noun agreement; thus, the first normalization is to be chosen). One is aware of the dangers of translating linguistic concepts into putatively corresponding ones in literary theory. Yet, if there is any validity in the hypothesis that discourse analysis (and the structural description of literary texts is discourse analysis of verbal texts that serve artistic rather than communicational ends; however, "artistic" is defined) involves the linguistic issues of individual utterances as the latter combine themselves into more complex sequences, the concept of "structural anomaly" may, at least, serve as a workable starting point for approaching a literary text characterized by traits seemingly analogous to those of anomalous utterances. The concept, thus, becomes not a tool for analysis but a conceptual vehicle for undertaking the careful analysis of a complex literary text.

To the best of my knowledge, no one has attempted a typological classification of Cortázar's texts (although Cortázar himself uses a tripartite distribution of texts in his *Relatos*); thus, it is difficult to refer to them as a body with any sort of analytical rigor. What this means is that, until a proper classification is available, it would be risky to suggest which texts are best characterized as indicative of structural anomaly. For the purposes of this essay, "Las armas secretas," the title story of a 1966 collection that is recognized as one of Cortázar's best, may serve as a paradigmatic example.

## II

"Las armas secretas" is an appropriate text for a study of narrative structural anomaly, for, unlike stories like "Casa tomada" or "Axolotl," there is no clear-cut movement toward a domain of events or circumstance that is in opposition to what we can roughly call the reader's normal world. Contemporary narrative analysis recognizes that all literature, particularly fiction, depends on reader

reference to a vaguely defined referential code or code of the probable and the possible. This code embodies the received knowledge of a sociocultural community.<sup>5</sup> Although it is relative to the extent that it may change from generation to generation, from social class to social class, and even from one reader to another in accordance with what is tacitly accepted as "real," the referential code is, from a structural and semiological point of view, the touchstone for the identification of the marvelous or the fantastic. We may define such literature as exemplified by a text that implicitly juxtaposes the semantic postulates of its narrative to what the referential code of the implied reader of the text accepts as semantically permissible. Of course, actual readers change from generation to generation and even from society to society, and it is for this reason that we restrict the point of reference to the implied reader of the text, the reader that on the basis of a number of principles of identification we can propose as the reasonable addressee of the text. Gerald Prince has studied this aspect of narrative structure in detail, and it is to his separation between implied and actual reader that we may distinguish between the actual readers at different times and in different places of a text and a "kernel" reader that, because the text is structurally stable, remains equally stable over a range of the most diverse of readings.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of stories like "Casa tomada" and "Axolotl," there is an undeniable movement from the known to the unknown, from what is acceptable as real by the referential code of the implied reader (that is, that a brother and sister inhabit an old, rambling mansion in downtown Buenos Aires) to what goes beyond the domain of the accepted (that they are forced out of their house by unknown invaders and that, moreover, the pair passively allows themselves to be evicted from various sectors of the house and then from the house itself.) We might also add that there is an inherent contradiction or, at least, a fundamental implausibility in the fact that the brother would so passively accept the eviction and then narrate a statement concerning it in which his own passiveness remains patently clear. Of course, we must recognize that much literature that strains the postulates of the referential code of the implied reader depends less on overtly contradicting them (although texts from surrealist literature or the theater of the absurd do, in fact, depend on such blatant contradictions) and more on the exploitation of internal weaknesses

5. See Roland Barthes's discussion of reader codes in his *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974 [original published in French in 1970]), pp. 18–20 in particular.

6. Gerald Prince, "Introduction a l'étude du narrataire," *Poétique* 14 (1973):178–96.

and ambiguities of that code. For example, in "Axolotl" the symbiosis of the narrator and the glass-enclosed animals may be read by a particular type of reader as less a case of fantastic metempsychosis than as a case of acute psychosis. That the narration is in the first person would support such a "normalizing" view of the narrative, which is thereby brought into line with what is recognized as actually or potentially possible by an accepted standard of modern psychology. Science fiction depends for its impact not on the proposition of the totally unknown or impossible (although, to be sure, such elements do figure prominently) but on speculation that exploits the fringes of the accepted referential code. It is for this reason that both science fiction and fantastic literature generally seem to come tantalizingly close to prophesying what will, in due course, become accepted by the received referential code (for example, space travel or human-organ transplants).

What all this means is that the critic must be exceedingly careful in making distinctions between different texts and the sorts of semantic postulates that they involve. In the case of Latin-American literature, two decades or more of dealing with the literature of Borges and other authors that were first grouped under the umbrella term *magical realism* have sharpened the ability to make such distinctions, assisted by some of the hypotheses of contemporary narrative analysis.<sup>7</sup> Neither Borges nor Cortázar can be conveniently classified—and then dismissed—as writers of fantasy. While it is true that their literature challenges the reader's referential code on various fronts, few would dismiss their stories as, therefore, frivolous. What we need, instead, are models of narrative reading that will enable us to appreciate the particular challenging complexity that these texts represent. What we do not need, it would seem, is a model for the routine "naturalization" of the unsettling texts of literature. Jonathan Culler<sup>8</sup> has spoken pointedly of the inherently unresolvable tension in literature. Because it is literature it is somehow different from both "life" and daily language, but because it does impinge upon life and makes use of what we recognize to be the structures of normal verbal communication we want it to be of use to us. In short, we want both to "monumentalize" literature (thereby justifying its difference) and to "naturalize" it (investing it with an existential usefulness):

Thus, the distinction between speech and writing becomes

7. See the distinction that Emir Rodríguez Monegal makes in "Borges: una teoría de la literatura fantástica," *Revista iberoamericana* No. 95 (1976):177-89.

8. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*, p. 134.

the source of the fundamental paradox of literature: we are attracted to literature because it is obviously something other than ordinary communication; its formal and fictional qualities bespeak a strangeness, a power, an organization, a permanence which is foreign to ordinary speech. Yet the urge to assimilate that power and permanence or to let that formal organization work upon us requires us to make literature into a communication, to reduce its strangeness, and to draw upon supplementary conventions which enable it, as we say, to speak to us. The difference which seemed the source of value becomes a distance to be bridged by the activity of reading and interpretation. The strange, the formal, the fictional, must be recuperated or naturalized, brought within our ken, if we do not want to remain gaping before monumental inscriptions. (p. 134)

Allegorical literature may contain structurally the keys to its own hermeneutic code; contemporary literature in Latin America that is casually—and often carelessly—called fantastic or *mágicorealista* does not. Naturalization, therefore, is a process of reading that attempts to resolve the conflicts between the semantic postulates of the text and the broad referential code. As such, it is essentially a reductionist process, one that we may see vividly at work in sociopolitical readings of Latin-American texts that oblige the textual complexities to render up a reading that fits into recognized sociopolitical schemes. For one sort of criticism, such a process may be legitimate. But for a criticism that accepts as its primary axiom the need to preserve a sense of the textual complexity of a work, it should be clear that reductionist readings are inappropriate. A reductionist reading of “Casa tomada” or “Axolotl” may safely align their meanings with accepted knowledge—the former is a parable of the assault on the Argentine oligarchy by *cabecitas negras* led by Juan Domingo and Eva Perón, the latter is a fictional treatment of a type of psychotic disturbance. But many sectors of modern criticism would acknowledge that somehow the particular fascination of the text gets lost in the process of applying such a reading.

### III

With these principles in mind, we may return to “Las armas secretas” and begin to see how the text does and does not lend itself to the category of fantastic narratives and to reductionist or naturalized readings.

The story is quite simple: Pierre is in love with Michèle, a sensitive and somewhat remote girl who appears to be the particular concern of some older friends, Babette and Roland. Pierre is particularly anxious to consummate his love and, in the face of her seemingly inexplicable reluctance, he experiences a series of feelings of insecu-

rities, speculations concerning how little we really know about even those with whom we are intimate, and, suddenly, a series of obsessive recollections that concerns Michèle but does not fit his own relationship with her. He means to take advantage of her invitation to her parents' chalet outside Paris to press his case with Michèle, who is both willing and reluctant, a circumstance that alternately bewilders Pierre and wounds his masculine pride. In the final section of the story, as the obsessive recollections become more insistent, Pierre "overwhelms" Michèle—it is not clear if he has just won her submission or if he is determined to force her. But Michèle has made a desperate appeal to her friends, who will arrive at the chalet during or just after Pierre's hard-won sexual triumph. This change of events would not be particularly outstanding if it were not for the integration of Pierre's obsessive recollections with their own role: it emerges that during the war (the story must, therefore, be set in the early fifties) Michèle was brutally raped by a German officer at a hunting lodge in Enghien. Babette and Roland were able to catch up with the rapist and to kill him with a shotgun. Subsequently, Michèle becomes unable to accept normal sexual relations with a man; her friends have hoped that Pierre and the affection between them would have helped to overcome that psychological hurdle. But in the final stages of his seduction of the girl, he appears to her to be the German rapist—hence, Michèle's desperate call to her friends (at a moment when Pierre storms from the house, only to return determined to possess her) and their flight to her aid. The story concludes on an appropriately ambiguous note, one that is even banal, given the circumstances just related. Yet, it is a significant departure for a structured reading of the story in terms of the semantic possibilities it postulates:

—Ser valiente es siempre más fácil que ser hombre—dice Babette—. Abusar de una criatura que . . . Cuando pienso en lo que tuve que luchar para que Michèle no se matara. Esas primeras noches . . . No me extraña que ahora vuelva a sentirse la de antes, es casi natural.

El auto entra a toda velocidad en la calle que lleva al pabellón.

—Sí, era un cochino—dice Roland—. El ario puro, como lo entendían ellos en ese tiempo. Pidió un cigarrillo, naturalmente, la ceremonia completa. También quiso saber por qué íbamos a liquidarlo, y se lo explicamos, vaya si se lo explicamos. Cuando sueño con él es sobre todo en ese momento, su aire de sorpresa desdeñosa, su manera casi elegante de tartamudear. Me acuerdo de cómo cayó, con la cara hecha pedazos entre las hojas secas.

—No sigas, por favor—dice Babette.

—Se lo merecía, aparte de que no teníamos otras armas. Un cartucho de caza bien usado . . . ¿Es a la izquierda, allá en el fondo?



