

Transnational Crime Fictions and Argentina's Criminal State

by
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Abstract

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My dissertation proposes a new understanding of the dictatorship novels of Ricardo Piglia, Juan José Saer, and Manuel Puig grounded in their shared appropriation from popular crime fiction. Across the 1940's, 50's, and 60's, a wide range of popular crime fiction was translated, written, theorized, printed and reprinted in Argentina, and these popular genres grew steadily in readership, visibility, and cultural legitimacy. These genres were largely dismissed as insipid forms of mass-culture entertainment by contemporary criticism, however, and their relevance has been downplayed by literary history to this day. My study of the novels of these influential authors restores this context in order to highlight their appropriations from these undervalued narrative traditions, in which they found incipient forms of social critique and unique modes of representing history and the social order. In three genre-focused studies, the dissertation maps out vernacular sources for these authors' formal experiments, linking a generational fixation on "active reading" to a contemporary reconsideration of sensationalism and melodrama; the problematics of historiography to the tenuous boundary between crime fiction and crime journalism; and, finally, the polemic psychoanalysis of violence to the unpleasures of the lurid psychological thriller.

Beyond reconsidering one generation of Argentine literary history and its relationship to popular culture, this work also functions more generally as a case study in how avant-garde literature poaches forms from popular culture in order to access the imagination of "the masses". The dissertation begins with a brief pre-history of crime fiction in the work of Jorge Luis Borges and the generation immediately *before* that of Puig, Piglia, and Saer. Borges put one form of crime fiction at the heart of his epochal project for a speculative and "irreverent" modernism in the 1940's, yet emphatically rejected any other direct contact with mass culture. When the next generation challenged Borges' taboo on melodrama, they did so by shifting their focus from the least melodramatic forms of crime fiction to the most melodramatic ones. Thus, I focus on the forms of

social critique particular to these melodramatic crime narratives, such as the spectacularized martyrology of Puig's *Boquitas pintadas*, the small-town naturalism of Saer's *Cicatrices*, and the gendered sentiments of Piglia's early short fiction. These works are read against melodramatic intertexts that were being reprinted and reconsidered in that period: James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce*, William Faulkner's *Light in August*, and Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos*, respectively.

Honing in on that boundary between fiction and journalism, the dissertation then plots out various conceptions of the author in true-crime fiction, creative non-fiction, and the more overtly polemic *testimonio* tradition against the backdrop of the Cold War. This entails a detailed consideration of the legacy of bridge-figure Rodolfo Walsh, whose populist works of crime-fiction and *reportage* redrew the boundaries between the literary and the popular spheres. I read Piglia's nostalgic and ironically testimonial *Plata quemada* (1999) as a working through of Walsh's legacy, updating his Cold War ethics of writerly veracity to the age of television and to the postdictatorial problematics of memory. Similarly, I read Puig's *Beso de la mujer araña* (1976), his *Maldición eternal a quien lea estas páginas* (1980), and Saer's *Glosa* (1986) as three distinct explorations of the readerly psychology of sensationalism and of the limits of *testimonio*. In these works, confession is considered as an inadequate mechanism for the memory work demanded of literature by post-dictatorial society.

Finally, the dissertation attempts to provide a tentative theory and genealogy of the three psychological dictatorship thrillers written by Puig, Piglia and Saer, constitutively marked by readerly affects of paranoia, doubt, and menace. Drawing from Piglia's evolving definitions of "paranoid fiction" and its generically diverse sources, I frame these thrillers as affective-manipulative hybrid texts responding to the historiographical impasse of totalitarianism. Starting with Puig's prescient psychoanalytic thriller, *The Buenos Aires Affair* (1969), I look to Hitchcock's Freudianism and the vernacular of the thriller as sources for a tradition, beginning with Puig, of psychopathologizing Argentine fascism. I consider Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980) not only as a novelistic critique of psychological and linguistic transparency, but also as modernist form of thriller following Puig's lead. Saer's novelistic representation of life under the menace of totalitarian violence, *Nadie nada nunca* (1980), is an equally hybrid of diverse cultural narratives structured by a rhetoric of aporia, combining high philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the most base pop-culture fantasies as equally inadequate approaches to the psychopathology of the criminal State. These polemical experiments in the limits of narrative representation are the culmination of a generational project of historiographical and novelistic experiment, the scope, scale, and importance of which fails to come into view without a restoration of the cultural context of their production and an expansion of the purview of literary studies.

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Introduction

Partial Maps

We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities . But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference.

—Michel Foucault, "History, Genealogy, Nietzsche," in *The Foucault Reader*, 89¹

This study began with the simple recognition of a pattern for which I found no place in the historical and critical narratives available. Namely, I noticed that many experimental Argentine writers whose projects evolved and matured during the late 1960's analyzed and refigured contemporary history in a shared idiom appropriated from North American popular crime fiction. For some combination of political, economic, intellectual, and especially cultural reasons, many of this generation's writers seemed to be turning to crime fiction as a way of narrating, allegorizing, and analyzing the contemporary moment. This moment, which gets bounded in most histories by the lead-up to the "años de plomo" on the one side and the "transition" to democracy on the other, comprise Argentina's "dictatorship years." (The phrase is often used to generalize a wide range of interlocking dictatorships throughout Cold War Latin America post-1959, but in this work I use it in its specifically Argentine sense). Manuel Puig, Ricardo Piglia, and Juan José Saer seemed a particularly fruitful subset of those authors for the wide range of genres they worked in and from, but also for the very different readerships they reached over the course of their somewhat parallel developments; only in retrospect do they seem "contemporaries" in the usual sense. A specific conjunction of conditions and traditions made this borrowed and retooled foreign idiom a natural choice for these three authors, and for a wave of contemporaries and followers as well.

These appropriations from crime fiction served a wide range of purposes, yet through all the disparate forms taken, the field defined by them still coheres structurally as well as thematically and topically: these related experiments with crime genres were exceedingly *timely* responses to common problems of representation. To better trace the evolution of this topical and historiographical mode of writing crime fiction, I resisted the tendency to map its terms onto those of other critical narratives. I have largely assumed the reader to be passingly familiar with the generic and cultural currents which usually suffice to map out this period: postmodernism and "pop" irreverence; the 1960's quest for alternatives to realism; the novelistic psychology of "terror" used to narrativize State Terror and the pan-Latin American "dictator novel"; the Boom's elaboration of an aesthetic proven on the international market; the 1960's "novel of ideas" and shifting roles of public intellectuals; the cultural "arms races" of the Cold War; Argentina's special penchant for "exilic" protest literature. There was something

specific to the crime genres that exceeded all these narratives of intellectual history, or rather, how these authors retooled the crime was hard to explain in the terms of these narratives.

There was another time-honored critical narrative, situated somewhere between hero-worship and pragmatism, that provided half an explanation of how North American crime pulp became so important for Argentine literature. It can be summed up as follows: Jorge Luis Borges declared crime fiction important and it has been important for Latin American literature ever since. Borges's relation to crime fiction is a key foundation and subtext of this work, and it has already been the subject of a number of studies and monographs, many of which appear in the endnotes here. Although Borges is the fourth most cited author in this study, I have tried to resist the temptation of centering this study on Borges's work, which would essentially frame the three later authors as variously rebellious heirs of Borges's interest in crime fiction. Instead, the name "Borges" comes to serve as a watchword for the broader literary establishment against which my three authors define themselves and whose concept of literature they variously strive to transcend. Borges's writing functions here not just as a precedent but also as a literary standard for Puig's generation, entirely "classical" well before Borges' death. Below, I will sketch out Borges's personal theory and practice of crime fiction in the 1930's and 40's in broad terms: specific aspects of this overview will be elaborated on by each chapter's generically more specific lens. This argumentative structure mirrors the cultural field of the 1960s and 70s, in which an almost unanimous reverence for the figure of Borges as literary trailblazer and national treasure coexisted with serious qualms and disputes over the ideological content of his creative work and the prejudices of his critical work. Particularly in the 1960's and 70's, discussions of works by Borges, or even of genres like crime fiction that bore his imprimatur, were often overshadowed by Borges' public endorsement of the Junta and his deep suspicion of almost all the period's artistic avant-gardes and ideological currents.

Similarly important to establish in advance as a kind of implicit backdrop is the contemporary phenomenon of the "Boom". Many accounts of Latin American or post-war Argentine literature shoehorn the entirety of Borges's thinking on detective fiction or crime fiction into the prehistory of "fantastic literature," an amorphous trans-generic term taken up by the Boom writers to describe a particular relationship of literature to its social world and to realism. Often critical accounts inflected by this teleological narrative (where Borges is the progenitor of the Boom's mythopoesis and ludic narrative structures) collapse the distinctions between crime fiction, science fiction, and other escapist popular narratives or myths, seeing them as inert materials and universal formulae ripe for the ludic recombination of the modern intellectual. This study seeks to position its authors as a countercurrent to that contemporary cult of the ludic and the fantastic, and to contradistinguish their modes of active reading and reflexive pastiche from those of their fantastic contemporaries. After sketching out Borges's legacy below, I'll also schematize the structural differences between the escapist literature of the fantastic and the range of crime genres studied here. In a word, the fantastic mode (aligned, in Frye's "ethical" taxonomy, with myth or adventure) is as far removed as possible from the everyday, while the variously melodramatic forms of crime fiction (spanning the tragic, the comic, and the realist modes) are all intimately tied to the violence and power struggles of everyday life.

Many explanations of the generation-wide interest in the crime idiom proffer or presume another metahistorical narrative: many critics argue (or glibly assume) that a political essence and conscious-raising function inhere in the detective genre *per se*, or in the hard-boiled school within that genre. (If authors occasionally crossed over into other, detective-less forms of crime fiction, the story goes, it was only because they'd been lead there by the Left-leaning detective tradition cut short by McCarthyism). The hasty conflation of detective fiction and crime fiction plagues the critical literature on both, and for that reason I have largely structured my study in such a way as to rigorously avoid it. I address detective fiction in Chapter 2, specifically as it speaks to journalism and non-fiction, rather than as a special case of realism or as simple one more vehicle for political allegory and persuasion. In the other chapters, I take seriously those other genres that many critics treat as merely offshoots or derivatives of more focally investigative fiction.

The structure of this work is not, however, driven by a polemic against these partial explanations and critical traditions, but rather by a kind of pragmatism: I have tried to let the study be structured by the categories and divisions that are crucial to the works I'm studying. Or, to be more precise, it is structured by the different *purposes* to which currents and tradition within the North American crime fiction genres *are put* by these authors who share a historical context and many of the same publics and readerships. What makes this corpus so interesting, and so difficult to theorize, is its central the adaptation of North American genres to South American traditions and low-brow affective manipulations to middle-brow ideological debates. Theoretically and methodologically, this corpus demands a bricolage of historical explanations and appropriated formal schemata. In particular, it requires a more precise and complex theory of these overlapping but distinct genres as they were practiced and read in that period, as well as a sensitivity to the historiographical nuances of the search for new narrative structures or ethical stances. While my goal has not been to create a universal or unified theory of these genres readily applicable to other national contexts, much less of the relations between genres and publics, I have had to work out some tentative theoretical precepts to offer an appropriately detailed account of this very international and reflexive practice. My hope is that this theoretical work might someday be as portable and intelligible to foreign and non-specialist readers as the novels I've studied have proven to be. Or even if it flatly fails to achieve that international and intercultural intelligibility, its failure could at least serve as a cautionary tale about how much precision one can demand of genre theory and literary history, and of how one can piece together international histories of literature from the partial maps of national and hegemonic ones.

The Chicken-and-Egg Problem of Genre Theory and Literary Genealogy

The basis of generic criticism is in any case rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public.[...] The significance of [an author marking his or her work's participation in multiple genres] is to indicate what tradition his work primarily belongs to and what its closest affinities are with. The purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby

bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them.
—Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 247-8²

Every study of a set of works understood as cohabiting and interacting within a genre is always, to some degree, a study of that genre and an exercise in "genre theory," the Sisyphean task of simultaneously defining a genre in isolation (an impossible abstraction) and in relation to other genres (each as amorously delimited as the next). The great utility of genres in organizing literary history and illuminating works is bought at the price of a perpetually-renewed process of definition and re-definition of those always-tentative genres. Genres operate at a level of abstraction that never coheres into the certainty of historical fact, nor in many cases even of pragmatic consensus, as they arise from a never-finished and always contentious collective work of drawing boundaries and mapping territories. When the definitions and boundaries of the genre are relatively stable across the decades and rooted in a kind of consensus, as is the case with the Novel or the *Bildungsroman*, a little care suffices to sidestep the definitional quagmires otherwise reserved for a few specialists and literary historians. But when generic definitions are muddled by ideological debates and the only consensus is a kind of minimal common sense, a genre can persist for decades without actually being of much help to literary history. In the case of so amorphous and subjective a category as the crime novel or detective fiction, closer examination reveals no two historians or theorists to work from the same definitions or to refer to the same set of works. Indeed, each thinker seemed to choose one strain or tradition as "central" and definitive of crime fiction generally, with all other forms framed as hybrids, derivatives, or secondary forms. After observing enough contradictions between and within theories of the genre, it became clear to me that "crime fiction" did not refer to a genre but to a tendency at a higher level of abstraction, made up of distinct genres interacting fruitfully with one another while evolving different forms for different publics. Thus, what began as a genealogical study in one generation's engagement with what seemed, commonsensically, to constitute a single "genre" gradually evolved into three distinct studies of that generation's engagement with three different, yet closely-related genres.

A useful way of organizing these genres and salvaging much critical and theoretical work that would otherwise oversimplify and overgeneralize them is to ask of each schema what heuristics and variables structure it, and to apply its insights accordingly. A useful methodological precedent for this is Martin Rubin's filmic "genre study," *Thrillers*, which tries to build on prior studies of the thriller, all of which treat it as a genre properly speaking, while at the same time refiguring the thriller as a meta-generic category which includes large swathes of genres and "cycles" that otherwise have little in common³. To adapt the insights of more narrowly-defined studies, Rubin organizes them along a spectrum from purely formal definitions at one end (defining "the thriller" as an affective mode or by specific parameters of the reader-text relation) to thematic or pragmatic ones at the other (defining "the thriller" by generalizing commonalities of narrative content, narrative frame, or thematic stakes). He elaborates his own overarching, meta-generic formal apparatus in terms of the former

approach, yet appropriates scholarship from the latter approach to treat specific genres and periods separately and in detail.

Rubin's meta-generic formal definition of the thriller is bipartite. On the one hand, he stipulates that all thrillers produce a paradoxical pleasure in the viewer or reader through unpleasurable sensations (terror, excitement, doubt, the experience of events or spaces as perplexing and labyrinthine). On the other hand, Rubin makes an important formalist stipulation about the "world" of the thriller and its rules of engagement. As a way of distinguishing the thriller from the similar affective unpleasures of the adventure, gothic and horror genres, Rubin borrows Northrop Frye's neo-Aristotelian, formalist schema organizing fiction genres "ethically," that is, by the "elevation" and "typicality" of the narrator⁴. While adventure fiction requires an exotic world of danger and an epic heroism inherent (even if unknowingly) in its protagonist, the thriller's protagonist has to be as familiar and sympathetic as a comedic one, and his ill-fated brush with another world⁵ has to begin and end in a realist mirror of our banal, orderly reality. For Rubin, the thriller achieves its heightened and direct affects by shuttling between our world and a more adventurous one which is realistic even at its most improbable: it contains the fantastic within the realist, stretching plausibility to its limits but returning us to our world at the end of the ride.

Analogously I have tried to sketch out a "big picture" for crime fiction between three distinct studies of specific crime genres, relying on different theoretical precedents for each, but united by certain ethical postures and ways of representing the social world through various legal and moral crises. While commonalities of content or narrative structure suffice for distilling a basic formula from a narrative tradition as codified as "the classic whodunit," "the hard-boiled detective," or "the true-crime exposé," defining the commonality between the three is only possible at the most meta-narrative level, a level at which it is hardly useful to discuss specific works. In these three formulae, irrational and unknowable crime is set against the rational basis of society as the basic and self-evident tension driving the reading experience: regardless of how one maps guilt and readerly sympathy onto the agents, the primary, structural desire of the reader is to uncover the how and/or the why of a crime. The sympathies and readerly desires in this interplay are never clean-cut, and neither are the interpretive stakes. Power and property are always endangered and/or dangerous in these works, an instability that is both structural to their narrative logic and essential to their representation of law and order. This instability is by no means inherently critical or radical, however: its place in the narrative structure can just as easily yield conservative allegories as radical ones, defending or questioning the legitimacy of the social order. Despite critical traditions favoring one or the other, a wide range of political leanings are represented in every genre of crime fiction, even if the great undifferentiated bulk of crime fictions fall in the toothless middle-ground of stylized social and political cynicism and lukewarm reformism hardly distinguishable from moralizing common sense.

More central to this study and its timely appropriations is another instability structural to the popular crime tradition, that of readerly affect. If the text and its reader shared total faith in the institutions of law and order, and the reader had no sympathy for criminals or well-

intended victims of the procedures of those institutions, then the result would be mechanical and affectively moot. (This limit-case of unambiguous rationality exists, at one extreme of the crime tradition favored by Caillois' and Borges' theories about the whodunit, discussed below). In all but the most cerebral outliers and tongue-in-cheek parodies of these genres, however, there is at least a straw man of sympathy for the devil, for the criminal or for the corrupt. This irrational undercurrent of affective and sensational diversions contradicts the ideological resolution achieved on the level of narrative formulae, on which order and peace are almost invariably restored. These readerly undercurrents sometimes take the form of an explicitly sensational and fetishistic fantasy (wanting the criminal or the forces of crime to triumph over law and order while still "knowing better"). In other instances, these perverse undercurrents create a complex and anti-heroic protagonist. Time can even transmute these unruly affects into a campy mannerism of cynicism, as they do in Raymond Chandler's epochally conflicted narrative voices, or in the infamously excessive atmospherics of *film noir* cliché. At this manneristic end of the spectrum, crime fiction's inherent ambiguities are put at center stage, a tendency which occasioned the sometimes serious, sometimes frivolous characterization of many crime fiction landmarks as mass-market analogues to literary existentialism. Indeed, whether or not one grants to these genres or their best works a kinship with existentialism, Argentine writers of the 1960's turned to these gems of mannerism precisely as an alternative to the modes of existentialism and realism then dominant in the literary scene. In the contradictory sympathies and moral ironies of these works, Argentine authors found a new language for polemic and a new way to analyze the social and psychological mechanics of violence.

Of course, this generational turn towards irredeemably popular "crime pulp" was also conditioned by contemporary ideologies of cultural capital⁶, according to which mass-market literature was, by definition, inherently uncritical and essentially unliterary. Before turning to the specific history of these genres and the ideologies conditioning their reception in Argentina, however, it's worth sketching out their reception in North America on its own ideological terms. Since literary modernism is often defined negatively, in a retrospective simplification, as a war between individual genius' and the straw man of soul-deadening mass-media and mass-market literature, it is now difficult to trace the reciprocal interactions between, say, William Faulkner, or Ernest Hemingway, and their contemporaries "beyond the pale" of institutionalized relations of cultural capital. Indeed, even attributing trends and formulae to individual authors, editors, or publishers goes against a long-standing tradition of generalizing entire genres as collective endeavors in which individual creativity or agency does not enter into play, a kind of persistent mass-media structuralism that understands most or all popular narrative as the "myth" or "folklore" of industrial modernity. For these reasons, more so than for any moral or thematic ones, the key works of popular crime fiction from the modernist period have largely been studied as separate or even parallel developments across a gulf from the "mainstream" of contemporary modernist literature. This is particularly ironic given that countless canonical authors, from at least the 1930s on, openly laud authors like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler as integral to their personal pantheons. When these "pulp" authors do make it into mainstream literary history, they often do so as individual geniuses credited with inventing

what genre specialists would say they merely refined or advanced. Their lesser-known contemporaries and important heirs, meanwhile, receive little to no attention, creating the paradoxical illusion that the leading figures of genre fiction were writing in isolation, or at an artful remove from the culture industry that greedily and artlessly incorporated their innovations for mass consumption.

Borges & International Modernism: A Specifically Argentine version of the "Great Divide"

Mass culture has always been the hidden subtext of the modernist project.

—Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," in *After the Great Divide*

Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general... podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas.

—Jorge Luis Borges, "El escritor argentino y la tradición," 1932

This operation of selective appropriation (of formulae, of heroes, of works) is neither new, nor exclusive, nor unique to Europe and North America—indeed, even the most casual comparison between modernisms in different cultures finds vastly different relations to mass culture. Jorge Luis Borges practiced, theorized, and presided over a national modernist project that was largely premised on this selective appropriation and recombination from Euroamerican culture: debates over how to interpret the "irreverence" of his appropriations continue to be central to Argentine literary history. It suffices for our purposes to emphasize a few points about Borges's modernism and his "irreverence," a mode of access and appropriation unencumbered by the "reverence" and "superstitions" of an author's formation within a given cultural tradition that leads her to honor its internal divisions, structures, and rules.

This irreverence meant for Borges a kind of impunity within an international system of cultural divisions and hierarchies—an Argentinean's choice of source materials or heroes was less encumbered by a high/low divide that didn't "translate well," or whose connotations and consequences the Argentine translator and innovator could electively bracket or simply ignore. As Borges's cultural politics, persona, and work grew progressively more anti-popular and esoteric after the mid-1940s, our discussion of irreverence needs necessarily focus on his work from the 1930's. In biographical terms, Borges comes into his own during that period, leaving behind his experiments in lyrical poetry and the avant-garde rhetoric that had made him the voice box and presiding aesthete for the high-modernist camp within Argentine literature. The self-assured Borges of the 1930's left behind lyric and experimented with many different modes of prose and criticism before writing the analytical and speculative works of "fantastic" fiction for which he is now known. Many of the doors opened by Borges during this early period of peak irreverence were quickly closed again once he assumed a place of authority in the literary

establishment in the 1940s. It is a central claim of this project that later writers returned to those doors, opened them anew, and annexed to the literary field they inherited whole genres foreclosed by Borges.

It's important to note that Borges's famous proclamation of irreverence comes from a cultural moment of chaotic upheaval early in what has almost universally been called⁷ Argentina's "Infamous Decade": various coups, proscriptions, and electoral frauds disappointed much of the political optimism of the 1920's, while export markets collapsed and foreign capital expanded its industrial footprint. International economics and foreign policy were at the forefront of the national imagination long before the outbreak of WWII or the Spanish civil war; the cultural mass market was growing and evolving quickly, in an outward-looking moment of massive industrialization. The same year he wrote his essay on irreverent cultural foreign relations, Borges was also hard at work hammering out micro-stories, blurbs, 3-paragraph literary biographies, and other pieces of occasional journalism for a popular weekly. Among these speed-written pieces of popular ephemera was his *Universal History of Infamy*, a newspaper-column compiled later into a mass-market short-story collection that Sarah Ann Wells has characterized as "his most sustained engagement with mass media, both popular journalism and Hollywood films"⁸. Wells also notes that the modern "mass market" with which Borges engaged in his newspaper work and in these stories was just emerging and being standardized in that same decade, both as a reality and as an abstraction, in Argentina and internationally.

In this column, the unique temporality and language of the newspaper reduce each barely-recognizable narrative of crime from history or canonical literature to a kind of mythical and pleasurable kernel; the kernel is then reframed parodically as an important episode in a "universal history" of crime and infamy. But Borges's collation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*⁹, Eduardo Gutierrez' gaucho folletín *Juan Moreira*, Emanuel Swedenborg's *Arcana Cœlestia*, and King Vidor's *Billy the Kid* does more than just "level" them and cast aside cultural hierarchies. It exploits the heterogeneity of the tales' origins and contexts to emphasize their only commonalities, namely, a stylized version of contemporary "light reading" and an ethos of irreverent appropriation. This same irreverent appropriation is on display in his *El hogar* column, where he introduced, to a very popular and mostly female readership, works of literature running the gamut from philosophy to adventure-Westerns to contemporary lyric. In this column, he summed up the literary biography of a given author in a paragraph or two in a similarly playful and encyclopedic reduction. Borges referred to this period as a kind of apprenticeship in the "workshop" [*taller*] of fast and furious writing paid by the word (Wells, 427). While Borges' artisanal metaphor implies his experimentation with diverse styles and narrative forms was a matter of craftsmanship, I would argue his timely experiments also taught him much about the different publics and different self-representations available to literary modernity.

After this period, Borges writes what he would habitually call his "first story," 1939's "Pierre Menard," which marks a turning point for his work and his auto-mythologizing performance of the modernist "author" and erudite thinker. The story's laconic style (formally

akin to the exemplary lives of infamy and the literary biographies of the 1930s) reduces Pierre Menard's literary biography to a kind of basic narrative kernel and philosophical joke, which resides in Menard's insistence that he's improving the Quixote by rewriting it, word by word, in a new cultural and historical context. What changes Cervantes' novel into something new is Menard, and the story is essentially a composite sketch of modernist genius, combining the trademarks and signatures of Borges himself, Paul Valéry (whose aesthetic vision Borges had been accused of merely translating to Spanish, Menardishly), and Valéry's self-caricature in the form of Monsieur Teste, a kind of literary double and "thought-experiment" for Valéry.

While there is obviously very much that could be said here about the hall of mirrors this opens up¹⁰, I would like to limit myself here to crime fiction and modes of appropriation, which are as crucial to the story as the play of literary hierarchies and authorities dizzyingly collapsed and reversed. To wit, crime fiction, or more specifically Borges' personal conception of it, is at play when the narrator describes Menard as "a Symbolist and *essentially* a devotee of [Edgar Allan] Poe, who begat Baudelaire, who begat Mallarmé, who begat Valéry, who begat Edmond Teste"¹¹. Borges's confusing and fanciful "genealogy" has Menard (i.e., the Teste to Borges's Valéry) descending directly from Poe, which is a complex and rich gesture with many effects: 1.) it cuts Borges himself out of the lineage; 2.) it elevates Poe to a position of prominence in this already intercontinental genealogy of modernism's self-consciousness; 3.) it pits a small-town (i.e., peripheral) Symbolist against the definitive Symbolist from the City of Light; and 4.) it echoes, as Prieto points out in the above-cited exegesis, Valéry's own explanation of the genesis of his fictional Teste, born from a close-reading of Poe's *Inspector Dupin* stories, and then inflected by Baudelaire's concepts and Mallarmé's aesthetics. To recap: in a parody of modernist concepts of authorship, Borges emphatically reminds us that Valéry's fictional super-thinker and phenomenologist Teste is a modernist re-writing of Poe's superhuman French detective, born from the pages of one of 19th century America's most widely-circulated magazines of light reading. Borges is irreverently writing his own genealogy into a revision of Valéry's, but he is also conflating the Symbolist cult of madness with Don Quixote's reading habits: Poe's romances (in this case, deductive and criminological ones) did this to him.

Over the next few years, Borges rewrites those same Inspector Dupin stories by Poe one by one (less literally than Menard, of course, but still recognizably) and, with the fervor of a devotee, attempts to get each new story published in English on the centenary of the appearance of its antecedent¹². These submissions for publication were not addressed to the literary establishment, but rather to a decidedly un-literary monthly catering to (and largely written by) detective fiction aficionados, few of whom would recognize the name of Valéry or even be capable of finding Argentina on a map. The first of these two pastiches of Poe's essay-stories, "Garden of Forking Paths" and "Death and the Compass," perform Borges's vision of the modernist genius as that alchemist who can transmute popular narrative into timeless myth and storytelling into speculative philosophy. In hindsight, they are also two of his most influential stories, paragons of irreverent appropriation and the freighting of genre writing with new significance in its appropriation to new cultures and new stakes. They are foundational texts of two divergent traditions: the criminological one that is the subject of this study, but also of "fantastic" literature (from which descend much of the project of Julio Cortázar, and

much of the Boom and magical realism's theory and practice). In many ways, the series of stories was written to be the charter for those traditions, and deserves sustained consideration as such.

The Raw and the Cooked: Crime Fiction and Fantastic Literature

El genuino relato policial— ¿precisaré decirlo?—rehúsa con parejo desdén los riesgos físicos y la justicia distributiva. Prescinde con serenidad de los calabozos, de las escaleras secretas, de los remordimientos, de la gimnasia, de las barbas postizas, de la esgrima, de los murciélagos de Charles Baudelaire y hasta del azar.

—Borges, "Los laberintos policiales y Chesterton," *Sur*, vol. 10, July 1935 (emph. mine)¹³

[The detective novel] is all abstraction and demonstration. It seeks not to touch us, not to move us to the heights, not to play on our heartstrings with the portrayal of its troubles, its sufferings and its aspirations. It is cold and sterile, and perfectly cerebral. It stirs no sentiment, it inspires no dreams. [...] It is embarrassed by [the nature of man], and tolerates it only reluctantly. It intentionally seeks to abolish it. It is by remaining a novel that the mystery novel, fully as intellectual as one could wish it, appeals so to readers who remain indifferent to the more severe charms of geometry.

—Roger Caillois, in *Le roman policier*, Buenos Aires: Editions des lettres françaises, Sur, 1941 (emph. mine)¹⁴

With the achievement of his "mature style," Borges largely leaves behind his interest in crime fiction, or rather, sublimates it by a process of distillation whereby what is fantastic and cerebral in the popular genre of detection sheds its sensational and mundane pelt. A key factor (or even, a catalyzing agent) in this intellectual development is Borges's sustained dialogue with French intellectual polymath and theorist of the fantastic, Roger Caillois, who was waiting out the war in Buenos Aires and amusing himself in the parlors (and publications) of the Borges/Ocampo salon. Both of these epigraphs, not coincidentally, are taken from publications of the imprint of that salon, *Sur*, which was already at that time the voice box of a certain establishment defined by its unabashed Eurocentrism and its aristocratic austerity. I juxtapose them above to show a similar view of the genre expressed in two different tones and contexts. Still publishing simultaneously in many popular publications and still moderately progressive in politics¹⁵, the Borges of 1935 frames Chesterton's eschewing of "cheap tricks" as a kind of exemplary aesthetic rigor, personifying the evolution of detective fiction by attributing to it "disdain" for cheap tricks and a "serenity" that sets it apart from other forms of adventure or entertainment fiction.

Roger Caillois, on the other hand, doesn't just narrate his history of the crime genres as a struggle for the fantastic and cerebral to break free of the mundane in the works of individual writers. On the contrary, he explicitly sociologizes the problem in terms of *readers*, as that of one readership struggling to break free of another, of one way of reading contained within

another. (Caillois also limits himself almost exclusively to French examples to better analyze and schematize those readerships within France, a move diametrically opposed to Borges's irreverent disregard to the difference between, say, British readers of Chesterton and Argentine ones). Caillois' crime fiction wants to seduce "those indifferent readers" over to the side of the fantastic and challenge them intellectually, largely against their will. What's more, the genre, which seems by some underlying instinct or essence to want to negate and transcend its melodramatic origins, is most effective (or most worthy of Caillois' critical efforts) when it is as cerebral and "as intellectual *as one would wish*." Right down to the genteel rhetoric of "what one would wish," the critical work assumes a reader sympathetic to this transcendental¹⁶ view of the detective novel specifically and of melodrama and popular culture generally. Given that this essay was printed in an edition of 200, in Sur's French-language chapbook series, it seems safe to assume that this essay was a nominally "public" record of a discussion among friends within Borges's circle (among whom intellectual literature would be a tautology).

Tellingly, Caillois subtitles this essay, written expressly for his friend Borges, "Comment l'intelligence se retire du monde pour se consacrer à ses jeux et comment la société introduit ses problèmes dans ceux-ci". The subtitle would have been entirely appropriate to Borges's 1936 collection essays, *Historia Universal de la Eternidad*, or for that matter to all the collections of fantastical fiction and irreverent criticism that followed it. In *El habla de la ideología*, Andrés Avellaneda's seminal 1983 account of literary styles as polemics and publishing circuits as sociolinguistic in-groups during this period, Avellaneda goes so far as to treat the 40s wave of interest in crime fiction as a special topic within the generational flowering of the fantastic. The fantastic, in turn, is one particularly clear-cut example of what he called the "poética de la respuesta grupal," responding to Perón's sudden monopoly on the populist imaginary. "Durante la década del cuarenta y gran parte de la del cincuenta se produce el auge del relato-problema, cuyo mecanismo básico es *el triunfo de la inteligencia frente a la oscuridad del enigma propuesto*" (42, emph. mine). Through Avellaneda's generational and historicist lens, the words "triunfo" and "inteligencia" are allegorically loaded by the contemporary ideological struggle between an emphatically, heavy-handedly popular Peronist cultural regime and all the dissenting and alienated intellectuals huddled under the umbrella of Borges's and Sur's "liberal elite" (11). For Avellaneda, "inteligencia," is code for "civilización," in the sense of an Enlightened universalism carried from Sarmiento to Sur, and "oscuridad" is code for the vast ocean of Peronist "sentimiento del pueblo" [*popular sentiment*] that during the 40's silenced and prohibited all other discourses and cultural formations, particularly translated and international ones (39).

Avellaneda's account is essentially an argument about the history of ideology and the political subtext of literary culture, and a markedly national one: for our more literary purposes, there's an international dimension left out of his account that proves central to our own. Caillois, for instance, could not be referring to the same civilization and the same barbarity as Borges in his Franco-centric essay on European crime fiction as a never-completed project of "intelligence" transcending "society." Indeed, it was perhaps essential to Caillois' role in Borges' circle that, like many other in the long line of "European visitors" so fêted by Argentina's contemporary "liberal elite," he was a genteel and liberal exile at odds with his historical

moment. He is, along with Adolfo Bioy Casares and the American academic Donald Yates, one of Borges's key interlocutors on the subject of crime fiction; Caillois' ideas deeply marked Borges's aesthetic project in ways that we can trace in the retoolings of that project by later generations. Avellaneda's discursively focused argument downplays many of the differences between genteel crime fiction and fantastical literature: one key difference being their textual origins, largely *native* in the case of the fantastic (he mentions Gorriti, Holmberg, Quiroga, and Lugones, 42) and overwhelmingly *translated* from Anglophone (and to a lesser degree, Francophone) traditions in the case of crime fiction. For Avellaneda's purposes, the two are largely coextensive and interchangeable as generational projects circulated in the same channels and written in the same mannerly idiolect.

The fissures in this short-lived functional equivalence may be minor or dismissible to an intellectual historian, but to literary history it's a hair worth splitting even during that period of censorial officialism and polarized cultural life. Borges' selective appreciation, translation, and imitation of imported "crime fiction" could be functionally equivalent to his concept of the "fantastic" insofar as both were "perfectly cerebral" and far removed from both histrionics and historicity. Crime fiction of any other stripe or filiation remained completely marginalized until a later generation returned to it. Indeed, we could even say that the ways in which Borges appropriated from crime fiction is less important for understanding Argentine crime fiction than all the other ways in which he *didn't*. At his most censorious and influential, the Borges of the 1940's was equally hostile to melodrama, realism, atmospherics, political allegory, the *deus ex machina*, and manipulation of the reader; in private, he even made lists and catalogs of the "cheap tricks" that he would banish from the literary realm if he were all-powerful legislator of taste¹⁷.

Yet as if by a kind of erosion of these generational taboos, all these styles and techniques crept back into the literary scene over the course of the 1950's, 60's, and 70's, above and beyond the changes of taste attributable directly to specific schools of thought or to some monolithic and international "postmodernism". In the interests of time and focus, this study will pass over much of the tentative and piecemeal erosion of those taboos in the cultural production of the intervening years and generation: to name just a few better-studied cultural landmarks of this period, we could mention Cortázar's blockbuster experimentalism of the 60's, the contemporary revalorization of 30's pulp-modernist Roberto Arlt, the existential "*noir*" novels of Sábato and Onetti¹⁸, the materialist criticism of the Contorno group¹⁹, and Puig's forerunner in the "pop-art novel," Alberto Greco²⁰. Furthermore, the 1960's saw popular crime fiction flourish, ranging from the low-brow to the middle-brow and mostly circulated through pulp/newsstand circuits, a publishing boom²¹ that certainly spurred contemporary literary writers to reconsider Borges's theory and definition of crime fiction. The disbanding into diverse and contradictory camps of Avellaneda's contingent coalition of dissidents after the fall of Perón²² is certainly a key historical backdrop to this intermediary generation, but against that backdrop many political debates and international culture currents aligned and realigned to form many tentative cultural formations that will be addressed as necessary within each chapter.

One such formation in particular stands to be explained in advance as a kind of subtext against which much theory and practice of crime fiction distinguished itself explicitly or, more often, implicitly. A second generation of "fantastic" literature, largely defined by the mature work of Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez through the critical lens of Emir Rodríguez Monegal, was given center stage in the international marketing phenomenon known as the "Latin American Boom". Somewhat against the grain of this fantastic aesthetic so dominant within the "Boom," Puig, along with many writers more peripheral or external to the Boom, took an interest in the less "intelligent" and inadequately "fantastic" genres of crime fiction that had been neglected by Borges and by modernism generally. Since this interest coincided with a publishing boom for mass-market fiction, these narrative forms came to be a privileged literary forum for analyzing the popular imaginary; this ideological subtext made popular crime fiction a kind of plain-language, cynical alternative to the Boom's mythopoetic approach to history and politics. Indeed, any history of postwar Latin American literature finds itself dispelling the retroactive illusion of centrality which the Boom's rhetorical bombast claimed for itself; many of what seem now like countercurrents to the Boom were, at the time, simply independent developments. Before, during, and after the Boom, Latin American crime fiction flourished in a number of specific times and places (such as Mexico's wave of neopolicial novels in the 1990's, or Cuba's "officialist" crime novel after Castro) which have been extensively studied in other works²³. This work, however, seeks to bring attention to this key episode for its particular historiographical stakes and the influence these novelists exerted on later experimental prose in Argentina and in Latin America generally.

It bears repeating, then, that these later developments of variously experimental and variously popular crime fiction all stem from the less fantastic, more quotidian genres and forms that Borges pointedly *wasn't* referring to when he praised and practiced "crime fiction". Thus, while Borges is often credited with having "introduced" crime fiction to Latin American letters or having been influential as its first champion, I would argue that the innovations of Puig, Piglia, and even Saer greatly expanded on Borges's narrow "introduction" to incorporate a whole range of new possibilities and forms that have been taken up by many writers since. The premise of this work is that Borges's highly selective appropriation of one small corner of mass-cultural fiction set a precedent for a series of later appropriations and approximations to the popular that go well beyond his own project and its metaphysics of transcendence. Impelled to represent contemporary history and its violence in new ways, this later generation broke from the Borgesian system and its fantastic, airless investigations to elaborate between them a popular and immanent crime fiction.

I've divided this study into chapters that treat this elaboration as three distinct movements towards contemporary history, each of which I will describe in more detail after a brief overview of their organization. The first chapter explores the turn to crime-melodrama as a mode of relating the reader to individuals allegorically and of representing a living, breathing social totality beyond the representational codes of realism. The second chapter frames a turn to the true-crime genre as a border-crossing between journalistic non-fiction and politicized crime fiction and as a privileged ethical stance towards historical truth, with all the epistemological weight that term bears. The third chapter reconceives the paranoid thriller as

an affective and direct vernacular especially suited to the representation of terror, surveillance, and other affects specific to the Cold War and the Dirty War. Instead of emphasizing the historical realities difficult to represent without these generic appropriations, I've taken a less deterministic approach that foregrounds these cultural appropriations as events important in their own right as literary quantum leaps. (After all, these innovations, launched self-consciously into an international market for literature, were often incorporated or extended in places experiencing the Cold War very differently.) Thus, I often refer to these movements as "fields" or sectors of popular and mass culture that get annexed to the realm of the literary as "source material" for experimental recombination. Indeed, the structuring trope of Ezequiel de Rosso's exhaustive and precise history²⁴ of Latin American appropriations from crime fiction is one of progressive and incremental movement of the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate "sources" or readings. The operations of appropriation whereby Puig, Piglia, and Saer lifted structures and stock characters from these "minor" genres effectively pushed back that boundary and annexed various new terrains to the literary. Much of their fame as novelists is built on what they brought back from their incursions into mass-market narrative: uniquely "forensic" modes of active reading, "criminological" forms of ideological critique, and a cynical way of representing even the most shocking violence as quotidian and structural.

Chapter 1: Melodrama, Naturalism, and the Legibility of the Social

We can now see how the mystery novel is suspended between two opposite poles, and how it entertains both the ambitions of the intellect and the appetites of the senses [...]. Yet it always contains, of necessity, two elements: the murder, and the investigation of the murder. And it pleases all of its various publics, without bias, and satisfies the most varied needs of its readers. It concocts seductions of plot that one listens to passively, and seductions of quest where one takes an active part. [...] It charms, captivates, and diverts, giving the impression of progress made, of efforts rewarded and work that bears fruit.

—Caillois, *The Mystery Novel*, 44-45

The critical point of departure for the first chapter is that the crime fiction genres, from their origins and through most of the forms they evolve, are fundamentally melodramatic, even if in many forms they "suppress" the sentimentality foregrounded and spectacularized by more conventionally melodramatic genres. This premise runs counter to most critical traditions, particularly in Argentina, which have followed Borges's conception much more than Caillois'. Many critics go so far as to treat crime novels as a kind of alien discourse genre, half essay and half parable, evolving *ex nihil* from Poe's short stories (or from some other, vaguely historicized combination of Romantic imagination and the Enlightenment project of rationalizing the police and the populace). Instead, we would here defer to Caillois' conception of crime fiction as a subset of melodramatic popular fiction that strives nobly but hopelessly to transcend and negate its basic forms. This taxonomic and genealogical move doesn't just alter the frame of reference and landmarks against which the "first mature" works by Puig, Piglia, and Saer should be considered; more importantly, it alters the terms in which we understand their intended

readership and their specific mode of *reading*. While the 1960's and 1970's also saw the novelistic project of the "Boom" and its fantastic lineage theorized in terms of "the ludic" and "active reading," I would argue that the more concrete and historicist works of Puig, Piglia and Saer operate a different kind of active reading. The structural irony of this "forensic" mode of active reading has less to do with playful suspension of realism than with a self-conscious introduction of melodrama into the novel of ideas.

The chapter borrows the schema of a melodramatic "mode" (in Northrop Frye's sense of a meta-generic category or transhistorical critical abstraction), which we define by its popular readership²⁵, a focus on plot and revelation at the expense of character development or interiority, and distinct conventions of the social totality's legibility (as opposed to allegorical and/or realist conventions, etc.). Then the focus turns to Borges and Bioy Casares' vexed relationship to James M. Cain and the melodramatic current within the otherwise hypermasculine and superficially anti-sentimental "hard-boiled" school of the 1930's. All these critical concepts are brought to bear on a largely unrecognized intertext for Puig's *Boquitas pintadas*, Cain's vicious Depression-era social satire, *Mildred Pierce*.

I then turn to Puig's first major popular success, the overtly sentimental *Boquitas pintadas*, as a deliberate and methodical hybrid of narrative techniques for representing interiority with melodramatic forms for narrativizing class conflict and power struggles as sentimental entanglements. While critics have rightly credited James Joyce for the interiority and the radio-dramas of Puig's youth for the social critique, critics have often insisted that the former lampoons and parodies the latter, refusing to take at face value Puig's insistence that this novel was intended as, and fully remains, a *folletín* and a popular melodrama. In addition to the intertext of *Mildred Pierce*, I also explore Puig's avowed debt to Henri-Georges Clouzot (another master melodramatist who freely combined melodramatic forms, psychoanalytic notions of conflicted interiority, and the formulae of popular crime fiction). The two sections on Puig's popular novel and its intertexts try to show that Puig achieved social critique not *in spite of* or *in parody of* but entirely *within* a melodramatic and sentimentalist tradition.