—Sí, a la izquierda.

—Espero que haya coñac—dice Roland, empezando a frenar.  
(pp. 221–22)

What should a “proper” reading of “Las armas secretas” be?<sup>9</sup> That is, what sort of reader does the narrative structure of the text imply? For many readers, the temptation to naturalize or normalize the story in psychological terms will be great, and it is undeniable that the relationship between Pierre and Michèle can, at least on an immediate level, be defined in these terms (as can the story, “Verano” in Cortázar’s latest collection, *Octaedro*; what is involved here is the frigidity of female sexuality within a context of a tranquil but stultifying domestic routine). Michèle’s frightening initiation into sexuality has understandably left her with deep psychological scars that jeopardize her intimacy with Pierre; the latter, unfamiliar with the girl’s past, is equally and understandably bewildered and even aggressive in his determination to force the issue in order to put their relations on what should be a normal level. (Clearly, the story involves the reader’s accepting, as part of his referential code, the normalcy of complete sexual relations between the two young adults. It also involves, but only to a circumstantial degree, the acceptability of Babette’s and Roland’s execution of the rapist be-

9. There are virtually no analyses of “Las armas secretas,” although passing references abound. Alain Bosquet’s review of the French translation of the collection that contains the eponymic text is included in *La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Pérez Editor, 1968), pp. 51–54. In “La intuición y la muerte en *Las armas secretas*, de Julio Cortázar,” *Hispania* 52 (1969):846–51, Saúl Sosnowski does not give a convincing explanation of why Pierre is the victim of a “desdoblamiento involuntario”—that is, to what conclusions, fantastic or otherwise, does the rhetoric of the text’s structure lead us. Lanin A. Gyrko, “Man as Victim in Two Stories by Cortázar,” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 19 (1972):317–35, is more detailed in tracing the structure of an event seen as essentially fantastic. Gyrko also discusses “Las armas secretas” in the wider context of fantasy in Cortázar’s fiction: “Destructive and Ironically Redemptive Fantasy in Cortázar,” *Hispania* 56 (1973):988–99. The story is most often mentioned in the context of the *topos* of the Doppelgänger in Cortázar’s works. Yet, these references do not represent an actual analysis of the structure of the story. See Malva E. Filer, “Las transformaciones del yo,” in Helmy F. Giacomán, *Homenaje a Julio Cortázar: variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra* (Long Island City, N.Y.: Las Américas-Anaya, 1972), pp. 260–76 (pp. 260–68 specifically); Marta Morello-Frosch, “El personaje y su doble en las ficciones de Cortázar,” in Giacomán, *Homenaje a Julio Cortázar*, pp. 329–38; and Frances Wyers Weber, “Cortázar: Doubles, Figures, and Others,” in Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce, *Narradores hispanoamericanos de hoy* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina), pp. 21–31.



cause of the arrogant violence of his crime against a young innocent girl).

However, such a reading invites many obstacles. The possibility of viewing "Las armas secretas" in psychological terms has been raised by Graciela de Sola, although she does not pursue the implication of her suggestion<sup>10</sup>:

El cuento objetiva una experiencia psicológica llevada a un grado de plena y estremecedora realización. Pierre tiene extraños anuncios. Oye un lied de Schumann cuyas palabras no comprende. Piensa en una casa en Enghien, con una bola de vidrio en el pasamanos, siente las hojas secas en la cara. Pero en el Pont Neuf no hay hojas secas. Una nueva personalidad desconocida parece aflorar a intervalos, y aunque Cortázar no lo señala en forma explícita en ningún momento queda abierta la posibilidad de un extraño caso de "posesión." (p. 60)

If we assume that the plot of a literary text has an internal logic and that the reader will apply the logic of his referential code to that text in an attempt to encompass the latter by the former—in more pedestrian terms, in order to oblige the story to "make sense"—there is a fundamental mismatch between a psychological reading of "Las armas secretas" and its narrative syntax. Psychologically, we can accept the likelihood of Michèle's sexual trauma; psychologically we can also accept a mechanism whereby part of that trauma is transferred unconsciously to Pierre: although he does not know the details of Michèle's dreadful experience or even that it occurred, his behavior could be seen as an unconscious reaction to abnormal or, at least, unexpected aspects of Michèle's behavior. For example, his decision to act aggressively could be "explained" as the result of his intuition that the girl suffers from some sort of "sexual block" that needs to be overcome through an appropriate affirmation of masculine sexuality. The opening of the story, which involves Pierre's stream-of-consciousness preoccupation over Michèle's sexual reserve, is an obvious example of a psychological reaction—one involving a sense of insecurity and confusion over what seems to be so natural—generated in one person by the preoccupations of another:

Una escopeta de doble caño no tiene nada de raro, pero qué puede hacer a esa hora y en su pieza la idea de una escopeta de doble caño, y esa sensación como de extrañamiento. No le gusta esa hora en que todo vira al lila, al gris. Estira indolentemente el brazo

10. Graciela de Sola, *Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1968). For a study of psychological conflicts in Cortázar's fiction, see Antoni, "Struttura psico-simbolica e rappresentazione di conflitti in alcuni racconti di Julio Cortázar," *Studi mediolatini e volgari* 22 (1974):7-33.

para encender la lámpara de la mesa. ¿Por qué no llega Michèle? Ya no vendrá, es inútil seguir esperando. Habrá que pensar que realmente no quiere venir a su cuarto. En fin, en fin. Nada de tomarlo a lo trágico; otro coñac, la novela empezada, bajar a comer algo al bistró de León. Las mujeres serán siempre las mismas, en Enghien o en París, jóvenes o maduras. Su teoría de los casos excepcionales empieza a venirse al suelo, la ratita retrocede antes de entrar en la ratonera. ¿Pero qué ratonera? Un día u otro, antes o después . . . La ha estado esperando desde las cinco, aunque ella debía llegar a las seis; ha alisado especialmente para ella el coberter azul, se ha trepado como un idiota a una silla, plumero en mano, para desprender una insignificante tela de araña que no hacía mal a nadie. Y sería tan natural que en ese mismo momento ella bajara el autobús en Saint-Suplice y se acercara a su casa, deteniéndose ante las vitrinas o mirando las palomas de la plaza. No hay ninguna razón para que quiera subir a su cuarto. Claro que tampoco hay ninguna razón para pensar en una escopeta de doble caño, o decidir que en este momento Michaux sería mejor lectura que Graham Greene. La elección instantánea preocupa siempre a Pierre. No puede ser que todo sea gratuito, que un mero azar decida Greene contra Michaux, Michaux contra Enghien, es decir, contra Greene. Incluso confundir una localidad como Enghien con un escritor como Greene. . . "No puede ser que todo sea tan absurdo", piensa Pierre tirando el cigarillo. "Yo si no viene es porque le ha pasado algo; no tiene nada que ver con nosotros dos." (pp. 188-89)

In addition, Pierre's musing concerning the difficulty of knowing another person would seem to be but a further specification of the psychological bases of their relationship:

[ . . . ] En esa remota vida que lleva, la única certidumbre es haber estado lo más cerca posible de Michèle, esperando y dándose cuenta de que no basta con eso, que todo es vagamente asombroso, que no sabe nada de Michèle, absolutamente nada en realidad (tiene ojos grises, tiene cinco dedos en cada mano, es soltera, se peina como una chiquilla), absolutamente nada en realidad. Entonces si uno no sabe nada de Michèle, basta dejar de verla un momento para que el hueco se vuelva una maraña espesa y amarga; te tiene miedo, te tiene asco, a veces te rechaza en lo más hondo de un beso, no se quiere acostar contigo, tiene horror de algo, esta misma mañana te ha rechazado con violencia (y qué encantadora estaba, y cómo se ha pegado contra ti en el momento de despedirse, y cómo lo ha preparado todo para reunirse contigo mañana e ir juntos a su casa de Enghien) y tú le has dejado la marca de los dientes en la boca, la estabas besando y la has mordido y ella se ha quejado, se ha pasado los dedos por la boca y se ha quejado sin enojo, un poco asombrada solamente, als alle Knospen sprangen, tú cantabas por dentro Schumann, pedazo de

bruto, cantabas mientras la mordías en la boca y ahora te acuerdas, además subías una escalera, sí, la subías, rozabas con la mano la bola de vidrio donde nace el pasamanos, pero después Michèle ha dicho que en su casa no hay ninguna bola de vidrio. (p. 196)

Yet, these musings are read ironically by the reader, especially the reader who, on the basis of elements of foreshadowing, senses that Michèle's story is even less expected than Pierre believes or the reader who reads the text a second time with its overall narrative structure in mind. Pierre's thoughts are ironic to the extent that they involve not just a degree of routine psychological introspection, but that they bespeak his acquisition, in a way that we are basically unable to explain, of a recollection of the specific details of Michèle's traumatic sexual history. To be mundane about it, Pierre begins to recall details of the circumstances of Michèle's rape that he cannot reasonably have had any access to. She has not told him about her rape by the German officer, nor have her friends. Moreover, as Babette and Roland make clear at the end of the story, Michèle does not know the circumstances surrounding the rapist's death and, hence, could not have told Pierre how the officer fell forward into a pile of dead leaves, his face blown off by Roland's shotgun. What is more, Pierre sings, in a language he does not know (and with a native accent?), parts of a Schumann song sung by the German officer; and, in the chalet, he stutters as did the rapist, and he even seems to speak with the same inflections of voice, despite the fact that the two are speaking French and not German, languages that are radically different phonologically.

Finally, how are we to take the closing scene of the story in the context of such a reading: are Ronald and Babette on their way to try to convince Michèle that it is time she overcame her traumatic experience of the past and assumed a normal sex life? Or will they attempt to prevent a new trauma by telling Pierre what he should have been told by either Michèle or her protectors before events got out of hand? A psychological reading of the story, moreover, would expect, in addition to further information on these points, a clarification of the effect Pierre's behavior had on Michèle. All we have is her hysteria and her appeal to Babette and Ronald. But, since the story is narrated from Pierre's point of view, we do not have any significant depiction of psychological impact, only external signs of it. That the story is related from Pierre's standpoint (there are only three brief passages in which perspective is shifted away from Pierre to Babette and Ronald) is somewhat odd, since we have neither a satisfactorily complete representation of his psychological development regarding Michèle's problem nor anything approaching an adequate representation of his perception of that problem from her viewpoint;

and, were Michèle's trauma the point of the story, we would expect it to be narrated with greater focus on her perception of events, which is hardly the case.