From Puig's breakthrough novel, I cross over to the contemporary novel *Cicatrices*, Saer's first major success on a national scale and a similarly disparate patchwork of homages and rewrites from both high and low genres. While Saer's four-part novel overtly names various "novels of ideas" as its intertexts (Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Robbe-Grillet's *Jalousie*, Wilde's *Dorian Gray*), it also incorporates a lengthy nod to Dostoyevsky's melodramatic satire *The Gambler* and borrows its overarching narrative structure from Faulkner's naturalist crime saga *Light in August*. Unlike Piglia and Puig, Saer is interested less in works by "minor" and popular authors than the minor works of modernism, mining the understudied and underappreciated melodramatic streak through the European novel of ideas. After briefly discussing Dostoyevsky and Wilde as melodramatic landmarks, I turn to the case of Saer's personal Faulkner, not just as a melodramatist *per se* but for his deployment of popular literature to modernist ends. To wit, the Saer of 1969 learns from Faulkner how to represent the consciousness of society's lower strata, and how to plumb the lower strata of the consciousness of the individual.

A similar revision of melodrama's role in modernism (worked out in narrative terms through a similar *gendering* of melodrama and of popular literature more generally) is both more salient and more central in the early work of Ricardo Piglia during these same years. Comparing three slightly-different versions of Piglia's first short story collection *Invasión* (edited in 1967, 1969, and 2007) and the famous novella "Nombre Falso" that launched Piglia's career in 1975, I examine the centrality of the figure of the *femme fatale* in Piglia's work, which follows through the present day. By caricaturing the gendered division of labor whereby woman becomes synonymous with mystery and indeterminacy in North American hard-boiled pulp and in the fictions of Argentine "pulp modernist" Roberto Arlt, Piglia lays bare the repressions and projections that warrant their investigations; by unearthing the late-Romantic *doppelgänger* lurking in the *femme fatale*, Piglia shows the historical and epistemic importance of paltry romances and emotional histrionics.

These three very different incorporations of melodramatic forms into intellectually challenging texts that self-consciously represent a popular conscious or worldview show that familiar concepts like "pastiche" and "parody" don't really convey the complex interactions between experimental fiction and popular fiction in this period. Not only were taboos on popular genres being challenged and overturned, but the modes of reading and of representing history specific to each were being surveyed and explored. The types of social and historical readings melodrama invites are categorically different from those of realism, and at times border onto a kind of vernacular and commonsensical "naturalism," appealing in the same breath to morality, to "common sense," and to a worldview coarsely derived from the contemporary social sciences (this includes the discourses of "pop-psychology" and "self-help" that Puig analyzed in good faith throughout his career). Appealing to their readers in these ways (or more to the point, alternating these modes of appeal with more conventional and more experimental ones) constitutes a kind of active reading that's political *a priori* in that it destabilizes at the same time as it highlights and pluralizes its representations of the social world. After this period of somewhat parallel experimentations with the melodramatic, the three authors take different courses, but I would argue that understanding melodramatic dynamics in their work, and in the North American source material they continued engaging with for the rest of their careers, is essential to later developments stemming from this engagement.

Chapter 2: The Legacy of Rodolfo Walsh and the Historical Horizons of Genre Fiction

This chapter studies works by Puig, Piglia, and Saer which exploit contemporary experiments in the evolution of "true-crime," "creative non-fiction" and "*testimonio*" as interrelated genres in which contemporary history could be presented polemically and with a revisionist slant. If melodramatic narrative can largely be defined by and understood through its interaction with popular discourses of sentiment and emotional well-being, then these genres of true-crime narrative can similarly be seen as the meeting-point of fictional narrative form and a journalistic *ethos* of accuracy, explication, and responsibility. Similarly, while the melodramatic works studied in the previous chapter satirically assume the polarized moral

worldview of popular melodrama in which suffering and spectacle are closely linked when not synonymous, these works about the crime scene of contemporary Argentina exploit the familiarities and formulae of true-crime to position their narrators or author-functions as informants, whistle-blowers and activists.

One key context for these appropriations was the 60s and 70s work of another literary polymath and polemicist (and his own *sui generis* conception of crime fiction's relation to realism): rebellious Borges disciple Rodolfo Walsh. While Puig and Saer were not, as Piglia was, a personal friend and direct literary disciple of Walsh, Walsh's figure was inescapably prominent at the time for his turning rapidly from minor literary celebrity to notorious underground activist and revolutionary thinker. Pivotal in this politicizing turn was the fate of his polemic non-fiction novel, *Operación massacre* (1958), an exposé of government corruption written in a blend of first-person true-crime *reportage* and detective story posturing. With a brief excursion through genetic criticism of this seminal work, and with reference to a Pygmalion-inflected short story about a working-class stiff cum crime fiction translator, I show how Walsh changed the valence and reception of crime fiction. Even if the status of melodrama changed little from Borges to Walsh, the status of realism changed drastically; indeed, Walsh is perhaps more responsible than any later Latin American writer for the widespread interpretation of hard-boiled detective fiction and other popular vernaculars as "pulp realism" with a unique insight into (and legibility to) working-class consciousness.

Piglia, Saer, and Puig never wrote "true-crime" exposés proper (any more than they wrote hard-boiled detective fiction or whodunits), but I argue that their work is actually marked by the precedent of Walsh when they try to write, in their respectively experimental ways, revisionist works about recent history intended for broad readerships. Written in 1999 but claiming to be a "reworking" of notes taken in 1969 (the period during which he and Walsh had the closest contact), Piglia's *Plata quemada* addresses Walsh's legacy quite directly, confronting the autofictional character of Renzi with an illegible and irrational event of violence and pondering the nature of history now that it's written by televisions as much as by intellectuals. The reporter at the center of *Plata quemada* (as well as in the rest of the trilogy formed by *La ciudad ausente*, 1992, and *Blanco nocturno*, 2009) isn't just based an amalgam of Rodolfo Walsh and Roberto Arlt—he is, I argue, an autofictional entanglement of the author and his characters²⁶ only possible after Walsh had so powerfully and dangerously conflated the hard-boiled detective, the investigative reporter, and the concerned citizen.

Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) and *Maldición eternal a quién lea estas páginas* (1980) are, respectively, Puig's most and least read novels, rarely mentioned together or studied in terms of one another despite the latter being largely a rewriting of the former and a revisitation of its themes (if not an outright rescinding of its optimistic message). Furthermore, they are long overdue for study as Puig's satirical contributions to the evolution of a historicist mode of fiction whose practice and reception evolved largely through the cultural institutions of the Cuban Revolution and pan-Latin-American coalitions of intellectuals committed to approaching the popular in new ways: the *testimonio*. I would argue that they are two important episodes in the evolution of the postwar novel's relationship to history because they

respectively mark, in the case of *Beso*, Puig's sincere faith in the revolutionary and revisionist capacity of the individual voice and testimony and, in the case of *Maldición*, Puig's disillusionment with memory-work and testimonial work whether it be fictional, historical, or somewhere in between. Saer's participation in this tradition, 1986's personal and semi-autobiographical *Glosa*, is more peripherally related to Walsh's legacy than Piglia's, yet similarly reflexive about voice of its characters and fundamentally retrospective, marking the differences between 1986 and 1958. *Glosa* earnestly pushes the formal envelope of the "memory-work" novel, a contemporary answer to new demands on the historical novel tradition. More specifically, *Glosa* strips the memory-work novel of any novelistic pretensions and any pose of journalistic objectivity to be simply and purely a personal novel of remembering, or better yet, a memoir in which the stranded, individual voice strains to remember conversations across a gulf. Saer's "historical" novel *manqué* is a difficult one for its unfaltering dredging and its refusal to narrate events or to emplot memories as narrative—it is, instead, a kind of "raw material" for a novel that breathes and speaks but does not tell its reader very much. By an inversion crucial to the novel's structure and intended readerly experience, the "frame story" is only explained by a mid-novel flash-forward to the familiar institutions of the memory-work genre: reunions between exiled friends, truth and reconciliation commissions, all the sentiment and consequence hanging from those memories.

While these are all very different novels, they share the common ground of extending fiction's incursion into true-crime and adopting its modes of reading and its writerly postures to new historiographical problems presented by the dictatorship and post-dictatorship years. I do not think the crime novel can really be addressed in isolation from these questions, yet at the same time, these texts have more in common with each other than with the melodramatic texts studied in the prior chapter or with conventional, investigation-driven crime fiction. They are experimental in the most literal sense, trying out new relations of fiction to history that are to some degree the watermark of the generation that lived through the dictatorships and the various waves of historical revisionism that followed them.

Chapter 3: The Criminal State, the Thriller, and the Literature of Paranoia

Having established how the melodramatic strain through crime fiction was pivotal in the evolution of one set of historical representations, and having gestured towards how these same three authors also contributed to the largely independent evolution of the revisionist historical novel inflected with true-crime structures, I would also like to show how a third set of borrowings enriched the possibilities of the Argentine novel, and of the crime novel generally. The novels I'd like to turn to last constitute something of a paranoid mini-corpus within the broader traditions of "dictatorship novels" and "State Terror" novels, wherein the historiographical problems of the State Terror period dovetail with the representational problems of narrativizing, on the individual level, psychic traumas of panic, menace, powerlessness and sadomasochism. Like other works of the period in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, the fundamental schism between Law and Justice makes realism impossible and the social totality that it illuminates unthinkable. Like contemporary fiction internationally,

murky and unstable narratives telescope Cold War anxieties about the totalitarian violence erupting throughout the developing world. Building on the engagements with melodrama and realism detailed in earlier chapters, Puig, Piglia, and Saer wrote their most historically important and influential works by bringing to bear on this historiographical problematic a self-consciousness and ironic take on the low-brow psychological thriller.

Here, more so than in previous chapters, the authors feel themselves out on a limb, inventing forms and genres as they go: when Puig casts around for models on which to base the last novel of his "Argentina trilogy" in 1969, he borrows freely and explicitly from Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), which speaks volumes about his aspirations for the novel and about the tradition to which Puig was aspiring. Like his two prior works, his "*novela policial*" is affectively manipulative and narratively demanding. Its structure is "*policial*" in the same sense that Hitchcock's film is: abortively and unsatisfyingly. It is crime fiction, but it fits squarely in the newest and least forgivable of crime genres: however tongue-in-cheek and overlaid with political innuendo and historical meaning, its generic affiliations are closest to the trashy psychosexual thrillers that neither Borges, nor Bioy Casares, nor Walsh could've considered worthy of literary attention of any kind. It is, however, a genre that has increasingly come to the forefront of cultural scholarship working on the affective (as opposed to the emotional and psychological) dimensions of narrative²⁷—in this, Puig's formal sensibilities proved prescient.

Piglia and Saer both seem to have turned to Puig's 1969 novel when they both chose, a decade later, to write novels about the experience of living through (and under the stifling pressure of) the surveillance and paranoia of the *Años de Plomo*, which is to say, the most openly repressive period of Argentina's military Junta. Piglia's best-known and award-winning novel, *Respiración artificial* (1980), takes up suspicion and disappointed readerly expectations as central devices in a formalist appropriation of the thriller, but in Piglia's case these devices are being grafted onto the trunk of the late-modernist novel of ideas rather than the psychological novel. Like Puig, Piglia makes psychoanalytic causalities not only more interesting and central than, but even more legible than, mere lived experiences, which are scarce in the novel by comparison to psychic actions and reactions. Piglia's novel is "*policial*" in the sense that it primes its active reader to investigate his or her way out of a hall of mirrors in which everyone is reading everyone; unlike the rest of Piglia's novels, however, the investigation at the core of the fiction is not just inconclusive or open-ended but furthermore hopelessly moot.

Saer's *Nadie nada nunca*, written the same year, operates the same kind of formalist decomposition on the thriller that *Glosa* operates on the memoir. Modulating the narrative pace from breezy and anecdotal to painstaking microrealism many times slower than real-time, pushing atmospherics and affective manipulation to the extreme, and withholding any definitive explanation for all the manifold violence and death everywhere in the text, Saer's novel is an at times excruciating representation of the psychology of justified and legitimate paranoia in violent times. Its use of familiar narrative conventions for representing crimes and investigations, like Puig's and Piglia's, is introduced only to be disappointed and shown as

inadequate; it represents psychoanalysis as more important, more definitive, and in this context more necessary than any legal investigation.

These novels present for literary history a distinct challenge: they are indisputably experimental forms of crime novel, yet they have more in common with the historiographical paranoias of Pynchon or the psychosexual unease of Hitchcock than with any fiction structured around an investigation, much less around a detective or a criminal. They demand a more robust theory of crime fiction than has been bequeathed to them by a century of practitioners and historians, an ironic lacuna given their growing importance for the Argentine tradition in the last decade. I analyzed these novels last because in many ways one needs to already have a working familiarity with the cultural specificity of crime fiction, melodrama, and polemic provided by the prior chapters to flesh out the network of intertexts resonating in these novels. Indeed, of all the novels studied here, I believe these are the novels that most continue to resonate for what in them seems timely and what in them remains contemporary. As Cold War anxieties give way to neo-liberal ones and Latin Americas grow habituated to ever more diffuse, almost *quotidian* violence, these writers shifted the ground under the novel, bringing a complex toolkit of affects and interpretation to bear on State Crimes and institutional violence beyond the merely denunciatory, journalistic, and moral registers to which so much literature about State Violence is limited.

Endnotes

¹ Ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

² Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957 (first edition).

³ By "cycles," Rubin refers to recognizable corpuses from the heyday of a given genre in the Hollywood system.

⁴ See *Anatomy of Criticism*, Essay 1.

⁵ In the case of a crime thriller, obviously that other world will always be an "underworld" or a "demimonde;" since there is so much overlap between the modes of crime genre and thriller (particularly when defined purely by this schema from Northrop Frye), I will first address two crime genres to which Rubin's theories are not directly applicable before returning to the crime-thriller in chapter 3.

⁶ I take the term liberally from Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment* (Paris: Minuit, 1979; Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1984).

⁷ The term dates to historian José Luis Torres' 1945 work, *La década infame*, which defined the "decade" from Uriburu's overthrowing of Yrigoyen's democratically-elected, socialist-leaning regime on Sept 6, 1930 to June 4, 1943, when president Castillo was overthrown by the military Junta of lead by Rawson, within which Juan Domingo Perón famously rose quickly through the ranks.

⁸ See "Late Modernism, Pulp History: Jorge Luis Borges's A Universal History of Infamy (1935)," *Modernism / modernity*, John Hopkins University Press, vol. 18 (2011), no. 2, pp 425.

⁹ For a fascinating analysis of Borges's revisionist gestures and subtle inflections on Twain's politics, see Jeff Lawrence's "An American History of Infamy," in *Variaciones Borges*, Pittsburg, PA: Univ of Pittsburg, vol. 31 (Jan 2011), pp.161.

¹⁰ For a thorough teasing out of the implications of this composite portrait, see Julio Prieto's incisive "Pierre Menard, traductor de Valéry: entre muertes del autor," in *Variaciones Borges*, Pittsburg, PA: Univ of Pittsburg, vol. 29 (Jan 2010), pp.53-77.

¹¹ "...un simbolista de Nimes, devoto *esencialmente* de Poe, que engendró a Baudelaire, que engendró a Mallarné, que engendró a Valéry, que engendró a Edmond Teste" (*Obras completas* vol. 1: 447; emphasis mine).

¹² See Irwin, John T. *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins U.P., 1996, pp 37-38. Irwin points out that although the stories were not actually accepted for publication by Ellery Queen's *Mystery Magazine* in those years, he did submit for publication "Garden of Forking Paths," "Death and the Compass," and "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in his Labyrinth" exactly one century after the publications of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," respectively. Irwin's entire book is a detailed exploration of the relationship between Poe and Borges largely extending the earlier insights of Borges's friend and translator, crime-fiction specialist Donald Yates. Like Yates, Irwin inherits Borges's own tendency to make Poe (and to a lesser degree, Chesterton and Wilkins) coextensive with "the detective genre" and "crime fiction" (taken as near-synonyms) at the expense of other schools or traditions within either; otherwise, it's a very cogent and exhaustive reading of this aspect of Borges's work.

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- ¹³ Reprinted in *Borges en Sur*, p.126. "The genuine detective story--need I say it?-rejects with equal contempt physical risks and distributive justice. It serenely does without jails, secret stairways, remorse, gymnastics, fake beards, fencing, the bats of Charles Baudelaire, and even the elements of chance" (Translation taken from *Borges: A Reader*, eds. Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981, p.71).
- ¹⁴ Translation taken from Roberto Yahni and A. W. Sadler's edition, Bronxville, NY: Laughing Buddha Press at Sarah Lawrence College, 1984, from the text of the 1974 Gallimard edition included in *Approches de l'imaginaire*.
- ¹⁵ Daniel Balderston's epithet for the Borges of this period, "el joven radical," dovetails nicely his formal openness to popular and populist modes and his support for the Yrigoyenist project of middle-class Republicanism. See "Borges, el joven radical" in *Borges: desesperaciones aparentes y consuelos secretos*, ed. Rafael Olea Franco, Mexico DF: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios, 1999, and
- ¹⁶ For a slightly more metaphysical and Kierkegaardian view of the "transcendentalism" of detective novels, see Siegfried Kracauer's eccentric (and as yet, untranslated) study from 1925, *Der Detektiv-Roman*, a first stab at the mass-cultural critical apparatus he would refine in his *Mass Ornament* (1927).
- ¹⁷ "Para 1942 hace ya tiempo que Borges ha abandonado los derroches del ultraísmo y la tradición modernista del neologismo, para elaborar un concepto no ornamental del lenguaje y una idea de estilo en que prevalece el rigor y la austeridad que se oponen al gusto por el énfasis y lo superfluo, que procuran combatir lo mecánico del lenguaje, sus clichés y sus ordenamientos obligatorios, que quieren reemplazar el gusto por énfasis y lo superfluo con un valor de 'plena eficiencia y plena invisibilidad.' Bioy ha recordado un catálogo prescriptivo que entre bromas y veras escribió con Borges en 1939, donde entre otras prohibiciones se condenaba "la enumeración caótica; la riqueza de vocabulario; cualquier palabra a que se recurre como sinónimo; inversamente le mot juste; todo afán de precisión... metáforas en general; en particular visuales; más particularmente agrícolas, navales, bancarias." (Avellaneda, Habla, 60; first citation is from Borges' "El idioma de los argentinos," 1928, Gleizer edition p.128; the second is from María Angélica Bosco's *Borges y los otros*, 1967, BA: Fabril Editora, 1967, p.83).
- ¹⁸ I've chosen to designate the work of these two canonical novelists as *roman noir* rather than as crime fiction because of their transparent (and in Sábato's case, sometimes derivative) filiation with the novelistic project of Albert Camus and existentialism generally; these French writers famously based much of their *stylistics* on the bleak, psychologically and morally "dark" end of the crime fiction spectrum (Jim Thompson, Chester Himes, James Cain), without much attention to the thematics of crime or the plot structures of investigation and/or evasion. For a revisionist take on film noir and hard-boiled fiction as "American existentialism" or existentialism *avant la letter*, see Stephen Faison's *Existentialism, Film Noir, and Hard-Boiled Fiction*, Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2008.
- ¹⁹ See Avellaneda, 22-23; Adam Shellhorse's dissertation at UC Berkeley, 2010; or, Sarlo, Beatriz, "Los dos ojos de Contorno," in *Punto de Vista*, No. 13 (1981), 3-8.
- ²⁰ On Greco, see Rafael Cippolini's essay on Greco in *Paranoia contagiosa*, discussed and cited in Chapter 3.
- ²¹ The authoritative work on this popular boom in Argentina remains Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera's *Asesinos de papel*, Buenos Aires: Calicanto Editorial, 1977; second edition, BA: Ediciones Colihue, 1996.

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- ²² For a succinct primer on the ideological diversity of the plurality of Leftisms from the 40's to the 70's, see Altamirano's *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, Buenos Aires: Temas Grupo Editorial, 2001.
- ²³ For the *neopolicial* in México, see in particular Ezequiel de Rosso's *Nuevos secretos. Transformaciones del relato policial en América Latina 1990-2000* (Buenos Aires: Liber, 2012); for an overview of crime fiction in México, see Stavans, Ilan, *Antiheroes*, México, D.F.: Porrúa, 1993 & in translation, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997; for Cuba and México in comparative perspective, see Persephone Braham's *Crimes against the state, crimes against persons*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c2004. For a tentatively comparative study, mostly of mass-market/popular novelists, see the slightly uneven anthology, *Contemporary Hispanic crime fiction: a transatlantic discourse on urban violence*, edited by Glen S. Close, New York, N.Y. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; on the *neopolicial* in comparative perspective, see Pellicer, Rosa. "Críticos detectives y críticos asesinos. La busca del manuscrito en la novela hispanoamericana (1990-2006)," *Anales de la Literatura Hispanoamericana*, 36, 2007: 19-35. I'll return to the Cuban case in Chapter 2, which Rodolfo Walsh and a young Ricardo Piglia, as visiting literary dignitaries in 1969, encountered as a contemporary form of "committed," realist crime fiction and an encouragement to experiment with these forms.
- ²⁴ See the historical survey in the first chapter of his lamentably unpublished dissertation on the "neopolicial" wave of the 1990's, or his introduction to the sourcebook, *Retóricas del crimen: reflexiones latinoamericanas sobre el género policial* (Alcalá La Real, Jaén, Spain: Alcalá Grupo Editorial, 2011).
- ²⁵ In this regard, Josefina Ludmer's work on Argentine traditions of the popular, both in *Corpus delecti* and *El género gauchesco*, has been particularly helpful; Beatriz Sarlo's work on the popular imagination and mass-media, in *La imaginación técnica* and *El imperio de los sentimientos* has also been invaluable. As for the penny-press prehistory of North American crime fiction, see Michael Denning's *Mechanical Accents*, and for a speculative/reconstructive account of the specific functioning of mass-market crime fiction for its contemporary working-class and semi-literate readership, see Erin Smith's *Hard-Boiled: working-class readers and pulp magazines*.
- ²⁶ Including, I'll argue in that chapter, Commissioner Laurenzi, hard-boiled detective in a series of apocryphal short stories by Walsh and a key interlocutor in the trilogy's final novel, *Blanco nocturno*.
- ²⁷ See, for instance, Robert Rushing's *Resisting Arrest* (New York: Other, 2004).

Chapter 1: Melodrama, Naturalism, and the Legibility of the Social

Introduction: Melodrama as suprageneric mode and as social representation

Frente a la literatura caótica, la novela policial me atraía porque era un modo de defender el orden, de buscar formas clásicas, de valorizar la forma.
—Borges, 1976, cited in *Asesinos de Papel*, 47¹

In a well-written drama, the story comes out of the characters. The characters in a well-written melodrama come out of the story.
—Sidney Lumet, Interviewed by Charlie Rose, 2007²

Despite constituting debatably the lion's share of all cultural production for at least the last two centuries in Europe and the Americas, melodrama is largely undertheorized as a cultural framework. Somehow its abundance is almost inversely proportional to the complexity and diversity attributed to it by many thinkers aligned with an orderly, rational, and civilized notion of culture that defines itself by strict and fundamental opposition to the melodramatic, the affective, and the "basely" or "guiltily" sensational. In the twentieth century, this opposition is reified to the point of becoming a wide gulf between melodrama and "real" literature, assumed to be more ideological and consequential a distinction than that more formal one between, for instance, lyric and epic or novel and drama. To move beyond this foundational prejudice and to find fault lines, landmarks, and spheres of influence to guide us in this oceanic mass of "chaotic literature," the first step is interrogating, rather than buttressing, the presumption that a clear and definitive line can be drawn between the literature of "order" and the literature of the masses. Instead, I prefer to seek out, on the one hand, the melodramatic in the cultural products of orderly elites and, on the other, the deliberate and formally-sophisticated artifice holding up the seemingly anarchic or casual products of the mass market. One key contention of this chapter is that crime fiction is fundamentally melodramatic in its structure (plot before character, empathy before understanding), and that realism is overlaid onto it superficially at best; another is that melodramatic emplotments, formulations, and modes of reading have quietly been integral to works throughout the tradition of the realist Euro-American novel, even at those experimental and intellectual moments where melodrama would seem most taboo or unacceptable. This latter contention sums up the thesis of Peter Brooks' most famous critical work, which finds in the upward-mobile bourgeois fictions of Henry James and Balzac not just traces of, but a constitutive engagement with, what he

considers the dominant mode of popular entertainment in the French and English 19th centuries: melodramatic narrative as it evolved out of urban theater's first mass-market boom.

But while European modernity and its novel form were, of course, relevant for the generation of Puig, Piglia, and Saer, there was a more immediate conversation taking place in their generation with more popular, New World traditions of melodrama evolving out of the mass-markets of radio, television, and contemporary print media. For this conversation, Linda Williams' 2001 study, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, has been as illustrative to this work as Brooks', dealing as it does with the North American tradition of melodramas that address racial politics sentimentally and spectacularly. Building on Christine Gledhill's specific negotiation of Brooks' terms and a whole film-criticism bibliography on melodrama before and after Brooks' seminal book, Williams' work tries to trace different modes of political engagement specific to melodramatic mass-culture. She swiftly and emphatically distances herself from the tendency to designate a genre by the term, conceiving instead of melodrama as a transgeneric narrative "mode" as broad as realism, comedy, or tragedy³. She quotes Gledhill: "The success of melodrama lies partly in its heterogeneity, arguably producing a greater variety of genres than its close modal neighbor, comedy, and able, moreover, to draw into its articulation the other dominating modes of contemporary popular culture: comedy, romance, realism" (Gledhill 2000, 235, cited in Williams, 23). Working against a concept of Hollywood's institutionalized mainstream aesthetic as having matured beyond or evolved out of a more primitive form of popular melodrama, she inverts the terms: rather than presenting melodrama as a "childhood" or a primitive stage of film narrative left behind by realism, Williams presents it as an "ever-modernizing" field alive and well at every moment of film's history, a primordial ooze or market force that "drives the production of a great variety of familiar film genres" (23). This melodramatic "mode" is a kind of umbrella term or abstraction connecting by a common root the different genres evolving over time to meet the moral and aesthetic needs of specific audiences, different social systems, and different configurations of cultural capital. There is nothing naturally or inherently popular about this mode, but it finds entire genres of popular production primarily under its sway, with perhaps a greater admixture of realism, psychology, or tragedy in its more elite offshoots.

The mention of "specific" readerships is pivotal here, not just for Williams' study of race in America but also for this study of the melodramatic origins against which crime genres are rarely judged. Particularly in film studies, but in cultural criticism generally, there is a marked tendency to equate "melodrama" with "the women's film," the popular romance novel, the "weepie," and any number of "feminine" genres and subgenres, implicitly or explicitly marking as masculine, dominant, and important the realism or classicism against which this other mode is defined. The entwined tendencies by which melodrama is gendered and aesthetically subordinated to a higher, finer, or better tradition of "serious" film were largely present in those authors and texts that became the backbone of film studies, which explains some of the occasionally polemic tone in work like Williams' (or in Elizabeth Cowie's seminal polemic, "Women and Film Noir"⁴). Cowie and Williams both remind their readers that genre boundaries have been imposed retrospectively, dividing westerns, gangster films, and *films*

noirs from women's films and family tearjerkers; at the time, all these films were referred to by studios, screenwriters, advertisements, and reviewers as so many colors of melodrama, regardless of which variously gendered audience they were intended for: western melodrama, gangster melodrama, crime melodrama, family melodrama, romance melodrama...

Before leaving behind gendered conceptions of market and value, I'd also like to reiterate a qualm Williams and Gledhill have with Brooks' terminology: his subtitled "excess" strikes them as reinforcing the aesthetic prejudice the book intends to historicize and read against, namely, the prejudice that melodrama constitutively exceeds a tasteful, realist, or classical criteria of "restraint" and proportion, a criteria by which it *fails*. While clearly "excess" (even if vindicated as the queering excess of "camp") can't define melodrama except negatively, it is hard to replace this intuitive criterion. Without recourse to this negatively-defined aesthetic category, the dividing line between realism and melodrama becomes something of a methodological problem for Williams. She credits to Thomas Postlewait the [theatrical] argument that "historically, melodramatic and realistic dramas developed during the same period in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," extending it to film; she somewhat circularly claims that melodrama may "borrow" anything and everything from realism, as long as the narrative is still "morally legible," its plot is still structured by a "dialectic of pathos and action," and its characterization is still illuminated by spectacular suffering (30-42). In other words, the concrete differences between realism and melodrama are less formal than affective, demanding radically different modes of investment and *reception*. To emphasize the tautology of this affective definition, a melodrama, no matter how realistic, demands you experience *melodramatically* its events, spectacles, and emotions directly, while realism is only superficially melodramatic as long as you're left with that satisfying aftertaste having judged its content from a comfortable, critical distance characterized by sympathy and understanding.

Essentially, Williams throws out Brooks' somewhat reified aesthetic category of "excess" and elevates his heuristic of "moral legibility" to the level of primary criteria. The difficulty (or, perhaps, the perversity) of applying this to crime genres like the hard-boiled detective genre or the emphatically amoral European *roman noir* lies in those genres' notoriously overt claims of moral *illegibility*. These genres inspire in their reader a vicarious investment in (or at the very least, sympathetic understanding of) transgression and selfish criminality; they often conspicuously lack a "Hollywood ending" or any moral code except the most negative ones. I would argue, however, that these bleakly negative and senselessly violent works function entirely within the system of melodrama when they performatively uphold a taboo on "melodramatic" sentiments⁵. After focusing on the melodramatics undergirding the anti-sentimental subjectivity of the hard-boiled mode, I'll extend this analysis in the next chapter to the detective genre's interplay with non-fiction and the "true-crime" genre, revisiting in that different context the pervasive (and dubious) dogma of detective fiction's two polar opposites, the "classic" and "hard-boiled" styles.

One fortuitous product of this dogma is the critical tradition analyzing the hard-boiled corpus as quintessentially American, as symptomatic of ideological currents of the time, and as more closely related to contemporary [North American] modernism than to international forms

of “classical” detective fiction. This historiographical tradition stretches from such seminal works as David Madden’s heterogeneous 1968 survey, *Tough-Guy Writers of the Thirties*, to Christopher Breu’s fine-grained Lacanian-formalist 2000 study, *Hard-boiled Masculinities*, and Megan Abbott’s more socio-historical 2002 study, *The Street was Mine*, all of which posit a defensive panic at femininity and a concomitant negation of [gendered] sentiment as essential to the hard-boiled aesthetic project. Of course, this exaggerated performance of rejecting the sentimentality so prominently foregrounded by other melodramatic genres can still be experienced directly and immediately—particularly if, as Williams argues, “excess” and exaggeration are structurally necessary to the immediately-legible construction (as opposed to development) of melodrama’s predictable characters. The contemporary moral codes that these texts so insistently lampoon and mock as obsolete are replaced nonetheless by an alternate ethical code determined primarily by the author’s ideological orientation (a code usually predicated on loyalty, sometimes honor, sometimes justice or even social justice)—the very legibility of that *alternate* code is a badge of melodrama and its partial obscurity, its status as an ill-hidden aspect of character or as a reward for active reading is part and parcel of the central dynamics of sentimental *negation* that recent authors like Breu seek to explain in Lacanian and/or sociopolitical terms. Works like John Irwin’s *Unless the Threat of Death is Behind Them: hard-boiled fiction and film noir* (2006) and William Marling’s *The American Roman Noir: Hammet, Cain, and Chandler* (1995) tease out a moral code as if from a corpus of myth. To put it another way, these works propose melodramatic ciphers that would unite a broad cross-section of works from the hard-boiled “cycle” (respectively, a work ethic and a prodigal-son tale). This isn’t the place to referee between their (or others’) specific interpretations of those ciphers, but rather to simply point out their common goal: that a melodrama claiming loudly to do away with *conventional* moral legibility can still be argued to provide an *alternate* cipher in its place and still be entirely legible in moral terms other than the ones it refutes.

The Curious Case of James M. Cain, founder and first master of the melodramatic *roman noir*

I make no conscious effort to be tough, or hard-boiled, or grim, or any of the things I am usually called. I merely try to write as the character would write, and I never forget that the average man, from the fields, the streets, the bars, the offices and even the gutters of his country, has acquired a vividness of speech that goes beyond anything I could invent, and that if I stick to this heritage, this logos of the American countryside, I shall attain a maximum of effectiveness with very little effort.

—Cain, Preface to *Double Indemnity*, 1943

Perhaps the abstractions of the preceding prelude have gone too long without substantiation, so I will now turn to particulars with which to refine the concepts of melodrama and negative morality. As Marling’s above-cited title attests, James M. Cain is one of the three

writers originally crowned as a master practitioner of the "hard-boiled" prose style, a triumvirate that never really lost its generic centrality, even if that initial designation had more to do with marketing fiat than with any commonality of project, politics, or aesthetics. In fact, there was little to no contact between Cain and the two detective novelists, and even some real animosity between Chandler and Cain: the former thought of the latter as a stylistic oaf and shameless sensationalist, and the latter thought of the former as an affected, pretentious aesthete⁶. But the three novels (and eponymous filmic adaptations) for which Cain is still primarily famous, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), *Double Indemnity* (1943), and *Mildred Pierce* (1941), are all deeply hard-boiled by every formal and moral criteria, with the notable caveat that none of the three deals primarily with a criminal investigation, and the third barely deals with crime at all. I've chosen to discuss Cain's *Mildred Pierce* as a prelude to a discussion of Puig's *Boquitas pintadas* exactly because it is *barely* a crime melodrama despite being one of the most widely-read and influential crime novels of all time—it is more like a hard-boiled version of a family melodrama, a melodrama that takes the tone and structure of a crime novel written from the criminal's point of view without ever getting around to any crime *per se*⁷.

There is another reason that I chose to start my discussion with Cain, another monkey wrench he throws into conventional histories of the crime genres: aside from writing only minimally *criminal* stories that are nonetheless generically crime fictions, Cain also writes what I dare say Irwin and Borges would agree are baroquely complex "analytical detective stories" without detectives. A long line of critics, from Borges to Todorov to Piglia, argue that a certain split temporality is definitive of the detective and police genres, whereby a timeline of criminal execution and another of the crime's reconstruction, discovery, or persecution are held in a generative narrative tension, whether juxtaposed, counterbalanced, intercut, or otherwise structurally tensed⁸. Borges's Parodi stories, written with Adolfo Bioy Casares, with whom he also edited the *Séptimo círculo* crime-fiction imprint, take this formula to what Borges often refers to as the "logical extreme" of the form pioneered by Poe's Dupin stories: Parodi's incarcerated and hyperbolically analytical mind needs *no access*, spatial or temporal, to that other scene and other temporality of the crime, but can solve mysteries with only the testimony of one relevant party. Cain's analytical puzzles are not reconstructions of a criminal's schemes from the criminologist's point of view but rather elaborate schemes on the part of criminals foreseeing every possible complication and criminologist heuristic—the temporality is essential reversed (along with the moral and legal valence). But these schemes are worked out for and by the reader as analytic problems all the same: the insurance schemes, first in *Postman* and then in *Indemnity*, were baroquely complex and legendarily accurate. (Both plots based closely, Marling extensively shows, on a scandalous court-case that Cain had earlier spent eight solid months reported on daily for the *New York World*⁹.) In both novels, private detectives, policemen, and judges all defer to the judgment of insurance adjusters, with more "resources" and more "invested" in the investigation of the events, presenting a starkly pessimistic view of the rule of Law in late capitalism.

Cain's melodramas, even if read against the grain as realist or adventure-novel representations of crime, spell out clearly a cynical critique of American late Capitalism (typified in its Californian vanguard) as fundamentally ruthless and veiled only by the thinnest veil of hypocrisy and decorum. Inseparable from this critique is their equally cynical depiction of social and sexual mores eroded by the desperation of the Great Depression. His narrator-protagonists in *Postman* and *Indemnity* conspicuously lack anything like a superego, bouncing around from one desire to its gratification at any cost to the next desire. This blunt and nihilistic expressionism borders on frayed-edge psychosis, a lead largely followed by writers like Jim Thompson, Patricia Highsmith, and Chester Himes, all of whom I'll be returning to in Chapter Three. The last two paragraphs of the second chapter of his first published novella, *Postman*, are a fairly illustrative example of the sort of sadomasochistic violence delivered deadpan in this lurid style: "I took her in my arms and mashed my mouth up against hers... 'Bite me! Bite me!' / I bit her. I sunk my teeth into her lips so deep I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth. It was running down her neck when I carried her upstairs" (9). Cain's aesthetic, psychosexually and socially much darker than the austere minimalism of Hammett or the equally precise, stylized wit of Chandler, spawned a genre of its own, usually referred to as the *roman noir*, which overlaps largely with the hard-boiled detective school, narrating crime almost exclusively from the perspective of a directly-involved party (usually a premeditated perpetrator of the central crime). Tony Hilfer's insightful and thorough 1995 survey, *The Crime Novel*, refers to this melodramatic and cynical *noir* genre as "the crime novel." Other than this terminological confusion (I reserve that latter term for more general use to encompass melodramas and investigations alike), Hilfer's exposition of the *roman noir* puts forth more emphatically than Marlin's a history of the *roman noir* and the hard-boiled detective novel twinned development. From Hilfer's perspective, every subgeneric (diachronic) development and every (cultural, geographical, or political) differentiation that evolves in the detective novel has its "equal and opposite" wrinkle in the melodramatic genre he defines negatively, i.e., as "negating every certainty" of the detective genre.

I have two qualms with Hilfer's approach, however, which are worth refuting to clarify and schematize the genealogy I'm tracing of criminal melodramas. Firstly, he defines this shadow-genre *only* by opposition to a detective genre that his study presumes to be more culturally legitimate, more static, and somehow more inflexible and unitary than the subordinate, yet freer, anti-detective genre. Hypostatizing the hackneyed American/English distinction as unquestioned genetic difference, he ascribes more flexibility (authorial, historical, subgeneric) to the *permutations* of these two traditions than to the traditions themselves; he caricatures the hard-boiled school as substituting a "certainty" in the "just social order" of the English novel for a merely equivalent American individualism and distrust of institutions, while considering a *noir* novel from either side of the Atlantic transgressive and socially critical almost *a priori*. I would prefer to think that detective-centric/investigative crime novels and crime-centric/*noir* crime novels in any subgenre can be variably conservative, variably critical, and variably anchored in social, moral, political, and epistemological "certainties"—I'd insist we resist the tendency to ascribe any inherent message to a genre or form. Instead, I would

maintain that genres are born when and where their readerships are, and evolve with them, and tend to offer as many political and ideological positions as are available to those publics.

My second methodological qualm with Hilfer's otherwise very helpful study is its equally spurious definition of a "genre" by such superficial traits as narrative perspective and strategies of emplotment taken as reified categories. Contradistinguishing the twinned genres merely by whether the central crime is narrated from the narratological and/or thematic "perspective" of detective or criminal, even if it were viable in 99% of cases, strikes me as a methodological shortcut that distracts from the more important central question of genre history: how did this public evolve this mode of debating its political and moral questions in these formulas and codes? For my purposes, I'd like to propose a more readerly and melodramatic definition of these hard-boiled permutations in both crime genre traditions: on the detective side, the reader's expectation of moral legibility is structured by the gendered repression of "sentiment" and conventional morality occluding quieter investments and ethical stances more appropriate to a violent and corrupt world; on the noir side, sentiment is presented as a luxury good auctioned-off by the Depression (or some other lapsarian crisis) and never fully recovered. The *noir* genre's sexual politics are as central to its moral legibility and "worldview" as the *femme-fatale* is to the detective genre—and its iconoclasm and avowed amorality are as superficial as the lawlessness and self-interest of the hard-boiled detective genre, which offers a rigid ethos in the place of the Law. The two genres are twins, but it can be erroneous to conflate or confuse them (as the term *film noir* often does, as many critics and specialists still do), even when a whole list of specific works can be said to fall squarely into both.

Instead of defining genres by plot devices or formulae, I find readerly and meta-thematic characteristics more appropriate, such as Williams' heuristic of moral "legibility". I'd argue that a conventional "moral register" is put under erasure in Cain, but as with Hammett's or Chandler's famously gendered repression of sentiment, a quieter, more rudimentary morality underlies and survives this erasure. The implied reader of the *roman noir* undergoes severe moral "shock" and vicarious nihilism, but is encouraged to judge and theorize nonetheless from the repelled distance of a morbid onlooker and spectator. In many cases, including many of Cain's best-known novels, a frame story of pre-execution confession both authorizes this vicarious moral contradiction and heightens its sensationalism. The censorship problems his novels experienced and his scandalous status as the great "sex and violence writer" of the 1930s and 40s (largely a marketing ploy) can overshadow the very *legibility* of his plots: as Tom Wolfe put it in his 1969 introduction to the one-volume Modern Library edition of the trilogy, "I suppose a lot of critics never got beyond that notion". But before turning to novels, he'd tried his hand at screenwriting (I'll return in a moment to the filmic fate of the trilogy), and before that, he'd been a journalist with a heterogeneous output, from scathing anti-clerical and political op-eds¹⁰ to domestic reviews and "human interest" editorials, mostly written under the tutelage of H.L. Mencken. While still an East-Coast journalist, he'd even written an almost forgotten forerunner to Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry* (1927), the equally controversial fictionalization *Crashing the Pearly Gates* (1926), which had less "sex and violence" than his later novels but no less didactic a melodramatic core. In political terms, the

epochal deployment of the *roman noir* formula in Cain amounts to a markedly classed portrait of desperation and a continuation of the attack Mencken had encouraged him to launch on America's "boobery," eschewing the codes of social realism or a pop-literary hybrid à la Dos Passos in favor of unadulterated, sensational melodrama (Marling, 157-161)¹¹. Cain's amoral social climbers are not failures of American Capitalism or bad apples; they are the unflinching paragons of its fundamental ruthlessness. Business is business, the novels of Cain seem to mutter at their darkest moments.

There is one last contextualizing remark I'd like to make before delving into *Mildred Pierce* as a hard-boiled variation on a melodramatic formula typical of the 1930's. American critics may largely have "never gotten beyond" the lurid and hyperbolic, almost campy bluntness with which Cain mentions sex and violence, in Wolfe's phrase, "at a hundred miles per hour"; but somehow, that most famously prudish of Argentine critics, *el pudoroso* Borges, seems to have made his peace with Cain, at least enough to publish him repeatedly. On the one hand, Borges names him in various writings and reviews among the four hard-boiled American deviants "progressively distancing themselves from the intellectual model put forth by Poe and tending towards the erotic and gory violences" [*las violencias de lo erótico y de lo sanguinario*]¹²; on the other hand, Borges and Bioy Casares include translations of Cain's major novels in both *El séptimo círculo* (their crime-fiction imprint) and, even more interestingly, in *La puerta de marfil*, a trans-generic and international selection of contemporary novels, which "does not limit itself to promulgating the work of the masters... but also the most novel European and American values". In an introductory essay from *El séptimo círculo*, they seem self-conscious about the exception to their ban on "los duros" when they write, "las [novelas] de James M. Cain se distinguen por una insobornable dureza"; in the analogous essay for *La puerta de marfil*, Cain is referred to as "el diestro narrador de la desesperación y de la violencia"¹³. There are many possible explanations here, not least convincing of which is that Bioy Casares, less prudish in his attention to cutting-edge American developments, might have lobbied against Borges's firmer categorization of Cain among the poets of the erotic and gory violences. In a 1961 interview, for example, Borges says of Cain, "sus personajes padecen de las más extrañas psicosis"¹⁴.