In sum, then, we cannot naturalize "Las armas secretas" by a psychological reading, and I doubt if many readers have really attempted it—at least, not those readers who are familiar with the overall sense of Cortázar's writings. Yet, I think it is necessary to dwell in some detail on the psychological aspects of the story, since it unquestionably concerns a chain of events related directly to a circumstance of paramount psychological significance: the sexual traumatization of a young girl. Cortázar's fiction often deals with aspects of sex, especially within the context of trauma or frustration: the story from *Octaedro* already mentioned, La Maga's childhood as recounted in *Rayuela*, the "black widow" fiancée in "Circe," homosexual seduction in "Las babas del diablo," and sexual hypocrisy in "La señorita Cora." Furthermore, sexual mores are directly related to Cortázar's concern with the self-delusions of the Argentine middle class and with sex as a liberating force (compare *El libro de Manuel*). It is natural for a reader to want to relate direct and passing references to sex to the concerns over the subject, from both a psychological and a sociopolitical frame of reference, in the contemporary Argentine and European societies that figure in Cortázar's fiction. Nevertheless, it would be clear from an attempt to fit together a casebook understanding of sexual preoccupations in Cortázar's writings that they do not conform in detail or in logical development to what we understand as customary psychological narrative. Thus, we must either reject a story like "Las armas secretas" as psychological or we must find an acceptable alternate definition for psychological narrative.

#### IV

An alternate reading of "Las armas secretas" would seek such a modified definition and could presumably base itself on the potential of the story for a fantastic reading. Read from the perspective of fantastic fiction, where the semantic postulates of the text need not conform to the referential code and where they are obliged in fact to set themselves in opposition to it as a higher order of "logical" comprehension, the psychological problem of "Las armas secretas" may presumably be seen as internally coherent even when it seems to be unsatisfactory from the perspective of customary psychological narrative. The key or "trigger" to such a reading (in addition to the reader's general acceptance of the unusual and the unknown in Cortázar's fiction) is also to be found in the opening passage of the text.

Curioso que la gente crea que tender una cama es exactamente lo mismo que tender una cama, que dar la mano es siempre lo mismo que dar la mano, que abrir una lata de sardinas es abrir al infinito la misma lata de sardinas. "Pero si todo es excepcional", piensa Pierre alisando torpemente el gastado cobertor azul. "Ayer llovía, hoy hubo sol, ayer estaba triste, hoy va a venir Michèle. Lo único invariable es que jamás conseguiré que esta cama tenga un aspecto presentable." No importa, a las mujeres les gusta el desorden de un cuarto de soltero, pueden sonreír (la madre asoma en todos sus dientes) y arreglar las cortinas, cambiar de sitio un florero o una silla, decir sólo a ti se te podía ocurrir poner esa mesa donde no hay luz. Michèle dirá probablemente cosas así, andará tocando y moviendo libros y lámparas, y él la dejará hacer mirándola todo el tiempo, tirando en la cama o hundido en el viejo sofá, mirándola a través del humo de una Gauloise y deseándola. (p. 185)

Characteristic of the sort of ambiguities associated with Cortázar's "writerly" texts—works that demand exceptional effort on the part of the reader, who must collaborate with the writer, as it were, in the structural construction of the text<sup>11</sup>—this opening passage is fundamentally disorienting in that it is not immediately clear to whom we should attribute the first sentence. Since there is a formal distinction between the first and the second sentences—the former is not enclosed in quotation marks and the latter is; the former is not explicitly attributed to a source, while the latter is, to Pierre—it would be natural to assume that both observations do not belong to the same source. For example, the opening sentence could well be attributed to the narrator whom we discover to be omniscient in his reporting of Pierre's thoughts and events beyond Pierre's own range of knowledge. In this sense, the first and second sentence form an ironic counterpoint: one is attributable to a limited consciousness (Pierre's explicitly identified thought) and one is assigned to an omniscient narrator. Such a possible irony is supported by the fact that the parenthetical assignment of source in the second sentence ("piensa Pierre alisando torpemente el gastado corbertor azul") contains at least one lexical item and possibly a second one that, because they are subjective assessments, underline the superior and ironic perspective of the narrator.

Nevertheless, setting aside formal considerations, we see that there are reasons of a semantic order for attributing both observa-

11. The concept of *lector cómplice* in Cortázar's works has become a major critical premise and is related to the emphasis of contemporary structuralist theory on reader competence. The term was given currency by Mario Benedetti's early review, "Julio Cortázar, un narrador para los lectores cómplices," *Tiempos modernos* 1:2 (1965):16–19.

tions to Pierre, with the omniscient and, therefore, ironic narrator not appearing until the tag to the second sentence that explicitly identifies the character thinking to himself. That the second sentence begins with *pero* is an essential point in linking the two utterances: the concessive particle implies that what follows it is related to a preceding proposition: A, but (no, yet, then, therefore) B. The member "but B" cannot occur without at least implying that there is an accompanying A member. Language has a number of such patterns that systematically link utterances together into a coherent discourse beyond the level of the individual sentence, and to speak of the internal logic or sense or "flow" of a discourse is to acknowledge the functional presence of such patterns. Thus, in short, despite the superficial differences between the two sentences that open the text, we can see that we must attribute them both to the logical flow of Pierre's interior monologue as he waits in vain for Michèle to visit his humble bachelor quarters.

Why, then, might there even be a problem in making such an identification? If both utterances are Pierre's, why distinguish between them orthographically (quotation marks versus no quotation marks) and in terms of reported performance (explicit attribution to Pierre versus no attribution)? One might say that it is simply a question of making the narrative *mise-en-scène* mildly confusing or complicated enough to engage the writerly participation of the reader. One notes that the opening of "Las babas del diablo," in the same collection and one of Cortázar's major metatexts on the problems of art and literature, also involves a certain amount of confusing complexity, both in syntax and discourse coherency. Nevertheless, on a broader level, it is possible to relate the seemingly insignificant problem of the structural relationship between the two opening sentences of the story to the issue of structural anomaly and to whether or not the text involves a clear-cut—or, at the very least, an adequately convincing—case of the supplantation of the known by the fantastic unknown. The ambivalence of the textual inauguration may be taken as either (1) to signal the narrator's ironic foreshadowing of the eventual imposition of the unknown on the unassuming existence of the hopeless Pierre, or (2) a signal—itself a sort of foregrounding on the level of the metatext rather than on that of the events narrated—that no straightforward characterization of the meaning or implication for a "theory" of experiential reality will be forthcoming in the narrative logic of the text.

The foregoing is an important point. Although "Las armas secretas" deals in the shadowy side of what at first glance seems to be transparent human nature and its associated happenings, does the actual *récit* of the text provide anything in the way of a coherent

postulation of the fashion in which the unknown comes unsuspectingly to control modest human destinies? I would venture to say that it does not. This is, in my opinion, no more a defect of the story than is the fact that "Las armas secretas" does not provide anything approaching a valid psychological analysis of the human behavior it relates. This refusal, which we identify on the level of the metatext, on the level on which we formally characterized the goals of the narrative and the implications for its discourse structure of those goals, is precisely what we have identified as the principle of structural anomaly. As a principle for text production, it becomes a positive mechanism that identifies a certain range of narrative structures.

But before I pursue further the presence of structural anomaly in "Las armas secretas," it is necessary to identify some of the motifs of the imposition of fantasy on accepted reality and the ways in which they do not coalesce into a clear-cut pattern. Clearly, the most important elements in the story are those that suggest that Pierre is reenacting, without realizing it, Michèle's brutal rape by the Nazi officer. These elements are the details of the setting and circumstances of that event. Throughout the text and in ascending frequency there are over forty references to approximately six major allusions: the lodge at Enghien, the song in German, the double-barreled shotgun that kills the officer, the dry leaves, the crystal ball at the bottom end of the banister, the key to Michèle's room, plus a few references that occur with lesser frequency, like Pierre's unexplained coolness to Ronald or his sudden fit of stuttering in the face of what is for him the girl's sexual reticence. Moreover, these references, which are, of course, functional motifs that underline with growing frequency how something unusual is happening to Pierre's prosaic existence and aspirations, are embodied in transcriptions of his interior monologues and stream of consciousness, which are, in turn, commented on ironically, both directly and indirectly by the narrator. These comments come within the context of Pierre's struggle to account rationally for what he only vaguely senses as occurring (see the beginning extract of this chapter; both are attributed to Pierre):

La delicia de estar ahí, de sentirse tan bien en ese instante, de cerrar los ojos, [ . . . ] de pasarse la mano por el pelo, una, dos veces, sintiendo la mano que anda por el pelo casi como si no fuera suya, la leve cosquilla al llegar a la nuca, el reposo. Cuando abre los ojos ve la cara de Michèle, su boca entreabierta, la expresión como si de golpe se hubiera quedado sin una gota de sangre. La mira sin entender, un vaso de coñac rueda por la alfombra. Pierre está de pie frente al espejo; casi le hace gracia ver que tiene el pelo partido al medio, como los galanes del cine mudo. ¿Por qué tiene



que llorar Michèle? No está llorando, pero una carta entre las manos es siempre alguien que llora. Se las aparta bruscamente, la besa en el cuello, busca su boca. Nacen las palabras, las suyas, las de ella, como bestezuelas buscándose, un encuentro que se demora en caricias, un olor a siesta, a casa sola, a escalera esperando con la bola de vidrio en el nacimiento del pasamanos. Pierre quisiera alzar en vilo a Michèle, subir a la carrera, tiene la llave en el bolsillo, entrará en el dormitorio, se tenderá contra ella, la sentirá estremecerse, empezará torpemente a buscar cintas, botones, pero no hay una bola de vidrio en el nacimiento del pasamanos, todo es lejano y horrible, Michèle ahí a su lado está tan lejos y llorando, su cara llorando entre los dedos mojados, su cuerpo que respira y tiene miedo y lo rechaza. (pp. 210–11, see also pp. 218–20)