This psychoanalytic comment, however, might not be as damning as it seems, given that in a much-quoted essay, he writes that the figure and work of Poe "lies behind" the entire genre of detective fiction, and that "behind Poe there is a neurosis," a generative compulsion that engendered Poe's permutations of Romanticism's cult of madness and imagination of which the detective genre is only one product. One wonders if for Borges, these constitutive psychoses might actually be an asset, only compromised aesthetically by their cartoonish "excess", their sensational tackiness, their unimaginative pettiness or banality. Given the political and social legibility I follow Williams in seeing as fundamental to melodrama, I'd also note that the term "*desesperación*" carries a certain unexpected socioeconomic valence in Borges's idiolect, as in his "literary biography" of Theoder Dreiser which ends, "hace bastantes años que recomendó a su país el cultivo de una literatura de la desesperación"¹⁵.

I won't dwell any longer on where Cain really fits into Borges's and Bioy Casares' critical pantheon and vocabulary, but I'd like to keep that word "desperation" in circulation, as I think its finger is right on the pulse of Cain's hot-headed, breathless narrations. Cain's "desperate" characters, which the reader can simultaneously judge as immoral and yet empathize with in their liminal situations, are a clear-cut case of Northrop Frye's "ethical" definition of melodrama, as a bridge between the quotidian and the exotic, the mundane and the exceptional. They mark a new stage in the elaboration of criminal melodrama: the sensational "trick the lover into killing the husband" subgenre of *noir* fiction clearly begins with Cain's *Postman* as definitively as the "armchair detective" and "locked-room mystery" subgenres begin with Poe's Dupin stories. (Speaking of the husband-murder subgenre, it wouldn't be groundless to conjecture that a young Julio Cortázar wrote a copy of *Postman* or *Indemnity*, perhaps even a copy from one of the Borges/Bioy imprints, into the hands of the ill-fated reader in the green armchair in "La continuidad de los parques," 1956, included in *Final del juego*.) Although only two of the novels include a desperate husband-murder, I'd argue that in terms of melodrama's internal divisions, all three intertwine three melodramatic genres for both maximal affective charge and to effect a three-pronged attack on the "boobery" and greed of a middle class in crisis: All three novels are *romance* melodramas first, "business melodramas" second, and crime melodramas only in the third instance, even if two of them came to be considered paragons of crime fiction. It is exactly for that reason that I'll study the third, *Mildred Pierce*, which most clearly shows crime fiction's debt to a curious melodramatic genre that we could call business melodrama for our purposes here.

***Mildred Pierce*: business melodrama as psychopathology of Capitalism**

[Mildred was] a successful woman of business, with the remains of a rather seductive figure, a face of little distinction but considerable authority, a credit to that curious world that had produced her, Southern California.

—James M. Cain, *Mildred Pierce*

The term "business melodrama" might sound a tad far-fetched, but if anything about Cain's writing resembles what Borges calls the "intellectual model" of Poe, it's the elaborate scheming, wheeling-and-dealing, backroom deals and hushed-up court decisions, on the part of criminals, prosecutors, and most interestingly of all, insurance adjustors. *Postman*, and even more so, *Indemnity*, conceptualize murder as a business venture and as a subgenre of the insurance scam or confidence trick: research on criminal precedent and police- and insurance-investigation procedure is explicitly analogized to market research, while the Kafkaesque insurance apparatus bloodlessly calculates life, death, and persecution in terms of returns, probabilities, and justifications of outlay. Many contemporary critics noted their surprise that all the baroque insurance loopholes of *Postman* and *Indemnity* were accurate to a t, with some even wondering if their dissemination wouldn't educate future criminals; similarly, the equally well-researched *Mildred Pierce* doubles as an entrepreneurial primer¹⁶. Critics like Irwin and

Marling don't have to stretch the text very far to tease out the entrepreneurial valences, somewhere between Jay Gatsby and Horatio Alger, of these venture-plots, and to incorporate them into the important North American tradition of the popular business novel. *Mildred Pierce*, which includes no actual crime *per se*, deliberately intertwines two parallel narrative arcs across the life of its protagonist: the deeply pathological mother-daughter relationship frames both the raising of her matricidal daughter and the meteoric rise of her restaurant chain. The one-woman "family business" rises, like its bootstrapping owner and her ruthless daughter, from the ashes of her husband Bert Pierce's real-estate business, which he had talentlessly founded in the Roaring 20 and lost, along with his dignity, his sobriety, and his marriage, in the Great Depression. The business she founds in a doubly-abandoned "model home" left behind by a collapsed market for single-family homes gets incorporated as "Mildred Pierce, Inc." The moral bankruptcy of the denouement is transparently and bluntly troped in the literal embezzlement and bankruptcy of Mildred Pierce, Inc., which leaves Mildred forced, by court order, not to "do business under her own name," which is now property of the corporation, operated by her defaulted creditors—identity, psychology, and business aren't just juxtaposed, they're tangibly coextensive.

But this business melodrama is operating in strict conjunction with a simple and sensational romance-melodrama formula that undergirds all three of the novels, which I insist on reading as a trilogy (and apart from their disloyal filmic adaptations) to emphasize their common structure and legacy for later crime melodrama. I would summarize the romance-melodrama plot at work in all three as one in which a solipsistic cat-eyed temptress eggs on a gullible and "egocentric heel" (the phrase is Wolfe's) to commit egregious and hyperbolic crimes against their own interest. Hilfer, comparing *Double Indemnity* to its film adaptation at the hands of screenwriter Raymond Chandler ("excising what was most melodramatic and sharpening the tough-guy dialogue into a more effectively mordant irony") to be staged by one of Puig's favorite directors, Billy Wilder, writes of the Wilder's more believable "materialistic interpretation of Phyllis," which "fills the gaps" in the former's Phyllis, "unconvincing because she seems a fantasy of Walter's passed off as a character". Quoting a famous and kitschy soliloquy of Phyllis' from *Indemnity* ("there's something in me that loves Death. I think of myself as Death, sometimes."), Hilfer writes, "This is not only operatic but it would *only* work in an opera, as an aria sung by a Cain version of the Queen of Night" (59-61). Putting aside for a moment the seemingly derogatory connotation of "operatic," one might ask how theories of melodrama contextualize this *aria*, rendering it sensible: *Postman* adapts easily as a B-movie, but for an ironic stylist like Wilder to make a psychological A-movie out of *Indemnity*, or for Michael Curtiz to make a toney A-movie murder melodrama out of the bloodless *Mildred Pierce*, requires "filling in the gaps" of the cardboard-psychology and cutting out the lion's share of un-cinematic logistics from the often-tedious "business melodrama". One must, in a sense, forget the eponymous films to see the novels for what they are: triple-strength melodramas that share a common sensational formula for making sex, love, and money into three interlinked and mutually exacerbating psychoses.

But what makes *Mildred Pierce* such a deeply disturbing psychological portrait is that in this variant of Cain's notorious seduced-heel formula, the heel and not the seducer is the protagonist, and much of the novel is given over to her dramatic and self-inflicted suffering. Mildred ruthlessly plows through her enemies, twisting arms by every economic, legal, sexual, and social means available to a "grass widow" in the Depression, not because she's been ensnared by a greedy lover but because of her susceptibility to exploitation by her ruthless daughter, Veda. Indeed, Mildred loves Veda in a way troped repeatedly as not "beyond" and "above" all her sexual relationships, as pathologically and unconsciously erotic. Mildred kisses Veda hard on the mouth (214), she is driven to alcoholism during their period of estrangement (192), and she even slips into her bed throughout the novel: "It didn't occur to her that she was acting less like a mother than like a lover who has unexpectedly discovered an act of faithlessness, and avenged it" (192). This double-edged analogy comes immediately before a chapter-break, suspensefully interrupting the discovery of a relationship between the daughter and Mildred's "Latin Lover", Monty Beragón; while a reader might expect this to be presented as a betrayal by the latter, or at least as a dual betrayal, the adult's betrayal of his lover goes conspicuously unmarked, as if it were entirely expectable or incidental to the jaded and desperate female protagonist. Desperate for her daughter's approval and love, that is—Monty is, at best, a trophy in the novel that mother and daughter fight over.

This love triangle begs the mention of Cain's most important intertext, which is rarely mentioned in critical accounts of Cain's work: proto-feminist Fannie Hurst's largely forgotten, but then widely-read and –influential race-melodrama, *Imitation of Life*, 1933. (Hurst's bestseller, even more so than *Mildred Pierce*, was eclipsed by its filmic adaptation at the hands of melodramatic master John M. Stahl in 1934, and again two decades later by Douglas Sirk.) *Imitation* is also a business-melodrama, in which a widow starts a food business (in this case, a pancake house, as opposed to Cain's more Californian chicken-and-waffle joint) to support the unbridled spending and social climbing aspirations of her thankless daughter. What makes this melodrama so progressive for its time (and what makes so conspicuous its absence from Williams' book on race-melodrama as a central strain through American cultural history) is the odd *coupling* of a black mother-daughter pair to the white pair, a shadow-family that experiences its own heart-wrenching thanklessness and periodically restaged rejection plot: as the white daughter desperately claws her way out of her grease-spattered origins, her shadowy *doppelgänger*, a textbook "tragic *mulatta*," cuts all ties to her black origins to pass full-time. (Racial passing and class passing were quite topical in the high literature of this period as well as in the melodramatic vernacular: Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* was published in 1925, while Nella Larsen's *Passing* dates to 1929). Hurst's bestseller bears mention as an intertext for Cain and for Puig in that it exploits the sensational mother-daughter love-triangle; in all these melodramas, an explosive game of Ping-Pong between class and race hierarchies is deeply polemic and "legible" to a popular audience via a representational schema much too direct to qualify as allegory¹⁷.

In Cain's *Pierce*, though, race relations, although pivotally important, are discussed only in a muted, off-stage, euphemistic kind of way that stems in large part from the specifically

Californian setting and a decorous taboo on race and class that Cain represents as somehow native to that setting¹⁸. Race surfaces as a topic only pages into the novel's many brutally frank and protracted blow-outs between Mildred and Veda or between Mildred; otherwise, race only surfaces in moments of erotic abandon (for instance, the "heavy, languorous South Seas feeling" that the Californio-descended Monty inspires in Mildred after their first tryst, 88). Perhaps the biggest compromise Michael Curtiz' film adaptation makes, in this regard, is the reduction of "Letty", the tragic black maid of the Pierce family, to a Mammy figure and comic relief, played by Butterfly McQueen, who had played a similarly comic servant-figure in Cukor and Fleming's *Gone with the Wind*, 1939—a long way from the spectacular suffering of Hurst's black shadow-protagonist.

The psychosexual stakes of Cain's novel and its sadomasochistic conception of class-performance are writ large across the novel, starting from the first traumatic and spectacular fight. This occurs when Veda bullies the tragic figure of Letty, the family maid, to mitigate the shame of swimming at a public pool:

"It quickly developed, however, that Veda's notion of a swim in the pool was for herself and [her sister] to go parading to the bus stop, with Letty following two paces behind, all dressed up in uniform, apron and cap, and which Mildred identified as the collar of one of her own dresses. It had been neatly sewed [sic], so as to make a plausible white corona, embroidered around the edges" (68).

Now, as you'd expect from a romance melodrama, this game of dress-up is hardly innocent: the settings, the wardrobe, the furniture are always characters in any great melodrama, conveying as much information as the dialogue¹⁹. Letty, Cain's Californian rewrite of Hurst's Delilah Johnson, may not be treated as a near-peer like Hurst's shadow-protagonist, but she is nonetheless treated with some modicum of dignity by Veda's downward-mobile mother, who is indignant *on her behalf*. She is indignant not only out of concern for the rights of her employee, however, but also because of a certain reluctant solidarity embodied in the secret uniform which Veda has appropriated to transform Letty into a more aristocratic privy servant. Mildred has, in fact, hidden this uniform in her closet to keep secret her day job waiting tables at a massive and popular short-order diner. The indignity of work that requires one to wear an apron haunts the entire trilogy like a middle-class bogeyman²⁰ (indeed, a very *topical* bogeyman coming out of the Great Depression).

Of course, as befits the logic of the novel, the ignominy of the apron isn't just about class, serving as a kind of schema for organizing the other registers and social hierarchies of the novel. Mildred's best friend's husband has an affair with a humbler woman whom is spotted "working in that pottery place, up the road about three miles, in a smock and—" (224); Cain cuts back to indirect discourse after that weighty word, as if everything after it is inconsequential by comparison. Mrs. Biederhof, the "widow" with whom Mildred's own husband similarly "shacks up" after their divorce, proves an outlet for both Mildred's and Veda's disgust, a perfect whipping post in all the registers of the novel; made the brunt of uncannily vicious and often bovine-themed jokes, she is depicted wearing a conspicuously

stained apron in the few rare scenes in which the reader glimpses her at all. Upward-mobile Veda fumes against and vituperates her upper-middle-class upbringing in Glendale throughout the novel in favor of then-aristocratic and WASP-y Pasadena, referring in the final, climactic show-down to the upbringing as “you, and your pie-wagon, ...and your shack, ...and its neat little two-car garage, and its lousy furniture. And from Glendale, and its dollar days, and its furniture factories, and *its women that wear uniforms and its men that wear smocks*. From every rotten, stinking thing that even reminds me of the place—or you” (191, emphasis mine).

Cain may seem to have cut the African-American shadow-family out of his rewriting of Hurst’s melodrama, but I would argue that he actually pushed race more seamlessly and subtly into the class hierarchy of his work than Hurst’s bipartite plot allowed. The one important aspect Cain retained from Hurst’s double-family structure is the conflict between white mother and white daughter over the treatment of the black mother, nominally their subordinate; aside from the uniform scene, one of Letty’s only important ones, and Monty Beragón’s Spanish-speaking Catholic family, the only other mentions of race could almost pass for particularly detailed local color: the Mexican ashtrays at the restaurant, the minor scandal (silenced by Mildred) over the Filipino dishwasher Pancho’s “addiction to flashy clothes” (109), or the odd celebration scene at the restaurant, having since hired another Filipino, a friend of Pancho: “The ensuing squeals were enjoyed by Pancho and Josie, who sat apart, not quite of things, yet not quite out of them” (142). This minimal nod to California’s quieter, more civil apartheid pre-Civil Rights might get lost amidst all the other details, if not for Veda and Monty’s whispered mockery of the heterogeneous party: “Mildred heard the words “varlets’ yulabaloo” and concluded, probably correctly, that they were laughing at the party in the kitchen. She launched into a long, boozy harangue on the rights of labor, and how anybody who worked for a living was as good as anybody else...She went on to the bitter end” (143).

Even if the somewhat unsympathetic narrator lapses into hard-boiled witticism to describe it, the reader still hears Mildred rally against her daughter’s racism and classism out of a middle-class ethos that falls on deaf ears. This dramatic irony turns to a spectacular martyrdom as Mildred robs her own corporation to buy her daughter the very means with which to abandon her (and her homespun progressive coalition of labor and middle-class concerns). Veda is seduced by Beragón, who aside from being Spanish with possibly some Italian “thrown in,” is only unimportantly Hispanic—he’s from a haughty aristocracy older than Pasadena, which in California’s class history isn’t much of a strike against him. The tragic core of the “operatic” plot is most dramatically and bluntly pointed out by the curious figure of the “wop” Treviso, world-class musician and voice teacher. Offstage through the tense months of Veda’s incommunicado rebellion, Treviso recognizes in Veda a talented *coloratura soprano*, champions her as his cause and project, and induces her into the world of classical performance. Seemingly without ever, in his international education and career, having proceeded past a Neapolitan sailor’s broken English, he warns Mildred (like a gypsy fortuneteller²¹ or a gutter-seasoned informant in a mobster film) that her daughter is a “fancy breed,” but far more venomous and dangerous than any snake: “A little snake, love mamma, do what papa tells, maybe, but a coloratura soprano, love nobody but goddam self. Is son-bitch-

bast', worse than all a snake in a world. Madame, you leave dees girl alone." In a bizarre creole of Italian and the deliberate, hard-boiled street "logos" so essential to the hard-boiled school, Treviso refers to Veda's affliction as a case of, " 'ow you say?—da *gimmies*" (200). As good a name as any for the melodramatic flaw *par excellence*, or for the essence of "boobery".

The critical fortunes of *Boquitas Pintadas*: having your *folletín* and parodying it, too

No sé qué son los géneros. Yo escribo.
—Puig, Interview²²

The afflictions in *Boquitas* are quite different, though, the skeptical reader will object: the unfolding of Veda's case of *da gimmies* is a world apart from how Juan Carlos experiences his afflictions, or from Nené's lifelong, escapist fantasies of finally consummating, in some parallel dimension or soap-opera heaven, her bovarism with dreamy Juan Carlos. Puig loved the affective precision of Wilder and Curtiz and refers to all three of the above-mentioned filmic adaptations in his novels, diaries, and letters, but why jump to the conjecture that he had picked up and read one of Cain's famously bad novels, whether in one of Borges and Bioy's Spanish translations, or at a newsstand in Miami International Airport? I'm not sure it's even necessary to make that claim to show a certain genealogical link: we know Puig read more contemporary American and French writers of melodramatic crime fiction that followed very much in Cain's footsteps. (I'll return to one of these particular, Patricia Highsmith, when I analyze *The Buenos Aires Affair* in Chapter Three.) But before testing this hypothesis against Puig's book, I'd like to interject a critical and methodological excursus on *Boquitas* to clear some space for such a reading. This preliminary excursus has to do less with the formal analysis of melodrama than with a kind of essentializing critical bias that prevents popular culture from being analyzed formally, or at least, from being analyzed with the same tools and precepts as high culture.

Graciela Speranza has written a fascinating, if somewhat schematic, book on Puig that seeks to rethink his relation to the realm of the popular, and her first chapter is a simultaneously polite, superficial, and at times dismissive survey of the Argentine history of Puig's reception and interpretation. In little more than twenty pages, she tries to sketch and synthesize a number of important factors: the cold shoulder given to *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1968); the prescient *Los libros* reviews of *Boquitas* (1969, 1970); the overnight elevation to legitimacy transpiring between those two moments, which Speranza and others often hint was more the product of *Boquita's coup* in the French press²³ than of any Argentine sea change; the groundwork-laying structuralist readings published by Josefina Ludmer (1971, 73); the correspondence of political ideologies to critical camps that saw Puig's third novel, *The Buenos Aires Affair*, fare worse than *Boquitas* not just with Ludmer et al. but with Argentina generally; the succession of critical/academic trends and toolkits grafted onto the figure of Puig

like decals on a steamer-trunk: Boom, post-Boom, post-modern, post-structuralist, pop. Before turning to her, or my, position vis-à-vis this tradition, I'd like to stop to analyze with a finer-toothed comb some of the critical language and ideology in this thumbnail reception history.

The source for Speranza's chapter is clear: an anthology of critical works presented at a conference she co-organized a few years prior (*Encuentro Internacional M.P.*, 1998) contains much more developed versions of the arguments and histories she thumbnails in a few sentences. This collection's painstaking analysis of the early reviews like Pablo Bardauil's or Miguel Dalmaroni's show many different permutations of a fundamental problem shared to various degrees by the entire volume: given the ambiguous status as *folletín*, critics then and now stumble on the conspicuous and manifoldly-trope "absence" or lack of a narrator or protagonist or for that matter any other mode of "mediation" between the characters and their [sociohistorical] setting. The fundamental problem could be framed as one of where Puig is "hiding" the unitary narrative "voice" and its political or ideological pay-off, both of which are conventionally expected from author-figures, from realist novels, from literary avant-gardes, from intellectuals, or what have you. (It's worth mentioning that around this time, Barthes' epitaph for the author-function was circulating and being commented extensively after its first French publication in *Manteia*, no.5, 1968.) Dalmaroni's article shows a young Ludmer influentially applauding *Boquitas* for refusing to offer any narratorial mediation or author-function. This refusal, Ludmer maintained, also refused the reader any historical transparency, and thus, any unitary representation or representability of the Argentine people, be that unitary representation Peronist or revolutionary—instead of representing classes or strata in allegorical contradistinction, Puig presented only a Menckenesque "boobery". The contemporary horizon of interpretation and its political stakes are clear in arguing (as Marta Lynch does a year after Ludmer in *Los libros* no.6) that the book combines tenderness and irony to effect a "retrato fino y trascendente, de la mamarrachería argentina. Que no se piense que eso solo toca a una clase social. Nos toca a todos por igual porque en alguna forma todo argentino es héroe de *Boquitas* en alguna de sus partes" (12). Francine Masiello, in her article synthesizing Puig's writerly project from the perspective of the later "trilogy," theorizes a deliberate and liberating *bricolage* of voices in terms of recent theories of language's instability and its relation to political discourse and consensus (Žižek, Butler, Spivak).

In some ways, then, all of these critical frameworks seem to inherit, with only minor conceptual adjustments, Ludmer's original analytical frame in which the political significance of an *opaque* pastiche of voices lies in its very opacity and the *absence* at its core (of character psychology, of realist causality, of literary "style" or "voice", of all the literary devices trope generally as "depth"). In Ludmer's interpretation, an active reader is led to perceive and experience this absence as a failure or lack by the dialectic of two modes of readerships, one naïve and the other campy/critical: "la lectura inmanente, sentimental, folletinesca, populista, y la lectura camp, vanguardista, la lectura formal" (1971, cited in *Encuentro* 105 and *Despues*, 29). Crucially, these two modes correspond to low and high art, respectively, ("obras creadas por su público" and "obras que tienden a crear su público"), and in so doing recapitulate a modernist dichotomy of genre versus vanguard worthy of Theodor Adorno. To this, I would

oppose my own faith in authorial agency at every point on the spectrum of cultural capital: popular genres and elite genres *both* participate in a historical dialectic with their respective publics, forming and being formed by those publics, as well as forming and being formed by one another. However much creative genius one may want to ascribe to Puig, Kafka, Joyce, or Flaubert, it is starting to sound old-fashioned to say of any of the four that they completely “transcend” genre or work completely “beyond” genre, or even that this was or should have been their intent. Complementing Puig's novels for “transcending” the materials they take seriously has always struck me as something of a back-handed complement; it projects onto Puig an ideology of genre that I find lacking in his interviews, pronouncements, and personal correspondence.

Since the pivotal moment in ‘70s cultural politics during which Ludmer's example was published and followed, the critical tradition I’m referring to here has been decoupled from much of the political baggage of such ostensibly formal categories as “populista” and “vanguardista.” What I’m trying to tease out from various thinkers, however, is an underlying conception they seem to share: on the one hand, the *folletín* is taken to be as inherently naïve (in the sense of an ideologically suspect pleasure and inherently conservative seduction à la Frankfurt School), and on the other, our “camp” reading is taken to be necessarily critical for being active, not to mention constitutively “ironic” and “parodic.” Simply put, Puig *must* have written this collage of trash in bad faith, and we *must* read it in bad faith. It is curious how at times even the most gender-progressive critics can seem to slide down the slippery slope to Cortázar's “macho” preface to *Rayuela*, 1963, where the “popular” mode of reading is troped as inherently feminine-because-passive, while “critical” literature demands to be read in a masculine, active way.

Masiello's article inherits, to some degree, that system of legitimate and illegitimate readerly pleasures (“Puig pone sobre tela de juicio nuestra habitual lectura de la obra literaria en términos de lazos de sangre, y nuestro deseo de identificarnos con un heroísmo típico de los géneros menores,” 342), but at points it also exceeds it with a more nuanced and contemporary deployment of the concept of camp which I would like to adapt for my own purposes²⁴. Masiello's article also sidesteps Ludmer's prejudice by noting how Puig's ironic nostalgia troubles the distinction between denigrated melodramatic structures of heroism, sympathy, and exemplarity and their redemption in a readership that “knows better”²⁵. Speaking of the disappointment experienced when the sisters Luci and Nidia visit the Brontë-sisters museum in *Cae la noche tropical*, Masiello writes, “Terminan preguntándose si la casa de Brontë había existido de verdad. Posiblemente Puig se refiera a *Cumbres borrascosas*, porque el enfoque de esa novela no está en los acontecimientos mayores de la historia inglesa del siglo XIX, sino en *la descripción de las casas que generan la acción de la novela*: la materialidad de los espacios mencionados se destaca por encima de los detalles narrativos” (346, *emph. mine*).

The phrasing here resembles Laura Mulvey's when she defines the melodrama (or to be more precise, the melodramatic women's film) as a genre of muddled, openly inconclusive ideological contradictions that allegorizes or otherwise renders intelligible its stakes *not* through the realist conventions of character interiority, as does “Classical Hollywood,” but

rather through affect and sentiment projected out onto an [expressionistic] mis-en-scene²⁶. However useful and convincing this definition may be for discussing, as she does, the experiments of Sirk and Fassbinder with the "weepy" subgenre of woman-targeted melodramatic films so central to Puig's work, I would argue it is not a tenable generalization applicable to my broader usage of melodrama as a trans-generic and trans-historic mode appropriated to various [and variously gendered] publics²⁷. I bring it up as a formally *descriptive*, rather than as a *definitive*, generality, and in so doing, I claim another canonical literary text for melodramatic camp. I don't imagine I'm breaking new ground by calling *Wuthering Heights* a deeply melodramatic text that renders its moral stakes intelligible in sentiment writ large; it is an *Urtext* of popular Romanticism and of the *novela rosa*, and debatably one of the key literary *Urtexts* of Puig's project as a whole²⁸. Masiello writes of this scene in Puig as a postmodern example (via Sontag's *souvenir*) of Puig's skepticism towards melodrama's inherently conservative yearning for an idealized and originary "home" (a *locus amoenus* which Williams elevates from common formal device to definitional pillar in her book, a pillar I left out of my definition for the same reasons as Gledhill's and Mulvey's congruous theories of sentimental projection). I would agree that Puig *is* in fact fundamentally and insistently critical of such idealized origins, and of a mode of readership that would reproduce such myths.

The hair I split is that an ironic and parodizing pastiche (or any other form of readerly or writerly bad faith) is not the only way for a melodramatic text to launch a serious social critique. The most dramatic example I've found of this critical resistance to Puig's avowed engagement with the *folletín* is in Alberto Giordano's book, *MP: La conversación infinita* (2001): "Puig vence porque consigue poner el folletín al servicio de la vanguardia (y no como se proponía, si damos crédito a su declaración en la contratapa de la primera edición, los procedimientos de vanguardia al servicio de la literatura popular" (118). Why not "give credit" to that avowal, why *insist* so emphatically that the novel is basically avant-garde with a few low-brow infusions, when every pronouncement and interview²⁹ until his death in 1990 seems to imply the exact inverse? I maintain that works of the *géneros menores* might already make, on their native soil and with their own resources, the ideological critique Masiello shows Puig making of a nostalgic "home". *Mildred Pierce* certainly does, as I hope I've shown: it ends with both daughters dead, a loveless and almost sullen remarriage, and an unspeakably bleak toast ("Let's get blotto!") from now-alcoholic Mrs. Pierce to still-alcoholic Mr. Pierce in their "model home." (That the pun should be ham-handedly exploited throughout the novel makes clear that an idealized home is structural integral to family melodrama, and that Cain is exploiting that structure fully by inverting it).

In this sense, I chose to twist Masiello's example a bit by reading Puig's *Wuthering Heights* as a kind of *mise-en-abîme* instructing us on how to read his texts as self-conscious melodramas, aware of their own distortions, deceptions and seductions (to use a term central to the apparatus by which Ana María Amar Sánchez analyzes Puig's mediation of elite and popular culture in the same volume). As José Miguel Oviedo writes in 1977, Puig uses "las formas narrativas [de los materiales del kitsch y del melodrama] no como meros motivos de

denuncia y ataque, sino como instrumentos para recobrar lo más profundo de una experiencia personal y para crear, a partir de ella, personajes y situaciones de total persuasión” (cited in Giordano, 100³⁰). What I’m trying to explore is exactly how those narrative forms, by emphasizing the event and exaggerated suffering at the expense of character development, can effect that “total persuasion,” or what Beatriz Sarlo recently called “una mimesis de la lengua”³¹.

To do so I’d like to return to Gabriela Speranza’s interrogation of Puig’s “mediation” because it’s a bit more in tune with my own methods—she pushes the critical potential and contradictory tension into the mass-media universe itself, instead of crediting Puig’s individual and authorial genius for everything critical or ironic in his experiments with the *folletín*. She also writes, in ways that I think connect her to Brooks and Williams, that

[Es] posible pensar la oposición tradicional entre modernidad y cultura de masas no tanto en términos de exclusión mutua sino más bien de una secreta interdependencia. Tal como señala Andreas Huyssen, ya en *Madame Bovary*, uno de los textos fundadores de la literatura moderna, la cultura masiva no es otro ajeno y radicalmente opuesto, sino un subtexto oculto, una especie de otro reprimido, simbiótico y complementario (*Encuentro*, 130)³².

Two years later, in her book on Puig as a “pop artist,” she does well to elaborate on this analogy in her opening chapter, framing her rereading of Puig’s reception history in Flaubert’s censorship persecution, predicated as it was on the over-reading of free indirect discourse, i.e., on the inadequately active reader failing to distinguish between character and author-function. For better or for worse, she takes quite literally Puig’s famous pronouncements to have taken only cinematic models for his writing, reading his novels as the consolation career of a failed screenwriter (and a many-times frustrated adapter of his own novels to works to auteur-cinema). To ground a reading of Puig as pop-artist à la Warhol or Lichtenstein, she underscores, and perhaps biographically embellishes, a sort of star-worship bordering on idolatry (see in particular her prologue to *Primera Persona*, 1995; Toto’s scrapbook, Puig insisted in interviews, was autobiographical³³). The more androgynous excesses of the star-system, she writes, signify for Puig a “dream of power and liberty”³⁴, occupying that crucial gap between the “conservative” seductions of, say, the production-code A-comedy and the subversive slippages and excesses more easily found amidst the margins of the studio system.

Speranza’s analysis is most helpful when she analyzes Puig’s debt to his cinematic pantheon, which is at once formal, psychological, and ideological: “von Sternberg, Lubitsch, Hitchcock, [y otros] directores europeos, [...] frente a la construcción de las demandas hollywoodenses, encontraron mucho antes que las posvanguardias una resolución artística y personal del enfrentamiento entre lo alto y lo bajo” (*Encuentro*, 135-6). I’d disagree that what Puig sees in the “*auteurs avant la lettre*” could be called a “resolution” of high and low culture; much less do I think Puig’s personal and aesthetic negotiations could be called “resolutions” either. Instead, I’d frame his configurations of heterogeneous swaths of high and low cultural history as deliberately and productively tensile. I *do* nonetheless appreciate the courage of setting aside a great bulk of Puig criticism to look at Puig’s own words and attitudes towards

the directors he insistently claimed as his true models and inspirations. In this sense, it's helpful to connect his middle-brow directorial pantheon to his avowed unease with the ideologies of committed-, art-, and studio-film-making that were already consolidated during the years he studied filmmaking in Rome. It's thus very helpful to frame his attitude towards high and low culture in terms less of the impasse he saw between art-film and popular film, exacerbated rather than assuaged by the advent of *Cahiers du Cinema*, *Screen*, and auteur theory generally³⁵.

Some of Puig's cinematic models I'll return to later, but to position Puig's personal pantheon amongst the melodramatic tradition, I'd like to briefly mention the baroque aesthetic project of one melodramatist in particular: Josef von Sternberg. Although given freest reign in a razor-sharp, dialogue-driven melodramas like *Shanghai Express* (1932) or in the hyperbolic mis-en-scène of *The Scarlet Empress* (1934)³⁶, Sternberg's "anti-narrative"³⁷ and mythological treatment of femininity and sexuality bears a great deal on the dreamwork of *Pubis Angelical* and on the pastiches of femininity in *Rita Hayworth* and the epigraphs to *The Buenos Aires Affair*. (Coincidentally, Borges also idolized von Sternberg and drew inspiration from his mythopoetic film style and his treatment of crime in some of his Weimar films, particularly the crime films *Underworld*, 1927, and *The Blue Angel*, 1930³⁸). Like Lubitsch, von Sternberg is less concerned with depth psychology than with social types; in his aesthetic, affect not only exceeds but at times even halts the progress of narrative.

Returning specifically to *Boquitas*, Sternberg's heroines are often mentioned in Puig's novels but he is not the most important director in Puig's cinematic pantheon: *Boquitas* is an exceeding, almost schematically narrative melodrama to rival one of Hitchcock's, not an aesthetic monad suspended in time. To understand it, I'd like to briefly mention another director and pop proto-auteur who is not treated by Speranza or Argentine critics despite his central place in Puig's correspondence: Henri-Georges Clouzot. Take for instance, this anecdote from an interview: "I was reluctant to see a film featuring no stars [sic], but *Quai des Orfèvres* [1947], a French thriller by Clouzot, dazzled me. In that film the star was the director, and at least I knew what I wanted to become: a film director" ("Growing up at the Movies," 50, cited in Jill-Levine, 61). Having recently taken in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Gide's more melodramatic *Pastoral Symphony* "as a common reader" (still over a decade short of deciding to write literature), *Quai* may have inspired Puig in any number of ways for any number of reasons, which I won't belabor. One could plausibly conjecture that among those reasons figure the film's ambiguously-gendered supporting character of Dora Monier (played by French star Simone Renant, styled high-femme, but at times markedly androgynous in her body language, dialogue and delivery). At one point, Dora quite bluntly announces her lesbian ulterior motives in the same breath as she outs and interpellates the "thriller's" protagonist, police detective Maurice Martineau (played by the thoroughly hard-boiled character actor Bernard Blier). Other plausible conjectures could be found in the detective's own ambiguities, like his never-mentioned personal life, or the mulatto son for whom he tenderly cares throughout the movie, his only souvenir of a mysterious period of backstory spent "in the colonies".

But what I'd like most to bring to bear on *Boquitas Pintadas* is not Clouzot's treatment of sexual identity, however noteworthy might be the resemblance to Puig's own later treatments, nor anything as specific as a plot device, a character, or a stylistic tendency. I'd like to address the direction in which Clouzot took the straightforward detective novel by S. A. Steeman he was commissioned to adapt by his studio, steering it into the moral and thematic terrain of his more famous social-psychological works like the wartime responsibility-allegory *Le Corbeau* (1943) or his adaptation of a Boileau-Narcejac *roman noir*, *Les diaboliques* (1955). Often called "the French Hitchcock" for his intensely psychological variation on melodramatic expressionism and his analogous role as valorized forerunner to the first generation of New Wave auteurs, I'd crucially distinguish between the very individualistic psychological lens of Hitchcock and the more performative, social-psychological dynamics of Clouzot's microcosmic small-towns and large-ensemble scenes. In all three films, sexual mores and the little hypocrisies of public morality require as much (or more) strategy to navigate as the law or the economy—all three films make *gossip* an important branch of the criminological sciences (*commergraphie*, or for our purposes, *chismografía*). Detective Martineau's hard-boiled bluntness and seasoned insights are brought to bear on a social world just as mercenary and deceptive as those sketched by Hammett or Chandler, but the pivotal difference is that Martineau does not, like the Continental Op or Philip Marlowe, bring with him an encyclopedic knowledge of racquets, scams, gangs (what we could call a "technology" of urban and organized crime). Instead, Martineau is fundamentally seasoned by his experience of the more banal scams of *sexual* power, public decency, standing in the church, and what the Jones will think. Martineau's specialized knowledge is of boobery, of the Mildred Pierces of the world, the Nenés, the Doras and their shadowy motives, the backroom-dealings of photographers-cum-pornographers. If Puig's early work (as many have argued of Faulkner's early work) was driven by the search for a literary structure in which psychosexual drama indexes the social and ideological creation of the subject, then perhaps we should see in writers like Cain and popular, proto-auteur directors like Clouzot models of class- and race- politics encoded in the sexual undercurrents of melodramatic euphemism and gendered cliché³⁹. Working-class and gruff Martineau realizes, as much as Puig hopes the reader of *Boquitas* will be led to see, that "la represión sexual es una de las armas principales del capitalismo" (*PxP*, 91)⁴⁰: both texts navigate a social order, stopping to catalogue each class' euphemisms, hypocrisies, and cruelties, trying to find the "root crime" that tripped the chain of events leading to the actual, documented crime, and end up with nothing more particular than the sex-gender system in general.

Jugarse el todo por el todo: A *folletinesque* reading of *Boquitas Pintadas*

Nene: Yo creo que una tiene que jugarse el todo por el todo, aunque sea una vez en la vida. Me arrepentiré siempre de no haber sabido jugarme.

Mabel: ¿Qué, Nené? ¿de casarte con un enfermo?

Nené: ¿Por qué decís eso? ¿Por qué sacás ese tema si yo estaba hablando de otra cosa?

Los personajes de Boquitas pintadas son menos ingenuos y menos simples de lo que suponen algunas lecturas críticas. Creen en los estereotipos del amor como pasión sublime, pero a medias, o mejor, hasta donde pueden sostener esa creencia sin que afecte sus intereses reales, los que responden a otras creencias, referidas a otros códigos (el de lo conveniente, según la moral de la clase media).

—Giordano, 121⁴²

Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself a bit by comparing so ingenuously *Boquitas*, a straightforward *folletín*, to *Quai des Orfèvres*, a straightforward detective film. But then, the unifying logic of this chapter is that there is an underlying family resemblance between the sappiest women's *folletín*⁴³, the driest detective novel, and the bleakest *noir* thriller; the structures of affect and imperative to moral legibility structuring all three genres provide the terms of comparison. Honing in on Puig's literary project as rooted in experimentation with these structures, I'd like to read *Boquitas* a kind of breakthrough, a middle step between the formally complex but generically conservative *Traición* and the generically radical *Buenos Aires Affair*. Tellingly, the former is a *pastiche* of source-material from the romance *folletín* but its structure falls squarely in the mold of a modernist *Bildungsroman*, while the latter negotiates the psychosexual turmoil of melodramatic film through structures cribbed from the popular crime thriller; in genre terms, Puig's first "trilogy" poses an escalating challenge to cultural hierarchies encoded in notions of genre. The active reader of *Boquitas* has neither a narrator nor even a clearly-marked protagonist to cling to for structure, and much pieces together the plot structure (but also the unifying logic of the novel) from a loose frame story structure in which a passion-murder plot straight out of a Cain novel is book-ended by seemingly the unrelated "chismografía" of a melodramatic family saga.

My reading of *Boquitas* is thus, in some ways, a reading against *Traición* with *Buenos Aires Affair* in mind: against *Traición* in that I take Puig's grafting of the police melodrama onto the romantic melodrama as the "extension" of *Traición*'s psychosexual "morass" promised by the first edition's back cover; prefiguring *BAA* in that I see an escalating political frustration in the novel's "chismografía de la pampa" and the critique it launches of Argentina's distinct form of "mamarrachería". While the former claim about different melodramatic genres doesn't seem have been very central to the critical tradition on *Boquitas*, the latter claim about the politics of Puig's *pastiche* of voices and oral inflections is entirely conventional to it. In connecting the two, I'm hoping to highlight how the grafting together of different low-melodrama genres, the juxtaposition of different "voices" and classed oralities, the unmediated juxtaposition of conflicting perspectives on a given event, and the various different kinds of demands made on the reader are interrelated components of a very complex formal experiment, which makes *Boquitas*, to my mind, Puig's first mature novel.

One central component of this formal experiment was already a fundamental part of the "analytical detective novel," if we're to believe Borges' history of that genre. In a number

of articles, Borges praises the modern novelistic device of juxtaposed, contradictory accounts by directly-participating characters, unmediated by any synthetic narrator, preface, or protagonist's privileged perspective. In one version⁴⁴, written *a propos* of his translation of Faulkner's *Wild Palms*, the technique is referred to as a central trait in the "morphology of the modern novel" with a thumbnail genealogy: it was invented by Wilkie Collins' *Moonstone*, 1868, brought into poetry (!) by Browning, 1888, and brought into the modernist novel by Conrad. In other versions, this perspectival cubism is referred to as the backbone of the [analytic] detective genre, and at times Akutagawa's short stories "In a Grove" and "Hell screen" are thrown into the series, almost as international curiosities. In all versions, *The Moonstone*, a "psychological novel in the mode of Dickens"⁴⁵, holds pride of place. In 1952, an aging Borges was giving an extensive series of lectures on *The Moonstone*, which young Puig attended with some amount of interest and refers to years later as a formative engagement with Borges' literary project⁴⁶. The pleasure of active readership, Borges famously maintained, was the bread and butter of the analytic detective genre, and Collins' baroque and melodramatic morass of subplots maximized this pleasure by forcing its reader into the role of mediating its contradictory first-person accounts. Shifting our frame of reference from Joycean psychological interiority to Collins' juxtaposed monologues, the integration of new, equally-unmediated modes of narration in *Boquitas* (hyperrealism, new forms of stream of consciousness, correspondence, documents, concatenated thoughts, confessions, one-sided conversations) is a minor formal progression that follows naturally from *Traición*'s polyphony of free-indirect-discourses.

Another formal device I'd like to re-examine is the collating of "official" documents and State records into the text (in the 8th and 12th sections of the novel), alongside the more properly novelistic obituaries, letters, and "transcriptions" of thoughts or spoken words. While many critics refer to this as a device cribbed directly from high modernism, I'd actually argue that this form of readership has a long history in the popular genres largely independent of the novel's avant-gardes. Take, for instance, the case of Dennis Wheatley and J.G. Links, who published four massively successful⁴⁷ works in the 1930s that took to its logical limit the subgenre of "solve it yourself" detective fictions. The most famous of these was *Murder Off Miami*⁴⁸, which took the form of a dossier, presenting in an unbound cardboard box or envelope⁴⁹, containing reports from various agencies (crime scene analysis, telegraphs, testimony transcriptions and synopses, criminal records, bureaucratic documents, medical reports) and even facsimiles of physical evidence like hairs and fibers, etc. Puig's deployment of these kinds of documentary records is a little jarring and surprising in its lack of a paratextual⁵⁰ frame or of any kind of warning or context; the place these documents take in the overall structure of the novel, and that structure itself, is quite alien to the popular "forensic" genre from which it draws inspiration, to be sure. But the documentary or forensic mode itself (and its fetishistic logic of scientific "legibility") should not be mistaken, in itself, for one of Puig's "experiments" with or modifications of the *folletín*—it is, on the contrary, a storied and thriving subgenre of the detective novel to this day⁵¹.

Another device that many critics uncritically assume to be foreign to the popular melodrama is the confession, with all its Foucauldian resonances—but to dispute this assumption, we need look no further than Cain’s first two novels, both of which end with a death-row confession (in one case, retroactively revealing in the last chapter that the entire preceding first-person narration has been a confession). Here, as with the preceding three examples, it’s not really clear why critics jump to the conclusion that this device would be considered experimental in a contemporary *novela rosa* or a sensational crime thriller—it is, if anything, entirely conventional to both traditions. To my mind, the most dramatic formal experiment is not the combination of vanguard and popular literary resources, but rather the melding of the police melodrama into the romance melodrama without the paratextual and contextual certainties traditionally expected of either. Cain, in building his multi-melodramatic hybrid studied above, buttressed these frames for readerly critical distance with a snide, iconoclastic narrator and a calculating and pathological protagonist; Puig’s demanding version of this formula is to do away with that readerly scaffolding and require the same kind of active reading one would need to piece together a Faulkner novel or Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

This cross-wiring of melodrama and high modernism is both crucial to Puig’s methods of construction but also to his social critique. Not only are the melodramatic plots linked together by a narrative oblique structure that requires them to be read in the mode trained by cryptic high-modernism, but he also makes high-modernist stream-of-consciousness fodder for *melodramatic*. He does this by making socioeconomic class (as a defining trait of each two-dimension character but also as a worldview) completely legible in each of the stream-of-consciousness segments, treating them like forensic documents of interiority in a crime melodrama. In so doing, he sets up a system of formal correspondences at the moral and thematic levels that ultimately correspond to those different social structures and the popular modes of narrating their exploration. The fiercely hierarchized social space of the small town is mapped out by the mercilessly unequal relations between Juan Carlos and his “greasy” sidekick Pancho, or between the “rubia,” the “criolla,” and the “india”, all three of whom sat in the same high school class.

The perfect example of melodramatic legibility rendered socially critical is the ubiquitous and often vicious reminders that they sat *in different rows*. This last image of the reproduction of class, complete with a racial supertext tidily reinforcing the class hierarchy, structures the text and informs every scene like the family-tree charted out on the frontispiece of an epic family saga. The more nuanced *cultural* correspondences and comparisons, however, sketch out a kind of Bourdeiusian pecking order of cultural spheres—Mabel disdains any merely *national* film star, while Nené defers entirely to her friend’s infinitely more refined palate (“nunca había sabido juzgar sobre cine, teatro y radio,” 175), and la Raba, not one but two rows behind Nené (75), hardly seems to know that the cinema exists, orienting herself to much humbler stars in the tango and bolero lyrics vying for hegemony in her much more isolated, provincial cultural imagination. Much of the critical purchase of the novel lies exactly in its very clear, schematic presentation of these interlocking cultural hierarchies.

Many critics have dissected how la Raba's actions are "determined" by the ideological poison and bad consciousness of the tangos and boleros; but I would maintain that Nené and Mabel are just as poisoned by watching European parlor-tragedies à la Chekhov, or Greta Garbo films, and that the novel fundamentally shows us their hypocrisy and cruelty at excluding la Raba as a kind of class warfare conducted in a cultural and domestic sphere. I disagree with readings in which la Raba functions as a kind of working-class caricature or as an echo of the "real" events elsewhere in the novel like the servants in a comedy of manners à la Jane Austen—on the contrary, I think Raba's police subplot and medical records are the "real events of the novel," which Puig polemically demands his reader to interpret in the broader social context explored by the meandering romance melodrama. Indeed, Raba's "crime" seems minor compared to the hypocritical euphemism and unpunished deceit committed by her classmates throughout the novel. What's more, these social machinations stem from Juan Carlos' palpable but socially-warranted brand of gendered amorality, which itself comprises a kind of the unpunished sexual "crime spree".

Many critical debates revolve around these questions of judgment and punishment, conjecturing as to the moral reactions intended by Puig for his reader without considering the difference in moral systems between melodrama and realism. This has caused much criticism to ascribe to Puig an attitude towards his characters not corroborated by his interviews and published opinions on them. Asked in an interview about the novel's tango aesthetics and the inflections of its popular orality, Puig's answers unexpectedly shifts from an aesthetic to a moral register: "Bueno, si los modelos que tuvieron [los lectores populares] a mano fueron pobres, pues paciencia, ¿no? No es culpa de ellos. A nivel del lenguaje yo puedo perdonar hasta la clase media. Pero es *en la acción* que la clase media se pone tan terrible, porque es tan calculadora y fría... en *Boquitas Pintadas*, esa cosa de *actuar siempre a base de cálculos*." When the interviewer claims a kind of mitigating "romanticismo" on the part of the novel's characters, Puig clarifies: "fíjate cómo actúa Nené con la Raba. Es tremenda; para que no cuente que no tiene muebles deja que esta pobre chica que no conoce a nadie quede sola en Buenos Aires, cuando ella podría ayudarla un poco" (PxP 91, *emph. mine*).

Here is where Puig's socially analytical second novel marks a critical departure from the more focalized and descriptive sociology of his first novel: the laws of propriety and decorum structuring the social space of Juan Carlos, Mabel, and Nené are presented not as a more sophisticated or superior version to those "simpler" or naïve ones governing Pancho and la Raba, but as *equivalent* in many key ways. Throughout the monologues of all the middle-class characters, particularly those of Nené and Mabel, *legalistic* tropes for morality dominate, and the *leitmotiv* of "getting what one deserves" foreshadows the fatal ostracism enforcing and underwriting the sex-gender system which, in this representative small town, is more fundamental to the social order than the law itself. Pancho "studies" Juan Carlos' womanizing techniques (70) just as Nené cribs Mabel's aesthetic refinement during their largely unilateral discussions on film and theater. North American critic Norman Lavers sums up the novel quite clearly in terms taken from interviews in which Puig recounts the novel's genesis from a curiosity to "depict" those social "successful" characters whose orbit was beyond Toto's reach:

“This novel of the successful ones, of those who play by the rules, is surely Puig’s blackest. It is the only one in which no one is saved” (*Pop Culture into Art*, 30). Rules of sexual propriety are enforced at every level, and punishments are doled out to every character for their respectively minor and major transgressions, except those of Juan Carlos, the absent core around which this whole melodrama spins like a roulette wheel.

This begs the question of how exactly to interpret the character of Juan Carlos, the “naturalistic character” and “mythopoetic center” in Lavers’ account (27). In terms of melodramatic morality, he is a villain in the clearest sense—he lies consistently and lives off of female sacrifices like a vampire, using everyone to his own ends. If *Mildred Pierce* criticizes the proud yet Machiavellian middle-class of California through the relationship of pragmatic Mildred and nihilistic Veda, *Boquitas* combines the means and the ends in pragmatically nihilistic Juan Carlos, whose death wish manifests in a whole litany of transgressions ranging from sneaking cigarettes to contaminating women and compulsive gambling. Perhaps it is to this death wish or Puig’s recurring trope whereby gambling stands in for fate that Lavers is referring to when she calls Juan Carlos “naturalistic”; perhaps it’s his nihilistic pronouncements, or his two-dimensional embodiment of this ethos. All this evokes a naturalistic tradition, which I’ll return to momentarily in discussing Saer’s *Cicatrices*, wherein the gambler metonymizes all the victims of a deterministic social order.

In another sense of the word “naturalistic,” then, we could read Juan Carlos naturalistically as the lynchpin holding together a whole social order; like a force of nature, he is the sanctioned transgressor whose crimes go unpunished, even as they incite the crimes of so many others whom are themselves consistently punished. Within melodrama’s moral economy, this makes for a focused critique of *machismo* and its paragon, a critique which Lavers and Jill-Levine both claim as primary among Puig’s intentions in writing this follow-up to *Traición*⁵²; Jill-Levine further notes that *Boquitas* was conceived, to this end, as a radio melodrama of the lives of townspeople unconsciously acting out the radio melodramas they listened to every day (Lavers, 26-7; Jill-Levine, 210-217).

In a sense, Lavers’ deployment of the concept of naturalism is curious—most people would call la Raba a “naturalist” character, in the long tradition (Zola, Dreiser, Norris) of rendering scientifically legible the impersonal social forces causing such modern mysteries as urban blight, criminal recidivism, immigrant resistance to assimilation. But I think Puig’s bleak novel applies a thoroughgoing and systemic naturalism at every level, showing Juan Carlos “tutoring” Pancho and Mabel policing Nené; this naturalist schema puts sexual repression generally, and predatory *machismo* in particular, at the root of crime in a way not unlike a Zola novel might blame a social or cultural institution for a whole society’s problems.

It is in this “naturalistic” framework of social critique that the mode of interiority specific to Puig’s novel should be interpreted. From large blocks of stream-of-consciousness to the unspoken thoughts spliced into the tense dialogues, the variously *interior* narrative modes deployed all serve to juxtapose those registers kept apart on the “surface” of the novel (i.e., in the *exterior* segments that narrate events and interactions). Take, for instance, the last of the

scenes which we could glibly name "stream-of-dialogues", in which Celine and di Carlo exchange ingenuous repartee while thinking daggers at one another: "Usted tiene que comprender que para nuestra familia es una vergüenza. *te la dije / no, vergüenza es robar* Si Dios le mandó esa enfermedad a su hermano fue la voluntad de Dios, no gana nada con tener vergüenza" (166). Here, as in the aphorism from Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* which Piglia so often quotes ("what's robbing a bank compared to founding one?"), the unspoken violence of class itself is brought forcefully to the surface via the metonymic scandal around a large, shady cattle deal. Similarly, the analogously bipartite dialogue between Mabel and Pancho renders saliently sadomasochistic the sexual innuendo of their exchange in a way that highlights its undercurrent of sexualized racial resentment. These thematic cruxes are what elevate the romance-melodrama-cum-race-melodrama to a naturalistic social critique: although all of Puig's novels critique the political ramifications of psychosexual mechanisms of control and subjectification, the microcosmic social world of *Boquitas*, more so than any of his novels focused on narrower cross-sections of society, emplots these mechanisms in a baroque play of variants that echo each other high and low on the social ladder.

I'd like to wrap up this exegesis of *Boquitas*, and its comparison to Cain's *Mildred Pierce*, by connecting the figure of *passion* definitive of Cain's works to the tragic and mordant irony of the Puig's small-town boobery. One of Puig's own glosses on his novel makes this connection explicit: "They had accepted all that world of sexual repression, had accepted its rules, the hypocrisy of the myth of female virginity, and, needless to say, they had accepted authority. ... These people had believed in the rhetoric of irresistible love, irresistible passion, but their lives had not reflected this in any way" (Puig, from a 1974 interview in English, cited in Jill-Levine, 211). The naturalistic (and perhaps even Marcusian) critique of the "world of sexual repression" is at the same time a melodramatic critique of a *cursi*⁵³ rhetoric and the bad consciousness it enacts on the characters' *folletinesque* unconscious. In this sense, perhaps I can make more explicit the comparison to *Mildred Pierce* by looking at this figure of *passion*, so central to the *noir* genre and its usefulness for the Argentine writers I'm looking at, with a long quote from Hilfer, writing on Cain:

Cain's characters cannot sustain their arias or embody their [wicked temptress] archetypes. [...] The attributes are forced, giving the characters more symbolic weight than they can carry. But this is Cain's point: his novels work best when he emphasizes the gap rather than attempts to bridge it. What gives a certain pathos is the gap itself, characters attempting to negotiate a desire that they cannot understand, much less articulate. Desire cannot express the self because Cain's characters lack self and have nothing to express. Desire destroys them, but this seems hardly a loss. More really a gift than a curse to these characters, desire gives them a kind of galvanic energy; they glorify desire essentially by bringing nothing to it. They are that which passion passes through. Geoffrey O'Brien puts it perfectly: "If the Cain hero ultimately embraces his own catastrophe, it is because it is the most interesting thing that has ever happened to him." The function of the fatal passion in Cain...enlivens characters, sometimes even giving them a shadow of justification as over against a stultifying normative social order. (57, emphasis mine)

I wouldn't want to conflate Cain's stripped-down, desire-driven *Urtexts* with Puig's desire-drenched and painstakingly assembled pastiches; nor would I argue that Puig's critiques, ironies, passions, and desires are reducible to the model set up by Cain. But the stultifying social order, the fetishistic and sensational dynamic of half-regret, the myth of passionate, romantic love causing and excusing the worst forms of exploitation and exclusion, strike me as traits shared with Cain's texts. I'm not trying to argue that *Boquitas* is a re-write of *Mildred Pierce*, but perhaps Cain's cynical and socially critical *folletín* can inform Puig's as a kind of unmarked popular precedent for so much of what, in Puig's novel, has too often been mistaken for "unprecedented."

***Cicatrices*: Juan José Saer's intertextual maze of passions**

Las novelas cambian la vida de los lectores. Esa es la utopía del género. [...] Pero las novelas que cambian la vida son libros populares, novelitas sentimentales, cuentos semipornográficos, literatura bandoleresca, relatos de masas.

—Ricardo Piglia, Introduction to Arlt's *Juguete rabioso* (1993, signed 1973), 9⁵⁴

In Speranza's critical survey, she also cites a lukewarm summation that Saer wrote of *Rita Hayworth* in 1972, in a sweeping discussion of [high] literature's relations to mass media: "es una novela que, no obstante preponerse como tema la fascinación del cine en las clases medias, aparece anacrónica porque el tema de la modernidad está tratado desde fuera, con una sensibilidad costumbrista" (cited Speranza, 33). This is taken from an article entitled "La literatura y los nuevos lenguajes," in César Fernández Moreno's anthology, *América latina en su literatura*⁵⁵. In the same article, Saer makes clear his position relative to genre fiction, pop culture, and to other critics of Puig:

El orden imaginario de los media es el del *fantaseo*, no el de la imaginación creadora... El fantaseo se caracteriza por su gratuidad, por su mitología ingenua—admirablemente desenmascarada por Roland Barthes—, por el límite preciso que impone: el de lo genérico. Casi me atrevería a afirmar que el fantaseo es un síntoma típico de lo genérico, una consecuencia de la abstracción; consiste en un escamoteo sistemático de la experiencia. El mundo que nos propone la televisión...es un sistema de enajenación. (311; 315)⁵⁶

What concerns me here isn't the ideological resistance to a liberatory, or even critical, potential in the mass media (or even in high literature reworking the raw materials of mass media); the reason I introduce Saer's first major novel by this anecdote is to interrogate his dismissive phrase, "sensibilidad costumbrista"—how *else* does Saer imply Puig should have "treated the theme of [mediatic] modernity"? How can popular culture, whether or not one wants to reduce to it pure and mere "alienation," be the subject of a *folkloric* representation? I introduced Faulkner and naturalism above when discussing the systematic ideological critique of *Boquitas* to lay groundwork for my reading of Saer's *Cicatrices*, often cited as his "most

naturalistic" novel, which I want to read as a rewriting of Faulkner's highly schematic and naturalistic *Light in August*. Saer's novels of this period (and for a good many years after writing the 1973 essay cited above) could hardly be said to "incorporate" or directly appropriate melodrama and popular modes of storytelling which Saer refers to as formally "exhausted," a judgment he eventually comes to level at the novel itself. But while narrative vernaculars are anathema to Saer as narrative models, they are nevertheless essential as a mode of access to the [alienated] popular imaginary and worldview, as they have been throughout the naturalistic tradition (and elsewhere literary analysis crosses over into the social sciences and folklore studies). It is through the novel's primary intertext, *Light in August*, that popular narrative becomes essential to representing the lower strata of society, and thus of representing a social totality; naturalism, like melodrama, suggests readily-deducible causalities and determinations for human actions, relies on thumbnail biographies of two-dimensional characters, and schematizes race, class, and history for maximal legibility.

Of course, approaching naturalistically Saer's melodramatic source texts is counterintuitive, given that the novel's allusive register is entirely "literary," as thoroughly indebted to major literary texts as Puig's *Boquitas* is to variously popular forms of music, theater, and film. Every literary work mentioned by name in the novel (lying on a shelf, read by a character, mentioned in passing) is in fact an intertext from which entire plots or thematic discussions are appropriated by what critic Julio Premat sums up as "una práctica intertextual invasora" (13), pushing that envelope between rewriting and plagiarism so important to his generation of writers⁵⁷. Stefan Zweig, Thomas Mann, Raymond Chandler, Oscar Wilde, Franz Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov, William B. Yeats, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Alain Robbe-Grillet come up explicitly in one part of the novel and are subtly paraphrased or plagiarized elsewhere in the novel, an allusive game encouraging and rewarding a bit of sleuthing on the part of the "active" reader.

However, the novel's basic structure (four chapters narrated in the first person by four characters, describing the overlapping fallouts of a crime narrated in the final scene), mirrors that of *Light in August*, making it less of an intertext than a kind of supertext. Faulkner's novel interweaves multiple narratives obliquely connected by a love-murder, bringing to the surface the structural roles played by race and sex in binding together a whole social order. In the novel, the Argentine system of fine-grained differences in hair-color and complexion serve as metonymic indexes of relatively subtle racial phenotypes (commonly a source of befuddlement or astonishment to non-Argentine readers not familiar with its peculiar racial taxonomy). As in *Boquitas*, this system is foregrounded to a degree that seems almost polemic *a priori* against the backdrop of previous generations of Argentine literature; Saer's structural and narrative modeling equates this Argentine system to the racial system of Faulkner's South, and by force of this equation, tropes the political violence of the Argentine '60s as a kind of legal lynching, done with the full complicity of the nation-state's legal apparatus.

Martin Kohan has written an interesting article⁵⁸ comparing *Cicatrices* to Rodolfo Walsh's novel of the same year, *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*, an exposé about a political assassination written, as all of Walsh's late works, in a subtle blend of committed journalism

and true-crime stylistics that bears much in common with the experiments of Truman Capote and Norman Mailer⁵⁹. While clearly Kohan is correct to see the death of Saer's murderer Luis Fiore a "topical" allusion to the real-world events surrounding Augusto Vandor and more generally to the political climate of doubt and conspiracy around political assassination and the corruption of syndical representation in particular. But reducing Luis Fiore to a mere double of Vandor (the historical Vandor or Walsh's portrait of Vandor) is reductive in that it assumes a transparency in literature that couldn't be more inappropriate to Saer's experimental and ironic fictional mode. Not only does Kohan's article fail to mention Faulkner's text once or the naturalistic apparatus it lends Saer for self-consciously critiquing "representation", but he also fails to mention any of the alluded authors listed above—a dubious methodological starting point, to anyone who's read much of Saer's work or the critical tradition surrounding it. I would argue a middle path—Saer's novel can only analyze and critique the real-world assassination, or the political crisis of legal, popular, and syndical representation more generally, insofar as it achieves this critique by "invading" and occupying Faulkner's microcosm of the South. The novel's alchemical superimposition of its literary sources, most of them addressing other crises of political or popular representation, isn't a mere literary in-joke or stylistic overlay—it's a systematic meditation on representation that encodes various positions and ideologies in borrowed narratives, bringing all kinds of resonances to bear on the trademark "*sobreentendidos*" of his characters' conversations.

But how is this *melodramatic*, one might ask, and much less, how does this relate to crime fiction in particular? The citation from Saer above, like any number of other pronouncements Saer has made about genre fiction and popular culture (whether in the novel or in mass media), may render perverse or disingenuous the application of terms like melodrama or popular fiction to the study of one of Argentine's most experimental and esoteric authors. I would argue, though, as Brooks does, that Henry James, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Honoré de Balzac didn't invent the social novel *ex nihil*, but appropriated wholesale from a popular narrative tradition evolving in tandem with the modern novel, using it to configure a similar moral relation to its readership, to ask the same questions about personal ethics in an "unmoored" modern age. In Brooks' conclusion, he writes: "We have talked at some length of Victor Hugo, of Balzac and James. We could as well have discussed Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Lawrence, Faulkner, for instance, *whose ambitions belong to the same mode*" (198, emphasis mine). Saying of Saer's characters or texts that they are pastiches as bovaristic as Puig's is just a matter of bringing Dostoevsky, Wilde, and Faulkner into the fold of a melodramatic mode—a move Brooks makes 7 years after Saer published *Cicatrices*.

Faulkner's position relative to hard-boiled crime fiction, the best-selling melodramatic genre of literature in 1930's America, is an interesting one, particularly given his avowed respect for Dashiell Hammett. Faulkner claimed to have modeled *Sanctuary* directly on Hammett's minimalist brutality for the mercenary goal of writing a "bestseller," a provocative and auto-mythologizing anecdote the sincerity of which has been debated by Faulkner scholars ever since. However anomalous *Sanctuary* might seem stylistically, I'd actually say it's more interesting to interrogate in naturalist terms the way it fits into the trajectory of his

progressively more *explanatory* novels (i.e., explanatory in sociological, political, and psychological terms). For example, *Absalom, Absalom*, with its “detective figures” trying to reconstruct and investigatively exorcise a family trauma microcosmically standing in for a national one⁶⁰, seems to imply the debt to Hammett was more than superficially stylistic. So too does Faulkner’s later career in Hollywood, including, among other *film noir* credits, the screenplay adaptation of Chandler’s first novel, *The Big Sleep*, often considered the centerpiece of the *noir* cycle despite the incoherent mess of Howard Hawkes’ final edit or Faulkner’s famously incoherent state of health while working on the script at a rate of two bottles a day.

But the connections to Hammett don't end there; on the contrary, I introduce them as biographical and cultural background for a reading of Faulkner's naturalism and Saer's. In the aforementioned work on the psychosexual dynamics of hard-boiled gender, Christopher Breu has argued that *Light in August* be read as a hard-boiled detective novel, or rather, as a meta-novelistic discourse on hard-boiled violence and hard-boiled bovarism. Breu reads the “scene of reading” around which Faulkner's entire novel revolves as a classic *mise-en-abîme*: in that scene, Joe Christmas, just before committing the cold-blooded murder the fallout of which the massive preceding novel has catalogued, reads an issue of *Black Mask*, the detective-pulp magazine that launched the career of Dashiell Hammett and the term “hard-boiled” into record-setting circulation. Joe Christmas’ unmitigated brutality and zero-degree masculinity conflates sexual prowess with whiteness, violence with autonomy, and woman with evil; his psychotic, runaway id makes Cain’s narrators seem ponderous and even-keeled, and the only time we see him calm in the entire novel is when he *methodically* (word by word, page by page) reads the notoriously violent and nihilistic detective-pulp from start to finish, throws it in the fire, washes his hands, and then just as methodically kills his wife.

Saer keeps this pivotal scene in his novel, but with a radical difference. In Saer’s fourth chapter, in which Luis Fiore quarrels heatedly with his wife and soon-to-be murder victim for most of the chapter, the scene of reading is displaced: she, not he, is reading a melodrama, and it’s not crime-pulp but rather a pair of *fotonovelas*, a particularly Argentine and specifically *contemporary*, mass-media offshoot of the *novela rosa* or romance-novel tradition in comic-book form⁶¹. In the paragraph in which reader first sees the reader pull these glossy melodramas while her husband hunts ducks, the scene of reading is “intercut” syntactically with Fiore literally “reaching for his gun” (273). She reads them not just to enact a performative disinterest in his outdoor pursuits, but even within sentences of consummating a quick sex act in the bushes initiated somewhat forcefully by the husband (285); later, she unambiguously snubs his physical affections to continue reading (287). Indeed, Fiore refers to her throwing one of the magazines at him repeatedly in the litany of her various physical and verbal provocations, which Fiore invokes as justification for her receiving her variously-trope “desserts” (mostly euphemized as “that”/“eso”)⁶².

Perhaps most importantly, though, the most severe and final of her provocations seems like a paraphrase, if not a citation verbatim, from her lurid readings in the “adventure” genre of adultery: “La *negra más sucia* es capaz de hacerlo dejar todo. Capaz de *hacerlo robar, cualquier cosa*. Como si no fuese [yo] tan o más mujer que cualquiera” (297, *emph. mine*). Compare this

to Faulkner's scene, in Chapter 12: Joanna "provokes" Joe, who keeps thinking "I'm going to do something," by inciting him to admit publically what she'd already screamed at him a hundred times in bed, namely, his black blood. Saer has not only displaced the reading from the murderer to his victim, he has also displaced onto her his *racialization*.

Having thus explained how Faulkner's subtext functions to structure the naturalism of Saer's commentary on contemporary Argentine political violence, we can return to Kohan's subtext of a contemporary crisis of representation. Faulkner doesn't just give Saer a springboard for analyzing the ways in which race is sexualized as a sadomasochistic *performance* (cf. Faulkner's stream-of-consciousness scene of misogynistic violence against what Joe Christmas calls the "womanshenegro", or the melodramatic "theater" of their passionately "staged" relationship). What's more, in Saer and in Faulkner before him, race itself is also shown to be historically and politically *constructed*. Fiore isn't just a *negro* in the sense of belonging to an underclass treated differently by the populace and by the apparatus of Law⁶³. Fiore is a *syndicalista*, driven to violence less by his wife's constant sexual and moral insults than by her insinuation that he's robbed from the union coffers; what basis this may have in fact is unclear, except that years before the actions of the novel, Fiore, Sergio Escalante (narrator of Saer's second chapter), and "el Negro Lencina" all took part in a direct action that seized the local headquarters of the national union bureaucracy and spent 9 months in the same prison for it (109). (The union in question is, of course, the same Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT) that had been notoriously corrupted by Augusto Vandor.) When "Marquitos" Rosemberg (a Jewish intellectual that recurs in many of Saer's novels) and "el Negro" both ask Escalante to help in the legal defense of Fiore on the grounds of a shared militancy ("Antes defendías a los trabajadores, dijo [el Negro]. / Sí, antes sí, dije yo," 177), or when Marcos and Escalante discuss their political affiliations (146, 160), it becomes increasingly clear that race, as Saer is adapting it from Faulkner, is in some measure political and operated by a system of guilt-by-association, as though a union organizer were somehow "blacker" than a "scab" of any ethnic makeup.

But the ciphers of race, class, and politico-syndical institutions of power don't just explain and determine the novel's central crimes; on the contrary, they structure the entire social microcosm at work in the novel as much as sexualized race and passing structure Faulkner's naturalist cross-section of Southern society. Escalante's one-eyed grandfather (a curious metonym for Perón is a first-generation Syrian immigrant, like Saer's own, who "assimilates" quite quickly to this peculiar Argentine configuration of party-politics, race, and class. He became a machine-politician, selling the votes of the institutionally invisible; in so doing, a local indigenous community, *los mocovies*, comes to call him their "father" (107)⁶⁴. The [organized] working class, as much in the novel's representation of 1969 Argentina as in Rosemberg's or Lencina's political ideology, needs committed *pro bono* lawyers to defend it against a "racist," classist, and merciless legal system. The crux of the novel is that the breakdown of literature's capacity to represent experience is inseparable from a breakdown of political representation, or even from (pardon the pun) *legal* representation: el Negro and

Marcos fail to compel Escalante to pull himself away from his gambling addiction or his mysteriously esoteric critical essays on comics to defend Fiore in a biased court.

On every level, this manifold crisis of representation connects all the chapters and their narrators as well as the intertexts they are trapped in, sometimes unwittingly and other times ironically. The judge López Garay, seemingly trapped in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* which he is quite senselessly re-translating (a project just a touch beyond his fluency in English, it seems), narrates his perambulations, automotive and pedestrian, in hyperrealist detail except that all the humans he sees become “gorillas” in his eyes, quite literally. In every scene at his office, he is sneaking translation time at the expense of his duties (which include making complex judgments with life-and-death consequences). In the most important and ironic of these interruptions, he would be struggling to translate Wilde's line, “One should absorb the colour of life, but one should never remember its details. Details are always vulgar,” while pretending to listen to contradictory eyewitness testimonies as to Fiore's state of mind, intentions, and motivations. The curious and titillated crime-genre reader, trying to elucidate that other plane of the horrible events of the crime, is impeded by the even more horrible foregrounded plane in which there is no elucidation, just the judge ignoring testimony in the presence of the interloping young reporter but not Escalante, who by all rights should be there.

But Escalante is too busy *overreading*, writing “critical” exegeses of comic books and comic strips that are, to the erudite eye, caricatures of critical essays by Saer himself, of Borges essays, and even the famous debate between Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin à propos of the political ideology of Mickey Mouse (114-115). But here another key thematic cluster emerges: Escalante writes of one of these essays, the first and best, that “el título, *Murciélago y Robin: confusión de sentimientos*, si bien en parte está tomado de una obra de Stefan Zweig, resume a mi juicio bastante bien el núcleo del problema” (114). There are two drastically different sexual currents running through the text, a supertext of Oedipal family drama and a subtext of homosocial engagements. The first chapter inaugurates both of these in the first few pages: Angel Leto, whose father was a conspicuous absence until his recent death, stumbles through a white-knuckled chapter of Oedipal near-misses with his too-young, Cainian vamp of a mother. She stumbles onto him masturbating naked in the patio, and “from that day on things started to go badly between us:” he stumbles on her reading a comic book (a *fotonovela*?) naked in bed, they fight, he hits her, storms off, and goes straight to a brothel. There, after some abortive and half-assed attempts at sexual initiation overseen by Angel's literary and professional father-figure Tomatis, Ángel picks *the one prostitute reading a comic book* (also distinguished by an abdominal scar indexing an abortion or Caesarian!).

Among the more colorful and evocative of the tense literary/psychosexual exchanges between Tomatis and Ángel is one in which Tomatis, opening mail addressed to him as editor of their newspaper's literary section, ironizes that “Desgraciadamente, todo el mundo tiene sentimientos—Por lo tanto todo el mundo hace literatura”. Ángel responds that he knows a counterexample, a writer (Tomatis) devoid of any sentiments who writes nonetheless. The banter quickly escalates to penis humor (“he must write with his penis,”), to penis size banter (I'll spare my reader a paraphrase), to a mention of a girl in whom they share a sexual interest,

to Ángel storming off “because I don’t like spitting in people’s faces” (79). The chapter, which begins with a scene of reading from which Ángel is distracted by Oedipal tensions, goes on to revisits this scene of “distraction” through dialogues with Tomatis and with Ángel’s mother, with workplace anxieties and with journalistic endeavors, culminating finally in the “primal scene” of Ángel walking in on Tomatis sleeping with his mother. Mirta Stern influentially called this work “una investigación edípico-policia”⁶⁵, an interpretation buttressed by the frequent references to the Oedipus myth as “the first detective story” in Saer’s work from throughout his career⁶⁶. Julio Premat, whose massive monograph reading Saer’s oeuvre as deeply and self-consciously *melancholic* (in every sense of the term from Burton to Lacan) is the most influential to date, reflexively admits the subtle tautology he commits by framing his study of Saer’s mature work in Oedipal terms given how many of the text frame themselves with overtly Oedipal supertexts.

Clearly “primal scenes” and psychoanalytic theory are centrally important to Saer’s work as a whole, and critics are right to interpret *Cicatrices* in this light. *El río sin orillas* (1991), Saer’s most sustained attempt at nonfiction in the form of an *ensayo nacional*, makes copiously clear how broadly explanatory this mode of interpretation is to Saer, as do the recurring stagings of “primal scenes” in the works that constitute for Premat the core works of his career: *Cicatrices*, *Nadie nada nunca*, *El entenado*, *La pesquisa* (1969, 1980, 1982, and 1994, respectively). Yet too much attention to this explicitly and bluntly foregrounded supertext might occlude some subtler intertextual maneuvers, not least of them the homosocial tensions and backstories the “sleuthing” reader is encouraged to sniff after, not just by the passing mention of Zweig’s melodramatic novella of cluelessly overlooked passions or to Wilde’s labyrinth of decadent passions. If anything, the Oedipal drama and that other, queer drama cohabiting the same chapters through a Faulknerian technique of narrative intercutting and retrospective polysemia are linked by the self-consciousness of the work as “mature,” the thematizing (primarily through variously explicit intertexts) of maturity in simultaneously literary, psychoanalytic, and ethical terms.

One site of this self-conscious “maturity” is the character that comes closest to embodying an author-figure or double, Sergio Escalante, specifically in the detailed accounts of his gambling addiction. Marcos asks him what he thinks of Dostoevsky’s famously autobiographical and markedly *melodramatic*⁶⁷ novella, *The Gambler* (1866), and later gifts him a copy in jail, which he finds disappointing for its lack of abstract meditations on the game of roulette itself, meditations which Escalante amply provides for the game of *punto y banca* (North American baccarat). What interests me here isn’t just that the self-destructive author-figure is flatly unsympathetic when narrating his wife’s suicide as a direct consequence of his addiction, or that he only seems interested in the grim ending of Dostoevsky’s quickly-written novella, in which the narrator essentially devotes himself full-time and indefinitely to equally destructive gambling. I’m more interested in the novella as a sexual and romantic *morass*, in which the international intermingling of decadent aristocrats is troped as a romantic contest for a mercenary vamp, complete with its own homosocial endearments and endless diatribes against various national characters by the protagonist, an indisputably immature *enfant*

terrible. Note also that character's curiously *guilty* deployment ("I know better and yet...") of pulp fiction in the form of Paul de Kock, an often censored sex-writer beloved by Joyce's Molly Bloom: "I am so hard up for something to do that, odd as it seems, I even take from the scurvy lending library here the novels of Paul de Kock (in a German translation), though I can't endure them; yet I read them *and wonder at myself*" (123, emphasis mine).

This brings us back, in some oblique way, to Angel Leto's masturbatory star-gazing. In a canonical early essay Saer doubtlessly knew and had in mind while writing *Cicatrices*, Freud describes the Oedipal drama in terms of that very same Dostoevsky novella, interpreting gambling addiction as a symbolic corollary to compulsive masturbation, and interpreting both behaviors as symptomatic of "partial Oedipalization." I'm referring to "Dostoevsky and Parricide," 1928, in which Freud famously writes, "Dostoevsky threw away the chance of becoming a teacher and liberator of humanity and made himself one with their jailers" (*Standard Edition* vol. XXI, p. 177). Stefan Zweig rears his head here again, because to explain Dostoevsky, Freud bafflingly builds his case on Zweig's suggestive nod to the autobiographical nature of Dostoevsky's criminological writings (178n1), as well as on another of Zweig's novellas included in the 1927 collection *Verwirrung*, "24 Hours in the Life of a Lady" (191-4). Here Zweig's maternal dame "mothers" back to health and sanity the compulsive gambler with whom she's fallen in love (a tidy inversion of Dostoevsky's figure of the intriguing temptress): "I had saved him; he was safe. And now I looked—I cannot put it any other way—I looked with maternal feeling at the man I had reborn into life more painfully than I bore my own children. [...] From the most dreadful moment of a whole life there now grew a second life, amazing and overwhelming me, coming in sisterly fashion to meet me" (63). When Zweig's novella metaphysically describes gambling exactly as Escalante does and as Freud faults Dostoevsky for not doing ("To this obsessive gambler the whole world, the whole human race had shrunk to a rectangular patch of cloth", 90), it becomes clear that this *unnamed* intertext is more important to the Escalante chapter than the *named* one—except insofar as the former is a mere social commentary, while the latter has always been interpreted, since its publication and definitively by both Zweig and Freud, as *autobiographical*, a tradition that bears heavily on the author-figure of Escalante. Escalante, after all, has left behind all his former ethical obligations, to his family and to his (hereditary?) political commitments as a "representative" of Argentina's *negros*. (Note that not only did he "learn" to gamble from his political-machinist grandfather, but also that he began playing at a *union* function, celebrating the release of some *political prisoners*; 107, 109). The only political action left to Escalante, or for that matter, his only action other than gambling (his wife and mother both dead), is writing—in his case, Marxist and/or Psychoanalytic analyses of the ideologies of comics.

Which brings us, once again, to reading habits—Escalante has pawned off all his books except his clippings of comic books and comic strips (!), while the gallingly juvenile narrator Angel Leto, in between sessions of outdoor masturbation, reads voraciously and tells his reader all about his preferences: Mann's *Magic Mountain* and *Tonio Kröger* rank high in the literary firmament near *Light in August* and *The Long Goodbye*, while Nabokov's *Lolita* and Ian Fleming's formulaic spy novels are utterly lost on him (23). It bears mention that while the

climactic mythopoeic dream at the end of *Magic Mountain* is rewritten to even more chilling [i.e., fascistic] effect than the original at the end of the judge López Garay's chapter (210), Chandler's novel notably *isn't* rewritten, despite Leto's apparent fixation on Philip Marlowe, whose name is deployed as a pseudonym and as a red herring throughout⁶⁸. Despite aspiring to Marlowe's pulpy wit and hard-boiled stoicism, the narrator is neither a good detective (nor a good investigative reporter), nor a hard-boiled stoic, nor even a witty stylist (judging from his problems at the newspaper); the Leto narrative disappoints whether conceived as a Chandler homage, as an Oedipal investigation, or as a *Bildungsroman* à la Thomas Mann (except insofar as Mann's model was already at its core an ironic disappointment of that genre-in-decadence).

But why not one of Chandler's major works (*The Big Sleep*, *The Little Sister*, *The Lady in the Lake*), why *The Long Goodbye*, that "swansong" to Chandler's hard-boiled successes, and by most critical accounts, the swansong of the thereafter-decadent genre itself? Perhaps it has something to do with a certain reflexive, melancholic character of *belatedness* that characterizes Chandler's novel, in which the aging, chess-obsessed detective meditates on his ethos as his life crumbles around him, sacrificing everything for a suicidal (and markedly homosocial) loyalty⁶⁹ to his client Terry Lennox. Or maybe by 1969, critics were already speaking in a stage-whisper about Marlowe allegorically choosing his peculiar relationship with the male client Lennox over his relationship to his female love-interest, a "loyalty" with homoerotic undertones not unlike that tender loyalty operative in the national epic, *Martin Fierro*. In *El río sin orillas*, Saer explains to his "*lector-idiota*" that Martínez Estrada had dared to call this loyalty by its name (and had implied it to be autobiographical on Hernández' part), a critical maneuver "prudishly ignored" by the Argentine critical tradition (84).

But Ángel's literary crisis of representation (or the literary representation of Ángel's Oedipal sexual crises) is, at best, peripheral to the *fatal* breakdown of representation for Fiore, which is also analyzed through the trope of reading habits, in this case the deeply disturbing ones of judge López Garay. The honorable judge is at best deeply distracted, and at worst lost in a psychotic break, while filling out the official record on Fiore's case. The Judge is too busy daydreaming about his Oscar Wilde novel or his own passions for Ángel Leto to notice anything in particular about the case he's hearing; but once López Garay has re-narrated a scene we'd previously seen from Ángel's point of view, we realize Ángel Leto is a pretty bad sleuth not to notice the open secret of the judge's interest in the crime-page reporter. (The most committed of sleuthing readers have also diligently noticed, lost in the crush of the seemingly endless hyperrealist narrations of drives and walks around the city, a scene from the *fourth* chapter, Fiore's, being re-narrated from López Garay's point of view too—tellingly, of course, López Garay notices nothing out of the ordinary about the behavior of these "gorillas", and we don't either, if we've been lulled into sympathy or boredom by that the hypnotic stylistic barrage of vulgar details, like Wilde's aphorism, compel us to forget.) The image of the growing tide of lynching vengeance as a game of chess is appropriated directly from Faulkner⁷⁰ into something López Garay can't even be bothered to read: "Parecen piezas de ajedrez sobre un tablero. Continúo subiendo, a través de la amplia escalera blanca de mármol, y al echar un último vistazo hacia el vestíbulo, desde el tercer piso, las figuras de los gorilas se han reducido tanto,

achataadas contra el tablero blanco y negro, que el efecto de ser rígidas piezas de ajedrez se hace de pronto perfecto” (194).

But it is a paragraph of Wilde’s that we see López Garay reading and mulling over two pages later that I think brings us back to a certain melodramatic layer of the text, a certain play of legibility and opacity by means of which the novel tropes political representation and contemporary reality: “He [Dorian Gray] was trying to gather up the scarlet threads of life, and to weave them into a pattern; to find his way through the sanguine labyrinth of passion through which he was wandering” (196). Most telling of all his linguistic difficulties, López Garay has trouble deciding between *sanguíneo* and *sangriento* in his translation of this phrase. Maybe he’s distracted from his Sisyphean task by the bloody (*sangriento*) double-murder, or by the prurient interest taken in it by the sanguine (*sanguíneo*) investigative reporter who, like the protagonist of *Confusion of sentiments*, has utterly no grasp of the double-entendre. To put it bluntly, he no idea how to read, a judgment the novel encourages us to second.

I don’t think it’s putting too fine a point on it to offer up Wilde’s phrase, “the sanguine labyrinth of passion” as an apt description of how the crime novel shows its melodramatic underpinnings when its author pushes the game of moral legibility and sexual illegibility to this extreme. We could even say of Wilde’s phrase that it describes the “pulsional” [i.e., drive-based] psychology operative in the lion’s share of both melodrama and crime fiction, a view of the psyche in which actions and intentions are always as multiple and unpredictable as desires and fantasies. Of Saer’s novel more convincingly than of Puig’s could it be said that the avant-garde novel appropriates, and fully exploits, techniques from the melodramatic popular text: Saer’s labyrinthine novel of ideas titillates it’s reader by placing a naturalistic, microcosmic murder on the second plane of events and before it a first plane in which four bad readers elucidate nothing, too mired in the psychosexual pathos of their respective [second-hand] melodramas of interpretation and representation. The plenitude and promise of truth that naturalism leads us to expect of an allegorically-read murder is just out of reach, just off-stage, drowned out by pulpy sound and fury.

From *La invasión* to “Luba”: the melodramatic machinations of Piglia's *femme fatale*

*el asesino como el artista / dijo el agente / se oculta en la falta / de emoción /
detrás del frío / tira los cadáveres / y así construye una casa / para la verdad*

—Maria Negroni, “Adiós, muñeca,” 2006⁷¹

Piglia’s first short story collection, *La invasión*, published in 1967 and expanded in 2006, offers an interesting point of comparison to Saer’s labyrinth of passions: Piglia’s early fiction is driven by questions of representation, genre, and masculinity, inquiries that are formally structured by latter-day modernist realism and yet, in affective and readerly terms, share this melodramatic psychology of *passion*. More interesting still, for our purposes here, are how the

revisions of 2006 expand on that unifying supertext of passion while simultaneously excising much of the sentiment and melodrama in the “literary utopia” of revising one’s own juvenilia, rounding corners and covering tracks. Both Piglia’s stories and Saer’s novel condition an active readership by deploying strategies of oblique and fragmented narration, minimalist characterization and settings, allusive shell-games and plagiaristic homages; both texts overtly set their readers the task of reading estranged characters against their ill-fitting roles and plagiarized lines, a task that their readers are invited to extend to the historical realities represented by those texts. Both texts oscillate between hard-boiled subjectivity and modernist ennui, but with one crucial difference—Piglia’s early texts take playful liberties with his personal pantheon precisely because they frame their experimentalism as tentative and *immature*, while Saer’s formally and thematically experimental novel nevertheless frames itself as a “mature” work by a seasoned (and by then exiled) novelist. For this reason, I’d like to preface my analysis of Piglia’s major works in later chapters with a distinct take on the hero-worship and canon-formation of this juvenilia in the light of its 2006 revision and in comparison to what I consider his first “mature” work, the “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt” included in his 1975 collection, *Nombre falso*.

My inquiry starts from Jorge Fornet’s indispensable 2007 work, *El escritor y la tradición*, which frames its inquiry within Piglia’s “papel rector” within Argentine intelligentsia and within the Argentine literary canon. Fornet’s analysis unpacks (in as straightforward fashion as possible) Piglia’s reading/rewriting of the precursors “from which he wants to be read,” a phrase taken from Borges’s essay on Kafka’s (and his own) “precursors.” Fornet’s introduction subtly implies that Argentina’s core literary canon at century’s end, as abstracted by a 1993 poll of 70 influential authors (12), was largely that created by “el sistema Piglia”: a pervasive and manifold influence exerted equally by Piglia’s fiction-as-criticism, criticism-as-autobiography⁷², and often highly-staged interviews and public appearances. I’d like, in this section, to scribble a few annotations in the margin of this “system” of precursors, sketching out how gender fundamentally troubles his system at exactly the point where modernism and crime-melodrama are sutured together. For theorizing this aspect of “the Piglia system,” Abbot’s and Breu’s historicist and psychoanalytic works on North American hard-boiled stylistics have been quite helpful in understanding the sentimental system undergirding the simultaneously tough and tear-jerking pastiche of his early works. Much as elsewhere in this chapter, I’ve striven to foreground a melodramatic undercurrent easily missed in Piglia’s early crime fictions. I will start with these early works where anxieties around authorship and influence are expressed in acutely gendered plots, and where the operations of pastiche and homage produce work simultaneously rough and sentimental around the edges.

In this sense, the comparison between *La invasión* and Saer’s contemporary breakthrough work is a useful starting-point for this analysis. While *Cicatrices* is structured explicitly by *Light in August*, it’s a different Faulkner text that surfaces conspicuously in Piglia’s early stories: a snide narrator compares one of the collection’s many “*minas fatales*” (fatal broads? red-hot vixens?) to Temple Drake, the central femme of *Sanctuary*. Faulkner largely disavowed that sensational and pulpy “horrific tale” as a mercenary and failed enterprise,

pandering to his speculations of “what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends” in literary form and content. (This apocryphal and ostensibly *confessional* paratext, framing the work as a product of bilious condescension, has persistently haunted the novel at least since its citation in the introduction to the novel’s first mass-audience edition for the Modern Library series in 1932). While Saer’s pastiche takes its source material from different totalizing, microcosmic naturalisms and lofty exchanges from various novels of ideas, Piglia’s anthology of micronarratives and isolated scenes works from the anecdotal and the high-modernist illuminating detail à la Borges or Joyce (which, in all his later works, he’ll importantly crossbreed with the revelatory detail so central to the detective narrative tradition). These details are made to open out onto a broader historical and ideological sphere by subtle maneuvers manipulating readerly investment, biographical insinuation, and sentimental projection. The extrapolations expected of the reader are conditioned by the overt suppression of sentiment exerted by the narrator, often subverting that suppression as a textual “surface” to be read beyond or as a grain to be read against.