Yet, if we see the juxtaposition of Pierre's increasing uneasiness, framed by the narrator's ironic commentaries, as the clear representation of the imposition of the fantastic, of the shibboleth "There are more things on earth than man has dreamed of," the structure of such a narrative discourse is not carried out and we are left with a sense of incompleteness. For example, we have a straightforward postulation of such a discourse in the opening references (narrator *cum* Pierre) to how things are not always as easy or as consistently identical as they seem to be. Then we have the introduction of the first motif that does not fit the verisimilar context established; that is, Pierre's first recollection of a detail that belongs to the circumstances of Michèle's rape seven years ago: "Le parece verla, y a la vez se da cuenta de que está imaginando una escopeta de doble caño, justamente cuando traga el humo del cigarrillo y se siente como perdonado de su tontería. Una escopeta de doble caño no tiene nada de raro, pero qué puede hacer a esa hora y en su pieza la idea de una escopeta de doble caño, y esa sensación como de extrañamiento" (pp. 187–88). As has already been noted, these references increase in number and become obsessively insistent in Pierre's subsequent relations with Michèle. Moreover, they cluster themselves into a clear network of references to circumstances Pierre has had no possible knowledge of. Finally, the reader is presented with what should be the resolution of the pattern established by the narrative discourse or formula. This resolution should involve his attempts at sexual relations with Michèle and the definitive, triumphant imposition of the fantastic circumstance—the reenactment in a different time and place through the medium of a different agent of a past and horrible event (how many cheap Gothic thrillers can be summarized with that formula?). But what we have instead of the unequivocal representation of this prototypic resolution is a series of oblique references: does Pierre in fact carry Michèle up to her bedroom?



Does he in fact possess her by force? Does he in fact "become" literally (metempsychosis) or functionally (psychological role assignment) the arrogant defiler of a subjected individual? Do Ronald and Babette in fact return to the scene of the crime to carry out once again the brutal vengeance against the Nazi rapist? Indeed, as I have already mentioned, the text closes not with a taut, suspenseful denouement of the reenacted tragedy, but with a comically and banal exchange between the two putative avengers. Perhaps their conversation is meant ironically to suggest that they are once again to become unsuspecting participants in the terrible assault on Michèle. But, I think not, for what we still miss is the implication of a satisfactory answer to the other questions raised above, questions that are surely reasonable in terms of plot expectations.

To what extent does the situation I have described constitute structural anomaly? Perhaps, the use of the term is a somewhat pretentious extension of a linguistic concept. Yet, no other phrase comes immediately to mind to describe what happens in "*Las armas secretas*." Although we do not demand literature to be semantically transparent—and, indeed, this study has as one of its axioms that a criticism based on such an assumption is misguided—we nevertheless approach a text with a set of expectations as to what happens in the real world of meaning. When a text, linguistic or literary, deviates from that expectation, we are faced with a delicate choice. We can reject the text as unfortunately ungrammatical, which is what is often done in the case of colloquial discourse. But, in literature, by virtue of the special conventions that control our reading of literary discourse,<sup>12</sup> our choice would more likely be to accept the apparently anomalous as an expansion of an elaboration on accepted versions of reality in meaning. To this extent, anomaly in a literary text becomes crucial not as simply one aspect of its meaning but as the very validation of the way in which we are willing, by virtue of the discourse conventions that control the reading of literature, to accept such anomaly as an appropriate, albeit a perplexingly difficult, feature of literary texts. By foregrounding the fundamental conflict between possible ways of understanding what happens in "*Las armas secretas*," Cortázar stresses the inevitable semantic opacity of literature and the phenomena that, in his view, it deals with.

All narrative, then, depends on the workings of plot expectations: the reader demands that stories "make sense" in terms of either a Propopian universal plot scheme or in terms of a typology of potential narrative structures. The writer constructs his tale with the confi-

12. Concerning discourse structure, see Jonathan Culler's chapters on the novel, and Robert E. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*, chapter 5 entitled "The Structuralist Analysis of Literary Texts."

dence that such a demand is, in point of fact, the competence or ability of the reader to follow and impose discourse structure on his tale.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, we expect discourse structure in all serious literature to put the reader's competence to extreme, demanding tests, which is why attempts like Propp's to describe an ideal discourse structure in sufficient detail so as to be considered universal to a vast number of potential structural variants have been disappointing: there is always some narrative that makes complex sense but that does not seem to have been taken into account by the universal typology. But, it is in terms of what we expect, however we define that expectation in terms of narrative typologies, that one may say that the conclusion of Cortázar's story does not provide an adequate characterization of the ultimate triumph of the unknown over pedestrian reality. In other stories by Cortázar, such a triumph is indeed definitive, as in "Casa tomada" (there is no question that the undefined/undefinable strangers have taken over the house); in "Carta a una señorita en París" (there is no question that the protagonist vomits furry bunnies and commits suicide in desperation over his uncontrollable aberration); or in "La noche boca arriba" (there is no question over the complete fusion of the motorcycle accident victim with the victim of Aztec sacrificial rites). Note that in the last example, we have the sort of cyclical reenactment defined as a narrative resolution, an uncompromising definition that is lacking in "Las armas secretas." In sum, unexplained elements seem on the verge of controlling events in the story, but a plotting of the narrative discourse based on their functional presence reveals that, unlike other stories by Cortázar, this text is marked by a truncated resolution of the postulates concerning the necessary, definitive triumph of the unknown or the fantastic in our humble, unsuspecting lives. Rather than resolution, we are left with only an ambiguous suggestion, which may be richer in meanings but which may also confuse the reader.

## V

Given the recognized quality of Cortázar's fiction, the critic can only reasonably propose that reader confusion is the goal of the narrative structure of "Las armas secretas." And perhaps such a "confusion" (if one may continue to use, without prejudice, what is nevertheless an essentially negative denomination) is part of the challenge to the competence of a reader of writerly texts that cannot, by virtue of the literary act, offer unambiguous meanings and pre-

13. Concerning the discourse conventions of literature, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*.

programmed interpretations—hence, the recourse to a narrative structure predicated on structural anomaly. We sense the potential for untroubled coherence, but the anomalous structure, by failing to conform to what our codes of competence would predict (in the case of *"Las armas secretas"* either a range of psychological interpretations or a range of transcendent and fantastic higher orders of experiential reality), we are left with a structure that cannot be resolved adequately in terms of what we perceive to be the potentially "proper" configuration. And it is not a question of ambiguity, which involves nonanomalous but polysemous structures. Ambiguity is what is involved in *"Verano"*: the text is not anomalous, for the intrusion of the unknown appears to be consistently postulated as a fact with which the protagonist must contend. Rather, the story is ambiguous to the extent that there are a number of discrete and reasonable interpretations that a hermeneutic reading of the text could put forth.

In this sense, the problems for an adequate reading that arise with regard to *"Las armas secretas"* are not really matters of ambiguity. Whether the concept of structural anomaly is, in the final analysis, the best theoretical frame of reference to use in the description of the particular complexities of this one text is of secondary importance. What does stand out as of primary importance is the need to postulate some reasonable point of departure that will identify categorically those particular complexities and invest them with meaning within the context of contemporary models for narrative analysis.

## Chapter VIII.

# The *Écriture* of Social Protest in Mario Benedetti's "El cambiazó"

Despite the acknowledged importance of Mario Benedetti in the contemporary Latin-American narrative, one is surprised by the relative lack of studies devoted to the Uruguayan's works, particularly his short stories. Aside from those articles that do not go beyond a brief journalistic review, essays based on analytic criteria and theoretical precision are indeed rare, as can be determined from the collection of papers on his writings: *Mario Benedetti, variaciones críticas*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this lack of a sustained criticism, which is all the more perturbing if we remember that the new narrators have often received disproportionate critical attention in recent Latin-American literary scholarship, is due to the fact that Benedetti has been somewhat eclipsed by his fellow countryman, Juan Carlos Onetti, truly a forefather of the new narrative. It is possible that it is due also in part to Uruguay's present socio-intellectual situation, where Benedetti's political commitment (he has worked for a number of years with Cuba's official cultural agency, the Casa de las Américas) unquestionably makes him a pariah. Whatever the exact reason for this relative neglect, it is time that the situation be remedied, and this chapter, which deals with one of the stories from *La muerte y otras sorpresas* (1968; the collection has so far received only brief reviews<sup>2</sup>) is the attempt to demonstrate how the Uruguayan's narrative *écriture* places him in the mainstream of the contemporary short story in Latin America.

The story that is to be examined here is "El cambiazó." Like several of the texts in *La muerte*, this story concerns modern technology and its ability to produce in the populace—the mass of people to whom it is offered as a phenomenon for increasing the quality of

1. Jorge Ruffinelli, ed., *Mario Benedetti, variaciones críticas* (Montevideo: Libros del Astillero, 1973). This collection has a fairly complete bibliography.

2. Among these reviews is my own, the only one in English: "Mario Benedetti: *La muerte y otras sorpresas*," *Books Abroad* 43 (1969):565. Ruffinelli also comments on this collection, although not always in favorable terms, in his study cited in footnote 1.

their lives and, therefore, the level of their civilization as dignified human beings—an alienation that can assume truly psychotic proportions. This technology, whether nationally developed or imported as part of the country's participation in the international capitalist marketplace, comes to constitute a form of impersonal control over human beings, a control that in turn is nothing more nor less than one more manifestation of the oppression and repression that frames life in Latin America. In "El cambiazio," television is the technological "value" at issue; nevertheless, as I shall demonstrate, this foreign invention, which transmits foreign shows (or local imitations of them that are often worse than the originals) in order to sell foreign products, is touted as an instrument that can be transformed from a stupefying agent of the passive masses into a galvanizing force for revolutionary uprising. In Benedetti's other stories in *La muerte*, we find an assortment of similar technological advances. In "El fin de la disnea," it is medical technology (which may cure asthma, but in so doing destroys the human confraternity of commiserating sufferers). In "Musak," piped-in music triggers psychic disintegration: the music is so neutral that it becomes a maddening "civilized" heir to Chinese water torture. In "Acaso irreparable," it is aeronautics as represented by commercial aviation, which is so efficient it takes everything into account but the chaos of real life. And in "Ganas de embromar," the telephone is a metonymic instrument of how modern technology can be made to serve the ends of mindless political oppression.