This formal mechanism of staging an unsuccessful suppression or a legible internal contradiction is shared by all the stories in the collection; what’s more, that mechanism is “fine-tuned” 39 years later, which makes a comparison of the two versions so illuminative. The prologue of the 2006 edition has this to say about the re-editing process: “En general se trató sobre todo de cortes y supresiones. Ya sabemos que—como decía Hemingway—todo lo que podamos sacar de un cuento, lo va a mejorar” (2006, 12). One such excision, ironically, removes a Hemingway epigraph from the story “La pared,” which serves as a great example of what Breu’s Lacanian study refers to as the repressed (and sublimated) sentimentality of Hemingway: “No morimos de viejos, morimos de las viejas heridas” (1976, 20). Did this epigraph seem more superfluous (or the total number of epigraphs excessive) in 2006, or does the prologue’s name-check to Hemingway supplant its role, giving a subtler hint to the reader? Or, like so many other “suppressions” throughout the text, does the mature writer see overkill where the younger author saw a breadcrumb trail, or Ariadne’s thread?

A page later in the prologue, Piglia confesses that at least in terms of tone, “Tender is the Night” borrows less from the lovesick Fitzgerald of *Tender is the Night* (to whom the story was dedicated, tautologically enough, in the 1967 edition) than from the Kerouac who finishes *The Subterraneans* with the line, “And I go home having lost her love. And write this book.” They may all have written great novels and, in their respective ways, inspired and consequential critiques of the American social order, but the yoke they’re all under here, and the yoke pulling all the stories forward, seems to be a biographical subtext informing the sentimental undercurrents of these spacious texts in which our South American minimalist is squatting. In the older version, this network sketched out by so many epigraphs, dedications, and allusive homages is all the reader has to grasp at in lieu of a preface or of any other explanatory paratext; in the 2006 edition, this network is riveted to the encapsulating self-critical narrative of a youthful “conception of literature” in which relations to canonical writers are troped directly as sentimental attachments. In this move from the evocative to the allusive, or as we might say in the technical taxonomy of Gerard Genette, in the move from hypertext (unmarked

homage) to intertext (allusion *per se*) or even to architext (inviting the reader to find a genetic resemblance between the allusions elevated to unifying structure), the text's sentimental supertext and allusive subtext switch places. To wit, the analogies and interplays between the reader's vicarious sentimental engagements unified the 1967 anthology in ways buttressed by the allusions, while in the 2000 the sentiment is scaled back with tasteful *pudor* and subordinated to the elaboration of a personal canon. Those sentimental ties are furthermore crucially *undercut* by an ironizing and self-conscious manipulation of readerly sympathy marking real differences between the 2009 and 1976 versions of the more substantially edited stories.

The strongest example of this playful subversion of sympathy is the story which was placed first and functioned like a prelude in the original book, an enigmatic one-scene micronarrative in which two elderly boarders, barely sketched out, try to block out a recurring, nightly sex scene next door that, tellingly, interrupts not just their evening repose but also a scene of reading. Motivated by an evocative admixture of vicarious lust, pride, curiosity, and ill-sublimated erotic tensions, they muster the courage to barge in to the adjacent room where the sexual scandal is proceeding loudly enough to whip these men into a fury. (In the older, redundantly homosocial version, the scandal is that the neighbor is another male boarder is "rubbing their face in it"; in the later version, the neighbor is the female party guilty of bringing home myriad men). The story ends at the suspenseful moment after they've peeked voyeuristically through the keyhole and before they've barged violently in, positing the reader in that vicarious social space of the voyeurs (marked as it is by sublimation and indirection, homosocial fury and insecurity), and positing the rest of stories on the other side of that door, in the opaque and enigmatic realm of someone else's sex life. In the original version, the male characters are barely named or described, but without the didactic structure of a Nick Adams story, they function only to position us before a keyhole as witness to what is promised by the book's epigraph from Roberto Arlt: "the twilight of piety."

Of course, that tiny phrase is less mysterious and evocative if one recognizes it as part of a longer quote that was circulating widely in the mid 1960's Argentine literary scene, which was undergoing something of a Roberto Arlt renaissance. Presumably, young Piglia intends his reader to have the entire passage on hand: "Creo que a nosotros nos ha tocado la horrible misión de asistir al crepúsculo de la piedad y que no nos queda otro remedio que escribir *deshecho de pena*, para no salir a la calle y tirar bombas o instalar prostíbulos" (emph. mine)⁷³. Roberto Arlt's angsty 1929 *Götterdämmerung* is tinged by his much-analyzed debt to Friedrich Nietzsche and his Wagnerian sense of melodramatic histrionics: Arlt's frames his anti-heroes' idealism as the exception to the general decline of all morality and valid social order, and their spectacular suffering as a badge of honor appreciated only by Arlt's sympathetic reader. In the context of Piglia's 1967 story, these characters are not anti-heroes but mere two-dimensional indexes of societal decline, forcing the reader into a position of sympathy with them that cannot be otherwise than uncomfortable.

In Piglia's 2006 rewrite of the scene, however, the one-scene play is promoted from operatic prelude to full story in the sequence. The minimalist placeholders of 1967 become

fuller characters, but tellingly enough, still characters without attributes—the keyhole scene is replaced with a paragraph-long rewrite of an analogous scene in Musil’s *Man Without Qualities*⁷⁴, in which the hot-headed aggressor becomes a blustery provincial tango singer who overdoes the *lunfardo* (an Arltian bit-character if ever there was one), and the pensive reader becomes another newspaperman who runs a German paper and entertains a “romantic” sympathy for the secret ex-nazis of La Plata. Piglia’s punning on the various senses of the word *romantic* functions to further underline the crux of sentiment and allusion at the same time as they heighten the reader’s discomfort at being forced into sympathy with the “romantic” nazi-by-proxy.

The perverse sympathies at work in the more melodramatic 1967 original are both stretched to their limits and mediated by the ironic distance of naming and foregrounding their perversity as such in the later rewrite; this is largely a function of the story being moved into the central bulk of the collection and relieved of its duties as doorman and prelude. The new opening story, “El joyero,” emplots another limit-case of even more perverse sympathies: the story’s protagonist is a drug-addict in various forms of denial who stages an armed kidnapping of his estranged child. More importantly, however, this story *names* its object of sympathy for the reader to trace, refigured, throughout the collection: the protagonist is, to his drug dealer’s eyes, “otro *desesperado*, un tipo que había perdido a su mujer y a su hija y que se arrastraba empujado por la benzedrina” (40, *emph. mine*). This key sentence doesn’t just explain the story’s structure of sympathy quite bluntly to the reader, it also, by force of the word “otro,” works to subtly frame the entire collection as a sketchy series of solitary, male protagonists on the brink whose very protagonism is always undercut by our necessarily tenuous and vicarious sympathy for them. The story as a whole presents its reader with an armed drug-zombie stumbling towards a grim, fateful crime of passion—the new prelude shifts the operative sentimental key from *deshecho de pena* to *desesperado*.

I don’t want to detain us much longer on the changes to the 2007 edition except to note that they round out a bit the gendered distribution of madness and that, with the hindsight of maturity, they explicitly name their central madness “desperation” and “passion.” (I’m reminded here, on the subject of gender and constitutive emotional dissonance, of Abbot’s characterization of the panicked narrators of Cain and Chandler as “male hysterics”). What interests me more here, or rather, what’s more useful to tease out of his first work for the sake of his later works, is how he changes two of the original stories, “Mata-hari” and “Tierna es la noche.” In both of these works, we see the two earliest treatments of that inaccessible, raving female voice that’ll be so essential to later works⁷⁵. These are also the two stories where we see, ostensibly from a more sympathetic perspective, the female end of this formula, where the *femme fatale* speaks. The term even comes up in the mouths of characters twice in the stories (in both editions), once creolized as “minas fatales, las de Discépolo” (i.e., of Tango lyrics and popular melodrama) and once camped as “haciendo de mujer fatal”.

Or maybe calling it “camp”⁷⁶ is being a little optimistic—the “sadistic fortysomething’s” complete statement, in all its condescending misogyny, is that she “daba pena, pobrecita, haciendo de mujer fatal con ese pullover todo desteñido y los zapatones”⁷⁷ (91). This character

without qualities, who tries for Eva Perón or the semi-mythic 19th century amazon La Delfina but ends up with a mere Temple Drake (82, 86), is a classic representation of the impressionable hysteric right out of Freud or worse. She assimilates whatever female role she sees depicted in the movies and finds (or is led to find) an adventurous outlet to her bovarism after seeing Michèle Morgan bed a German official in a WWII movie. The hollow performance of fatal femininity gets to her, and the story breaks down as she does, spilling all the beans of her spy-plot after a sudden lapse of self-consciousness, waking suddenly from the fiction to a suicidal lucidity. It's presented almost as a limit-case, a breaking point in a collection brimming over with crimes of passion: her death is caused not by her or another's passion but by a *lapse* of passion, her defective operation in the "man's world" whose inner workings are the real focus of the collection. Curiously, as much as some readers might expect him to, Piglia doesn't substantially edit this ironic short-circuit of the gender dynamics of the spy-novel for the 2007 re-release; perhaps its essential genetic link to the dated spy subgenre necessitates its preservation as a time-capsule.

Piglia does, however, significantly rewrite the other *loca*-logue, which the prologue explains is one of his favorites, "en especial por sus imperfecciones, que—eso sí lo aprendemos con los años—son esenciales para la eficacia de un cuento"⁷⁸ (12). The hysterical and enigmatic woman in this text, her features overlaid onto those of Fitzgerald's Nicole/Zelda and Kerouac's Mardou/Alene, seems to have matured decades in the 39 years between editions, as has the exchange between her and her still desperate beau: aside from acting less crazy in all the scenes and dialogues altered, she's called "crazy" 4 times fewer by the Dick Dover of the story (without, however, bringing the total crazy-count below 5).

The changes Piglia makes to the events of the story are, one supposes, "suppressions" primarily in the writerly sense of increasing subtlety and refinement, roping in stylistic excesses and "pavadas por el estilo." (This last phrase is one of many cut from the story's concatenated lists of near-synonyms and emphatic restatements). One detail, however, serves as an interesting thought-piece on which to end the discussion of juvenilia revisited, not only because it offers a curious example of rewrite as "literary utopia:" I refer to the striptease scene, or I should specify, the circle-dance, far less eroticized in the original, but to which two lines have been added: "Había empezado a desnudarse, claro, se desnudaba cada vez que podía. Estaba de espalda, hacienda de Rita Hayworth en *Gilda*" (142). Aside from more explicitly linking this *loca* to the theatrical *loca* in "Mata-Hari" and to the "*locas*" soon to suffer violence by their husbands in "El pianista" and "El joyero" (new stories bookending the original ones), she's also "haciendo de" (playing at being) the archetypal *femme fatale* at the root of a whole scholarly tradition that Piglia can assume to be topical for his 2006, just as he did Arlt in 1967.

One could argue that Piglia chooses Gilda as a figure representing intertextual and intercultural espionage: a white Hispanic starlet winking at the audience while playing at the archetypal Anglo-Saxon seductress, living a double- or triple-life in her "captivity" in a sound-stage "Buenos Aires" that might as well be Rio de Janeiro or Havana, an irony we can conjecture was lost neither on Hayworth herself nor on Piglia decades later. But despite the continuity between this *loca* and that of "Mata-Hari," or the general tendency mentioned above to

mediate with intertextuality what the earlier text left as evocative or immediate, I'd suggest this allusion is as much to a critical landmark as to a filmic one, bringing to the table not just the film itself but also Mary Ann Doane's canonical essay, "Gilda: Striptease as Epistemology" (1983)⁷⁹. Doane may have a firmer grip on Lacan than on the crime genres when she generalizes about Law and masculinist Orders, but her analysis dovetails nicely with the "man's world" clichés of Piglia's collection when analyzes as ideological lynchpin of the film a maxim mentioned only in passing, "women and gambling don't mix." This is exactly the kind of misogynistic "advice" that 4 different men in the 2006 edition give other men unsolicited, the backdrop of [homosocial] exchange against which madness, coded as feminine, and "desperation," coded as masculine, are enacted. While Doane presents the *femme fatale* figure as an "epistemological trouble" to classical Hollywood cinema's gendered dynamics of sympathy, suture, and ideological reproduction, Piglia's mature revision of his earlier work seems to present the figure as half a symbiotic pair, or even as a formal necessity of the hard-boiled repression of gendered sentiment. As Breu writes of Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*, using a Lacanian apparatus of gender related to Doane's, "the affect that is purged from the consciousness and voice of the hard-boiled protagonist finds its projective return in the figure of the *femme fatale*" (31).

But in Piglia's case, this "purging" of affect always feels deliberately botched or incomplete, as if Piglia's latter-day modernism ended up somewhere between parody and camp in its half-heartedly masculinist rhetoric and its histrionics of repression and misogyny. I'd like to bring all of these analytic readings of Piglia's sentimentalized intertextuality to bear on the "Homage to Roberto Arlt," generally agreed to be his first mature work for its complex matrix of author-functions, plagiarisms, and critical reflections. The many-layered ironies and interdependences in this matrix have been the subject of much critical acclaim and attentive unpacking, but critical discussions have given short shrift to its theatrical gender dynamics and the libidinal "economy" (pardon the pun) of its central trope of literature *as prostitution*. Furthermore, since it is, after all, an "homage" and a critical reassessment of the stylistic and ideological apparatus of Roberto Arlt, this trope restructures the *oeuvre* of the reassessed precursor by infiltrating its imagination with latter-day concerns. If, as he claims in *Crítica y ficción*, criticism is a form of autobiography and Piglia's critical homage to Arlt "could only have been written as a detective story" (to synthesize two of the homage's footnotes), then perhaps we would be justified in reading this Borgesian labyrinth of Arltian thematics as a way of working through some of Piglia's own ideological "issues" and investments.

I refer here not just to the classic Argentine "utopia," shared by seemingly all authors from at least Cortázar on, of alchemically synthesizing the incommensurate projects of Borges and Arlt (18), but also to a complex historical mapping of various different ideological positions onto a single palimpsestic field. (The reader may here note the similarity between Piglia's palimpsestic formal structure and Borges' allusive dog-pile in "Pierre Menard," read as a homage to Poe in the Introduction). Piglia's story unstably maps onto one plane many different ideological positions: Andreyev (*vis-à-vis* Gorki), Arlt (versus the more pragmatic "commitments" of his Boedo contemporaries), Brod (versus Kafka), and plagiarism (versus the bourgeois author-figure and its caricature in literary "hero-worship") are all connected by a

chain of analogies and equivalences. In the discussion that follows, I've tried to schematize my analysis by referring to the real author of the entire complex or cycle as Piglia and the self-caricaturing protagonist as "Piglia", just as I try to distinguish the historical Arlt from Piglia's Arlt as fantasized in the story and elsewhere in "the Piglia system" (insofar as it's possible to split that hair). Fornet notes that the parodic relation between Piglia and "Piglia" owes much to Henry James' *Aspern Papers* (41) and mentions in passing (60) that the only difference between the 1975 edition and the edition included in *Prisión perpetua* (1988) is the substitution, in footnote #2, of the name Emilio Renzi (Piglia's later alter-ego) for the apocryphal name Pablo Fontán, which appears nowhere else in Piglia's writing or any bibliography I've seen. Whereas Fornet takes this simply as a wink at the "suspicious" reader (13 years later, the "forgery effect" is now impossible to maintain), I would argue instead that Renzi is actually infiltrating the story here as a critic-detective and as a *doppelgänger*. As a double-agent serving as accomplice both to Piglia and to "Piglia," this slippery paragon of critical insight drives a wedge between them, spurring all readers (even those who might not notice the gap between Arlt and Piglia's Arlt) notice and read accordingly.

At the other end of the readerly spectrum from those that might need to see Renzi's name to be put on their guard, Fornet shows textually, down to the last fudged citation, how Piglia's text rewrites and restructures the tradition it's writing in, but just as importantly, the historical and intellectual *moment* it's writing in. Fornet convincingly shows how Piglia updates the stakes from Arlt's time to a contemporary vocabulary of intellectual property, plagiarism, and cultural value that Piglia largely shares with Saer and Puig in 1973. (Fornet signals as one source of this vocabulary the epochal influence of David Viñas; I might conjecturally append a particular debt to Pierre Bourdieu). As the first Piglia's most ambitious, most sophisticated, and most *effective* intervention in literary history, Fornet begins his history of "the Piglia system" there, unpacking its allusions and critical appraisals alongside the story's reflexive and readerly maneuvers. He also tellingly sees it as the first fully-developed version of the "double narrative," which will operate in all Piglia's major literary works (and many of his critics works as well), and its doubling of both protagonists and narrators. In a related gesture, he also pauses to emphasize the importance of this first appearance of the trope of the "critic as detective," a figure that has, almost to the point of cliché, come to define his work as a whole; Fornet also traces its provenance through Chesterton and Alejo Carpentier (without mentioning Borges or Walsh, perhaps in the interest of avoiding a lengthy digression), a gesture I need not reiterate except mention as correlation of my genealogy.

But with a difference: I think Fornet skips over the thematic minefield of the gender dynamics in Piglia's first mature work, which in turn occludes the repressed melodrama of staging the critic as a solitary, masculine detective. Fornet reads the quantum leap from "La loca y el relato del crimen," at that time his most prized and read story to date, to "Luba," as the passage from "a Borgesian to an Arltian conception of literature" (39). Yet Fornet's credible, if somewhat overly schematic, interpretation of the earlier story and its "conception of literature" is curiously predicated on different conceptions of *crime fiction* more than of literature generally: it might be more precise to say Piglia's first mature work marks the passage

from an anti-sentimental to an openly *melodramatic* conception of crime fiction. Fornet cites Jorge Rivera's glowing and encouraging review of the early Piglia story in his seminal anthology of Argentine crime fiction, which reads "La loca" and its youthful author as the final term in a national tradition stretching from "Death and the Compass," through Borges's and Bioy Casares' later rational and decidedly unsentimental experimentations in the genre, through the young Walsh's "Borgesian" period, which I'll address in Chapter Two. (Rivera might just as well have included some of Cortázar's early work in the same trajectory, and in the same anthology). Rivera reads Renzi's solution of the titular *loca's* Sphinx-like riddle as an "homage" to Borges and as the logical end-product of the whodunit's cult of rationality, dressed up in the contemporary intellectual discipline *du jour*, linguistics. What Rivera doesn't read in the homage to Borges, I won't either—having traced *la loca* and her speech patterns across various earlier works, I think it would be redundant to dissect her operation in one more story, neither the first nor the last in Piglia's long series of mythopoetic hysterical women. What interests me more here is the Arltian version of that dynamic at work in the homage to Arlt, which needs to be accounted for on two different levels.

First, within the universe of the double-forgery "Luba" (that is to say, in Piglia's forgery of Arlt plagiarizing Andrejev), Piglia significantly alters Andrejev's story as Arlt might believably have altered it if he were making it his. Piglia's interpretation of Arlt's "conception of literature" thus occasioned major changes on many levels, which as Fornet mentions go well beyond excising a few scenes, introducing some counterfeit bills, and passing the language through the double-filter of heavy Argentinization and Arlt's trademark "sloppy style." In fact, perhaps the most significant change is the allegorical consequence of imposing this latter "stylization": in the mouth of Kostia's pastiche of contemporary critical reevaluations and of citations from "Escritor fracasado," Piglia insinuates Arlt's infamously "bad" prose style was, in fact, a deliberate after-the-fact effect along the lines of George Perec's aesthetic of the "first draft"⁸⁰. Piglia alters the tragic/heroic ending of Arlt's story substantially, making the story less about the ideologue's moment of weakness than about the prostitute's ideological challenge to him, less about the nightmarish absurdity of commerce than about the absurdity of righteousness; in so doing, Piglia inverts the outcome of Andrejev's conversion story about a modern Mary Magdalene to one in which the prostitute's nihilistic pragmatism wins over and reconciles the false worldliness of the *immature* rebel. This outcome hinges on a stronger figure of Luba, delivering a more self-assured speech about a more stirring, anachronistic truth: "Mi verdad? El deseo es mi verdad" (202). Fornet remarks that this sloganistic truth is something of a self-plagiarism from Piglia's own, positive review of Puig's Joycean first novel, *La traición de Rita Hayworth*. I would go further and say that to smuggle the sexual politics of the 70s into Arlt's Madonna/whore complex, and to read Puig and Viñas from the wide margin of Arlt's open-ended metaphysics, Piglia had to cast Rita Hayworth in the role of Luba and rewrite Luba's lines to make the *femme fatale* out-anarchy Andrejev's anarchist⁸¹ and to out-counterfeit Arlt's counterfeiter.

In all of Piglia's refiguring and palimpsestic analogizing of real authors, we might lose sight of Luba's own opinions about writers in Andrejev's story, and how they function in

Piglia's. Piglia's version of Andreyev's dialogue puts more emphasis on Luba's critique of writers (in general) and of *her* writer (the masochistic client in whose cartoonish role she tries to cast the anarchist). These remarks are played out against a more explicit, more tragicomic sadomasochistic scene which effectively troubles the gendered dynamic of Andreyev's original (infused, perhaps, with Joyce's pastiche of Sacher-Masoch in Chapter 15 of *Ulysses*). In Piglia's fantasy of Arlt's rewrite, the rebel is, or at least collaborates with, an expert counterfeiter ("the best in the entire country"), and by conflating, implicitly and explicitly, the figure of the counterfeiter with that of the *writer*, Piglia's Arlt makes Luba less wrong (and less wrong-headed) in interpellating him as a forger/author. In the first footnote to the story, "Piglia" offers up an apocryphal autobiographical essay that Piglia has pastiched from "Escritor fracasado" and the *aguafuerte* "La inutilidad de los libros."

What's more, Piglia has spliced in Andreyev's, or to be more specific, *Luba's* metaphor of the "moneda falsa" offered by her rebel-writer: "La gente busca la verdad y nosotros le damos moneda falsa. Es el oficio, el '*métier*'. La gente cree que recibe la mercadería legítima y cree que es materia prima, cuando apenas se trata de una falsificación burda, de otras falsificaciones que también se inspiraron en falsificaciones" (137). Clearly, Piglia has put his personal spin on Arlt's ideas, ventriloquizing his precursor (Arlt) to speak about Piglia's own personal (and contemporary) obsession, "the false coin" of authorship. But the entire rest of the quote is in fact Arlt's own lambasting of authorship in the "Inutilidad" essay, and the image of the "false coin," by a cosmic coincidence if not by an underlying ideological kinship, was already present in an Arlt's influential precursor, Andreyev; much of the literary-historical palimpsest, like Borges' shell game through French and American letters in "Pierre Menard," is a truth stranger than fiction. What's more, if the reader isn't familiar with this genealogical streak through the broad corpus of Arlt criticism, Piglia even has the fictional Kostia "bother" (or, to translate *joder* more literally, "bugger") Arlt with insistent reminders of his plagiaristic borrowings from Andreyev's more famous "Seven who were drowned" (167).

This is the second level on which Piglia has reworked Andreyev's Luba—not only is she made stronger and almost emasculating vis-à-vis the rebel-writer who would "redeem" her, but even her status as plagiarism and as fantasy enables Kostia to emasculate both the living and the dead Arlt. (Here, more explicitly than in most places, the creativity and originality prerequisite to modernist authorship is rendered in masculinist terms). How Kostia and "Piglia" debate the *fracaso* of Arlt (and how one reads "Escritor fracasado") hinges subtly on the value of this prostitute that calls writers counterfeiters; the conflict between the two doubles for Piglia over a story that circulates "between men" like a prostitute becomes, in true *noir* fashion, a conflict over a prostitute, a *loca*, and over the "truth" of her unstable and destabilizing desire. Within the story, she is granted some agency with respect to the weakened (or perhaps merely unanchored, freer-floating) male protagonist; in the frame story, she becomes the crux of interpretation, the locus of the manifold investment being haggled over.

It is exactly this additional layer of ventriloquism which makes this homage Piglia's first fully-developed work in my eyes: Kostia and "Piglia" are debating where Arlt's "trademark style" begins and where Catalanian-Russian translationese ends, where late Romantic genius

begins and deliberate (i.e., inorganic, falsified) sloppiness ends, where Arlt's authorship begins and where his conscious or unconscious plagiarism ends. By emplotting this debate as a contest between two criminals and between two competing readings of the "genius" of Arlt, Piglia has split the modernistic author-function of his earlier homages in two, introducing a meta-commentary (protagonist/shadow-protagonist, interpretation/alternate interpretation) that would become the trademark structuring device of his literary career. The intellectual foils, Kostia and "Piglia," double the actual Piglia such that he can ventriloquize them as two different layers of his commentary on Arlt, just as the pastiches of Arlt and of Arlt's Andreyev refract the object of homage into a whole economy of borrowings (the literary object that circulates, like a prostitute, "between men"). What is produced is a complex dialogue in which various "conceptions of literature" battle for the interpretation of Arlt. It stands to be mentioned again that the interpretation of Arlt was entirely topical at the time, as it constituted a central debate in Argentine letters in the late 60s and early 70s, between Cortázar's Arlt, Masotta's Arlt, Viñas' Arlt, and those of many others⁸².

Piglia's Arlt, however, is put into conversation with impossible interlocutors from other continents and palimpsest. Somehow, Edgar Allan Poe and Walter Benjamin come to be key players in this battle for the soul of Arlt, at least if you interpret as central the notes that "Piglia" jots down after "pacing around the city as if hallucinating," itself seemingly an unmarked citation from Poe's "Man of the Crowd":

- (a) La imposibilidad de salvarse y el encierro: el lugar arltiano.
- (b) La mujer como *doppelgänger* y como espejo invertido.
- (c) La prostituta: el cuerpo que circula entre los hombres. Como un relato (a cambio de dinero).
- (d) Ver el trabajo de Walter Benjamin: anarquismo y bohemia artística (en Discursos interrumpidos 36 y Ss.). El prostíbulo como espacio de la literatura. (178)⁸³

Poe isn't an entirely novel point of reference for analyzing Arlt⁸⁴; what's novel here, to my eye, is the interpretation of the *femme fatale* (and its creolization as *la loca*) as a modern form of the *doppelgänger*, the ultimate Romantic trope of repressed sentiment and desire returning to haunt and trouble the modern subject. The *femme fatale* is as deadly as William Wilson, for all the same reasons. The simpler relations of modern-romantic hero-authors to hysterical muses that drive the plots of *La invasion* splinter here as the plot itself doubles and mirrors into a whole paratextual economy of borrowings and thefts. The constitutive misogyny and mysterious, irrational power of the figure of the *loca* is yoked to the service of making prostitutes of the muses, of making Arlt's story (and Arlt's author-figure) a false coin haggled over in a brothel between a buffoonish Max Brod and the sinister embodiment of Arlt's satirical "escritor fracasado". The irrational *loca* troubles the economy in which women and stories pass between men; Renzi, previously on the side of the solitary heroes and riddle-solvers, now plays both sides against each other to create a more three-dimensional literary object. The truth of desire, highest Law in the melodramatic universes of an author like Cain or Arlt, is invisible and unknowable to these men of literary pretensions haggling over their false money; their intermediary to it can only be an uncanny and unreliable. And perhaps even hysterical for good measure.

Conclusion

"Piglia's" seemingly offhand conflation of the *femme fatale* and the *doppelgänger* might, in fact, be a shorthand version of the thesis of this entire chapter: the melodramatic roots of the crime genre are belied, despite all its overt cynicism and repression of sentiment, in the melodramatic revelation of secret knowledge or truths and, even more emphatically, in the sadomasochistic and self-immolating gender relations that the most boisterous melodramas present as normal in their outstripping of psychological realism. This horizon of truth (and this leaving behind of realism in lieu of other representation codes and narrative modes) is an important meeting-ground between high-octane melodrama and that most melodramatic form of crime fiction, the cynical *noirs* so influential on this generation of writers. More pragmatically, we could say that the *juxtaposition* of melodrama and realism, of baroque excess and modernist austerity, of complex allegory and spectacular suffering, was key to the elaboration of a complex and multimodal readership brave enough for such generic pyrotechnics. This relation to new genres and generic recombination, this drive for new modes of reading, is what most defines this generation's intertextual fetish for pastiche, rewriting, and homage above and beyond those themes and structures specific to the crime genres or the melodramatic mode.

At the time these works were written, the revalorization of melodrama was trickling down directly or indirectly into the literary imagination of a generation just beginning to take it seriously (and watching history grow more hard-boiled and paranoid by the minute). The importance of the melodramatic mode for understanding these specific works, debatably the first "mature" work by each of these authors, says a lot about a shared historical moment and an intellectual scene revisiting its boundaries, its markets, its influence or "efficacy" in a broader cultural scene and historical moment. It marks a kind of cross-pollinating moment, when drastic reconsiderations of genre boundaries were being called for and vaulted.

It also marks a generational crisis of literary "truth," a term I've been careful to avoid in this chapter as part of a division of labor: in the next chapter, I'll be turning to this crisis and the legacy of Rodolfo Walsh, an author whose particular relation to the crime genres, and to historical and journalistic truth, brought new attention to the political and intellectual stakes of crime fiction's unique mechanisms of social commentary, active readership, and ethical interpellation. This other apparatus appropriated from popular culture, which I'll be treating at length in the following chapter, might at first appear unrelated but is, I maintain, subtly complementary to the melodramatic one I've discussed thus far; it is, in a sense, the other side of the same coin.

Endnotes

- ¹ "Faced with chaotic literature, the crime novel attracted me because it was a way of defending order, of finding classical forms, of valorizing form itself" (tr. mine).
- ² <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/8815>. Sidney Lumet's anti-establishment Hollywood crime films from the 1970s are referenced specifically in Piglia's *Plata quemada*, which I'll analyze at length in Chapter 2,.
- ³ Her taxonomy of genres and modes differs slightly from Northrop Frye's "ethical" breakdown of suprageneric modes mentioned in the Introduction and elaborated to situate the thriller in Chapter 3—whereas Frye defines modes "ethically" by the reader's social relation to the central characters and the world represented, Williams emphasizes specifically *affective* dimensions of this relationship. Throughout this chapter, I largely use the term "mode" in Williams' affective sense, and elsewhere in this study, I tend to use it in Frye's more neutral, taxonomic sense. The debt to Frye is clear, however, in such formulations as "[melodrama's] close modal neighbor, comedy," in Gledhill (cited below)—for the permeable boundary between melodrama and comedy, see Frye, 46-48.
- ⁴ In *Shades of Noir*, ed. Copjec, J., London: Verso, 1996.
- ⁵ In the North American critical tradition on hard-boiled fiction, much reference is made this melodramatic "taboo" and its underlying romanticism and "negative" morality as codified by Raymond Chandler. Chandler defines the hard-boiled detective's ethos and moral system in his widely-cited essay, "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944, emph. mine): "But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, *a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world.* I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. [...] He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, *a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness.* The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in."
- ⁶ See Irwin, *Death*, 70-71.
- ⁷ The massive embezzling at the novel's climax, various business authorities keep insisting, is technically still *legal*.
- ⁸ Todorov's version of this theory can be found in his "Typology of Detective Fiction," included in *Poetics of Prose* (tr. Richard Howell, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977); Piglia's Calvino-ized variation is in *Formas breves* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Temas Grupo Editorial, 1999.).

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- ⁹ See his chapter on Cain in *The American Roman Noir*, Athens, Ga. : University of Georgia Press, c1995.
- ¹⁰ Much of it collected in his first book, *Our Government*, 1930; see Marling.
- ¹¹ To the reader whose first language is not English and/or has never heard the term "boobery" in the context of North American political discourse of the 1930's, I can only offer as translation Marta Lynch's phrase from an article cited below in *Los libros*, "*la mamaracherría argentina*." By this phrase, Lynch means (much as Mencken does with "boobery") not so much middle-class society as the small-minded commonsense of a society run by its middle-class, wherever a particular boob or *mamarracho* may find themselves on the social ladder. On the role of Mencken and other cultural and political strategists on the Left in North American popular culture of the 1930's, see Michael Denning's *The cultural front: the laboring of American culture in the Twentieth Century* (London; New York: Verso, 1996/1998).
- ¹² *Museo*, 143. More generally, the coupled adjectives "lo erótico y lo sanguinario" recur throughout entire decades of Borges' critical writing to describe the "American school" as a dead-end of the detective genre.
- ¹³ *Museo*, 114, 115.
- ¹⁴ *Museo*, 228.
- ¹⁵ "For many years, he's been recommending to his countrymen the cultivation of a literature of desperation," *Textos Cautivos*, 260.
- ¹⁶ Wolfe glibly writes in 1969, "He is in a class with Hemingway when it comes to immersing the reader in the secrets of various arcane arts, like short-order cooking, insurance investigation, operatic concerts, all sorts of things—and you get all this scenery and setting and atmosphere at a cool hundred miles an hour" (*Cain* x 3, viii).
- ¹⁷ This explosive melodramatic formula is fine-tuned and amplified by Douglas Sirk's 1959 larger-than-life remake, but not fundamentally altered in its basic structure and sympathies. Sirk's legacy in works like Rainer Maria Fassbinder's racial firecracker *Whity* (1971) or Todd Haynes' revisionist masterpiece *Far From Heaven* (2002)¹⁷ simultaneously update Hurst's race-melodrama to contemporary society's race-relations, and at the same time demand a fuller understanding of the popular tradition they keep alive.
- ¹⁸ Note the cheeky rewriting of the legalistic disclaimer that Cain includes on the copyright page of his novels: "The locale of this book is California, and the Californian will find much in it that is familiar to him; the characters, however, are imaginary, as are the situations, and in one instance, a whole neighborhood; they do not represent, and are not intended to represent, actual persons, events, or places."
- ¹⁹ See, for instance, the novel's opening scene, which stages an alarming introduction to the family's psychic and socioeconomic precarity by way of their department-store furniture and picture-perfect tract home. On the role of furnishings and mis-en-scene more generally in melodrama, see William's primary intertext, Gledhill's *Home is Where the Heart is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987); for a socio-cultural reading of how hard-boiled fiction may have served as class-training for an upward-mobile readership, see Erin Smith's *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000)
- ²⁰ In *Postman*, where the race politics are blunter²⁰, the seductress goads on her lover to kill her Greek-American husband (who speaks in the same "Hokay?" broken English as Mildred's boss at the diner) and to take over his

roadside restaurant, threatening that the desperation of the Depression will otherwise offer them no alternative to literal or figurative prostitution: "The hash house for me, and some job like it for you. A lousy parking lot job, where you wear a smock. I'd cry if I ever saw you in a smock, Frank" (14).

- ²¹ Puig said of his melodramatic stock-character in *Boquitas pintadas*: "Para la filmación ... impuso a Mecha Ortiz para un papel...el de la gitana agorera, como homenaje a la actriz e inspirándose, sin duda, en el personaje similar interpretado por Marlene Dietrich en *Sombras del Mal*, de Orson Welles" (Schoo, p. 92)erin
- ²² Cited in Armando Almada Roche's *Buenos Aires cuándo será el día que me quieras* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Vinciguerra, 1992), p.163.
- ²³ Note, for example, the book jacket copy from the first edition of *Boquitas*: "Convocados por el prestigioso diario 'Le Monde,' un grupo de críticos franceses seleccionó recientemente las 13 mejores novelas extranjeras de la temporada 1968-1969. Los primeros cinco puestos fueron ocupados por escritores latinoamericanos, y entre ellos Manuel Puig con su novela 'La traición de Rita Hayworth'. Editorial Sudamericana publica ahora la segunda novela de Manuel Puig "Boquitas pintadas" de la que el autor declara:...[the rest is quoted above]"; for a more detailed play-by-play of French reception, see Dalmaroni.
- ²⁴ Speaking of a particularly postmodern souvenir from *Sangre de un amor correspondido*, Masiello writes, "A partir de un falso recuerdo, se construye el equivalente de un sentimiento real. Por un lado es la base de una estética *camp*; pero, más importante, diría, coincide con nuestra lógica contemporánea de *mercado*" (345).
- ²⁵ Or a reader that exercises what Žižek calls "fetishistic disavowal" to simultaneously love and hate popular culture: "I know very well, but still..." (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 1989, p. 18)
- ²⁶ "Mise-en-scène, rather than the undercutting of the actions and words of the story level, provides a central point of orientation for the spectator. [...] Melodrama can be seen as having an ideological function in working certain contradictions through *to the surface* and representing them *in an aesthetic form*." ("Notes on Sirk and the Melodrama" and "Fassbinder and Sirk," in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989, p.41-43).
- ²⁷ On a purely film-historical note, a good example of a multi-generic director with an expert eye for both wide-angle/landscape framing, interiors, set design, and other techniques of melodramatically expressive mis-en-scène would be B-film "auteur" Jacques Tourneur, one of Puig's favorites and director of three different films central to *Beso de la mujer araña*. But Tourneur, something of a poor-man's Max Ophüls, also contributed many indisputably hard-boiled crime narratives to the *noir* "cycle": far more so than Curtiz, whose *Casablanca* and *Mildred Pierce* are often cast as peripheral, hybrid, or derivative works in *noir* historiography, Tourneur's *noirs* were popular, thrilling, and trashy, without compromising his baroque aesthetic. Comparing *I Walked with a Zombie!* (1943) to the Robert Mitchum vehicle, *Out of the Past* (1947), shows convincingly the "family resemblance" between the filmic flowering of the hard-boiled style and the stylistic prowess of a baroque-crafted high melodrama made in an analogous corner of the studio system.
- ²⁸ Suzanne Jill-Levine's biographical account, for one, seems to support this claim: "During those first months at film school [in 1956], Manuel had written a draft of his first script, "Ball Cancelled," a sort of *Wuthering Heights* set in an English country manor, with a modern twist. He wrote it in English, 'for Vivien Leigh' [Blanche DuBois in 1951, Anna Karenina in 1948, Cleopatra in 1945, Scarlet O'Hara in 1939]. 'I didn't know it then, but what

excited me in film was to copy, not to create.' ... Manuel transported his mother-son baggage into British gothic romance. The Hollywood country-manor setting of the story, Manuel's naïve idea of what he called the glamour touch, was also a typically Argentine fantasy. In *Boquitas*, middle-class vamp Mabel would aspire to live in such a manor, transplanted to a vast *estancia*, by marrying the veddy British Cecil. *Wuthering Heights*, a childhood favorite of Coco's [Manuel's childhood nickname], was the ultimate romantic melodrama, about love made impossible by social repression and class differences, yet invincible by death" (98). For the relationship between high-brow Romanticism and melodrama, see Brooks, in particular pp. 82-93.

²⁹ For instance,

"MP: Tengo una debilidad por los géneros menores, ¿no? No sé si es porque siempre han sido subestimados.

[Interviewer:] ¿Pero tú realmente crees en géneros mayores y menores?

MP: No, quise decir pretendidamente menores. La verdad es que a mí las cosas que más me gustan en cine son los dramas, los folletines, y los policiales. Trato de mantenerme fiel a mis gustos y hacer en literatura un tipo de cosas que es lo mío." (*Puig por Puig*, 87).

³⁰ From "La doble exposición de Manuel Puig," in *Eco* 192, p. 607-626.

³¹ "Dos escritores son originales después de Borges: Saer y Puig. Hoy, más que Borges, marcan el presente de la literatura. Manuel Puig inventó la representación después del realismo: una mimesis de la lengua, una literatura hecha con el gusto, el deseo, las pasiones en estado de sustancia popular colectiva a la que el cine, la radio, los géneros de la novela sentimental o el policial le dieron una primera forma... Destruyó la categoría de lo banal porque la empleó hasta el fondo." ("Entre varios peronismos", in *Ñ, Revista de Cultura*, no. 99, Buenos Aires, August 20, 2005; also available online: <http://edant.clarin.com/suplementos/cultura/2005/08/20/u-1036666.htm>)

³² "[It's] possible to think of the tradition opposition between modernity and mass culture not so much in terms of mutual exclusion so many as of secret interdependence. As Andreas Huyssen points out, already in *Madame Bovary*, one of the founding texts of modern literature, mass culture is not a foreign and radically opposed other, but a hidden subtext, a kind of repressed other, symbiotic and complementary." (tr. mine). She cites Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism*: Indiana: , 1987, p. 44.

³³ One wonders, perhaps, since we're already in the art world of 60's New York, whether this beauty-cult might not have less in common with Warhol's star-portraits than with Joseph Cornell's unsettling and asexual votives to nubile ballerinas and silent-cinema starlets.

³⁴ En las 'mujeres irreales' de Hollywood...pero sobre todo en las 'mujeres exageradas'... encuentra una ambivalencia que les permite corporizar momentáneamente un proceso de liberación encubierta, un borramiento enigmático de los límites de sus roles sexuales tradicionales, un sueño de poder y libertad. En esa ambigüedad, Hollywood no sólo es el consabido espacio de consolación, sino una posibilidad próxima al consumo masivo de introspección liberatoria" (134; these same sentences recur, little changed, in the 2000 book on page 105).

³⁵ I'll return to the ideological slant and bias of "auteur theory" in Chapter Three, looking at another work by Linda Williams to position Puig's interpretation of *Psycho* vis-à-vis what she calls the "modernist" phobia of pleasure in auteur theory.

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- ³⁶ *The Scarlet Empress*, a.k.a. *Katherine the Great*, is now one of von Sternberg's more obscure works, but for reasons perhaps obvious to Puig aficionados, one of his favorites.
- ³⁷ I'm referring to Laura Mulvey's spectrum from sadistic/maximally-narrative (Hitchcock) to masochistic/minimally- or anti-narrative (von Sternberg) in her canonical essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," reprinted in *Visual and other pleasures*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, pp. 57-68.
- ³⁸ See, for instance, Cozarinsky, Edgardo, *Borges en/y/sobre cine*, Madrid: Fundamentos, 1981 (Borges in/and/on film, NY: Lumen, 1988).
- ³⁹ "[Interviewer]: "Te parece que la represión en los países nuestros se maneja también a nivel del lenguaje y la separación de clases?"
MP: Sí, claro, por eso a mí en cierto modo la cursilería me resulta simpática. En la cursilería del lenguaje, cuando el lenguaje es muy recargado, veo que hay alguien ahí que está queriendo expresarse, ¿no? La cursilería argentina a mí me sirve" (*PxP*, 91).
- ⁴⁰ "Sexual repression is one of the key weapons of capitalism" (tr. mine).
- ⁴¹ "Nene: I believe that you have to bet everything you've got, even if it's only once in your life. I'll regret it for the rest of my life if I hadn't know how to bet it all. / Mabel: What do you mean, Nené? Marrying an invalid? / Nené: Why would you say that? Why do you bring that up when I'm talking about something else entirely?" (tr. mine).
- ⁴² "The characters in *Boquitas pintadas* are less ingenuous and simple than some critical readings suppose. They believe in the stereotypes of sublime passion, but only halfway, o better, until the point where they can sustain that belief without effecting their real interests, the ones that respond to other beliefs, following on other codes (that of self-interest, according to the morality of the middle class)" (tr. mine).
- ⁴³ I will not dwell on the generic specificity of the *novela rosa* (a somewhat naïve and flowery strain of the modern romance novel) or the women's *folletín* as it evolves in Argentina; for the interested reader, a good place to start would be Beatriz Sarlo's seminal, structuralistic study of the *Novela seminal*, a weekly newspaper insert targeted at women, in *Imperio de los sentimientos: narraciones de circulacion periodica en la Argentina, 1917-1927* (Buenos Aires: Catalogos, 1985).
- ⁴⁴ *El hogar*, 5 de Mayo, 1939 (*Cautivos*, 319).
- ⁴⁵ *Cautivos*, 262.
- ⁴⁶ M.P., "Un recuerdo de Borges," in *Revista espacios*, ed. J. Amícola, no 15 (1995), p. 25; cited in Jill-Levine, 74.
- ⁴⁷ The encyclopedic fan-site, complete with images of the covers of various of the reprints, seems to account for at least one 5-digit reprinting per decade since original publication of all the major Wheatley titles!
- ⁴⁸ I have thoroughgoing comparatist Sarah Ann Wells to thank for tipping me off to this corner of the American crime fiction scene.
- ⁴⁹ Although unbound first editions are worth a fortune now to antiquarians and collectors, countless later reprints (bound conventionally) still circulate.