"El cambiazio" is one of those stories in which two separate events seem to be unfolding at the same time and along parallel tracks. Two series of plot segments alternate: in one series Coronel Corrales, heading the operations of the Secret Police, converses with himself, with his colleagues and with the political prisoners he has hauled in about the country's problems and the value of the strong hand he knows how to wield so well in the campaign against the enemies of the fatherland; in another series we see the progressive stages of a television contest for young people, a contest in which Corrales's daughter participates and in which the contestants have to come up with changes for different parts of a song sung by Lito Suárez, a young crooner who is the idol of the program and its viewers. The last segment, after the successive stages in the change-game (hence, the story's title), we realize that the winning verses make up what is in fact the call for an uprising, and the young viewers take to the streets, invade Corrales's headquarters, and, screaming hysterically, shoot him to death. Thus, a paradigmatic figure of sociopolitical oppression is brought to (admittedly violent, lynch-law) justice by adolescents inflamed by the song of a callow idol of the teenybopper set.

To give the narrative form, a narrative that in the end addresses itself brutally to certain aspects of sociopolitical life in Latin America, the story marshals on the level of its *écriture* a series of thematic-semantic oppositions. These oppositions shape the text of the story as it evokes linearly, and our discovery or perception of them is what makes an approach to the sense of the narrative possible. To be sure, the fact that the text involves the interplay of two series of alternating segments reflects on the level of text composition the fact that what is fundamentally at issue is a network of oppositions. These oppositions, in turn, manifest themselves directly in the way the story is to be read in terms of two sequences of events that come together only in the closing scene. This network of oppositions cluster around three basic conflicts: (1) the police versus innocent youth (in the end there is an inversion with regard to the question of innocence); (2) sociopolitical reality versus the popular, gratuitous culture of the masses (a modification also takes place as concerns the issue of gratuitousness); and (3) machismo sex versus asexuality (innocent sexuality or at least the fear that is the antithesis of the swashbuckling dominance of the macho).

The first controlling opposition underlies the movement back and forth between scenes that give a faithful portrayal of police cynicism, especially the cynicism of the Secret Police, and scenes that present carefree youths, untroubled by social preoccupation and innocent of the reality that surrounds them, totally absorbed in the innocuous diversions served up by Lito Suárez's scandalously popular television program. What this means is that there is, on the one hand, a tragic social truth and, on the other, the maddening mindlessness of a subculture that is totally divorced from what should be the legitimate concern of the people. That this subculture belongs to the youth, to the future citizens of the Republic, serves all the more to underline how that subculture is supported by an officialdom that finds it immensely preferable to authentic civic and mass sentiment: "Las nuevas canciones son una idiotez. Pero ¿qué hay de malo en eso? La verdad es que la muchachada se entretiene, se pone juvenilmente histórica, pide autógrafos, besa fotografías, y mientras tanto no piensa. [ . . . ] Siempre es mejor que canten eso y no la Internacional" (p. 85, Coronel Corrales is speaking).<sup>3</sup> From the good Coronel's point of view, that is exactly how things should be: people, especially young people, do not think and, as long as they do not think, the defenders of the fatherland are able to pursue their job of ridding the country of enemies and the opposition cynically and peacefully:

3. All quotes are from *La muerte y otras sorpresas*, 2d ed. (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1969).

Y al final resultaba que ser soldado de la patria no era precisamente defender el suelo, las fronteras, la famosa dignidad nacional, de los fueros civiles el goce defendamos el código fiel, no, ser soldado de la patria, mejor dicho coronel de la patria, era joder a los muchachos, visitar al embajador, joder a los obreros, recibir la visita del subsecretario del secretario del embajador, joder a uno que otro cabecilla, dejar que los estimados colaboradores de esta Jefatura den rienda suelta a su sadismo en vías de desarrollo, insultar, agraviar, joder, siempre joder, y en el fondo también joderse a sí mismo. (p. 86)

The second opposition concerns the relationship between life and art: the latter is obliged to function only as a means for keeping intact the innocence and the passiveness of the young. In this sense "art"—subculture television—is diametrically opposed to the texture of life itself, which is reflected so faithfully in the words that have just been quoted from Corrales's stream of consciousness in another of the segments assigned to him. By way of contrast, the Coronel's daughter is completely swept away by the insane fluff of the tinsel world of her favorite television program:

hipnotizada frente al televisor, Julita no se atreve ni a papadear. No es para menos. Lito Suárez, con su rostro angelical y sus puñitos cerrados, ha cantado Siembra de Luz en seguida Mi Corazón Tiene un Remiendo. Gritos semejantes a los de la juvenil teleaudiencia salen también de la boca de Julita, quien para una mejor vocalización acomoda el bombón de menta al costado de la muela. Pero ahora Lito se pone solemne: "Hoy tengo una novedad y se llama El Cambiazo. Es una canción y también es un juego. Un juego que jugaremos al nivel de masas, al nivel de pueblo, al nivel de juventud . . .". (p. 82)

Yet, and herein lies the genius of Benedetti's story, the two oppositions described so far both undergo the process of rupture, a modification-inversion that alters their meaning completely while pointing at the same time to the possibility for a change in the structures to which they refer. In this way, the innocence attributable to the young television audience emerges as the real basis for potent revolution that is portentous in its implications. In exchange, the cynicism of the police is shown to mask a self-destructive naiveté as concerns the nature of mass persuasion. The manifestations of a cheap and trivial subculture end up suggesting their use as instruments for bringing about authentic communication among the masses, one that will effectively channel consciousness raising and positive responses. All of this is brought about via the game involving changes in the lyrics of a song as described by Lito Suárez at the

end of the preceding quote. The change in lyrics involves a contest: the singer will provide the audience with the text of a song in the form of a quartet. Each week one of the lines will be replaced by the best verse chosen from among those submitted by the audience. As the text progresses, the reader witnesses along with Julita and her father (who, as we have seen, discusses the game with one of his subalterns) the gradual modification of the quartet, line by line. Only at the end do we realize what has happened: the quartet is no longer just another stupid modern song:

"Paraquená dieeeee loimpida, paraquetuá mooooooooo des-  
pierre, paravosmí vooooooooooz rendida, paramisó loooooooooo  
quererte". (p. 83)

Instead, it has become the battle cry of an insurrection:

"Paraqueseá braaaaa laherida, paraqueusé mooooooooooooo  
lasuerte, paranosó troooooooooos lavida, paracorrá leeeeeeeee  
lamuerte". (p. 89)

Rupture, therefore, takes place not only in the reader's understanding of what has happened, but in the Coronel's as well. It is a rupture that directly concerns innocence: whereas the young are innocent in their apparent failure to participate in the tragedy of their country's sociopolitical reality, the police and the entire system of oppression, particularly insofar as the police are cynical toward the value of the people, are innocent on another level because they are incapable of conceiving of an insurrection invited by mass communications and the subculture that they believe serves only to distract the people and to turn their attention away from the oppression that has become their lot. The game ceases to be a game when it becomes political action and when the hypnosis of the youth ceases to be the result of a stupefying subculture and to become the instrument for mobilizing the masses against one of the focal points of their oppression.

Sex-related topics are also one of the bases of the story's *écriture*, for they also point up the opposition between oppressive power and the masses and because they likewise undergo an inversion. Coronel Corrales is an expert in torture techniques. He is also the paradigmatic military macho and his machismo is in effect part of his exercise of power, part of his image, and his professional persona:

decime, podridito, ¿vos te crees que me chupo el dedo? Ustedes querían provocar el apagón, ¿no es cierto? Seguro que al buenazo de Ibarra se la hubiera hecho. Pero yo soy un jefe de policía, no un maricón. Conviene que lo aprendas. ¿Tenés miedo, eh? No te culpo. Yo no sólo tendría miedo sino pánico frente al coronel Corrales. Pero resulta que el coronel Corrales soy yo, y el gran



revolucionario Menéndez sos vos. Y el que se caga de miedo también sos vos. Y el que se agarra la barriga de risa es otra vez el coronel Corrales. ¿Te parece bien? Decímelo con franqueza, porque si no te parece bien volvemos a la electricidad. Sucede que a mí no me gustan los apagones. A mí me gustan los toquitos eléctricos. Me imagino que todavía te quedarán güevos. Claro que un poco disminuidos, ¿verdad? ¿Quién te iba a decir que los güevos de avestruz se podían convertir en güevos de paloma? (. . .) ¿te comieron la lengua los ratones, tesoro? (pp. 83–84)

What we have is a dual set of oppositions: *yo/vos*, *macho/marica*. As a result, there is a degradation of the prisoner based on verbal abuse, stressing his alleged “femininity,” and based on the use of the electric probe directed against his sexual organs by an individual who derives his power from his machismo and his position with the military police. This opposition is defined principally in the segments assigned to Corrales, rather than being distributed between the two parallel series of narrative segments like the first two oppositions discussed. Nevertheless, Corrales sees young people in general and Lito Suárez in particular as something having to do with homosexuals. As such, he is confident that he and his men can handle them and that they represent no real threat to the security of the nation. This is what Corrales believes (see the quote from p. 85) and this is the impression that narrative itself gives in the manner in which certain aspects of Lito Suárez and the behavior of his fans are presented: “Lito Suárez, con su rostro angelical y sus puñitos cerrados . . .” (p. 82), “por fin ha conseguido una imagen de Lito. Un ángel, eso es. Besa la foto con furia, con ternura . . .” (p. 85). Moments before he is shot, Corrales converses with a subaltern:

“El [acto público autorizado] del cantante.” “Bah.” “Vengo de la Plaza. Eran miles y miles de chiquilines y sobre todo de muchachitas. Verdaderamente impresionate. Decían que allí iba a completar la canción, que allí iba a elegir el cuarto verso. Usted diría que yo soy demasiado aprensivo, mi coronel, pero ¿usted no cree que habría que vigilarlos más?” “Créame, Fresnado, son taraditos. Los conozco bien, ¿sabe?, porque desgraciadamente mi hija Julita es uno de ellos. Son inofensivos, son cretinos, empezando por ese Lito. ¿Usted no cree que es un débil mental?” (p. 89)

In summary, what I have been maintaining is that “El cambiao” from the outset is predicated on a fundamental opposition: the young versus oppression in the hands of adults—Julita versus her father, Coronel Corrales. This opposition in turn bases itself for the generation of the linear narrative on three more immediate opposition that exemplify the central one. In each case we are presented

first with a dichotomy that is reinforced by the distribution of the narrative along two alternating but parallel axes that are well delineated. However, there is also in each case a modification and an inversion that take place: innocence becomes Corrales's guilty trait, television becomes a powerful instrument of the call to rebellion, and the "kids" end up assassinating Corrales, the macho par excellence. Seen in these terms, the distribution of the text in terms of two narrative sequences is only a parenthesis for the purpose of stressing the distance between the two realms, that of blind power and that of the innocent young. Yet, these two sequences—and the realms they seem to differentiate—end up by coming together or overlapping when the latter attacks the former and executes the symbol that incarnates its meaning. Thus, the oppositions that stressed a sociopolitical dichotomy have been nullified and, to a certain extent, overcome.