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- ⁵⁰ I use the term in the readerly and sociological sense first coined by Gerard Genette in *Seuils* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987; London, NY: Cambridge UP, 1997): "More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold [...] a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that ... is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (1-8).
- ⁵¹ This "do it yourself" genre could be seen as merging with the classical detective subgenre to form the modern police procedural, which comes to be one of television's most lasting and popular formulas (responsible for a number of canonical television shows, including "Law & Order," the longest-running live-action show in television history to date). While we're tracing begettings, the police procedural also begat the recently very fecund "forensics" subgenre, which, like Wheatley, fundamentally consists of presenting the viewer with the simulacra of intelligible physical evidence for her to second-guess the detectives and/or scientists.
- ⁵² In both sources, the genesis of the projection is given as a corrective return to those characters from whom the first novel had "drifted"; the second novel, then, was originally envisioned as a damning portrait of those characters that ended up being marginal to the finished version of *Traición*.
- ⁵³ 'Tacky' or 'cliché'; the word, commonly used in day-to-day Spanish as a derogatory term for bad taste, recurs both within Puig's novels and in the criticism about them quite often, but is particularly fitting to describe the "boobery" of *Boquitas* and the "rhetoric" they live by with such disastrous results.
- ⁵⁴ "Novels change their readers' lives. This is the utopia of the genre [...] But the novels that change lives are popular novels, sentimental little things, semipornographic stories, bandit literature, stories for the masses" (tr. mine).
- ⁵⁵ Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1972, p.307.
- ⁵⁶ The imaginary order of the media is that of *fantasizing*, not that of the creative imagination... Fantasizing is characterized by gratuity, for its ingenuous mythology—admirable unmasked by Roland Barthes—and for the precise limit it imposes: that of the generic. I would almost go so far as to affirm that fantasizing is the symptom typical of the generic, a consequence of abstraction; it consists in a systematic occlusion of experience. The world proposed to us by television...is a system of alienation" (tr. mine).
- ⁵⁷ I refer less to a generational concern specific to the turbulent Argentine 60s and 70s than to a more international *Zeitgeist*. Perhaps something of that *Zeitgeist* is conjured by the anecdote that in 1968, the year Saer moved to France, there was something of a media craze around the almost entirely "plagiarized" intertextual novel, *Le devoir de violence*, by Malian postmodernist Yambo Ouologuem; the novel was translated quickly and published in Argentina in 1969, with reviews and advertisements appearing in the same issues of *Los Libros* mentioned above, two years before Ralph Manheim's English translation and three years before the scandalous plagiarism suit brought by Graham Greene. Of course, that generation wasn't the only one to go in for rewriting hijinx, only the first; in June 2011, María Kodama, heir to the Borges estate, sued young poet Pablo Katchadjian for "plagiarism" à propos of his 2009 text "El aleph engordado," which "engorged" a Borges short story by making it about 150% longer. See *La Nación* 4-16-2012, also available online: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1465418-que-nadie-se-atreva-a-tocar-a-mi-borges-maria-kodama-y-la-industria-del-juicio> .

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- ⁵⁸ “Saer, Walsh: Una discusión política en la literatura,” in *Nuevo texto crítico*, vol. VI, no.12-13, 1993-4, pp. 121-9 (Stanford University Press); reprinted in *Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh*, Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2000.
- ⁵⁹ I’ll return to Walsh in the next chapter as a central figure and forerunner for Saer and Piglia’s engagement with history via fiction.
- ⁶⁰ I pick this example exactly because there is such a long tradition of Latin American novels that fit this basic mold before and after Faulkner’s infusion of innovations
- ⁶¹ On fotonovelas and their distinct mode of affective manipulation, see Sergio Delgado's forthcoming work on the *Casos de Alarma*, a 60's Mexican *fotonovela* spin-off of the longer-running yellow-journalism mainstay, *Alarma*.
- ⁶² Here, just as in Puig's *Boquitas*, "getting what one deserves" functions as a leitmotiv and as a tautological rationalization of a violence ostensibly enforcing a social order, yet which is intended to ring more and more false and deluded with each repetition.
- ⁶³ Faulkner, on Joe Christmas: “He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made folks so mad... It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too” (331).
- ⁶⁴ He lost his eye, the student of Argentine history will note, in 1945, the year Perón momentarily lost power and left “his” *cabecitas negras* defenseless until he was restored to power following massive public protests (largely organized by the CGT) on October 17, which became an official Peronist holiday called “Loyalty Day.” Saer is here, as elsewhere, alluding to a long historiographical tradition of understanding Perón's regime as “paternalistic” psychologically and “patronalista” in political terms.
- ⁶⁵ “An Oedipal-criminal investigation” (cited in Premat, 52).
- ⁶⁶ Oedipus is referenced in *Palo y Hueso*, 1965, with *En la zona* the most critically discussed of Saer’s work pre-*Cicatrices*, but also in numerous critical and nonfiction works (*JJS por JJS*, *El río sin orillas*), and centrally in the “detective novel” *Pesquisa*, 1992, as well as in that last novel's follow-up short story in *Lugar*, 2000, where the Oedipus myth is half-jokingly integrated into the detective genre by two of Saer’s recurring characters Tomatis and Pichón Garay, as if to riff on the recurring gesture of doing so in the critical commentaries on *La pesquisa*'s throughout the 1990's.
- ⁶⁷ Polson quips, introducing in 2003 the Modern Library reprint of the Garnett translation, “If Dostoevsky’s stories often seem rather too melodramatic for plausibility, consider his actual life” (xvi).
- ⁶⁸ By an odd crosscultural coincidence, young Rainer Werner Fassbinder, in his early *noir* homages of 1968 and 1969, also name-drops Chandler and checks into a hotel under a false name, in this case Franz Biberkopf, protagonist of Alfred Döblin’s Ulysses-based *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a novel appropriating more than Joyce’s model text from social realism and crime fiction in its naturalistic depiction of urban blight and crime; the novel was, coincidentally, the subject of a glowing review by Borges in *El hogar*.
- ⁶⁹ Here, again, the complex issue of “loyalty” (and the backstory about the CGT and the Peronist “Loyalty Day” protests seems obliquely insinuated.
- ⁷⁰ “Brown...called no names, thought no names. It seemed to him now that they were all just shapes like chessmen—the negro, the sheriff, the money, all—unpredictable and without reason moved here and there by an Opponent who could read his moves before he made them and who created spontaneous rules which he

and not the Opponent, much follow. He was beyond even despair..." (414); "He seemed indefatigable, not flesh and blood, as if the Player who moved him for pawn likewise found him breath...It was as though he had been merely waiting for the Player to move him again... But the Player was not done yet..." (437-9).

⁷¹ "the murderer, like the artist, / said the agent / hides himself in the lack / of emotion / behind the cold / he throws the corpses / and so build a house / for truth". "Adiós, muñeca" was the Spanish international title for Edward Dmytryk's canonical 1944 adaptation of Chandler's *Long Goodbye*, a film she included in a 2012 course on film noir and Argentine literature that she taught at the Universidad Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires. The poem is included in her 2010 anthology, *Cantar la nada* (Buenos Aires: Bajo la luna).

⁷² Fornet cites the Costa interview in *Critica y ficcion*, 1990 ("[la crítica] es una de las formas modernas de la autobiografía. Alguien escribe su vida cuando se cree escribir sus lecturas", 17), but had he been trying to account more exhaustively for the trope, he could just as easily have gone back further to Piglia's introduction to his markedly "personal" 1968 anthology of autobiographical texts, "Yo," or forward to *El último lector*.

⁷³ *Cuentistas argentinos de hoy*, 1929. Buenos Aires: Claridad. The entire paragraph is also spliced into in the pseudo-apocryphal pastiche of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt," in *Nombre falso*, 117; reprinted in *Prisión perpetua*, 156.

⁷⁴ Which most readers wouldn't notice even if, as I have, they've recently read Musil's massive sputtering tome—I thank Miguel Pablo Soler for his detailed 2008 blog entry on the subject:
<http://acteondural.blogspot.com/2008/02/cuando-uno-busca-departamento-es.html>

⁷⁵ I'm thinking, in particular, of "La loca y el relato del crimen," *La ciudad ausente* (1992), *Blanco nocturno* (2009), and in Piglia's 1998 film project, *La somnábula* (where another modernist landmark is determinant, namely, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, 1927).

⁷⁶ Here I'm using the term in its pre-Susan Sontag colloquial sense as "exaggerated," reducing the performance of any social role or sign to absurdity by ridiculous overacting. For a concise history of the term, see Mark Booth's "Campe-toi! On the origins and definitions of camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

⁷⁷ "The poor thing was just pathetic, trying to pass for a *femme fatale* in that faded sweater and those clunky shoes."

⁷⁸ "Especially for its imperfections, which—and this one does learn with the years—are essential to the efficacy of a story."

⁷⁹ In *Camera Obscura* 11 (Fall 1983) and reprinted in *Femmes Fatales*, 1991.

⁸⁰ Jorge Volpi has called for a reading of Roberto Bolaño's style along similar lines, arguing from personal and biographical evidence that the latter's deep respect for and emulation of the former extended to a stylistics of "sloppiness" (See his article in *Bolaño salvaje*, ed. Edmundo Paz Soldán & Gustavo Faverón Patriau, Canet de Mar (Barcelona): Editorial Candaya, 2008.).

⁸¹ Or, to appropriate slang from contemporary feminist debates, a "manarchist" (i.e., a masculinist anarchist unaware or uncritical of his own gender privilege).

⁸² As we'll see in the next chapter, these debates even reached Cuba: when Casa de las Américas staged a panel discussion on contemporary Argentine literature at a literary festival in Havana in 1969, a surprising portion of the panel was devoted to the place of Arlt. Rodolfo Walsh was one of the panelists, and Piglia was in attendance (see Laforgue's anthology of Walsh criticism, *Textos de y sobre Walsh*, discussed at length in Chapter Two).

⁸³ (a) The impossibility of salvation and captivity: Arltian space.
(b) Woman as doppelgänger and as inverted mirror.
(c) The prostitute: a body that circulates between men. Like a story (in exchange for money).
(d) See also the work of Walter Benjamin: anarchism and artistic bohemia (in *Interrupted Discourses* 36). The brothel as space of literature." (tr. mine).

⁸⁴ For an impressive and textually convincing account of Arlt's self-conscious relationship to Poe, Chesterton, and other landmarks of the popular crime short-story, see Adsuar Fernandez' excellent article, "Roberto Arlt y el arte de ocupar la vidriera del café," in *Tonos: revista electrónica de estudios filológicos*, Nu. 13 (July 2007), Madrid: also available online at:
<http://www.um.es/tonosdigital/znum13/estudios/indicestudios.htm>

Chapter 2: The Legacy of Rodolfo Walsh and the Historical Horizons of Genre Fiction

Introduction: Crime fiction as crucible for facts, fictions, and author-functions

Rodolfo Walsh no existe. Es sólo un personaje de ficción. El mejor personaje de la literatura argentina. Apenas un detective de una novela policial para pobres. Que no va a morir nunca.

–Osvaldo Bayer¹

I ended my discussion of melodrama and sentimental manipulation of the reader with Ricardo Piglia's trademark hall of mirrors, in which the author puts himself in dialogue with a "Piglia" who is, like Bayer's Walsh, "only a fictional character" and puts Roberto Arlt in dialogue with a fictionalized "Arlt." The manifold and self-conscious ironies of the short story collection *Assumed Name* effectively made Piglia's name, and made it synonymous with a timely form of postmodern literature-as-criticism in which various author-fictions proper to distinct genres are dazzlingly superimposed. The collection was "timely" not just in aesthetic and intellectual-history terms, but also on a more literal, quotidian level: in 1975, *noms de guerre* and assumed names were a fixation of the press and a by-word for anxieties about State surveillance and repression. In his monograph on Piglia, the critic Jorge Fornet convincingly posits this juggling of author-functions as the core operation of Piglia's illustrious double-career as critic and author, framing the operation as a *sui generis* innovation. Yet as Piglia has emphatically made clear in his academic teaching², his public lectures, and countless interviews, these trademark manipulations of the effects and projections of authorship are a refinement and further elaboration of the literary project of Piglia's precedent and mentor, Rodolfo Walsh. The reception of Walsh's work during the 60's and 70's modeled for Piglia's generation a body of prose stylistics that trampled the boundary between fiction and non-fiction and a public persona that framed literature as crucial to the work of the author as activist. Bayer's aphorism concisely sums up the larger-than-life legacy of Walsh in these very terms, while emphasizing the *generic* specificity of Walsh's trajectory through novels written "for poor people." The carefully-manipulated persona of "Walsh" survives and thrives decades after Walsh's equally-public death³ because it superimposes the dime-novel crime fiction's omnipotent detective figure onto the paratextual projection and myth of the committed author and investigative journalist; this literary and extraliterary figure, more than the historical person on who established it, is what presides over the work of Puig, Piglia, and Saer, and their own elaborations of autofictional commentary and semi-fictional moods.

This problematic of history and truth took shape, like all the cultural effects of the Cold War, in ways drastically different in Latin American than in North America or Europe; for this reason, it is important to resist collapsing Walsh's impact on Argentine literary culture into the North American history of "faction" and investigative non-fiction (Capote, Wolfe, Mailer, Didion) or into the French tradition of creative nonfiction, often hybridized with critical autobiography or "autofiction" (Sartre, Dumas, Alexakis, Doubrovsky). Particularly given Walsh's familiarity with those histories (he personally translated both Mailer and Sartre, both of whom he admired as model public intellectuals), and with the radically different social role played by literature in North America and France, the differences will be more telling than the analogies in sketching out this period as a prehistory for the generation that followed. This generational "pre-history" is obviously central to Piglia (and to other, more popular authors that pay frequent and public homage to Walsh⁴), but I will also show at the end of this chapter that Walsh's legacy was a watershed that deeply impacted Puig and Saer as well, as adapters of crime fiction but also as public intellectuals struggling to make literature impact history and shift the terms of public discourses about power, violence, and truth.

In sketching out how Walsh changed the terms of literature for the generation that followed him, I'd like to revisit the cliché-ridden crossroads of crime fiction, journalistic fiction, and testimonial fiction, paying particular attention to how the relations between these genres have changed against different historical horizons of censorship, reconciliation, and memory. In my Introduction and in Chapter 1, I focused on crime fiction in the context of melodrama's evolving role in Argentine literature and of other changes in the terms of literature, of historical representation, and of the critical position of the writer-as-public-intellectual. This chapter will similarly position crime fiction at the heart of debates about historical truth, ideological truth, and the capacity for literature to exercise a kind of historical agency. Yet insofar as this project seeks to dissect crime fiction into its constituent parts and treat separately its boundaries with other genres and modes, this chapter will also treat crime fiction's permeable boundary with crime journalism, creative non-fiction, and *reportage*, genres which were home, in this period, to various forms of earnest literary interventionism that evolved in the ideological minefield of the Cold War and in a period of rapid shifts in how "news" was delivered, processed, mediated, and interpreted.

To this end, pressure will be applied on two key concepts throughout this chapter: realism and "active reading". In the case of realism, this means revisiting a formal precept hastily stated in the prior chapter but little substantiated: the evolution of crime genres in the 19th and 20th centuries overlays a veneer of realism onto what is fundamentally a melodramatic "structure" and reading experience. The distinction between realism proper and a realist veneer is crucial for how crime fiction relates to journalism and how it assumed the representational codes native to it: realism makes a pretext of objectivity and presumes a moral, allegorical, or otherwise interpretive readership, while a narrative without these presumptions could still borrow realism's means, or to borrow the Barthesian vocabulary of Walsh's generation, its "effects". For Borges, crime fiction was at its best when it could forego both the propriety of mainstream realism and the manipulations of melodrama in favor of

unadulterated logical and mythical free-play; yet by the 1960's, most contemporary crime fiction was far more topical, infused not only with concessions to middle-brow realist tastes and Cold War euphemisms, but often with the sensational style and urgency of fictionalized true-crime or with the emphatic referentiality of journalistic writing for television and radio.

In the case of “active reading,” this relation between crime fiction and crime journalism will also be central, in that I will try to show that journalistic codes of representation and conceptions of different reading publics are essential to the subtle ideological operations by which, in this period, “active” and “deductive” readership is construed to be inherently “critical” in the political sense. This perhaps nebulous assertion of the influence of journalism has far less to do with abstract formal properties or ideologies than with concrete questions of readership, distribution, and class: when literature assumes the rhetorical poses and readerly address of journalism, it inherits a social apparatus by which narrative traditions have historically been tailored to classed readerships. Anarchist historian Osvaldo Bayer's epigraph specifies a detail that is crucial in this regard: Walsh, an educated and elite writer, lives on as a specific kind of fictional character *only possible* in “books for poor people,” to which his professional and literary life was largely devoted before his political activism expropriated those literary investments. This largely unspoken distinction between the readership of middle-class literature and “books for poor people” underwrites much of the theory behind committed literature, *testimonio*, and Marxian conceptions of literature. Walsh's exceptional bluntness in discussing this dimension of his project makes his legacy useful in elucidating the more euphemistic role social class played in cultural debates in later periods of Latin American literary history.

To organize these questions, I'll sketch out a thumbnail biography, a theory of genre, and do close-readings of a few reflexive moments in the work of Rodolfo Walsh before turning to the most centrally “Walshian” texts by Piglia, Puig, and Saer. The theory uniting my analysis is that these reflexive works by all four authors, particularly the later works, don't just demand of their reader an active reading but also re-read *themselves* as representations of history and as projections of an authorial figure. This self-consciousness, made so explicit in Piglia's conversations with “Piglia”, Arlt, and “Arlt,” is at work more subtly in all the works I'll study in this chapter as an understudied internal complement to “active reading”. First, I'll show its elaboration within Rodolfo's Walsh's decisive literary project, looking primarily at his non-fiction works that border most on the true-crime genre, *Operación masacre* and *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*, but also at his posthumous diaries and shorter works like “Footnotes,” to tease out a nuanced theory of genres and readerships. Then, I'll try to bring this theory of genres to bear on readings of Piglia's *Plata quemada* (1998) and its Walshian playfulness with respect to the trope of the novelist (and the critic) as detective. I'll then turn to Puig's affective and interpretive pyrotechnics in *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) as a response to his generation's sometimes naïve (and sometimes overtly misogynistic, as in the case of *Rayuela*) valorization of active reading; I'll also consider Puig's little-studied late novel, *Maldición eterna a quién lea estas páginas* (1980), as a bitter revision of this alternate mode of “active reading.” Finally, I'll end by considering the meticulously *oral* operation by which Saer's *Glosa* (1985) dredges

memory for evidence. In ways that are simultaneously conflicted and polemic, Saer shorts the circuits connecting the literary genre of *testimonio* with the journalistic genre of the exposé and makes the literary concept of truth collide with the legal and historical one.

It is beyond the scope of this project to offer as coherent an account of Rodolfo Walsh's oeuvre on its own terms or its place in the Argentine tradition as I strive to offer for the three other authors treated here. For my purposes, I would instead like to offer a more focused reading of Walsh's "theory of genre," by which I mean his influential thought on the high and low genres (primarily the veins of crime fiction and experimental/high-modernist narrative), journalism's potential for political agency, the prism of class consciousness, and political ethics, four topics he rarely treated in isolation from one another. The rhetorical tropes of "truth" and "stupidity" in his discussions of these topics are the moral poles governing the entire field of literary and journalistic production: the invectives against journalistic laziness or deception are the critical flipside to the discipline and rigor he brought to everything he published in any genre or mode. Within a given generic framework (detective fiction, Faulknerian autobiography, even the most banal *faits-divers* journalism), Walsh always fine-tuned the text's challenge to its reader, its multivalent interpellations and knowing winks, training, challenging, and rewarding the active reader. For Walsh, the active reader of literature was also the active reader of contemporary history, and with enough training would necessarily become a critical, and even a *radical*, reader. Thus, Walsh's role as a major adaptor and theorist of imported crime genres is inextricable from his exploration of all the modalities of active readership available to his generation, from his acute awareness of the difference between national and international publics, and between the ideologies of reading held by different readerships. I don't think any of these problematics can be effectively bracketed from his exemplary exercise of the role of writer as public intellectual⁵.

My thesis, however, is not that we should read the work of Piglia, Puig, and Saer as responding directly to Walsh's, even if the terms of my analysis are largely rooted in Piglia's direct responses to Walsh. My thesis is that Walsh's interventions and their reception so refigured the political life and representational functions of Argentine literature that engaging Walsh is essential to framing and elucidating (particularly for the non-Argentine reader) the horizons of possibility and interpretation opened up for these later authors. Inseparable from this is how Walsh radically changed the Argentine conception of the author-as-public-intellectual, a sea-change felt both globally and locally in the 1960's. Walsh's complex and deliberate manipulations of the author-figure in his works and his public persona outside of them constitute a legacy at least as important as his experiments in generic alchemy. That Bayer, a historian, no less, could commemorate Walsh as a fictional cliché and, in the same gesture, incorporate him into a Leftist canon of contestatory and historically significant writers, shows not only Walsh's lasting influence, but the complexity of his self-representations, and the stumbling block this complexity can present for literary history.

Walsh's Theory and Practice of Literature: Literary Genre and Historical Truth

En cuanto a la manera de informar—o deformat—de las agencias y los medios en general, solo se me ocurre decir que su consecuencia es que la gente ya no cree nada. Ni los periodistas ni los lectores. Salvo en los resultados de fútbol, se ha creado una forma de leer al revés.

—Walsh, interviewed in *Primera plana*, No. 485/10, 3/16/1972⁶

A little introduction is in order for those that have never heard of Walsh, which includes many Latin Americanists, given that excepting Paco Ignacio Taibo II and his colleagues at the annual *Semana Negra* festival in Gijón, little critical attention is given to Walsh outside the Southern Cone and its specialists. Walsh is remembered primarily as a bridge figure between various genres of literature and journalism, but also as a paragon (or martyr, or cautionary tale) of committed journalism, depending on one's interpretation of his mercurial politics, which ran the gamut, over the course of his life, from anti-imperialist right-wing Nationalism to an Argentine form of apolitical rejection to anti-Peronism to Peronist sympathies to pro-Castro Internationalism to revolutionary nationalism. This range of allegiances and enemies makes Walsh's career as a writer difficult to organize biographically or even chronologically without a kind of politicized periodization, a critical tradition kicked off by Walsh's own teleological (and auto-critical) accounts during his most radical revolutionary phase in the 1970's. These conflicted invectives against anti-bourgeois complacency and the individualism and inefficacy of intellectual pursuits renounced all his prior work from the perspective of revolutionary politics' most nihilistic margins; needless to say, a nuanced and synthetic account of Walsh's writing cannot read his life's work through that retrospective lens.

There are two criteria by which critics have synthesized Walsh's work across different historical and political periods. On the one hand, many critics inherit Walsh's classical rhetoric of "truth" trumping fact and style; with David Viñas and Ricardo Piglia having both pursued this tack in influential essays⁷, this is the dominant mode in Walsh studies. Other critics more invested in an essentially formalist case for Walsh's influence on later literature (most notably Roberto Ferro) synthesize instead Walsh's work in light of his readerly operations of manipulation and indirection, his interpellation of different readerships, and his adaptation of their various modes of reading. While the first approach might be more useful as an argument for Walsh's importance or value (making a case for Walsh's aesthetic "integrity" to readers put off by his radical politics), the latter methodology will be more useful for our more generically-focused and genealogical approach. In this light, Walsh's influence within literature can mostly be traced to his pioneering combinations of different modes of reading (actively, skeptically, critically, "backwards"), each specific to a given generic tradition and its formal structures.

Of course, bracketing Walsh's politics to analyze his aesthetics in isolation would be as inappropriate as making them determinant: after all, Walsh was both a key player in, and later a victim of, the increasingly entrenched politicization of the literary field which I find inextricable from the fate of the crime genres in Argentina. But I would warn against the

biographical excess that sometimes reduces Walsh's generic experiments to self-evident conveniences or necessities to which he was led by the ideological sea changes in his political biography. Instead, Walsh's literary output needs to be understood as prototypes produced by a stylistic laboratory with its own aesthetic prerogatives, which Walsh strained to make coextensive with his shifting ideologies of the literary sphere. There is an important vein running through Walsh scholarship (I refer primarily to articles by Victor Pesce, Jorge Lafforgue, Ángel Rama, Eduardo Romano and Pablo Alabarces⁸), that provides just this kind of interpretive framework. Basing their work primarily on posthumous apocrypha and testimonial reconstructions I'll mention below, they detail a consistent literary apparatus evolving alongside his political thought, a creative engine that, in recombination with different political moments and commitments, yielded divergent formal experiments and progressively more ideologically-loaded challenges to his reader.

To simplify my quick treatment of Walsh, I will sketch out three periods in Walsh's writing life, corresponding loosely to the explicitly political periodizations that structure autobiographical and critical accounts. The first period, which I would follow Eduardo Romano in characterizing as a literary "initiation," saw Walsh supporting himself through the late 1940's and early 1950's with a combination of journalistic writing and translations from the English and French, running the gamut from crime-pulp to self-instruction manuals to "weird tales" and more literary short works by Ambrose Bierce, Poe, London, H. G. Wells, Erskine Caldwell, and Guy de Maupassant. The crime pulp he translated in this period also ran the entire gamut discussed in the previous chapter, with the lion's share gravitating to the most melodramatic end of the spectrum—eight lurid noir novels by Cornell Woolrich first, then later some George Simenon—and surprisingly fewer book-length pot-boilers in the genteel detective tradition Walsh himself was then devoted to: in this line, he translated only a work or two each by Victor Canning, Dickson Carr, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Ellery Queen. Largely unstudied and undertheorized as a merely instrumental or "vocational" initiation⁹, this vast corpus of translations is crucial both for the stylistic and conceptual raw material it provided and as an index of his reading interests and his evolving conception of the author. Approaching the period from many different points of view and with many different methods of analysis, Romano, Rama, Pesce, and Arrosogaray¹⁰ all agree that Borges and his circle reigned over this period as hero and mentor. From Walsh's first honorable mention in a 1950 crime-short-story contest (Borges and Bioy Casares were two of the three judges) to the many prizes awarded in 1953 to Walsh's first book, an anthology of three virtuoso works in the same Borgesian/Bioy line, it could be argued that Walsh rose suddenly to literary prominence, less on the merits of his contribution to middle-class magazines like *Leoplan* and *Lea y Vea* than as a specialist in the two genres most prized by Borges' "Sur" circle, the definitive cultural establishment of the 1940's and 1950's. Walsh's ludic and logical pyrotechnics in crime fiction, and, to a lesser degree, in the as-yet loosely-defined corpus of "fantastical literature," put him at a stature comparable to young Julio Cortázar's, whose first publications (short stories in 1948, the anthology *Bestiario* in 1951) can also be credited in large part to the endorsement of Borges and his circle.

The second period, of most interest to us here, bridges the “apolitical” and Borgesian initiation and the third, fiercely political (and bitterly anti-Borgesian) period. Some readers date this “mature” period to the fall of Perón at the hands of the “Liberating Revolution” of the 16th of September, 1955, or to the night four months later, in which Walsh’s iconic chess game (and the apolitical, staid, and intellectual café life it metonymically represents) was interrupted by the sensational news that a civilian had miraculously survived his own paramilitary assassination. This political assassination and its cover-up was the subject of Walsh’s most famous investigation, *Operación masacre*, published piecemeal over 1957 and in book form a year after the assassination itself; hearing of the event is marked within the book and by Walsh’s own accounts outside of it as the mythic watershed of his life, after which an “apolitical” or innocent pre-history was definitively (and nostalgically) foreclosed. I hesitate to take this self-mythification as fact, particularly given the genetic scholarship on that text done by Roberto Ferro¹¹, to which I’ll refer in more detail below. Instead, I would date the definitive shift even further forward into 1957 as a result of the crucially self-conscious process of *re-editing* these episodic journalistic dispatches into the first edition of Walsh’s true-crime novel, fortifying the urgent, direct, and pragmatic enunciatory position as a journalist by reframing it in the complex and reflexive rhetoric of an autofictional denunciation.

I would date the end of that transitional second period to the editing of the *third* edition of *Operación* in 1969 (on the heels of *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*, a radically contestatory, almost confrontational novel in the same vein). The final period following this shift is marked by a dramatic “abandonment” of literature in lieu of full-time journalism and political activism. (The term is Walsh’s own: it appears again and again in interviews, private correspondence, and private diaries from the period, usually as a kind of self-reproach mixed with varying amounts of anti-bourgeois rhetoric). After *Rosendo*, Walsh’s literary output is reduced to a trickle and largely subsumed by more properly journalistic work (published, sometimes anonymously, in Left-leaning magazines and journals¹²), translations and critical works (i.e., Sartre and de Beauvoir, theoretical and historical works on Marxism), and of course political activism that, after 1973, meant seclusion and militancy with the Montoneros. I’ll return to this period only after having established a working analysis of Walsh’s theory of genre in quarantine from this retrospective refiguration of it.

This periodization might seem too ideologically tidy (or worse, deterministic) without adding purely literary events as additional landmarks: in 1957, before the finishing first edition of *Operación*, Walsh closed the Hernández “cycle” of short stories, and December of that same year he opened a new “cycle”, centered on a more cynical, humanized, jaded detective, Laurenzi, incorporating many formal devices of the “hard-boiled” tradition described in the previous chapter and qualified as outright taboo in the various “rulebooks” put forward by Borges¹³. I mention this generic turning point because unlike many authors that work in multiple subgenres and veins, Walsh didn’t overlap his cycles: instead, Hernández (a likeable, if somewhat bland, paragon of Borgesian ratiocination) is retired suddenly and replaced by a detective from a new subgenre marked by cynical social critique and by a different set of historical “realism” effects. Laurenzi is born the day Walsh finishes the first novelized edition of

Operación masacre, which is to say, he was neither necessary nor even possible until Walsh developed his mature style and his public persona. We might even speculate that Walsh experienced a kind of crisis of enunciation in attempting to fictionalize himself as Hernández, and after producing a more hard-boiled true-crime novel, replaced Hernández with a hard-boiled alter-ego. Walsh's "mature work," then, follows not only from a fratricidal rejection of Borges' narrow definition of crime fiction, but also from the search beyond that definition for a new modes of engaging wider, more popular readerships¹⁴. One representative example should suffice to demonstrate the shift: in November of 1956 (that is, only weeks after finishing the first edition of *Operación*), Walsh published the first Laurenzi story, which begins:

El país es grande –dijo el comisario Laurenzi—. Usted ve campos cultivados, desiertos, ciudades, fábricas, gente. Pero el corazón secreto de la gente, usted no lo comprende nunca. Y eso es asombroso, porque soy un policía. Nadie está en mejor posición para ver los extremos de la miseria y la locura. Lo que pasa es que uno es también un ser humano. Pasado un tiempo nos cansamos, dejamos que las cosas resbalen sobre nosotros. Siempre las mismas elipses concéntricas, las mismas pasiones, los mismos vicios. Con tres o cuatro palabras explicamos todo: un crimen, una violación o un suicidio. Veá, queremos que nos dejen tranquilos.

¡Pobre de usted si me trae un problema que no se pueda resolver en términos sencillos: dinero, odio, miedo! Yo no puedo tolerar, por ejemplo, que usted me salga matando a alguien sin un motivo razonable y concreto. (reprinted in *Tahures*, 89)¹⁵

There is another noteworthy aspect to this purely fictional "event": this story is signed not by Rodolfo Walsh, but by Daniel Hernández, recasting the Sherlock/Dupin figure at the center of the prior stories as a mere Watson/narrator, and putting the real interest and prowess of hard-boiled protagonism somehow beyond Hernández' all-too-logical reach. Although "Hernández" is progressively censured and his tangible presence elided over the course of this second period, it would nevertheless be an exaggeration to say that he disappears from the works. Aside from being the narrator of the Laurenzi stories (in many cases a completely unmarked and inobtrusive narrator), his name is still used as a pseudonym for signing not only the Laurenzi stories but many works of investigate journalism and *reportage*.

But there is another, more subtle way in which "Hernández" quietly survives the retirement of his cycle of Borgesian detective stories, kept on as a kind of foil in the successive re-editions of *Operación*, the book that put him into retirement. Indeed, with each successive edition, the narrator grows less "Hernández" and more "Laurenzi": the aristocratic and literary bravado Walsh had originally intended for the series of articles gave way increasingly to a kind of plain-spoken reticence on the part of the increasingly un-literary narrator. Hernández' tone and register is kept on in a few places, but largely as irony or counterpoint as the thrust of the mature work increasingly performs a kind of "street smarts" and an almost folkloric representation of proletarian language and thought. The process of re-editing the work for the second edition (1964), and again for the third (1969) and fourth (1972), marks three progressive

and substantial reductions of the novel's literary register: take, for instance, the first editions famous epigraph, quoted in the original English, from Eliot's 1935 verse drama, "Murder in the cathedral," which denounced the 1170 execution of Archbishop Beckett: "A reign of blood has blinded my eyes [...] How can I ever return, to the soft quiet seasons?"¹⁶ From the second edition on, this was replaced by a quote from courtroom testimony which the reader will recognize later in the work. This framing conceit, of the watershed moment that interpolates its messenger and forces him into the role of witness and whistleblower, hardly changes from one edition to the other; on the contrary, my entire periodized thumbnail biography (and most others) are based entirely on Walsh's avowal that the watershed was sincere and autobiographical. What changes starting from the second edition is the generic framework within which Walsh inscribes his enunciatory position. Walsh isn't just moving from genteel detective to hard-boiled detective, but from timelessness and transhistorical interlocutors to timely and local ones, from classical balance to the effect of urgency and earnestness. The language grows more quotidian and authentically proletarian as the free indirect discourse and narratorial interjections characteristic of the Hernández stories are phased out. Patricio Pron has recently called this first edition a "hinge-text" (*texto-bisagra*), in the sense that once it was written, it opened up a new direction in which it would progressively move in re-editions, refinements only possible after the quantum shift of generic framework and the new and *sui generis* readership of this curious text¹⁷.

Pron's concept of new terrain opened up by the novel's fusion of real-life journalist and dime-novel detective returns us to Osvaldo Bayer's poetic claim (in the epigraph of this chapter) that Walsh lives on in his fictionalized and stylized self-portrait, in a way only possible in "novelas para pobres." Clearly, the autobiographical referent of the novel's first-person narration (originally in the singular, later in the plural) is markedly different from the first-person of his journals, or his interviews, and Bayer is right to claim the former replaces the latter more with each passing year. The actual, historical Rodolfo Walsh bears as little relation to this sleuthing, deducing, chart-making "Rodolfo Walsh" that narrates *Operación* as he does to "Daniel Hernández," fictional detective, or to "Daniel Hernández," pseudonymic investigative reporter thumbing his nose at ever-more-eager censors and libel lawyers from 1955 on. In Walsh's first book edition of *Operación*, he refines the rhetorical subtlety of the expositions and jeremiads and signs them Daniel Hernández, while fashioning himself an enunciatory position as an expert logician¹⁸ polishing his previous work with a methodical and contemplative retrospect. More emphatically, however, he borrows, particularly in that first edition, many of the tropes, tics, and descriptions of the fictional Daniel Hernández, genteel and bookish detective named after the Old Testament's proto-sleuth¹⁹. The result of this appropriation is a nonfiction page-turner modeled on the police- and the courtroom- procedural, starring a dumb-struck, earnest "Rodolfo Walsh" rendered as sympathetic as a matinee idol.

My interpretation of this strategy is largely indebted to a 1983 article by influential literary critic Angel Rama, which I think nuances quite effectively the historical legacies, cultural channels and political valences structuring this appropriation²⁰. Rama takes as his point of departure David Viñas' claim that the mature Walsh "transcends" the legacy of Borges,

reframing this event as a fratricidal rebellion, striking out at the hand that had fed him. For Rama, Walsh's revisions of the social role and literary lineage of the detective form were central causes and effects of that rebellion against Borges: Walsh redrew the family tree of crime fiction to emphasize its social and critical potential, which he sometimes refers to as the inherent "fate" or natural end of the crime tradition. Rama sketches out this alternate lineage, basing himself squarely on Antonio Gramsci's passing remarks on the French and British popular crime traditions in the prison notebooks. Gramsci crucially sees the rise of these melodramatic and sensational cultural forms out of the fertile soil of folletín print culture as a crucial event marking the dawn of Continental mass culture. For Gramsci, these crime serials are important mostly as "translations" of the *causes célèbres* of the day into the language of the mob, but also into its political and moral worldview, in key cases giving voice to working-class resentments and fantasies otherwise repressed in the contemporary cultural mainstream and lost to history.

For Rama, the Borgesian "valorization" of a certain subset of the crime genres isolated a few esoteric and apolitical outgrowths from their populist and overtly political roots. (Caillois' winking "concern" that at any point the cerebral machinations of the most philosophical detectives could "lapse" into the tawdry melodramas from which they strive to leave behind, analyzed at length in the last chapter, finds here a kind of Marxist prehistory in an earlier stage of the antagonism between low-brow and middle-brow print cultures). Rama also argues that Walsh was already headed towards a definitive break with the cultural establishment of Borges' generation when he published his Borges-prized collection, *Variaciones en rojo* (1953), not in the respectable paperback series (largely edited by Borges and his circle), but in the "newsstand press"²¹: "Escritos can sabiduría y dentro de la órbita lingüística borgiana, no se ofrecen al público culto sino al público *indiferenciado* que lee policiales *sin reparar en quién los firma*" (80, emphasis mine)²².

In Rama's account, the vernacular and political valences of the crime genres were always centrally important to Walsh, but the fall of Perón drove a further wedge between Walsh and a politically heterogeneous cultural scene that had been contingently united by their collective marginalization under Perón; after the dust settled and lines were redrawn, this interpretation goes, Walsh increasingly grappled with the North American tradition of:

el periodista-denunciante, el que sólo está comprometido con la verdad, el que descubre las tramoyas secretas y las pone a la luz de la palabra escrita, el guardián de la honestidad, el servidor incorruptible de la justicia, en fin, ese último descendiente del liberalismo norteamericano, más mítico que real, donde han persistido algunos valores centrales de la cultura norteamericana del pasado, aunque hoy sepamos que en esa imagen subyace un esfuerzo ideologizante cumplido por el grupo periodístico en lucha con las imposiciones del sistema. Ese periodista ideal viene de los filmes de la década progresista del "New Deal", que a su vez proceden de un modelo literario fijado por Sherwood Anderson en los cuentos "Ohio" (81)²³.

Rama's genealogy of the American-style jeremiad leaves something to be desired: firstly, it's light on plausible landmarks in the tradition being referred to, which is surprising given how many of those landmarks Walsh had translated (to wit, Ambrose Bierce, Mark Twain, and Erskine Caldwell). Secondly, Walsh had translated and commented on all three of these writers long before writing *Operación masacre*, before the events it narrated, and before any redrawing of allegiances post-Perón; the periodization seems to take at face value Walsh's own accounts of a night-and-day politicization around the events of the book. And there's a third detail at odds with Rama's swift gloss: some of these writings on Bierce and Caldwell were signed with a pen-name: Daniel Hernández.

Another way to problematize and enrich our understanding of this "denunciatory" stance taken by Walsh's works is to compare the later editions of *Operación* to the more politically and formally radical true-crime exposé *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1969). A quick comparison of what the two works share and what they don't will flesh out how I'm using the term "radical". As Rama writes of the three book-length investigations, "Los diversos tramos diseñan los niveles de los tres libros: un asunto policial, un trasfondo político-social oscuro, ambos objeto de una investigación que pasa por la prensa y por los tribunales de Justicia, y por último—o primero—una opción de lector que predetermina los instrumentos, el lenguaje, las formas literarias empleadas" (83)²⁴. Whereas the 1953 prologue to *Variaciones en rojo* bluntly challenges its reader by listing, for each story, the page by which she should be able to read through the narrative and decipher the enigma behind them, "beating" Hernández to the awaited explication, the prologue to *Rosendo* challenges the reader to a more analytically profound competition: to read "backwards" from the particular crime to the *general* enigma of its possibility and its historical preconditions, to understand the naturalization of violent corruption to the point of cliché (and thus, of formulaic fiction). "Si alguien quiere leer este libro como una simple novela policial, es cosa suya" (9)²⁵: the challenge is to see beyond the particular and into the general, what Rama calls the "trasfondo político-social oscuro," which is to say, the back-room deals that "reformist" hard-boiled fiction marks as the exception responsible for corruption, and that the more radical²⁶ texts and authors in the tradition mark as the norm.

Rama's jump from classing the novels as "optimistic" and "pessimistic" to classing them as "reformist" and "revolutionary" might seem like a deterministic application of Marxist theory on Rama's part, but it's actually a tradition within crime fiction theory entirely germane to Walsh's own thinking. The politicization of crime fiction stems from its foundational logic of *exception*: where this exception is presented optimistically, as in *Operación*, there is some hope that the criminals (in this case dangerous henchmen of the State) have cut a corner for which they could be punished. The same exception to the rule of Law can be presented pessimistically, however, as it is in *Rosendo*, where the reader is encouraged to see crime as a routine operation of the impudently corrupt social order. Indeed, the 1969 version of the epilogue to *Operación* shows how *Rosendo* recasts the prior work as almost naïve, even as it subtly weaves the two books (and a third exposé, which he would re-edit as a book four years later) into a self-conscious trilogy of increasingly systematic denunciation: "Era inútil en 1957

pedir justicia para las víctimas..., como resultó inútil en 1958...por el asesinato de Satanowsky, como es inútil en 1968 reclamar...a los asesinos de Blajaquis y Zalazar, amparados por el gobierno. Dentro del sistema, no hay justicia” (*OM*, 223-4)²⁷.

This prologue to the third edition of *Operación* also challenges its reader as directly as prior prologues had, but inflects this challenge through the autobiographical motif of the “watershed” rather than stating it directly. The lapsarian narrative of the interrupted chess game is subject, now, to stagey autocritique of politicization fatigue, delivered crucially in the present tense: “¿Puedo volver al ajedrez? / Puedo. Al ajedrez y a la literatura fantástica que leo, a los cuentos policiales que escribo, a la novela ‘seria’ que planeo para dentro de algunos años, y a otras cosas que hago para ganarme la vida y que llamo periodismo, aunque no es periodismo.”²⁸ From there, the suppressed epigraph from Eliot returns, creolized and banal, as the next sentence details the author’s collision with brutal reality: “A reign of blood has blinded my eyes [...] How can I ever return, to the soft quiet seasons” gives way to “La violencia me ha salpicado las paredes, en las ventanas hay agujeros de balas, he visto...”²⁹. Walsh’s explanation of the work’s genesis is tinged with a rueful historical auto-critique: the author regrets his optimism in trying to realize in the South American novel what Rama calls the “liberalist” North American fantasy of correctable exceptions and reformable institutions.