This structural study of the semantic bases of Benedetti's story, of the principles of *écriture* that give coherence to the linear text, could be accused of reducing the human commitment of "El cambiozo" to formalist schematics. Nevertheless, the semiological and structural analysis of a text cannot avoid dealing with what is being said via the structures of the text. This is because such an analysis is based as it is on the demand to provide not a reductionist interpretation, but guidelines for an adequate reading in the sense that it elucidates the principles of *écriture* on which the text has been constructed. It is not so much a question of "message," expressed in heavy-handed extraliterary terms, as it is of that segment of human experience given meaning through the signifying medium of the text. Far from ignoring the meaning of a literary text, structuralism studies the possibilities for dealing with it, always basing itself on an approach to reading that takes into account how we set about understanding linguistic messages (on which the text is based in its character as a form of linguistic discourse), how we come to see an abstract relationship between the flow of the text, barely divided into fragments by the conventions of orthography, and the underlying semantic denominators that give it meaning. There is, one must insist, a dialectical relationship between the flow of the text and these common denominators that I have called the principles of a text's *écriture*, and an adequate reading of any literary text involves the perception and the evaluation of this dialectic.<sup>4</sup> In "El cambiozo,"

4. From the point of view of the structural study of a work, it is possible to see how questions of "style" become a subcategory of *écriture*. This is why the present study and the one by Oscar Fernández are so different in their critical premises: "Mario Benedetti: Four Stories, Four Styles," *Studies in Short Fiction* 11 (1974):283–90.

where the “artistry” of Lito Suárez’s song and the story itself become homologous as a text capable of awakening an impulse for rebellion in their respective audiences (and no one will deny that Benedetti sees art as an instrument of consciousness raising and of activist mobilization), the ability to grasp the underlying principles of *écriture* that give structural shape to the story means the concomitant ability to convert the reading of a story that would otherwise seem to be a confusing example of clever new narrative writing into an appreciation of the essential semantic oppositions that it evokes.

## Chapter IX.

# Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* and the Generic Ambiguity of Narrative

*El general preguntó la hora y un edecán se acercó rápido a musitar: "La que usted quiera, señor Presidente". (p. 99)<sup>1</sup>*

### I

While it may be true that *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* owes its title as well as many of its narrative segments to material left over from the author's *Tres tristes tigres* (1967), it is undeniable that the distance separating the two works is great and that Cabrera Infante's most recent work of fiction represents a marked change in his writings.<sup>2</sup> The following points constitute basic features of *Vista* that any adequate characterization of the work—whether seen as a fragmentary novel or as a loosely connected series of stories<sup>3</sup>—must account for:

1. Narrative texture is the most noteworthy feature. We claim that the texture of a work is the direct manifestation of underlying structures, of its *écriture* as text. Yet, these considerations aside and to focus on only the verbal substance of the text, it is surprising to observe how Cabrera Infante has left behind the norm-breaking linguistic experimentation that distinguishes his *Tres tristes tigres*,

1. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1974). I know of only two review articles: Eloy González Arguelles, "Guillermo Cabrera Infante: *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*," *Caribe* 1:2 (1976):121–23; Matías Montes Huidobro, "Review of *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* and *O*," *Chasqui* 5:2 (1976):81–84.

2. For a representative collection of essays on Cabrera Infante's fiction prior to *Vista*, see Julio Ortega, ed., *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* (Madrid: Ed. Fundamentos, 1974).

3. For what the datum is worth, Editorial Seix Barral published *Vista* in its *Relatos* series.

José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*, and Sarduy's *Cobra*—all of which are eminent examples of what Barthes called reader challenging (if not reader defying) *scriptible/writerly* texts. The result is a work that seems to be above all *lectible/writerly*, at least regarding its immediate linguistic expression, which gives the impression of document whose meaning is decidedly transparent. Meaning in the aforementioned novels, of course, is not transparent: whatever meaning that can be purported to underlie the textual *énoncé* is maddeningly elusive. Since the new Latin-American novel is known for its insistence on the nontransparent text whose play of signifiers impedes access to a realm of text-independent meanings, in order to create—to suggest or to insinuate—meanings dependent on the unstable structures of the textual *parole*, Cabrera Infante's shift to a form of pseudo-journalistic expression that seems more document than narrative hopscotch is significant.

2. In *Vista*, we encounter a series of fragments whose interrelationship is tenuous. All extensive narratives (save those that suppress any internal division) are made up of fragments, whether the traditional division into chapters or "scenes" or the more experimental division into blocks of narration that are short as such but are tightly interrelated. *Vista* follows the pattern of Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963) rather than that of Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el Supremo* (1975), which means a narrative made up of a string of fragments that appear to be autonomous in the sense that, rather than following each other in a continuum, each fragment is isolated graphically to the extent that it begins on a separate page and, if it is especially short, is followed by blank space at the bottom of the page and even by a blank overleaf. Moreover, each fragment appears in the index with its opening words by way of a title. Since there are 101 fragments in *Vista*, the index belongs more to a collection of untitled poems than to a work of fiction. What is particularly significant about this fragmentation—and what sets *Vista* off from *Rayuela*, where we can speak of a novel in at least a skeletal fashion, with characters and action-plot trajectory—is that it bespeaks a fundamental ambiguity of genre on Cabrera Infante's part. In other words, it is not clear whether we should speak of an organically structural novel or of a series of short stories, or whether we should speak of fragments that are scenes which, in turn, refer kaleidoscopically to a miscellany of narrative possibilities: an event, an impersonal circumstance, an outstanding individual, even a song or a news item that is spread by word of mouth.

Since the fragments take on the character of autonomous scenes, even when grouped together on the basis of the constant of the *trópico* in the title, the book stands in the end outside the genre of the

novel to which *Tres tristes tigres*, when all is said and done, does belong, no matter how hard it may be on occasion to know what is happening in the latter in terms of a unified *fable*. To this extent, *Vista* cannot be studied in terms of novel-reading conventions but insists instead on a reading of independent vignettes. Yet, at the same time and due to the organization of the fragments under an umbrella title and our natural desire to seek organic structures where there seems to be only chaos and disorder, the reader discovers common denominators among the fragments in order to bring them together into a homogeneous text, one without gaps on the level of its abstract meaning. By departing from the patterns of easily recognized genres, especially the novel that is based on a trajectory of events and the short story that stands apart from the other stories with which it appears in a collection, the author forces us with unusual emphasis to think about such conventions. We undertake to see how they are applicable to the text at hand, to what extent; and, if they are not applicable, what the conventions are that should be brought to bear in order to achieve a coherent reading of the text.

3. As a result of the foregoing generic ambiguity, *Vista* brings into focus the question of extratextual versus intratextual unity.<sup>4</sup> It would be impossible not to notice how the fragments are unified not by the trajectory of persons or events described by the inner action, but by the sweep of Cuban history. This point is made explicitly by the back of the book. But it is also made clear by the internal references of the fragments themselves, where chronological movement and allusions to certain happenings and key figures of Cuba's history are obvious to even the reader who lacks a complete knowledge of the history of the island. It is true that Cabrera Infante can count on a more perfect knowledge on the part of the average reader than would be the case, let us say, if he were dealing with the trajectory of Bolivian history, a country that has not been in the public eye to the same extent as Cuba has been in the last twenty years. It is undeniable that Cabrera Infante's text allows one to read it on various levels, from an approach that what is related is understood as a series of key references to men and events that are part of common knowledge (to which is added "historical fact" in this reading), to a reading where we know that the basis is in history but also that what is narrated is to be taken as history without our having to identify documentarily the points of historical reference. It is probable that an intermediary reading is the most normal or appropriate one, the one that Cabrera Infante counted on implicitly in

4. Concerning intertextuality, see Julia Kristeva, *El texto de la novela* (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1974).

structuring his stories so as to place emphasis on first what are historically verifiable data and then on what are really fictional elaborations but with a remote and more mythic historical quality.

The end result is a text in which specific extratextual and intratextual knowledge enriches one's reading, but also one in which this knowledge remains more the possibility of concrete historical knowledge and not an obligation imposed on the reader by the author. The effect is at times one of ambiguity or the hint of ambiguity: the reader has the impression that more is going on than he can handle because he has only an imperfect acquaintanceship with Cuban history. Yet, it is an ambiguity that emerges more from the lack of preciseness in the presentation of many of the data, or from a certain obliqueness in the elaboration of the text itself than from the absence of sufficient historical learning on the author's part. One could go so far as to say that such an ambiguity is operant even for the reader who is extensively familiar with Cuban history, since it is an ambiguity that arises functionally from the mode of narration rather than from the formation of the average reader of the text. In this sense, any question concerning Cuban history in *Vista* concerns more a trap for an adequate reading of the text and not an inherent feature that necessarily defines as such the nature of that text.

4. The use of the principles of intertextuality—references that are both explicit and oblique to other works of history and literature—as well as the fragmentariness that gives *Vista* its particular character contribute to a situation in which the narrative voice, in addition to being multifaceted like that of *Tres tristes tigres*, where we have a text that seems to be self-generating (and self-destructive), depends on the intrinsic nature of each segment, rather than functioning as a "presence" that unites the text as a whole. One could refer to the idea of a pseudo-mythic voice that replaces the perspective of a narrator circumscribed by his limitations as the source of data and opinions (that is, the unreliable narrators of new novel texts that suggest the problem of the inaccessibility of knowledge, such as we have in many of the narrators of Borges's stories). Such a mythic voice insists on a gnosiological primacy based on its being the center whence flow the structures of linguistic expression. It controls expression because it encompasses it as the spokesman of an absolute knowledge as regards the phenomena to be portrayed through the agency of the mythic tale. In primitive, "innocent" contexts, we have myths that lack self-awareness and in which self-contemplation is impossible: they stand as witnesses to an absolute faith in the expressive power of the word. In the new narrative, the need to achieve distance between the narrator (as the maker of fictions) and the narrative material, as well as to permit the latter to "speak itself,"

as the cliché goes, or to vanish as a non-meaning that cannot be independent from the narration that articulates it, gives new life to the possibilities of mythic expression whereby the text exists only as the product of *énonciation* by an explicit narrative voice. But, at the same time, in a modern context, where innocence is impossible, where metaliterature—literature that turns in upon itself to engage in self-commentary and self-criticism—becomes an imperative, mythic expression demands dialectics in which the structures of expression embody not only a meaning with an absolute value (the “truth” about something or some experience—in this case, the intrahistorical trajectory of Cuba)—but also an often cutting irony that exposes all of our uncertainties concerning actions, characters, and values that intrahistory represents. In this latter sense, the text can be the expression of a myth while at the same time it bespeaks the strain on myth by modern human ineptness.

Thus, *Vista* may be using the anonymity of historical facts and figures to create, on the one hand, a mythic setting in which values are what is most important, but also, on the other, to achieve a demythification of a certain canon of received Cuban history by relating it via a fragmentary narration lacking in one controlling voice as though it were unimportant as a specific story, as if anonymity were a reference to relativity, if not to the cyclical and perennial nature, of the national *gesta*. In this sense, the narration that functions more in terms of the individual fragments than with references to a cohesive voice serves to delineate, rather than a mythic expression that is self-narrating (which is what we associated with epic or mythic texts, characterized by unobtrusive—and, therefore, nonironic—narrators), an ironic and self-challenging text.

## II

The foregoing are the features that most distinguish *Vista's écriture* and that set it off from Cabrera Infante's other writings, despite whatever similarity it may have to them on the basis of the constants that underlie any writer's works. To characterize the fragments' specificity as texts, the following passage will be examined:

[segmento 4]

Al llegar a una aldea grande, los conquistadores encontraron reunidos en la plaza central a unos dos mil indios, que los esperaban con regalos, mucho pescado y casabe, sentados todos en cuclillas y algunos fumando. Empezaron los indios a repartir la comida cuando un soldado sacó su espada y se lanzó sobre uno de ellos cercenándole la cabeza de un solo tajo. Otros soldados imitaron la acción del primero y sin ninguna provocación empezaron a tirar sablazos a diestra y siniestra. La carnicería se hizo mayor



cuando varios soldados entraron en un batey, que era una casa muy grande en la que había reunidos más de quinientos indios, "de los cuales muy pocos tuvieron oportunidad de huir". Cuenta el padre Las Casas: "Iba el arroyo de sangre como si hubieran muerto muchas vacas". Cuando se ordenó una investigación sobre el sangriento incidente, se supo que al ser recibidos los conquistadores con tal amistosidad "pensaron que tanta cortesía era por les matar de seguro". (p. 17)

In addition to the seemingly cold or detached narrative voice, this segment, which belongs to the first group of texts that deal with the colonization of the island by the Spaniards and the "hosts" of civilization, lends itself to considerations on the point of reference in any code of knowledge and value. In general, *Vista* concerns a series of events that satirizes or attacks through satire the official commonplaces of Cuban history (and one will recall that Cabrera Infante's political position is both anti-Batista and anti-Castro). Although some of these segments are marked by a truly tragic-pathetic note, Cabrera Infante prefers to focus on his material from a satirical angle where officially propounded pretensions, the kitsch of school texts on Cuban history, and the lachrymose literature of mass taste make up a textual point of reference for the elaboration of his own writing. (For examples of segments of truly tragic-pathetic note, see segment [98], "Primero me quitaron el taller," which deals with the injustices of a social and liberating revolution; and segment [21], "Habian estado jugando," which concerns the Spanish reprisals against independence movements.) What this means is that Cabrera Infante's text degrades another canonical text, either because it forms part of the written elitist tradition or because it is a part of an oral tradition: both cry out for submission into the critical rewriting of iconoclastic literature. Only in this way can the lies, distortions, and mistakes come to surface.

In the segment quoted, we see very well how the process of constructing a text on the degradation of other texts works. On the one hand, we have a story told with all the stylistic flourishes of public-school textbooks: the slightly journalistic tone, made weightier due to more balanced periods. This tone, worthy of an elevated rhetorical standard, is not used to portray the deliberations of a constitutional convention or some other event where such a standard would be an appropriate vehicle of expression, but to report an episode of startling barbarity and military perversion. It is as though this register were being used in a contemporary context to describe police torture, for the values that justify the style or register are in irresolvable conflict with the meaning they convey, and herein lies the deployment of satire for textual degradation. Moreover, this

segment contains a reference to Padre de las Casas's chronicle of the Conquest. This reference does not contribute to the neutral journalistic tone, but constitutes rather a rupture with it, to the extent that it is the only sentence in the fragment that establishes the sense most appropriate to the scene in its use of the simile equating the massacre of the Indians with the slaughter of cattle. This play of language is what defines most categorically the essence of the textually elaborated "view" of the tropics put forth by Cabrera Infante's writing.

Another segment that makes a specific issue out of its own textuality is [12], "Dice la historia . . . ," in which there is a hierarchy of references to a slave conspiracy. The segment is made up of four paragraphs. The first one begins with: "Dice la historia . . . " and is followed by a sentence in quotes. The second paragraph opens with "Cuenta la leyenda que . . . " and is followed by the complement introduced by *que*, without quotation marks. The third paragraph, on the other hand, closes the matter with the statement that "En realidad . . . " And the fourth one consists of the single sentence: "Todos los conspiradores fueron ahorcados." In this way, the segment juggles a series of versions, so to speak, on a single matter. History and legend are marked by a single quality that allows them to avoid the central issue: the execution of the conspirators. The proposition of "reality" serves in exchange to put that fact forth, which in the end is the most important one. Thus, it is unquestionable that the text bases its *écriture* on the problematic question of multiple versions of events, versions that disagree with each other, less because truth is relative and unstable, but rather because each version originates in a different understanding of what is important and how it should be presented. The literary text thus defines its own space as a story opposing all other versions and possible texts. See also, in this regard, segment [18], which addresses itself to patriotic poetry: "Los insurrectos lograron tomar. . . ."

One other fragment also suggests the question of fiction and reality in the facts it relates. But here, the text occupies a space in which the distinction is no longer valid or is meaningless:

[segmento 43]

Los obreros haitianos y jamaquinos enviaron una delegación a hablar con el hacendado. Decidieron terminar la huelga si recibían el aumento. Todo pareció ir de lo mejor y el hacendado propuso hacer una foto del grupo para conmemorar el acuerdo. Los delegados haitianos y jamaquinos se colocaron en fila enfrente de la máquina, cubierta con una tela negra. El hacendado salió del grupo para dar una orden a su mayoral. El mayoral destapó la máquina y tranquilamente fusiló con la ametralladora al grupo de delgados. No hubo más quejas de los cortadores de caña en esa

zafra y en muchas más por venir.

La historia puede ser real o falsa. Pero los tiempos la hicieron creíble. (p. 97)

What is most characteristic about this segment is the fact that it discusses in general terms an event of undeniable injustice and moral irresponsibility, this time one that occurred after independence. And one feature that deserves detailed comment is the rhythm of the text between segments that portray the same type of happening but at different moments and in different times in history (the Colonial Period, independence, right-wing dictatorships, socialist government) that are nevertheless homologous in their implications. That is, to say, the segment at hand describes a strike by slaves and Negro workers, and as such is a repetition of an event that is described in segment [12], "Dice la historia . . .," where the *clases de color* set out to imitate their Haitian counterparts by rising up against Spanish slave owners. This time around it is the Haitian and Jamaican workers who request better working conditions not by demanding a black republic as part of their revolt (an eighteenth-century Enlightenment solution), but a salary increase as part of strike demands (a twentieth-century remedy). The former are hanged, the latter, shot by a machine gun disguised as a camera, which is a brilliant touch and one that symbolizes perfectly the newly dawned age of technology. And, finally, where history, legend, and reality were categorized, in segment [43] we are given a circumstance that is ambivalent as to whether it is fiction or history. What is, thus, at issue is a certain parallelism between the two segments in not only their sociocultural meanings—they are accurate vignettes of an emerging people—but also in their *écriture*, where the tone and essential facts are told as something that is more potentially true than documentarily historic.

This type of segment brings up another question concerning *Vista's écriture*: how the fragmentation of events and the ambiguity of documentary history result in the participation of figures that are more outlines of a certain form of human conduct than they are independent individuals. It is for this reason that, alongside the ambiguity of historical data, we have the anonymity of historical protagonists. The result is that the personages who appear in Cabrera Infante's stories or texts, many of whom could be easily identified as historical or public names by one type of reader (one certainly in the minority outside of Cuba or a Cuban exile community), do not differ markedly from the sort of character we are accustomed to finding in the *nueva narrativa*.