“Es que uno llega a creer en las novelas policiales que ha leído o escrito, y piensa que una historia así, con un muerto que habla, se le van a pelear en las redacciones, piensa que está corriendo una carrera contra el tiempo, que en cualquier momento un diario grande va a mandar una docena de reporteros y fotógrafos como en las películas. En cambio se encuentra con un multitudinario esquivar de bulto” (20-21, *emph. mine*)³⁰.

The third period in Walsh’s work is defined for me by exactly this rejection of the second period’s fantasy of reconciling Hernández and Laurenzi, of reconciling denunciation and artistry, journalism and literature; now, Hernández is definitively censured, devoid of any efficacy beyond the bourgeois Imaginary that distilled him from the crime genre tradition, his insights founded on false analogies and imported ideas that only work in a First World democracy, like the detective novel itself.

Another crucial change in the 1969 edition of *Operación* is the elision of an eventless set-scene, something like a three-page establishing shot, overtly modeled on the opening of Sarmiento’s *Facundo*³¹. But, as we saw above with Eliot’s first elided, then rewritten, epigraph, the mythopoetic geography of the *Facundo* returns from its suppression: the site of the shooting is studied less through the aggrandizing lens of a disembodied, lyrical narrator than through the frame of reference of a reader of newsstand pulps, of “weird” fiction and supernatural potboilers. In the same edition, only a few pages away from the elided interlude, a footnote is rewritten to heighten the already uncanny effect of don Horacio’s “mirage”: standing in a very precise position at the site of the crime, “Walsh” realizes that the trees do in fact appear to be, as don Horacio described them, one tree, and realizing in the same moment that he has not only corroborated don Horacio’s improbable description of the site but done so standing on the exact spot where he was shot. The vertigo of this uncanny reality-effect is

indexed, paradoxically, by an effect of irreality and artifice: “Y de pronto, tras buscarlo ambos un buen rato, lo vi. Era fascinante, algo digno de un cuento de Chesterton” (82)³². This inversion, offsetting and yet reinforcing the somber moment of realization, and condensing the magic and evocation of the elided Sarmiento homage, binds the believable to the fantastic, the supernatural to the banal, bringing us full circle to the first sentence of the prologue to *Variaciones*: “Sé que es un error—tal vez una injusticia—sacar a Daniel Hernández del sólido mundo de la realidad para reducirlo a personaje de ficción” (6)³³.

The 1969 prologue offers a different relation of reality to language, one that, it could be argued, applies less to any edition of *Operación* than to *Rosendo*, which in its emphatic orality and deliberate code-switching functions as something of an ethnography³⁴ of the proletarian social world imperiled by a corrupted syndical apparatus. This new relationship of reality to language, or perhaps, of language to class, is condensed in the noun phrase “palabra-ganzúa” (‘lockpick-word’, a neologism for passphrase): “Nos dicen que no está, pero está, y hay que ir venciendo las barreras protectoras [...] Se sale del sol de la calle a la sombra del porche, se pide un vaso de agua y se está adentro, en la oscuridad, se pronuncian palabras-ganzúa...” (23)³⁵. The journalistic raw material, and thus the deeper truth, are accessible only by immersion in a different (read: working-class) social world, a door barred by a specificity of language, a key not produced or said but pronounced. This kind of performative speech act opens the metaphorical door of the prologue but also returns throughout the novel in the form of indirect discourse peppered with terminology and concepts to authenticate its testimony. An interesting example can be found later in the same chapter as the Chesterton footnote, echoing its fabulous hyperbole with a second set even more definitively in a proletarian reference: when Giunta miraculously boards a bus and buys a ticket, “parece fábula, le dieron un boleto capicúa...,” a 1/100 chance and a fortuitous omen in the superstitions of that class who collected “capicúas,” or tickets with palindromic numbers. Not just the syntax but also the term *capicúa* itself, which enters the Southern Cone dialect from Catalán, evokes an immigrant milieu and its urban *lunfardo* register that was historically central to the reality-effects of Argentina’s populist literary tradition³⁶.

This progressively more central role of an almost anthropological orality in capturing and exploring the worldview of a working-class subject has been compared to the contemporary Cuban origins of the “*testimonio*” genre (launched in 1966 with *Biografía de un cimarrón*, written by an ethnographer, Miguel Barnet, who’d studied under Fernando Ortiz). There is obvious validity to the comparison³⁷, but it could also be argued that other theoretical debates inform the move towards orality as well: something of Lúkcacs’ Hegelian formulation of the novel as ultimate expression of bourgeois consciousness³⁸ seems to bear heavily on his thought across the mature second and “abandoning” third periods, such as when he says in a 1969 interview,

Una novela sería algo así como una representación de los hechos, y yo prefiero su simple presentación...[los eventos de *Rosendo*] tienen más valor literario cuando son presentados periodísticamente que cuando se los traduce a esa segunda instancia que es *el sistema de la novela*. [...] Lo que está en crisis—al menos en lo que a mí atañe—es *el concepto mismo* de la

novela. Es decir, toda la novela, lo que podríamos llamar las *relaciones falsas del género como tal* (EH, 142-3, emph. mine).³⁹

Many have read pronouncements like these (and the progressively more categorical ones from the following decade) as constituting a rejection of the literary *tout court*, a stance Walsh takes throughout the third period in a number of self-effacing interviews and the diaries reprinted in *Ese hombre* (126, 161). Lilia Ferreyra's 1980 article "Rigor e inteligencia en la vida de Rodolfo Walsh", however, argues instead that these rejections should be read as extremes of the anti-bourgeois tendency in his thinking at the time, indefinitely postponing a return to literature rather than categorically rendering it impossible—she also narrates that in his last days, coming back from some of these extremes, he was speaking more and more about returning to the novel project he'd been putting off for almost a decade, now in the form of a memoir in three categories: the literary, the political, and the personal⁴⁰ which would reconcile the politics that had taken center stage for all that time with the literary world and "cultural trap" that he'd been in until *Operación massacre*, "redeeming" the literary for the political (117; 242-3; 235).

It is beside the point here whether or not Walsh would have written that novel had he lived longer. What's more important is how the transgeneric output from the second period, and the third period's rejection of fiction itself as a representational system inadequate to contemporary political necessities, weighed on the production and reception of his contemporaries. I don't just refer to the authors on whom this study focuses, but also to other landmark writers and public intellectuals of the era, like David Viñas, Julio Cortázar, Germán García, and Haroldo Conti (all of whose work Walsh took seriously and critiqued in his private diaries: see EH 176, 193, 242, and 249, resp.). One crucial aspect of this epochal and generational influence is of course Walsh's relationship (some have called it a tutelage) of Ricardo Piglia, who famously interviewed Walsh for the thin 1973 edition, censored and banned almost immediately, of "Un oscuro día de justicia," a continuation of the autobiographical "Irish" series in his two short story collections of the 1960's. But before turning to that relationship, and to the 1973 interview by Piglia, I'd first like to dwell for the sake of generic specificity and formal experimentation, on two "minor" stories as reflexive parables of modes of readership, one from 1953 and one from 1967, to tease out another, more formal legacy of Walsh.

Two Walshian Parables: Class, Autocritique, and the Limits of Fiction

All right [sic], you still want to be a writer. You stopped being a writer in 1969, when Rosendo was published, or in 1967, after Un kilo de oro? That's an important question... The thing is I cannot go back to 1967, my very ideas of 'the' novel have changed. / But then I cannot stay in 1969, or rather / That was a crossroads, was it?

—Personal diary, dated 3/5/1971, written in English, printed in EH, 205

*Para narrar a su grupo y a su clase desde adentro, para narrar el mundo de la civilización, el gran género narrativo del siglo XIX en la literatura argentina (el género narrativo por excelencia, habría que decir: que nace, por lo demás, con Sarmiento) es la autobiografía. La clase se cuenta a sí mismo bajo la forma de la autobiografía y cuenta al otro con la ficción.*⁴¹

–Piglia, “Echeverría y el lugar de la ficción,” in *La argentina en pedazos*, 9

The 1953 story, “La aventura de las pruebas de imprenta,” has largely been interpreted as a reflexive manual à la Borges, training its reader both in how to read Walsh’s early detective fiction and in how to read literature more generally (to wit, “slowly”, comprehensively, totally). Its faithful deployment of the whodunit sets up the investigation economically, spending the bulk of its pages on the investigator’s tender interest in his dead friend’s literary life and on his impossibly long speech at the end, disproving alternate interpretations and detailing his proofs to a roundtable of all the other characters with hyperbolically logical precision. The allegorical two-dimensionality of its characters (the suspicious wife, the innocent victim, the overconfident, uninspired policeman, the invested insurance investigator) and the prolonged discussion of literary hermeneutics make clear that like Poe and Borges before him, Walsh intends his reader to walk away from the deductive game with a playful bit of lay philosophy. But I would go one step further and say that in this complex, multi-vocal expansion of Poe’s Dupin formula, Walsh is expounding a theory not just of interpretation but of the role of fiction as a “representational system”, reconfiguring not just the competing sciences of Poe’s “Rue Morgue” but also anticipating the autofictional representations (and pro-active readerships) of later works.

Given my preceding sketch of Walsh’s conception of literature and genre, I would also like to compare this story to “Nota al pie,” a later revision of the themes mentioned above from the 1967 anthology, *Un kilo de oro*. Politicized overtly in terms of class-consciousness, the later conception of literature short-circuits the previous story’s rational triumph and rewrites it, in 1967, as a suicide and an impasse. What survives the crisis (not just for Walsh but also for later writers) is the imperative to perform a deductive, contestatory reading, politicizing it beyond contemplatively “reading slowly” or skeptically “reading backwards” to a more aggressive reading against the grain, at its more radical moments reading in spite of the author and perhaps even transcending the self. Thus does Walsh’s historiographical imperative translate to an autocritical one, dovetailing with Piglia’s theory of a dialectic of fiction and autobiography central to Argentina’s national tradition, taken from an essay on founding national literary figure Esteban Echeverría. By analogy, I think these two stories show not only a shift in Walsh’s thinking on the representational system of fiction, but also a growing gulf between the subject and the object of literature as a science: how can the middle and the working classes understand one another, much less through the limited and classed medium of literature?

Indeed, in Walsh’s project, the exploration of classes and their worldviews is always fraught, tentative, at times even mystical in its adynatons and aporias. From the Biblical epigraph on, the early story, “La aventura,” is a limit-case of hermeneutics, pushing the detective-story’s formulas to a showdown not just between sciences and humanistic or

psychological insight, but between instrumental reason and a unique mysticism of literature-cum-labor. It also enacts the argument (later published in an essay in *La nación*, which I'll discuss in detail below) that it was the prophet Daniel and not Edgar Allan Poe who founded the genre of interpretive superpowers and readerly challenges. Daniel Hernández, like his namesake, is called in by the State to read the writing on the wall (in effect, his Old Testament namesake read the *original* writing on the wall, from which the idiom derives; see the Book of Daniel, chapter 5). At first glance, it would be easy to interpret the story in terms of the clichés it exploits: Walsh combines the modernist commonplace of a mole-like literary functionary imperiled by absent-mindedly turning his back on the world and on his wife with the more sensational, vernacular commonplace of the dangerous and duplicitous wife codified by James M. Cain⁴² (and discussed at length in the previous chapter). Critics often cite the rhetorical flourish of Daniel's speech to counterintuitively emphasize the "professional" mode of reading as *slower* than that of the layman, reading not just each word but each character, as obliquely directed at Walsh's reader. This pithy imperative is, no doubt, in line with young Walsh's (and Borges') conception of an active readership particular to analytical detective fiction.

What's missing from many critical readings of "La aventura," however, is adequate attention to the more emphatically reiterated imperative that Hernández explicitly addresses to the other characters and, given the prologue's challenge to race Hernández to the solution, to the reader as well: read the proofs themselves, and furthermore, read them "slowly". While, in the elucidation of the mystery, Daniel reads for editorial and formal indexes of the outside world of the editor, critics seem to completely sidestep the content and provenance of the proofs. By this reading, Raimundo is just a corpse; but given Walsh's critical relationship to translation and to North American culture, Raimundo's work seems entirely overdetermined. The titular galley proofs constitute a contrapuntally philosophical *mise-en-abîme* that provides a historical (and historicizing) back-story to what has too often been taken for an ahistorical whodunit. The North American author of those proofs turns out, on "slow reading", to be as important to young Walsh's theory of fiction as his virtuoso solution to the murder mystery. To wit, Oliver Wendell Holmes was a great rhetorician and stylist in the tradition of Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce (and thus, a key forerunner of the "liberalist tradition" of the denunciatory journalist), yet he was also "el único quizás de los clásicos norteamericanos completamente ignorado en nuestra lengua,"⁴³ a fate which the critic, Daniel (and not the translator, Raimundo) deduces to be a function of how difficult it would be to translate his omnipresent, footnote-worthy New England localisms. Raimundo's dazzling time spent at Harvard "authorizes" him to introduce to a Spanish-language readership this unknown author, public intellectual, scientist and Renaissance man (*Var*, 12); yet something in Raimundo's literary aspirations seems intended to jar the reader as odd, or as Poe's Dupin would have it, "outré".

The story outside the translated *mise-en-abîme* also hinges on this Harvard connection, since it spurs Daniel's personal investment and Dupin-like intuition as to the blind spots of the police and insurance investigators: "Le parecía una incongruencia que Raimundo hubiera muerto por un balazo. El brillante alumno de Harvard y las armas de fuego parecían elementos de mundos distintos" (25)⁴⁴. This class-marked "incongruence" is reiterated in Daniel's

rejection of the theory of suicide (“le extraña que un hombre que al parecer llevaba una vida puramente intelectual se suicide brutalmente, pegándose un tiro en la cabeza, *como un vulgar comerciante en quiebra*”, 26, emphasis mine⁴⁵) and of the theory of his drunken handwriting (“Raimundo Morel, el hombre de letras, el ensayista brillante, escribía *como un campesino, como un ebrio*,” 49, emphasis mine⁴⁶). Indeed, this lowly editor, slaving away at a difficult and thankless (to say nothing of financially ruinous) translation, seems motivated by other (or other-worldly) factors, hinted at by the third galley proof included as a “figure,” with its very Borgesian *locus amoenus* of the patrimonial library:

Estoy seguro de que todos tenemos un algún lugar del mundo, nuestro doble exacto, tan similar a nosotros en todo, salvo en los accidentes de su condición, que si llegáramos de conocernos nos amaríamos como hermanos mellizos. Yo sé que tengo mi duplicado en algún lugar de los Estados Unidos. Estoy seguro de que existe algún inglés exactamente igual a mí (Confío en que pronuncie la *h* aspirada, pues *no creo que el Príncipe Danés hubiera permanecido fiel a Ofelia si ella lo hubiera llamado Amllet.*)[...] cada uno de ellos, *si hubiera nacido en la casa* de tejado holandés donde yo nací, y hubiera cultivado mi jardín y *hubiera crecido en mi estudio* desde el estante que contiene la Biblia Poliglota de Walton hasta el que aloja el Tácito de Elzevir y el Polibio de Casaubon, y *hubiera estado rodeado de todas las complejas influencias que me circundan*, habría sido tan semejante a mí que yo lo habría amado como a un hermano [...] Porque quizá, al fin y al cabo, es probable que mi Único Lector no sea la persona que más se me parece. (61, emphasis mine)⁴⁷

Raimundo’s key role, then, is neither to provide the crime story with a corpse nor, as a reductively autobiographical reading would have it, to stand in for young Walsh, who began as a copy editor and worked his way up to translator and author. Raimundo is a point of contact to another “world,” an ideal reader that is “authorized” to translate for a less ideal readership, an importer of cultural forms and of sciences⁴⁸. Raimundo, like Walsh, is a privileged bicultural agent authorized to import cultural forms, whether they be Cainian murderer-wives, nineteenth-century public intellectuals, or autofictionalizing, didactic poets. It’s worth reiterating that when he died, Raimundo was proofing his translations of Holmes’ “breakfast table” series, the speaker of each of which was a caricature of Holmes’ voice and public persona: the Autocrat, the Professor, the Poet.

This brings us back to Rama's theory that Walsh's life's work was to import a North American cultural form for the purposes of Latin American *intelligencia*: the denunciatory journalist. Few critics have remarked the similarity between Daniel’s gloss of Raimundo’s ambitious translation project, on the one hand, and on the other, Walsh’s own self-aggrandizing introduction to Ambrose Bierce in *Leoplan* (April, 1953). The latter doesn’t just “introduce” Bierce to Spanish readers but even claims, to some degree, to have *discovered* some of Bierce’s pseudonymous texts by sleuthing around in bibliographies and footnotes, presenting the humble yet influential author as “casi un desconocido, no solo en el extranjero, sino también en su propio país” (VO, 15). In an ironic reversal, Walsh takes at face value the declaration that “el arte es la única ocupación seria que hay en la vida,” made in an facetious analysis of a Poe forgery he himself had “discovered”, yet at the same time, Walsh calls him a

“man of action”, and ponders his willful disappearance in 1913 Northern México (ostensibly to search for Pancho Villa) as a somehow natural end to the ever-ironic life of an aesthete. Even in this early, purely literary text, we see some of the building blocks of his later manipulations of the author-figure and of his own reception, in the form of readerly prescriptions and seemingly worshipful depictions of other authors as role models.

Returning to the “adventure” of the gallery proofs, we can take the *mise-en-abîme* not just as a model scene of reading, but also as a model of the relationship between the author as public intellectual and his “ideal reader,” slowly and actively piecing him together across the divides of time, language, dialect, context. The reading lesson may seem to be primarily literary, but it’s also extended into other registers by the subtlest of Borgesian details and footnotes. This lesson accrues something like a political dimension (at least it could, to a deconstructive reading), in that the word Daniel crucially noticed as written first clearly and later in degraded form is the word ‘*nacional*’. The story also restores the literary object to its historical specificity as an object of mass consumption and winks at its place in a reified order of genres in its opening scene, the publishing house’s New Releases display case, where “confluyen...en heterogénea mezcla, el último *thriller* y el más reciente premio Nobel, los macizos tomos de una patología quirúrgica y las sugestivas tapas de las revistas de modas” (9)⁴⁹. This discursive maelstrom sets the stage for a *locus classicus* of the genre, so central to Sherlock’s condescension to Watson, and to Dupin’s straw horse, the “modern” Police force: the parable of competing sciences. Here, Walsh adds a historicist nuance by staging not only the unspoken contest between Hernández and Jiménez, but also a second between the victim’s Harvard pedigree, to which Hernández repeatedly refers other characters and the reader, and Commissary Jiménez’ illustrious education at a prestigious Criminology research institute, where new methods of Enlightened policing are pioneered and promulgated.

This confrontation of sciences complicates the imperative to read actively as the “editor” footnoting the story comes into his own over the course of the story, undermining the authority of the protagonist Daniel without ever explaining his or her relation to him or to the events narrated. In the first of the four “editor’s notes,” the word “posthumous” tips off the reader, pages early, that Raimundo has been killed, listing in the same sentence the fictional publishing house’s [posthumous] publication dates. The second footnote, authenticating that the editor’s notes are in fact written by a professional editor, explains the shorthand used in the galley proofs included in the text as illustrative “figures”. The third, perhaps the most baffling footnote in all of Walsh’s work, volunteers (in the midst of the Commissary’s speech about forensic ballistics) the nationalistic factoid that a tool used in the forensic process being described is an Argentine invention (perhaps, the reader seems invited to speculate, invented at Jiménez’ *alma mater*). The fourth footnote establishes that a special annotation will be used thereafter to help rationalize and schematize Daniel’s solution for the reader, reiterating the call to methodical, slow reading; after this fourth, a few further footnotes embellish this system of annotations by referring back to previous pages and figures as if to invite a slower, fact-checking reading of Daniel’s logically exhaustive solution.

“Nota al pie” is neither a sequel to, nor a rewriting of, “La aventura,” yet all the same it demands to be read as a companion piece from across Walsh’s second period, a drastic reconfiguration of its parable of reading and its historical vision of the possible agency of mass-market literature. It’s an idiosyncratic story, starting from its format, which consists of a frame story footnoted on its first page by the contents of a letter, substantially longer than the frame story itself, which runs under the footnote-bar on each page until the last, which has only footnote and no frame story, typographically giving the last word to the suicidal editor. The frame story follows a publisher, Otero, attending the funeral service for León, a translator on contract to his publishing house, sliding in and out of a Joycean free indirect discourse as he grapples with how much to mourn his forgettable and mysterious underling. All this is narrated in a curiously flat present tense, as if to emphasize the short span of time it fills, between Otero’s being handed the suicide note and leaving, presumably to open and read it. The running footnote reproduces the content of the suicide note, providing a parallel commentary on many of the same events (often described in contradictory way in the body and at the foot of the same page), and even more curiously, using many of the same figures of speech, as though the inner monologue of the employer and the heartfelt letter of the employee were cut from the same idiomatic cloth. Like an evidentiary or procedural police story, the reader is challenged to read two testimonies against each other, which is, not coincidentally, the operative readerly experience and structuring aesthetic of Walsh’s non-fiction novels discussed above.

As in other, contemporary stories in an overtly Joycean or Faulknerian vein, Walsh sketches the vexed, overdetermined relationship, bordering on vassalage, between this employer and the thankful employee to which he gave a “big break.” This big break is the pathetic core of the drama and yet, ironically, feels somewhat bathetic in narrative or biographical terms: the raises to the translator’s wage over time can’t keep up with the runaway inflation of the decade it’s set in, and at the grim end of the suicide letter, he states, “in more than one sense, I’m worse off than I started” (96). The story is awash in pawn tickets, barely-balanced books, and an economy that can only strike the middle-class reader, then or now, as depressingly meager, to the point of cliché. This makes clear that the gratitude of the dead translator has little to do with the terms of his employment or with his meager payment; clearly he is more grateful for Otero’s trust in, and respect for, his “work”, a work described in mystical, Borgesian terms, although not quite idealized. In more than one way, the employer’s and employee’s registers passing right by each other like boats in the night can’t seem to agree on what this work means, enacting the incommensurability of literary value and literary labor as an incommensurability of working-class and bourgeois worldviews.

The “work” in question is, importantly enough, León’s translations into Spanish of crime-fiction dime novels written in English, a sensational and popular mass market that boomed in Argentina and across Latin America in the 1940’s and 50’s. It might be tempting to interpret this character, living off translations, as a stand-in for Walsh himself, or more specifically, for the relatively unknown initiation-era Walsh who, like León, ceased to be “circa 1954”. See, for instance, a 1969 interview: “[En 1956 yo era] un periodista muy oscuro que escribía notas—

algunas notas—para *Leoplán*. Pero no vivía de eso, sino de las traducciones del inglés y francés. También escribía cuentos policiales, a veces con mi nombre y a veces con seudónimo” (*EH*, 140)⁵⁰. But León can hardly be called an autobiographical character, or even a self-caricature—Walsh’s English was semi-native, Walsh’s French was refined and traveled, with a solid foundation in Latin and Greek from his Jesuit-school days, while León stumbles through the dictionary marveling at all the words (fish, birds, trees) he’s translated sight unseen. Walsh may have supported himself translating for popular editions (*Evasión*, *Serie Naranja*), but he also translated de Beauvoir and Sartre for the news wires and intellectual publications, as well as publishing translations in Borges and Bioy Casares’ *Séptimo círculo* series and later Piglia’s *Serie negra*, both of which occupied a privileged, intermediary zone of middle-brow commercial viability side-by-side with literary respectability. The progressive valorization (from, it stands to mention, an importantly anti-Peronist literary establishment) of the crime genres over the late 1940’s and 50’s is neither the focus of the short story’s historical interest nor a phenomenon León would have benefited from, or even, perhaps, known about. On the contrary, León is a curious thought-experiment: the autobiography-as-other, the self imagined through the prism of another class, another life, another worldview.

At one point, this fundamental class drag makes an ironic nod to the *compadritos* and folkloric neighborhood lore of the young Borges: walking home from being assigned his first novel to translate, León now “found that neighborhood of low houses and wide, cobbled streets beautiful for the first time” (81). But this euphoric resolution quickly gives way to a trope from the later Borges, the nightmare-subjectivity of “The Aleph” and “Shakespeare’s Memory”: “All my powers were set to that task which was more than a mere translation—I see this now—was the exchange of one man for another [*el cambio de un hombre por otro hombre*]” (86). This second, aesthetically-gifted and pretentious man who replaces the lumpen forerunner goes on to discover Shakespeare and Keats, whose works are “branded into his memory”, citing one line of each of in the suicide letter as if to vouch for their accessibility to his memory⁵¹. León’s stereotypically rough, workman’s hands literally “soften up,” his outward appearance becomes more “put-together,” his living situation moves towards one where a minimum of privacy and quiet are possible.

He confesses to a certain “vanity” in clipping newspaper reviews and comparing himself to other translators, even counting the number of cards to his credit in the library’s card catalog (“Sesenta. Más que Manuel Gálvez,” 77). Here, perhaps, another autobiographical comparison bears mentioning: in Roberto Ferro’s prologue to the revised 1997 edition of *Caso satanowsky*, he notes the grim irony by which Walsh’s complete signed works were purged from the National Library and its card catalog by Dirty War censors, while all of his ostensibly “innocent” dime-novel translations were left behind (which, though not more numerous than Raimundo’s or Manuel Gálvez’ output, do still outnumber his censored works). For reasons that Otero, from his side of the page, can only marvel at, León stumbles from that contentment and pride to a sulking recognition of his limitations and inefficacy. Otero marvels and clucks at León’s aspirations to move on from his impersonal and indifferent science fiction translations to writing his own novels (a course that Otero convinces him it wouldn’t be economically viable)

or to translating more literary works⁵². From the perspective of his condescending cultural capital (characterizing León as “a man of a middling culture, hardly and crudely won [*hecho a los tumbos*], full of lacunas and prejudices,” 82), Otero can only see in this frustrated and disappointed self-made man an ingrate: “Perhaps [not knowing his parents] was why he felt cheated and could not love the order of this world [*el orden del mundo*]. But...no one had cheated [*despojado*] him” (81). Beyond describing León’s melancholy as enigmatic and his frustrations as unknowable, he most cruelly enacts the self-saving gesture of “killing the dead” that frames his narration when he interprets his suicide with twinned clichés, which underscore Otero’s privilege and politics: “It was a mediocre cop-out, a symbol of the chaos of the day [*Era la escapada de un mediocre, un símbolo del desorden de los tiempos*]” (84).

Clearly, Otero’s condescending sympathy for León’s impasse is a straw horse in much the way that *Rosendo* is an entertaining page-turner—Walsh is challenging the reader not only to understand León psychologically but also to understand him historically. Should the reader miss the historiographical hint, she has only to read the rest of the anthology, which also contains “Fotos,” an even more direct challenge to understand historical forces writ large in a marginal, yet sympathetic, case of suicide. The ambiguous remark that Otero so glibly writes off as immaturity (“There is so much injustice in this world”) sticks in the reader’s throat, never really explained by the suicide note except insofar as it refers, not to history or politics, but to his own limited, dead-end career. Indeed, in working-class terms, León admits he should be contented, since his neighbors who “work winches, concrete mixers, and lathes” are jealous that he could subsist on four-hour workdays, not realizing “how it feels to be inhabited by another, often an imbecile...they lent their hands, I rented my soul”. In the curiously concatenated logic of León’s brusque thinking, he then remarks the etymology of a Chinese term for servant, *yōngrén* (“man of utility”), here polemically conjugated as “used man,” and then rebuts himself: “¿Me quejo? No. Usted siempre me favoreció con su ayuda, la Casa nunca cometió la menor injusticia conmigo” (94)⁵³. Whether unjust or not, Otero perceives his servant in the mystifying light of a humble acceptance: León, “at certain moments, perhaps at many moments, got to intuit the mission of the House, grasped vaguely the sacrifice that editing books implies, feeding the people’s dreams and building them a culture, even in spite of them [*incluso contra ellos mismos*],” 76). The “used” man figures his role in the process far less nobly, as a kind of *prostitution* leaving him “used up” and sexually impotent as a consequence, seen first in the plot of his “imbecilic” first translation (read the proofs!) and then again in his digression on his romantic life, intercalated with equal abruptness⁵⁴.

Here, as elsewhere in Walsh’s writings, a masculinist trope of intellectual honesty is pitted against a feminized figure of mercenary contamination as *prostitution*; here, as elsewhere, Walsh has no easy answer or idealistic optimism about how to avoid the stain of intellectual prostitution, which haunts the darkest corners and pessimistic limits of Walsh’s virile ethics of truth. León’s disillusionment is as much with himself and his “used up” life as with literature and the culture industry generally: “Estoy solo, estoy cansado, *no le sirvo a nadie y lo que hago tampoco sirve*. He vivido perpetuando en castellano el linaje esencial de los imbéciles, *el cromosoma específico de la estupidez*. En más de un sentido estoy peor que

cuando empecé. Tengo un traje y un par de zapatos como entonces y doce años más” (96, emphasis mine)⁵⁵. As proof that León’s self-reproach voices a dark undercurrent in Walsh’s theory of literature, one need only compare this grim summation to the last line of Walsh’s autobiographical sketch accompanying his 1969 anthology, *Los diez mandamientos*: “I believe literature to be, among other things, a laborious advance through one’s own stupidity [*un avance laborioso a través de la propia estupidez*]” (EH, 15).

Before setting aside Walsh and turning to Piglia, Puig and Saer, I’d like to read “Nota al pie” in the light of Angel Rama’s interpretation of Walsh’s work, grounded as it is in Gramsci having “privileged” crime fiction above other popular genres as having a less mediated, more direct relation to popular fantasies of power and retaliation, expressing, in Gramscian terms, the subculture’s sense of injustice⁵⁶. Specifically, I find quite pertinent Gramsci’s concept of a defanging “schematization” of crime fiction: political and social content of real-life trials (*proces célebres*⁵⁷), which can so readily be interpreted as conflicts between discreet interests, gets excised by the displacement of the narrative to another nexus and abstracted into a formulaic moral pair of culprit and investigator, clearing center stage for a disinterested exploration of the machinations of evasion and detection. Rama seems to imply that Walsh’s career can be read as the progressive reversal of this process, beginning, as it clearly does, with the most formulaic and “schematized” rationalism and escapism, and attempting more and more centrally to expose (and even to channel into political consciousness) an underlying substratum of class fantasy and resentment.

Rama’s account is extensively corroborated not just by “Nota al pie” but also by Walsh’s diaries, such as this note from 1969: “I have ‘almost’ completely crossed over into the popular camp which furthermore, and of this I’m sure, offers me the best literary possibilities. I mean to say that I’d 100% rather be an Eduardo Gutiérrez to a [Paul] Groussac, and a [Roberto] Arlt to a [Julio] Cortázar” (119). Eduardo Gutiérrez’s 19th century true-crime *folletines*, particularly Juan Moreira, were being debated and rethought by much of the Left in 1969 (Vito de Martini’s television adaptation having just debuted, as had César Aira’s parodic/psychedelic novella version); at stake in these debates was the anti-State tendency in the popular imaginary that Gutiérrez was both channeling and domesticating, fictionalizing and gratifying. The chronology sketched out is one of heirless uncles: Gutiérrez precedes the genteel Groussac, Arlt precedes his wayward heir Cortázar. Arlt is less a model to be followed than a point of contact with a working-class consciousness depicted almost as an elemental force⁵⁸. In a Havana roundtable from the same year, mapping and commenting on the field of Argentine modernism and its positions, Walsh expounds on Arlt’s importance, and offers up an at-best obliquely relevant sound bite to the discussion of his social consciousness: “[Arlt] admits his true literary influence is Rocambole.” Walsh seems to suggest to Mario Benedetti and his two other interlocutors that Arlt’s social consciousness was (in contrast to the other modernists discussed) crucially organic and rooted in a sincere admiration of that sensational and poorly-translated French crime-pulp on the tail end of Gramsci’s process of “schematization” into defanged, formulaic adventure.

What’s curious to me, and essential to my argument about Walsh’s legacy, is Walsh’s uneasy relationship with this “schematization,” this generic evolution and codification. Many

have taken his tortured resistance to the literature of “diversion” across what I’m calling his second period, and his many dogmatic rejections of it in the third, as a rejection of all literature closed off from reality by this very schematization, by this insulated and self-referential literariness (and here the “classic,” rule-driven, whodunits and the most experimental, subjective modernism are equally guilty of being middle-class diversions, incomprehensible to the working-class reader and useless to the outside world). It is tempting to read this kind of “rejection” into León’s comment to Otero on the historicity of the crime genre in Argentina (“A menudo discutí con usted si fue la caída del peronismo lo que acabó con el fervor por las novelas policiales”⁵⁹) and his disappointed transition to the Cold War genre par excellence, the dystopic strain of allegorical science fiction (“al principio mi interés se reanimó. Después fue lo mismo. Paseando por los paisajes de Ganimedes o sintonizando la Mancha Roja de Júpiter, veía el espectro sin colores de mi pieza”⁶⁰; note also the novel by [J.G.] Ballard on León’s desk, a prescient critical nod in 1967). This line of criticism, looking in Walsh’s fictions for echoes of his extreme later views, might see in the debates about the decline of reader demand between Otero and León a shadow of Walsh’s famous 1957 letter to Donald Yates à propos of the genre’s brief heyday, written while putting the final touches of the first book edition of *Operación*. In this letter, Walsh playfully invites Yates to write an article “along the lines of” Howard Haycraft’s 1941 “Dictators, Democrats, and Detectives,” which was dismissive of the very possibility of any worthwhile crime fiction being produced outside of “democratic” societies like England, America, and France⁶¹. Walsh’s proposed essay, however, would make “the inverse argument,” i.e., that Perón’s restrictions of the press and literary establishments, combined with a middle-class readership deprived of any real debate or engagement in the official press, made for a sudden local boom that lasted until the contemporary bust, after which the oppositional press literally inherited that readership weaned on crime-genre diversions for so many years⁶².

I read Walsh’s historicism of the genre differently, however, because I see in it a less unidirectional and teleological version of Gramscian “schematization”. Walsh had neither stopped writing detective short stories proper nor stopped conceiving of his journalistic work as targeted at a similar readership when he wrote “Nota al pie,” as evidenced by his bibliography⁶³ and his letters to Yates⁶⁴, respectively. If anything, I think that for Walsh the relationship between the imagination of popular subjects and the most defanged, “schematized” crime fiction is a living one, a road that can be traveled in either direction—a skillful twist of the writer’s pen can reverse the process, bring the detective novel back into substantial engagement with a consciousness outside of its middle-class sphere, just as it can write engaged and denunciatory journalism for a readership trained to read the most schematized, logical forms of whodunit. In different historical moments, different functions or applications of this apparatus might take higher precedence, or eclipse the others⁶⁵.

In contrast to his public pronouncements throughout the third period, Walsh’s private diaries from this period mention a “nostalgic” impulse to “redeem” the abandoned literary sphere at some future date, a tendency which Lilia Fereyra’s 1980 article (reprinted in *RW, vivo*, 195-201) conflates with a growing resistance to the Montonero leadership and project⁶⁶. I

conceive of this "redemption" not just in the political sense of conforming to his commitments, but in the Gramscian sense of reversing schematization and wresting the literary free from social relations of power. The redemption that so stymied Walsh survived him as a kind of a generation pipe-dream for new, revolutionary cultural forms. As a glimpse of that pipe dream and the conception of the author's role in society on which it's based, I find an apocryphal anecdote strangely fitting: Fereyra describes Walsh's intended project for a "geological novel" that would synthesize all the different genres and modes he'd written in to counterbalance a subjective and literary autobiography with a politically and historically analytical exposition⁶⁷. He planned to begin the literary section of this synthetic project with his earliest memory of narration at age nine, which I think sums up the Gramscian fantasy of literature's social and redemptive powers: his mother having read him Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Walsh remembers summarizing it, at the rate of one chapter every night, to his fellow sufferers in the infirmary of his boarding school.

Piglia's aesthetics of truth: from a hard-boiled "Walsh" to a self-effacing "Brecht"

*Las reglas del policial clásico se afirman sobre todo en el fetiche de la inteligencia pura. [...] En la novela negra, no parece haber otro criterio de verdad que la experiencia: el investigador se lanza, ciegamente, al encuentro de los hechos. [...] Son dos lógicas, puestas una a cada lado de los hechos. En el medio, entra la novela de enigma y la novela dura, está el relato periodístico, la página de crímenes, los hechos reales.*⁶⁸

—Piglia, "Sobre el género policial," *Crisis* no. 30, Jan. 1976 (reprinted in *Crítica y ficción*, 67-70)

*[On Walsh's aesthetic:] Por un lado está el manejo de la forma autobiográfica del testimonio verdadero, del panfleto y la diatriba...El escritor es un historiador del presente, habla en nombre de la verdad, denuncia los manejos del poder. [...] Por otro lado...la ficción es el arte de la elipsis, trabaja con la alusión y lo no dicho, y su construcción es antagónica con la estética urgente del compromiso y las simplificaciones del realismo social. [...] Las dos poéticas están sin embargo unidas en un punto que sirve de eje a toda su obra: la investigación como uno de los modos básicos de darle forma al material narrativo. El desciframiento, la búsqueda de la verdad, el trabajo con el secreto, el rigor de la reconstrucción: los textos se arman sobre un enigma, un elemento desconocido que es la clave de la historia que se narra. Cuentos como "Fotos" o "Esa mujer" o "Nota al pie" no son estructuralmente muy distintos al Caso Satanowsky o a ¿Quién mató a Rosendo?. El relato gira alrededor de un vacío, de algo enigmático que es preciso descifrar, y el texto yuxtapone rastros, datos, signos, hasta armar un gran caleidoscopio que permite captar un fragmento de la realidad.*⁶⁹

—Piglia, "Rodolfo Walsh y el lugar de la verdad," *Fierro* no. 37, Sep. 1987 (reprinted in *Textos*, 13-15)

I've juxtaposed these two long quotes published 11 years apart to show that Walsh is not only foundational to Piglia's theory of the genre, but that his theory and practice served as a springboard for Piglia's more complex and more far-reaching conception of crime fiction's political vocation and utility. While Piglia's notions of the inner workings of the crime genres can largely be traced back to Walsh, Piglia's bombastic claims for crime fiction's secret centrality in twentieth-century letters cannot, even if those claims often cite Walsh's works as examples of hybridity and experimentation rooted in the idiom. In the 1976 collaboration between Piglia and crime genre historians Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera, Walsh (recently censored and living underground) isn't mentioned by name but is indisputably⁷⁰ implicated in Piglia's "middle term" between journalism and crime fiction. A year after this issue, *Crisis* was shut down in a climate of escalating censorship and not brought back into print until years into democratic rule. In 1987, as part of a broader post-dictatorship project of reversing censorship, reinvincating exiled cultural figures, remembering martyrs, and reassessing the cultural landscape of the preceding three decades, Walsh studies picked up again (in, among other venues, the recently-resurrected monthly *Crisis*). Piglia contributed to this boom in many academic and popular venues, notably including Walsh among a series of more properly canonical authors pedagogically (and polemically) considered, in brief introductory essays to illustrated versions of a short work or excerpt from each, in the popular comics monthly *Fierro*⁷¹. It is in this context, then, that we should approach Piglia's debt to Walsh, and to the personal "Walsh" he ventriloquizes in his critical writings; keeping Walsh's truth and Brecht's conception of history distinct from Piglia's ideas should help bring into light Piglia's personal metaphysics of truth and objectivity as a rubric for his generation's dialogue with journalism, with history, and with entertainment.

The two synoptic accounts of truth and literature cited above as epigraphs are a good point of departure to schematize these divergent conceptions of truth. In both, Piglia underlines Walsh's bombastic navigation of genres and publics as his most important legacy, a contribution framed as the Promethean discovery of a "middle path" between the polar opposites and critical debates that had structured literary history up until that point. In the 1976 essay, Piglia indirectly personifies the nascent genres of creative nonfiction and literary journalism as a new form of "investigator," defined as a hybrid between the two "detectives" which critics have long discussed as personifications of different strains of crime fiction. In the 1987 essay, however, Piglia goes even further, calling for a reevaluation of Walsh's complete works whereby all the generically hybrid works, including some "minor" ones overlooked by most critics to this day, should be set aside as especially prescient and influential⁷². In Piglia's revision of the hard-boiled/classic-detective binary, the experiential and visceral realism of the hard-boiled vernacular, conventionally troped as a rebellion against the disembodied rationalism and game-like *irreality* of the genteel detective tradition, is reconceived as a diametrically opposed outgrowth of a shared journalistic origin. In both 1976 and 1987, Piglia's dialectic of literature and truth organized literary history across genres into a common field of historical engagement and social commentary. This dialectic account of the evolution of form

implies that literary genres overstate their independence from, and difference from, non-literary genres (mass-media journalism, history). It also presents form on both sides of the divide as spurred to evolve by the same cultural shifts and historical sea changes. From this leveling perspective, Walsh's book-length true-crime investigations and the more hybridized and enigmatic of his more properly literary stories⁷³ are equally clear instances of a distinctly Walshian "narrative logic," which could be defined as such: 1.) an interpellation of the reader that demands active reading, 2.) a stagey and investigatory narrator or narrative frame, and 3.) a microcosmic plot allegorizing and illuminating broader historical forces (or as Rama phrases it above, a "trasfondo político-social oscuro").

But Piglia isn't just implying that in the retrospective broad view, a trademark "narrative logic" emerges from seemingly disparate works in various genres. Instead, Piglia is painting a picture of his own personal "Walsh" as, even before his first published fictions, a deliberate and self-conscious combiner of genres and publics, decades before the birth of a public that can appreciate such recombinations. One might object that this projection of postmodern ideals onto the pragmatism of a professional editor and writer is a little anachronistic, but Piglia seems to make his claims based on a professional biography that he himself largely shared with Walsh. At the time of the above-cited 1976 formulations about crime fiction's porous boundary with journalism, Piglia was still editing the hard-boiled translation series for the publishing house CEAL, continuing, in some measure, Walsh's work at Hachette. There, Walsh had edited the first entirely Argentine anthology of crime fiction in 1953 as part of Borges and Bioy Casares' *Evasión* series (which bore the telling subtitle, "Jerarquía en novela policial"), a series in which Walsh had previously translated a number of novels (mostly dark thrillers by Cornell Woolrich). The critical stance of Walsh's editorial prefaces are explicitly and conservatively Borgesian in their slant towards the logical "perfection" and "triumph" of stories like "Death and the Compass" and *Parodi*. The preface also makes a slyly self-promotional promise of enough comparable material for a second volume of the same length, which the reader can expect "si la presente encuentra la favorable acogida que esperamos" (8)⁷⁴.

More significantly for the Argentine history of the crime genres, and for Piglia's own later position as both writer and critic, the biographical note that precedes Walsh's contribution mentions his forthcoming *Variaciones en rojo*, subtly tying Walsh's own literary future to that growing (internal) market and readership coming into its own with this very anthology. Curiously, Walsh does not include, as one might expect him to, one of his stories most in line with the Borgesian credo expounded in the preface, such as a previously-published Hernández story of the same length (as might better build suspense for his forthcoming anthology). Rather, he chooses the lurid mini-thriller, "Cuento para tahures," which, while still basically a logical whodunit in structure, is run through with the gritty atmospherics of a working-class gambling milieu. The enigma hinges on a pair of loaded dice, referred to by their name in gambler's argot ("*chivos*"), with scare-quotes both marking the term as foreign and forgiving the genteel reader should she not know it. Halfway between the mythologized *compadritos* of Borges' early fiction and the experiential (and linguistic) criteria of veracity expounded by

Walsh decades later, this early gesture towards an alternate crime-genre lineage is barely perceptible except in the retrospect of his later work and its re-evaluation at the hands of Piglia.