In a study on how the character-hero of the literature of the last century has given way to the character-actant (A. J. Greimas's term)

of the contemporary narrative, Jitrik identifies nine key processes. The character-*actant* who exists only to the extent that he intervenes in a fictional text that is not necessarily verisimilar and in a fashion such that we assign him specific structural roles in terms of the overall pattern of the narrative stems from the interest on the part of contemporary fiction in speaking of the world as a structure of circumstances and not as the drama of extravagant personalities. Thus, the character-*actant* is antithetical to the character-hero, who enjoys a well-defined biographical and psychological verisimilitude that gives him the impression of possessing an extratextual autonomy. Undoubtedly, features of this character-*actant*, of this nonexistent cavalier, define the role that Cabrera Infante assigns to the great (but often infamous) figures of Cuban history that parade through his texts:

1°) *Procedimiento de la "grupalización"*. [ . . . ] un personaje que sea un grupo: es la tentativa de romper la "psicología" radicada en lo individual y proponer una figura más amplia en el interior de la cual se pueden producir desplazamientos—que no se explicitan—y que apelan a un nivel más profundo de psiquismo; en el fondo, se trata de volver al momento del mito, más allá del coro que, de todos modos, actuaba como un solo cuerpo aunque de él se desprendieran los personajes. [ . . . ]: la conjetura se constituye no sólo en cuanto a la "identidad" de los encargados de encarnar la conciencia del grupo, sino en cuanto a la consistencia del grupo mismo, es decir a su posibilidad de ser aprehendido o pensado por lectores acostumbrados a hacer del singular el punto de toda relación con el mundo y del plural una noción que sirve para descripciones de orden general. . . . (p. 82)<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt that this procedure of categorization (along with those of levelling, metonymy, and disjunction, which is what leads to a kaleidoscopic effect) defines perfectly both the role of individuals and that of events themselves in *Vista*: participants as well as facts typify metonymically and synecdochically a plural generalness where one has traditionally spoken of a singular trajectory of historically outstanding men and events.

To close this characterization of the texts that make up *Vista* and the salient features of their *écriture*, let us examine a segment that exemplifies how Cabrera Infante sees the participation of the character-*actant* within a context shown to be eternal and inalterable. It is in the juxtaposition between the human being as type and his equally paradigmatic circumstance wherein we can see the writer's undeniable humanistic preoccupation, despite his conception of

5. Noé Jitrik, *El no existente caballero, la idea de personaje y su evolución en la narrativa latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Megápolis, 1975).

the depersonalized role of the individuals in his texts:

[segmento 72]

¿Es cierto que ningún arado se detiene por un moribundo? Los autos pasaron de largo toda la noche mientras el hombre moría a un lado de la carretera. Deben haberlo sacado de la cárcel a medianoche y vinieron y lo mataron aquí. O tal vez ya estaba muerto, torturado, y un carro lo trajo de madrugada y lo dejó junto al laguito. O [tal vez] lo tiraron, al anochecer, de una perseguidora. Le dieron por muerto y el hombre estaba vivo todavía y se estuvo muriendo la noche entera.

Amaneció como siempre. La luna se ocultó temprano y Venus se fue haciendo primero más brillante y después pálida, tenue. Dejó de soplar el viento de tierra, pero había más fresco que al atardecer. Varios gallos cantaron o un solo gallo cantó muchas veces. Los pájaros empezaron a silbar o a píar o a gorjear sin moverse de los árboles. El cielo se hizo azul y luego regresó al violeta, al púrpuro, al rojo, al rosa y más tarde fue naranja y amarillo y blanco al salir el sol. Las nubes llegaron desde la costa. Ahora olía a café. Alguien abrió una cancela. El tráfico se hizo mayor.

El muerto siguió en la cuneta hasta que a media mañana lo levantó el forense. (p. 163)

Beyond the division of the segment into three parts or "movements," what stands out is the correlation between the first two: the opening paragraph refers to the cruel lot of a political prisoner, while the second alludes to a gorgeous tropical morning. The third paragraph rounds out the juxtaposition with the impersonal journalistic information concerning what happens subsequently to what is now human garbage. What underlies the interfacing of the first two segments is the transition from the personal (the dead man's lot) to the impersonal (the verbal sketch describing the dawn), from an erotesis (the series of rhetorical questions that serve to mark the stages of the first movement) to a lyrical evocation (the use of allusions, a certain type of "emotive" adjective, the references to pleasurable and simple natural phenomena, the use of polysyndeton to reinforce the latter). This rhetorical procedure involving the juxtaposition of two so different verbal subtexts can be identified as the major stylistic feature of segment [72] for inscribing the underlying *écriture*, which in turn concerns the need to structure a portrayal of the violent conflict between the human individual and his socionatural environment.

In the first movement, although there is only one rhetorical question overtly marked with question marks, the subsequent sentences possess an identical interrogative value, as though they were dominated by the abstract clause, "¿Será que . . . ?" Thus, we can iden-

tify a series of dubitative structures that stress, on the one hand, the ambiguity of this event lost in the night and unknown to the world of the living, while, on the other hand, it calls our attention to how this fact is ambiguous to the extent that it is paradigmatic, typical of this island (not "vale") of tears: "Es cierto . . . ?" "Deben [that is, deben de] haberlo sacado . . . ," "O tal vez ya estaba muerto . . . ," "O [tal vez] lo tiraron, al anochecer, de una perseguidora." These four sentences (of the six that make up the paragraph) convey a markedly reserved tone. It is as though it were difficult to establish with any certainty the nature of the events, as though there were too many possible explanations for how a prisoner who has been tortured and is now slowly dying has come to spend the night of his extended agony in a ditch alongside the road.

By way of contrast, the opening sentence of the second movement sets forth, with the authority of a narrator accustomed to executing such verbal portraits, a delightful and eternal scene: "Amaneció como siempre." The extent to which this text is based on an *écriture* of juxtaposition is evident: a movement that dwells on a pathetic and ambiguous human circumstance is correlated with one that places that circumstance within the lush context of a tropical morning. Thus, one could say that, if there is one text in *Vista* that synthesizes Cabrera Infante's perspective, his "view" of non-transcendent Cuban history, it is unquestionably this one.

### III

*Vista* is an important collection of texts both for the form adopted for the presentation of Cuba's sociohistorical experience and for its particularly unique *écriture*. This *écriture* is based on a series of principles that substitute for the cohesive novel and the organic collection of autonomous short stories a textuality based on narrative fragments that are neither completely interdependent nor completely autonomous. There are no characters, no "cavaliers," and a documentary precision is lacking that would give the reader facile entrance into extratextual meaning. Thus, he is obliged to maintain his distance and to experience the play of allusions and references as dynamic but nontransparent signifiers. *Vista* is, in sum, a collection of texts whose nature is synthesized by a phrase from one of the segments quoted above [43]: "La historia puede ser real o falsa. Pero los tiempos la hicieron creíble".

## Conclusions

As opposed to a chronological registry of contemporary practitioners of the short story in Spanish America, a country-by-country survey of prizewinning names and titles, or an index of sociopolitical and philosophical motifs to be found in the major collections, I have chosen instead to emphasize a highly selective inventory of structural issues associated with an equally, highly selective choice of individual texts.

Virtually all of the stories discussed have been translated into English and other languages, and there is no doubting the pivotal role played by Borges, Cortázar, García Márquez, Rulfo, and, to only a slightly lesser extent, by Benedetti and Cabrera Infante in what we call the "new Latin-American fiction."

By the same token, topics like "fictional *narrataire*," "reader complicity," "structural or pattern rupture," aside from being issues associated with universal literature by virtue of the inherent nature of verbal discourse, enjoy particular prominence in contemporary fiction, especially in Latin America, where they can be related to the acknowledged sociopolitical objectives of the literature of these writers. Thus, while I have foregrounded the analysis of the discrete structural and textual markers of the theoretical processes identified in the title of each chapter, attention has been paid, if only obliquely or implicitly, to how a process is the extension of the overall significance of the text being studied: Cabrera Infante's intertextuality, which derives to a great measure from his blending fictional and nonfictional modes of discourse, novelistic and short-story procedures, stresses the mythical nature of official Cuban history; linguistic rupture in Cortázar is a striking reflex of how his fiction breaks with conventional views of reality, partly because we have come to believe that a secure reality is cameoed by stable linguistic structures. Reader complicity in García Márquez's fictions has less a patronizing attitude toward the material he is describing than the imperative that the "objective" addressee be drawn into and assume responsibility for a seriously awry social order.

I do not maintain that these observations or that this sort of textual analysis blends easily with accepted sociological analyses of Latin-American literature. I do, however, claim that the appropriate structural analysis of verbal discourse must view the text as part of a larger structural context in which the former alludes to and incorporates the latter in a systematic fashion. Thus, the *écriture* of literary texts does, as I insisted in my opening programmatic chapter, in-



volve implicitly an answer to the metaliterary question as to why write literature at all. This study has not rehearsed the many and complex debates that have surrounded the new Latin-American narrative and its sociocultural role. Gordon Brotherston's recent work entitled *The Emergence of the Latin American Novel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) is one excellent study in which to pursue this subject. Nevertheless, the theoretical underpinning of the textual analyses contained in this study has led naturally to the goals inherent in processes like structural rupture and reader complicity.

From one point of view, this study is necessarily fragmentary: the decision to examine individual short-story texts in depth means that, in practical terms, only a handful of works can be studied. Yet, the distinguishing characteristics of the *nuevo cuento hispanoamericano* should have emerged nonetheless: the insistence on a dialectical relationship between a perception of the sociopolitical reality of Latin American and its semiological representation in the narrative; the challenge to colloquial and literary dialects of Spanish to rid themselves of rhetorical clichés and to convey with greater fidelity the unstable nature of Latin-American man's contemporary experience; the need to experiment with received literary forms and to enrich the literary tradition by fashioning new ones (specifically, the *microtexto* and varieties of nonfiction narrative); the imperative that literary discourse recognize in its structural markers the non-privileged status of narrator, *narrataire*, and text, and that it incorporate features to demonstrate explicitly the problems of verbal art in a culture degraded by the inescapable facts of political life. To this extent, the structural issues discussed and the consequences of the demand that particular verbal and technical features be dealt with in terms of the larger context of discourse *écriture* do, in the final analysis, involve the most general concerns of fictional writing in Latin America today.



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