Piglia's more radical later revisions of crime-fiction's family tree has forerunners in other critical works by Walsh, starting as early as 1954 in a short piece for the Culture section of *La nación*. The article is entitled "Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial" (reprinted in the first edition of *Tahures*), and its tone and stance are almost bombastically self-assured⁷⁵, as if he had not one but twenty recognized books published in the genre. In the essay, Walsh marks a more definitive distance between the narrow Borges/Sayers rulebook he'd rigorously played by in *Variaciones en rojo* (here I'm referring to those lists of proscriptions discussed extensively in Chapter One) and a broader definition of the genre, one that less categorically distinguishes between the logical whodunit and the popular, often sensationalistic crime reporting from which it evolved in its Gramscian "schematization". By his broader criteria, the book of Daniel (from which the epigraphs to two Daniel Hernández stories were pulled), a myth of the Popol Vuh, and an episode of the Quixote can all be argued to precede the conventional Enlightenment "origins" of the genre in Voltaire's *Zadig*. His alternate criteria are simple and tripartite: "la confrontación de testigos, la clásica trampa para descubrir al delincuente y la interpretación de indicios materiales" (164). The main difference between, on the one hand, Borges' various criteria and checklists for the genre, playful hyperbolized in the Isidoro Parodi cycle, and on the other, Walsh's progressively incompatible interest in detection plots is the latter's emphatic insistence on the interview, on testimony. Here we find a bridge from the Hernández cycle to the Laurenzi cycle and the testimonial novels, an emphatic orality that puts the crime genres back in touch with their popular imaginary⁷⁶.

Returning to Piglia's essays on Walsh and on the hard-boiled tradition, I'd like to emphasize that Walsh never wrote about the hard-boiled tradition as an underdog or as a repressed tradition, assuming a vindictory or revisionist posture of "defending" or "rediscovering" the hard-boiled formula over and against that of the classical detective. This posture was perhaps most influentially expounded, in one of its most polemic forms, by Argentine novelist Mempo Giardinelli in his 1984 survey, *El género negro*, which ascribes to the hard-boiled tradition and in particular to its flowering in Cold War Latin America an inherently critical stance towards the law that is congruous with (if not inherently predisposed to) Leftist and anti-State critiques. A more nuanced version of this history can be found in the more international accounts of Mexican scholar Ilan Stavans⁷⁷ and Mexican hard-boiled novelist Ignacio Taibo II⁷⁸; somewhat more reductive versions of this same rhetoric undergird three of the only English-language critical surveys of Latin American crime fiction, those of Amelia Simpson, Persephone Braham, and Glen Close⁷⁹. What all these accounts share with one another (and with neither Walsh's nor Piglia's critical writing) is the idea of the hard-boiled subgenre as a historical off-shoot of the detective genre, spawned directly from the classical detective story by an internal (and North American) rebellion or by a (modern, mass-market) shift in readership. Piglia distances himself explicitly from this critical tradition and its concomitant attribution of a political critique to key texts (or the bulk of texts) in the hard-boiled corpus: he calls "ambiguous, or better yet, contradictory" the readings that arise "entre

nosotros,” that is to say, among Latin American readers, when faced with the ideological ambiguity of these vernacular North American texts (70).

One reason both Walsh and Piglia reject, in different ways, the attribution of any inherent politics to hard-boiled "realism" is that a fiction borrowing its reality-effects and testimonial stylization from journalism will be just as ideologically flexible and varied as journalism itself. For Piglia, the only political distinction between "classic" and hard-boiled crime fiction is that the former downplays, while the latter embraces, their shared dialectic relation with the newspaper crime section, and thus, with the perspectival and partisan nature of journalism. Whereas Rama sees Walsh crossbreeding the detective-genre apparatus with the denunciatory journalist of the North American popular Imaginary, Piglia makes a much broader claim about Walsh returning both strains of the detective genre to their shared roots in journalistic nonfiction, reactivating the dialectic at the origins of the genre more broadly conceived.

This reorienting of the crime fiction tradition around journalism and crime *non-fiction* is more implied than stated, but consequential none the less. One form it takes is Piglia's polemic revision of the figure of Poe⁸⁰, that progenitor claimed so emphatically by Borges, by his Hispanophone and Anglophone interlocutors, and by an entire critical tradition tracing the lineage of crime fiction's "classical" school. Piglia's "Poe" is perversely presented as an uncredited forerunner of Truman Capote's non-fiction experiments (and of course, by extension, the analogous experiments of Walsh, unnamable in 1976 but implied by association). Piglia points out that "The case of Marie Roget," with its surrounding real-life polemic that scandalously blurred the line between fiction and crime-reporting, constitutes a full one-third of the tiny "Dupin cycle," if the third least discussed by literary historians. It offers a different feat of reasoning from the prior two stories of Dupin's ratiocination: Dupin claims to solve the enigma without material evidence or direct testimonies of any case, but simply by reading the Crime section of the various Paris newspapers deductively, or as Walsh would have it, "backwards." In a sense, though, Dupin is reading "sideways," since Poe's fictional text about a factual criminal case was printed in columns on the very same page as factual crime reporting—in Poe (as in Arlt), the dialectic of crime reporting and literary fiction wasn't a theoretical construct or abstract, but merely a professional fact of publishing.

Walsh left very little critical writing, or even apocrypha, on the hard-boiled tradition within crime fiction, which is surprising given that he translated so much of it and drew from it in writing both his novels and his Laurenzi stories. One might extrapolate, however, his take on the hard-boiled conjuncture of truth and action in ex-commissary Laurenzi's oblique and hard-boiled micro-biography: "Yo notaba que [como comisario] me iba poniendo flojo, y era porque quería pensar, ponerme en el lugar de los demás, hacerme cargo. Y así hice dos o tres macanas hasta que me jubilé"⁸¹ ("Cosa juzgada," *Vea y Lea* N.1-386, 12 April 1962). Taken at face value, it might seem a Dupin-esque jab at the police to frame thought itself as incompatible with the commissary's profession, but the concatenated syntax elliptically implies that the problem was more specifically some combination of thinking, empathy, and [just] intervention. The oblique causal chain implied is that some thought that led to empathy which led, in turn, to actions that

constituted “*macanas*,” a 20th century slang term for missteps or bad judgments which could be taken as a kind of hard-boiled synonym for the more old-fashioned euphemism, “*desgracias*,” which was in 1962 still current in crime journalism for serious and legally consequential misdeeds. Central to Piglia’s working definition of the hard-boiled genre (and to most contemporary accounts in North American academia of the same⁸²) is the effacement of any investment or stake in politics itself; the cynicism of the tradition with respect to social change or political reform is often troped in sexual and/or financial terms as a wounded or world-weary resignation which defines the protagonist, often to the point of clichéd presumption. These protagonists acquire their definitively stoic ethical stance due to tragic encounters with women (whom they thereafter swear off with variously misogynistic fervor), after a fateful, yet systematic, loss of personal integrity or idealism, and/or owing to traumatic experiences incumbent upon the profession itself.

But in Walsh’s formulation, the fateful fall from grace does not even seem to have been singular or understandable except as an irreconcilable gap between, on the one hand, the State’s institution of the police and, on the other, natural empathy and truth. I’m not sure any of Walsh’s work, even *Rosendo*, would quite fit in the series of translations Piglia edited for CEAL (i.e., alongside McCoy, Chandler, Hammett, and Goodis); while Piglia selects works for their bleak representation of endemic corruption in late Capitalism, their hopeless narrators and ambiguous protagonists are never as explicit or as optimistic as Walsh’s are in proposing as possible another world or another system. Walsh’s hard-boiled aesthetic is always tempered by a variously explicit implication that another State and another configuration of power which would be less structurally antagonistic towards empathy and truth. Indeed, one might even define Walsh’s late-modernist faith in literature as a kind of optimism that literature could redeem language from journalism, or from journalism as it is practiced in late capitalism, seen as a low point in relations between language and truth⁸³.

In Piglia’s personal pantheon of modernist thinkers, Walsh and Arlt are only two of the authorities to be consulted on the subject of crime and the Law; another is Bertolt Brecht, whose ambitious and disjointed work Piglia respectfully describes as grappling with the Marxist “enigmas” of currency and of the nature of capital. Returning to his 1976 article on the hard-boiled tradition for the CEAL series, we could characterize Piglia’s critical concepts there as essentially Brechtian, almost lifted from the famous Lukács-Brecht debates: the hard-boiled school is “ambiguous” for its finally “toothless” and “hopeless” social critiques and for its inconsequential expression of class antagonism, even when their authors might harbor real-life sympathies with revolutionary politics. He also dismisses as “contradictory” the various Latin American overreadings of those texts which try to extract from these works a definitive position vis-à-vis North American capitalism. Instead, he argues, these texts need to be submitted to a nebulous “Brechtian reading,” but the only explanation he gives of what that reading would consist of is the famous aphorism from Brecht’s early *Threepenny opera* that would later serve as epigraph to *Plata quemada*, his own experiment with the hard-boiled and true-crime genres: “What’s robbing a bank compared to founding one?”. Many critics have taken this to mean that we should interpret the corpus in light of Brecht’s own “materialist” apparatus,

sidestepping the validity and security of the system being critiqued and making the leap to the capitalist status quo as history's worst ongoing crime scene (this interpretation might also make Brecht, like Capote above, interchangeable with Walsh, whose *Rosendo* explicitly makes that very leap). I would suggest, however, that the invocation of Brecht and the *Threepenny Opera* might actually be more complex and worthy of a brief analysis.

Firstly, Brecht was himself an avid reader of crime novels (or "*Krimi*," as they are affectionately known in German, as well as in some of Brecht's own writings on them⁸⁴); Brecht was particularly fond of both the English "classical" tradition, Chesterton in particular, and the more popular, feuilletonesque adventure-crime hybrids of the early penny press in England and in Germany. He makes reference in various critical texts to representational and critical potential in the crime genres, suggesting in his famous article about writing truthfully under fascism that effective representations of social conditions might be "snuck into" the "despised" genre of the crime novel without attracting the attention of fascist censors. He also devotes an entire 1940 article to speculating psychologically as to the appeal and popularity of crime novels: aside from the usual explanations about escapism and the pleasure of disinterested logic, Brecht also offers an interesting historicist corollary that the illusion of knowable causalities and definitive [historical] truths is gratifying to the alienated modern subject who can only experience history as catastrophe (268-9). This escapism from a "catastrophic" twentieth century seems quite congruous with Walsh's and Yates' ongoing conversation about the Peronist "boom" of the crime genres, and could offer a different and complementary "Brechtian reading" of the North American corpus.

Secondly, the *Dreigroschenoper* in particular is a reflexive work of genre theory and history itself, since its prelude sets up a kind of *mise en abîme* of the crime genre's origins in (and ties to) a proletarian view of history and urban capitalism. In the first film version (co-adapted with the important pioneer of popular film, G. W. Pabst), this *mise en abîme* is reconfigured tellingly as a kind of frame-story in which the events of the play (and thus, the bulk of the film) are presented as a staging or imagining of the content of an itinerant crime-balladeer's tale. Brecht, too, saw crime fiction as especially apt for mobilizing proletarian discontent with a legal and economic structure that looks very different from a proletarian perspective; Brecht's philosophical take on Marxist history, and on literary form, overlap quite a bit with Antonio Gramsci's, and thus with Rama's interpretation of Walsh. But what's specific to Brecht, I contend, and what Piglia means by a "Brechtian reading" is the way in which social relations and history can be dissected by the microcosm of theater understood as panglossia, a form of literature that makes an experimental social microcosm from speech and gesture alone.

To schematize, then, we could say that Walsh synthesized the strong narrators of both contemporary journalism and popular fiction to craft for himself an enunciatory position from which to dissect contemporary history and to propagate unpopular truths. In Bayer's aphorism, as in Piglia's "reconstructed" interview from 1986 and even in a spate of recent works of creative non-fiction⁸⁵, Walsh's life and work converge in the lasting myth of a detective-investigator-avenger mediating and channeling subaltern voices. Brecht, on the other hand, strove to write himself out of the equation in favor of a more transparent polyphony of minor

voices. Whether or not Brecht succeeds at achieving that objectivity or that effacement of the authorial voice is irrelevant to the “Brechtian reading” which, as I read it, is called for as a counterweight to Walsh’s form of active reading. Brecht’s panglossic work with voices, whatever else one might say about it, strives to be radically decentered and squarely grounded in the specificities of inflection, irony, and dialect. While the rest of Piglia’s major works before *Plata quemada*⁸⁶ could be characterized as grounded in Walsh’s experiments in form, structured around the same central axes of investigator and enigma, in *Plata quemada* the Walshian investigative frame gets dwarfed by the expansive Brechtian radio-drama that fills it. Here, then, Piglia’s deployment of “Brecht” is less about Brecht’s actual work (or his DDR-officialist biography) than it is about claiming Brecht as a kind of anti-Walsh, a science of the “Brechtian reading” to . Piglia finds “Brecht” a useful landmark in registering shifts in the historical horizons of possibility for the novel: Walsh’s investigative fictions are a relic of an age characterize by public intellectuals and an activist, ideological press, while the subversive best-seller fantasized by Brecht looks more worthwhile than ever in the media-numbered age of neoliberalism.

***Plata quemada*: Walshian truth and Brechtian voices in the age of televised talking heads**

*Entre [las ideas críticas de Brecht], hay una muy sugerente: la idea de que hay una gestualidad y un uso del lenguaje que condensan sentidos sociales. Como si uno fuera extranjero y se moviera dentro de una realidad, percibiendo el funcionamiento de esa nueva sociedad desde afuera, solamente por el uso del lenguaje y de cierto tipo de posturas, de sistemas de organización de las redes sociales: cómo se saluda la gente, cómo se sienta, etcétera. Eso me ayudó mucho a darle al trabajo de Plata quemada un sentido que no fuera solamente naturalista o costumbrista. ¿Cómo trabajar un mundo cerrado, cuyo lenguaje parece una lengua extranjera, sin hacer de esto una mera reconstrucción antropológica o una visión costumbrista del habla de ciertos sectores? Para Brecht, ahí se deben encerrar sentidos que hablen del conjunto de la sociedad y no solamente de ese sector*⁸⁷.

—Piglia interviewed by Juan Gabriel Vásquez in *lateral*, revista de cultura no. 73, Jan. 2001

*La voz llegaba distorsionada, en falsete, una típica voz de guanaco, retorcida y prepotente, vacía de cualquier sentimiento que no fuera el verdugueo. Tipos que gritan seguros de que el otro va a obedecer o se va a hundir. Esa es la voz de la autoridad, la que se escucha por el altavoz en los calabozos, en los pasillos de los hospitales, en los celulares que llevan a los presos en medio de la noche por la ciudad vacía a los sótanos de las comisarías para darles goma y máquina.*⁸⁸

—*Plata quemada*, 117

I should state clearly at the outset that I read *Plata quemada* as a formal breakthrough for Piglia, and for crime fiction generally: beyond marking a turn in Piglia’s career or in

Argentine crime fiction generally *from Walsh to Brecht*, it also represents a timely and experimental synthesis of disparate modes of analyzing history in the novel and different ways of representing social sectors presented as radically foreign to the literate middle class. Indeed, the novel synthesizes many different affective modes of popular crime fiction I've studied so far, refined over the course of the twentieth century for very different publics. It is "ambiguous" and cynical in its hard-boiled investigative frame story yet sensational in its gossipy, polyphonic content. Its nostalgic evocation of the 1960's can be seen as a recreation of, or homage to, an earlier, testimonial moment in the history of creative non-fiction, yet the style and structure of the piece are nevertheless fine-tuned to a contemporary audience. (Putting aside the nepotism controversy about the Premio Planeta prize, it was a successful and popular novel well before its filmic adaptation). The novel's open structure juxtaposes a wide range of affects drawn from diverse generic conventions: the guilty thrills of true-crime journalism, the objectivity-effects of an "anthropological" study of inaccessible and marginal social sectors, while still gesturing towards the pseudo-scientific and sociological conceits of the irredeemably lurid paperback *thriller*.

This fugue-like synthesis makes the disparate generic approaches and affective structures it juggles feel like so many variations, in fiction and in non-fiction, of a common discourse on the social order as projected on the criminality it excludes. As much in narrative structure as in the variance of styles (usually sustained for an entire chapter each), the novel presents the heroic narrative arc from planning to heist to ambush to self-sacrifice through so many filters, digressions, and variations as to make the narrative content largely secondary to the formal patchwork of voices and ideologies mediating it. The subtle power of the piece lies in its texture of insinuation and double-entendre, which represents the entire discourse of criminality from the legal register down to the yellow press as crisscrossed by ulterior investments and ideological distortions. The "voice of authority" that is both the messenger and the structure of that Statist discourse is the boogeyman around which all the voices of the novel are oriented; the novel is structured as a series of testimonies from various ostensibly "foreign" or subaltern perspectives. Insofar as the novel is a *contestatory* and parodic representation of that authoritarian voice, it can be seen as a Walshian denunciation, yet it lacks (or even mourns) the enunciatory position from which such a denunciation would normally be launched. Its attack is much more indirect, a series of minor skirmishes. Its Brechtian polyphony exceeds and escapes the kind of testimonial denunciation promised by its first two chapters, leaving behind the reliable and maverick investigator suspended on the margins as a kind of campy throwback. This toothless Walshian commentator left mootly on the sidelines marks the difference between 1968 and 1999, between the historical horizons of possibility for Walsh's print-driven and polarized revolutionary moment and the mass-media-driven age of neoliberal democracy in which "revolution" and "truth" are no longer concepts available to the writing of novels.

Of course, Piglia's intention is hardly to show a Walshian project as dated or foreclosed; if anything, Piglia's novel is earnestly trying to recuperate and update Walsh's methods for a drastically different age. Piglia's parodic and unmediated juxtaposition of legal, official,

contestatory, pathologizing, populist, moral, amoral, middle-class and working-class interpretations of the same characters and events, which is the basic operation of Piglia's novel, takes to a new level the trademark Walshian method of synthesizing various free-indirect discourses. The autofictional narrator orchestrating this ostensibly non-fictional oral history takes Walsh's novelistic methods and formal innovations to the point where they seem a parody of "ambiguous" hard-boiled social commentary and its "trasfondo político-social oscuro". This somewhat parodic cameo by the hard-boiled detective figure that survives the historical Walsh is not so much critical as nostalgic: it establishes a kind of period-appropriate interlocutor and frame story to be juxtaposed with newer, more impersonal inquiries into foreign social terrain, namely a "Brechtian" work on voices and a reflection on how television changed the news event. Piglia is trying to update, at the turn of the millennium, many of the formal operations by which Walsh and Brecht exploited crime fiction's politically-consequential fantasies about State power and individual agency by appealing to popular fiction's porous boundary with journalism. This reflexive work on testimony and journalism takes the form of a semiotic metalanguage whereby popular opinions and prejudices are treated as so many "myths," a trope which weaves together all the novel's chapters and which is retroactively emphasized by the reflexive epilogue.

Belying this vocabulary of cultural values and myths, however, is the tangible lack of an exteriority from which to study them; as the novel progresses, the frame story about first-hand documents and Renzi's investigations offered by the first two chapters recedes into the background as a kind of generically-necessary premise, even a fairly implausible one at that. As the voices continue to multiply and outstrip the ostensibly objective position of the investigator collating them, the voices comprising them take over the novel, an effect which essentially all critics remark but with little consensus on how to describe or analyze. Each chapter, or in a few cases each large section set off within a chapter, is readily legible as the variously-mediated or synthesized testimony of one person; in some of these, other sources are corroborated or credited explicitly with phrases like "or at least, according to...". Michelle Clayton has written of this multivocal texture⁸⁹ that "these voices are grouped according to their registers: from the jargon of the marginalized and criminal classes, through the readily comprehensible speech of the masses, the deceptively definitive tone of reportage, the specious and reductive terminology of a psychiatric report, the authoritative declarations of police reports, to the artistically enhancing style of the privileged narrator, Emilio Renzi... These voices circulate and compose society" (46). As a summary of the novel's organization into testimonial nodes clustered around the account of one interview subject or "speaker", I find her take quite useful. I would, however, draw a crucial distinction between a patchwork of voices that "composes" society, in the sense of representing as a cohesive and legible totality, and one that "decomposes" society, in the sense of using those voices to highlight fissures and conflicts in society. The former mode is the domain of mainstream historical fiction and, to some degree, of much of Latin America's testimonial tradition (to which I'll turn below), in which an atmosphere and a *Zeitgeist* are produced chorally and synthetically. The latter, more critical mode experimented throughout the 60's and 70's in various genres⁹⁰ has a negative, parasitic relation to the former mode, rendering it emphatically self-contradictory and ambiguous.

Piglia uses this disjunctive mode of polyphony to destabilize not only the conventions of *Zeitgeist* and topicality but also true-crime's "schematizing" apparatus for domesticating transgression, resentment, and populist heroism as mere sensational fantasy. All the chapters are definitely "grouped together by register," and the voice of young Renzi is in fact "privileged," but there is something a little more complex at work. This playfully vernacular scheme occludes subtle maneuvers that could easily pass by unnoticed or be mistaken uncritically for pulp conventions, when in fact they are quite the opposite. I'm thinking in particular of the way corroborating and conflicting accounts are woven into a given chapter not just as parenthetical asides, but also "translated" into what Clayton refers to as the "register" of each chapter, particularly noticeable when, say, a psychiatric prognosis or legalistic conjecture are phrased in street slang to blend into the testimony of one of the gun molls or vice versa.

I see this overt subordination of each compared or corroborating source to the register of the chapter's primary source as an echo of (and perhaps even a deliberate homage to) the free indirect discourse apparatus evolved through the successive rewritings of *Operación massacre*. Across these rewritings, the allusive and linguistic register of the autofictional young "Walsh" ceded gradually to the linguistic register of his subjects, on whose behalf he both literally and morally spoke. This middle register made a kind of hermeneutics out of the "palabra-ganzúa," symbolically downplaying the text's individual authorship by buttressing the authority of the synthesizing author-figure with the experiential, oral criteria of authenticity grounded in its many testimonial subtexts. But while Walsh reconstructs a repressed truth by pitting one set of testimonies against the official account produced by the State, claiming greater objectivity and veracity in a synthesis less foreign to the subjects' working-class milieu, Piglia brings this subtle and persuasive synthetic form into closer contact with the sensational and "domesticated" mainstream of the journalistic tradition, but sabotages his own synthesis and fails to produce the harmless, entertaining account the reader is conditioned to expect from this form. The mainstream true-crime formula could be described as a moralizing, simplistic narrative buttressed by a dossier collated from the usual accounts of doctors, lawyers, policemen, repentant accessories, and victims, as would dictate; Walsh and Capote made a revisionist variation on the formula by showing exactly where, in a complex and contradictory set of testimonies, a simplistic interpretation might err or already had. Instead, Piglia simply collates his testimonies half-synthesized to provide a reflexive space for more open-ended and broader historical considerations; instead of a moralizing or even a self-righteously revisionist overarching thesis, his sensational story advances no thesis at all, simply offering up its vicarious thrills as ends unto themselves.

In *Plata Quemada*, Piglia expunges a whole heuristic of "truth" and the ideological certainties it presumes along any central argument or narrative focus. Instead of trying to unearth a buried truth, Piglia's sights are set on truths hidden in plain sight; instead of leveraging new testimonies against an official account, Piglia destabilizes the official account on its own terms, turning its own testimonies against itself. By reducing to absurdity the paranoid (and anachronistic, even for 1965) prognoses of the criminal psychologist, the militaristic posturing of the single-minded police sergeant, the wrathful legacy of prison culture, and the

contradictory position of the seemingly sympathetic former accomplices betraying the culprits to the authorities, Piglia is showing key institutions of power as ineffectual and cruel, a prognoses of total corruption that bounces around the echo chamber of the novel with a kind of indirect unanimity. But this nihilistic overtone of negativity shouldn't be hastily equated to an absence of any clear message or social critique; stopping to examine the speech of a few specific "mouthpieces" can tease out some of the subtleties of this indirect critique of neoliberalism.

For instance, it is unclear whose testimony provides the factual backbone of the accounts of the first chapter until this witness is introduced pejoratively on page 21: "El entregador era un cantor de tangos que se hacía llamar Fontán Reyes"⁹¹. Fontán Reyes is a petty crook and minor tango singer whose career was ruined by cocaine, a cartoonishly generic stock character defined by his emphatic pettiness: his monologue is peppered with self-serving references to emasculations at the hand of the real "pesados," professional alienations as an outsider to the conspiracy, and escapist fantasies of relocating to New York with a suitcase full of dollars. The cliché of the excessively minor tango singer, stretching from Borges' early work through to Juan Sasturain's campy *Manual de perdedores*, is an established commonplace for pettiness and proletarian aspirations (rendered with varying degrees of sympathy depending on the politics of this or that middle-class author). The almost hyperbolic pedigree and Iberian evocation of his assumed name cartoonishly draws attention to the connotations of his actual name, Atir Omar Nocito, which remain unspoken by any character within the novel. But that electively Hispanic identity also defines the character by his dream of finding a place in the Puerto Rican "mafia" of New York; it could even be read as a harbinger of the Puerto Rican corpse of *Blanco nocturno*, blessed with an campy name that one might expect from a B-Movie dandy or a Merengue singer, Tony Durán.

But Fontán Reyes is also a near-perfect anagram of Renato Flores, the fall-guy in Walsh's first (and most widely reprinted) hard-boiled story, "Cuento para tahures," which, as mentioned above, was Walsh's contribution to Argentina's first anthology of national crime fiction. The bookish intertext seems deliberate, since Flores, like Reyes, is defined by his fear and by the unfortunate circumstance of having stumbled into a world of professional "heavies." Both men opportunistically fight their way out of this working-class criminal milieu about which we are assumed to know nothing as "innocent" and vicarious middle-class readers. Whereas in Walsh's story, the single *palabra-ganzúa*, which names the loaded dice over which a man had to be killed, appears in scare quotes, here, Piglia's D-list tango singer unleashes an excessive and stagey flood of such "local" words and *al vezre* syllable inversions without any typographic or contextual concessions, nervously *overacting* his role in a combination of clichéd tackiness and cocaine-addled nerves. After all, Flores' testimony is only valuable, to either the authorities or to the true-crime reader, insofar as his testimony is *authentic*; he has to sound the part.

The second chapter concatenates the testimonies (both in the press and in the police record) of the victims, which is to say, of the bank employees and security personnel massacred by the gang. But the martyrology that the mainstream true-crime genre would demand of these noble and innocent victims is undercut on various levels at once. On the one hand, the

criminals' monologues and sound bites about drugs and hotrods, unattributed to a specific witness unlike everything else in the chapter, mythologize the perpetrators at exactly the moment of their worst transgression, ramping up the vicarious sensationalism that would delight in their unknowable amorality and that portrays their senseless violence as an elemental force. On the other hand, the victims' innocence is problematized by a free indirect discourse that characterizes them in economic, Walshian fashion by dwelling on their long-standing fantasies of theft and their alienated resentment towards their dangerous jobs: "guarding other people's money and other people's women... [like] loyal dogs" (29). This sentence marks the first appearance of the recurring imagery of wolves and dogs (loyal or savage, wandering or caged) that effectively links the frustrations of the security personnel, the police, the short-term accomplice left bleeding at the police ambush, the explanatory prison flashbacks, and the climactic siege. This *locus classicus* for representing alienation and violence, equally common in hard-boiled fiction and modernist literature, here serves to turn every form of violence and masculinity into one more permutation of a shared dehumanization which is the only overarching theme of the novel. In proper Brechtian fashion, this alienation finds its simplest, most quotidian expression in the invisible frustrations of working for an unexceptional bank, being paid a pittance to help guard a temple of primitive accumulation. In sharp contrast to the various "miracles" in *Operación masacre* that achieve a paradoxical verisimilitude and sympathy, here the clichéd *milagro* of the bullet-stopping pocket watch is a kind of sick joke, a banal commonplace that falls flat and, in so doing, further confounds the distribution of sympathy and scorn traditional to the true-crime genre.

Having unmoored the vicarious investments and thrills from their moral grounding and justification, Piglia's third chapter uses a generalized and free-floating affect of paranoia to further undermine the traditional ideological frame of the true-crime genre. This paranoia shared between narrators and induced in the reader is perhaps the furthest affective register possible from the scientific and criminological certainties on which generic and conventional crime fictions are based: these certainties about law and order are the ideological tenets that permit a criminal tragedy to be represented as a knowable, dissectable, and preventable exception. This genre-inappropriate uncertainty and unknowability is presented, from the very first page, as a kind of essential periodization of the mid 1960's: from the first news of the straight-forward bank robbery, the newspapers begin speculating as to how it must relate to the period's escalating terrorist violence, without needing to defend the assumption that they are related in the first place. This groundless comparison undergirds the deep and pathological paranoia uniting the three central voices of the chapter, and set the tone for the rest of novel, which in this regard can be read, at least affectively, as a prequel to *Respiración artificial*.

The chapter is structured then, less by a factual cohesion or synthesis of account, then by a spurious corroboration between three proleptic fantasies about terrorism. First, Nando, the focal point of the press' fantasy of a terrorist conspiracy, explicitly models his criminal organization on cellular terrorism he'd learned in the nationalist underground during the proscription of Peronism⁹², which Piglia makes sure to specify was, in Nando's case, a strictly right-wing affair (51). Second, Commissioner Silva gets *carte blanche* from the Federal

authorities to operate a “*campaña de exterminio*” and to apply to common criminals torture protocols that would become widespread and official a decade later, based solely on the paranoid fantasy that crime cannot be distinguished from, or insulated from, anti-State terrorism along Algerian⁹³ lines and vice-versa (52-53). Thirdly, the State doctor Bunge’s emphatic and obsessive litany of his patients’ incurable, deeply-engrained pathologies not only justifies but even dovetails with the fantasy-world of Silva, turning the State’s mental ward into an extension of the prison and his psychiatric treatment into an extension of the [torture-induced] confession (55-57). In a paranoid flourish, Bunge even suspects the most tangibly disturbed criminal, the schizophrenic Dorda, of falsely performing his symptoms to avoid persecution, subtly harkening back to the concern for the veracity and empirical stability of psychological symptomology in the work of José Ingenieros, the politically and culturally influential founder of Argentine criminology and modern hygiene⁹⁴. Piglia paints Bunge as a clownish Foucauldian bully right out of Peter Weiss’ play *Marat/Sade*, making Piglia’s fantastic Siege of Montevideo a coordinated operation between all kinds of institutional power, of which psychology is but one cooperative wing. Nowhere is this clearer than in the interpellative address that Piglia playfully imagines as preface to the police’s standard, more pragmatic megaphone declarations: “Sabemos quiénes son ustedes. Están totalmente rodeados” (118).

The constitutional “paranoia” of that total institutional power is not just an *effect* of, or reaction to, the multivocal instability of the text; rather, Piglia’s subtle and deliberate strategy of concatenating alternate versions and citing conflicting and ill-informed sources strives precisely to uncover just how paranoid that power is, and how powerful is that popular mythology it suppresses. It is also a powerful reversal of the basic affective structure of the true-crime tradition that the novel situates itself in parodically: instead of moving from curiosity and vicarious thrills to social and moral resolution, it moves from certainty to paranoia. As the two protagonists reflexively muse in Piglia’s next novel, *Blanco nocturno*⁹⁵, the next stage in the evolution of the crime genres is to reverse the sign of the genre’s basic structure from singular truth to self-contradictory paranoia, from the methodological fantasy of positivist stability to the chaos of local, contingent truths distorted by unknowable individuals and self-serving institutions.

A quick side-bar might be in order to clarify my usage of the term “paranoia”, here, since it can often stand in for a whole set of theoretical and critical concepts, and will be treated at length in the next chapter. In criticism about Piglia’s novels, the term “paranoid” is often used in a narrow sense to mark the legacy of the two guiding stars of *La ciudad ausente*, the atmospheric and self-contradictory narrative techniques of Philip K. Dick and the redemptive schizophrenia of Deleuze and Guattari⁹⁶. But using the term more neutrally as a category of readerly affects (doubt, confusion, over-reading), we could just as well find various paranoias to be fundamental to all of Piglia’s mature works. The atmosphere and narrative structure of *Respiración artificial* owes most of its critical renown to the “accuracy” of its reflection of the rightly paranoid psychological *Zeitgeist* of the dictatorship period; *Blanco nocturno*, in its parodic pastiche of Argentina’s homegrown variant of “classic” detective fiction and of the even more emphatically home-spun “local sciences” of the national *gauchesco* tradition, uses both

genres to investigate a national tradition of paranoia that links Arltian mad scientists to neoliberal captains of industry.

In *Plata quemada*, the readerly experience of paranoia when faced with an opaque mass-media heteroglossia is Piglia's oblique and postmodern deformation of the Walshian challenge to active reading. Indeed, the true-crime genre customarily challenges the reader to recompose the events or sympathize with the characters' deep psychology, in variously conservative or critical ways. For instance, consider as both landmarks in the genre and as intertexts of *Plata quemada* Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* and Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson's *El Pibe Cabeza*, both from 1975 and both cited in Piglia's critical writings. Here, above and beyond these thought exercises within the narrative, the reader is prompted to challenge and decompose the narrative's authority to judge and understand. Beyond simply undercutting the conservative tendency to fix the characters' symptoms into official pathological categories and absolve the reader's vicarious investment, the reader is challenged to read against the grain of the genre and its basic logic of norms and exceptions.

One key formal device for achieving this paranoid and destabilized "true-crime" parody is the removal of a Walshian synthetic, autofictional narrator privileged over the other authorities in the novel. But "erasure" might be more apt than removal, because just as Walsh kept Hernández around as a foil and bystander after introducing his more hard-boiled alter-ego, Laurenzi, so too does Piglia retain his Walshian investigator, Renzi, as an index of his untimeliness and obsolescence. Indeed, in another winking allusion for the knowing reader, the young Emilio Renzi is first introduced by a scene of dialogue clearly modeled on Walsh's early story "Isaías Bloom," about a reporter baiting a foul-mouthed commissary at a press conference (68). This scene serves as an apt *mise-en-abîme* for the novel as a whole: the crypto-intellectual reporter challenges the authorities to justify their methods, their narrative, their science, their fantasies, but the reader is invited to continue the inconclusive line of inquiry after the scene's sudden truncation. Just as Walsh's nonfiction narrators seem conjured up magically by the conjunction of journalistic curiosity and a story worth telling, so too does Piglia present his hard-boiled double, only pages after being introduced, impulsively looking up "hubris" in the dictionary and beginning to frame his popular myth in literary terms. It's telling to note that in contrast to the working methods detailed by "Walsh" in Piglia's 1987 reconstructed interview, Renzi doesn't just begin working from this conceptual frame once it's struck him: he remarks, instead, that he'll have to *request permission* to use it in his headline (73), just as he'll petition, unsuccessfully, to keep investigating after his assignment loses its popular appeal at the end of *Blanco nocturno*. In both cases, Piglia circumscribes his mass-media bard not with editorial timidity or *de facto* censorship, as in Walsh's case, but with a merely mercenary concern for salability and circulation, a norm as repressive as any exception.

A classicist framework of tragedy and "hubris" serves as the meeting-point, then, of Walsh's *folletinesque* true-crime saga about the J. L. Suárez massacre, the Brechtian aphorism about the bank-robbery as exception and currency as norm, and Piglia's own playful effacement of narratorial control. Not only did the Jesuit-trained young Walsh edit *Operación massacre* into a novel structured around tragedy and hubris; some of the first testimonies published as

free-standing newspaper accounts already gestured towards an overarching “Odisea” that, implicitly, were calling out for a long-form bard to narrativize (cf. the *Revolución nacional* headline of 1/15/57, in Ferro, Appendix II). Likewise does young Renzi frames his account as a “larga odisea” in the most dramatic of his editorializing paragraphs, hedged by the recurring phrase “at moment of writing this note.” This dramatic paragraph starts off chapter seven with the longest continuous section written in Renzi’s distinctive and emphatically journalistic style, marking Renzi’s account as fundamentally different from the many accounts preceding it (135). Earlier, a reflexive nod to the deliberately classicist *construction* of Renzi’s journalistic account unexpectedly interrupts a chapter-length conjectural testimonial *reconstruction* of the mounting anxiety in the Buenos Aires hide-out: “De todos modos el destino había empezado a armar su trama, a tejer su intriga, a anudar en un punto (y esto lo escribí el chico que hacía policiales en *El mundo*) los hilos sueltos de aquello que los antiguos griegos han llamado el *muthos*” (84)⁹⁷. And in the apocryphal epilogue, “Piglia” recalls Blanca Galeano narrating to him in 1966 these same fateful “loose threads,” i.e. the same characters and events of chapter four, and recalls listening to them “como si me encontrara frente a una versión argentina de una tragedia griega. Los héroes deciden enfrentar lo imposible y resistir, y eligen la muerte como destino” (197)⁹⁸.

Renzi's impetus to write the story and that of Piglia's autofictional epilogist converge in this campy confession of the vicarious thrills and literary tourism that fuel the entire project. Indeed, this perverse undercurrent even leads to Renzi seemingly sympathizing on some level with Silva’s paranoid and torture-based interrogation methods in its veridical and linguistic directness: “Los restos muertos de la palabras que las mujeres y los hombres usan en el dormitorio y en los negocios y en los baños, porque la policía y los malandras (pensaba Renzi) son los únicos que saben hacer de las palabras objetos vivos, agujas que se entierran en la carne y te destruyen el alma como un huevo que se parte en el filo de la sartén” (146). The rhetorical impetus (its overtly hard-boiled masculinism) seems an explicit parody of an apocryphally-published diary entry in which Walsh describes, *à propos* of a sketch for his never-finished novel, his goal of “language to be handled like an object, wielded like a hammer” (*EH*, 210). This youthful, masculinist enthusiasm marks a certain distance between the young Renzi and the more ironic latter-day narrator, but it’s a distance that marks a continuity and the roundness of a biography, strengthening rather than weakening the autofictional dimension of the narration between its synthesizing, retrospective narrator and his forerunner “at the moment of writing this note”.

This autofictional link between Renzi’s mythologizing and “Piglia’s” mythopoesis also lays bare a certain ideological orientation of the novel which Ana Rodríguez-Pérsico has subtly analyzed in terms of a late essay by Claude Levi-Strauss,⁹⁹ in which the anthropologist genealogizes history and mythology as related explanatory frameworks for organizing collective experience. I’d like to build on Rodríguez-Pérsico's analysis, looking at how Piglia's is a specifically *Argentine* version of a Greek myth, and how this specific historical fiction could not have had the same historiographical and ideological agenda had it been set in 1975 or 1955. Here, I feel Josefina Ludmer’s essay on the *Juan Moreira* “cycle” of myths¹⁰⁰ is as important a

point of reference as Levi-Strauss, in tracing Argentina's canonical populist myth of the noble criminal across variously radical or domesticating versions in high and popular culture. It is the paranoid, nationalist-terrorist imaginary of Nando that most explicitly references this Argentine tradition, jumbling anarchists and nationalists, personal investment and popular appeal, historical figures and characters from the fictions of Roberto Arlt: "Era su amigo, no era un tipo cualquiera, era un bandolero al viejo estilo, un idealista, Malito, que podía convertirse en un héroe popular, como Di Giovanni o Scarfó y como el mismo Ruggerito o el falsificador Alberto Lazin y todos los mandras que habían peleado por la causa nacional" (105)¹⁰¹. It is something of an academic commonplace that in the Latin America of the late 1960's and early 70's, escalating Cold War repression, increasingly violent and confident challenges to the State from across the political spectrum, and tensions heightened by rapid economic and social changes all contributed to an upsurge of populist sympathy with social change, leading many on the Left to revive older myths and social alliances as grounding for new ones. In Argentina, this largely explains a revived interest in the variably anti-State myth of rebel-gaicho Juan Moreira, an interest contemporary with and subtly linked to broader public discussion about proscription during Perón's first regime and the repression of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in the 20's. Piglia's (as well as Ludmer's) critical work from that earlier historical period provides an intellectual corollary and context for this latter-day recuperation of a populist imaginary, now aimed at a new kind of public in a cynical, neoliberal age.

Plata quemada's 1965 setting also offers a chance to thematize the still-new social technology of television: the various testifying and opining voices don't share a lived experience of the events, but rather the counterfeited experience of televised, simulcast reality which is perhaps the only synthesis offered by the novel. Of the police performing their siege as if it were a war-game, Renzi writes in his emphatically immediate style and in the present tense: "Todos tienen en la cabeza imágenes recientes de la Guerra de Vietnam" (137)¹⁰². A chapter earlier, the synthetic narrator opines in the more ironic imperfect tense that recurs throughout the novel: "La gente se había reunido en la zona y hacía declaraciones idiotas en los micrófonos y frente a las cámaras como si todos supieran lo que estaba pasando y fueran testigos presenciales y directos. Por la pantalla de la tele el Nene y el Gaucho se dieron cuenta de que afuera había empezado a garuar" (124)¹⁰³. The homology between war and crime is even mentioned as a deliberate aesthetic choice on the part of the nameless, faceless television journalists in the same chapter: "Las cámaras hacían sus paneos sobre los heridos porque por primera vez en la historia era posible transmitir en vivo, sin censura, los visajes de los muertos en la batalla de la ley contra el crimen" (130)¹⁰⁴. Renzi's mythologizing of his subjects' "heroic" and anarchic acts (culminating in the theatrical potlatch of the titular currency bonfire) is thus a kind of anachronistic Walshian activist journalism, sympathizing with the irredeemable villains in an unstoppable mass-media process of domestication. In Piglia's complex vision of this historical shift in journalism, the Vietnam and Algerian wars become domesticated and the domestic "war on crime" becomes a theater of inhumane violence as it gets deliberately confused with twentieth-century's Argentina's recurring domestic struggles of prescription, repression, torture, and retaliation. Renzi undermines that mass-media illusion of immediacy and intelligibility with his optimistic present-tense mythologizing, while the past-tense

disillusionment of the epilogue's "Piglia" bemoans both the limits of the genre and the cynical folk wisdom that crime *does* pay if you can coordinate with friends in high enough places.

This bifurcated frame story, which begins with Walshian Renzi and ends with a brow-beaten, Brechtian "Piglia" dramatizes the underlying nostalgia of the novel, its anachronistic resuscitation of a testimonial form that long ago ceased to function as the political weapon it had been for Walsh, who saw it as the literary genre of the future. Piglia's fictionalized non-fiction novel marks end of a genre in decadence, and for this very reason Piglia sets the action in the historical period that created that genre in the first place. This ironic play of timeliness and untimeliness foregrounds a shift in social relations of power that takes place in the interceding decades: the violent excesses of the State become easier to sell to an eager public when the rhetoric of war, and its concomitant narrative, filmic, and journalistic codes, are brought into the living room and applied to new theaters of "war". The ironic dissonance created by juxtaposing the "idiotic declarations" of the television-witnesses to the refined and critical journalistic testimonial apparatus that Renzi cribbs from Walsh serves not just to position the text in a contestatory and revisionist tradition vis-à-vis that "voice of authority" that underwrites journalism and history generally. But unlike Walsh's appeal to his active reader, this is no call to arms against a corrupt State or even a corrupt state of affairs; the Goliath in Piglia's novel is the complacent public that accepts its State's unquestioned representation regime, in which all crime can be reduced to an attack on order. For the first time in history, furthermore, any and all challenges to the State (and more usefully, any distasteful reprisals and suppressions they entailed) could be transformed into public spectacles that enter into a market for scandal and news. If, in Walsh's day, the deceitful and censored press required its reader to read "backwards," the "Brechtian reading" Piglia asks for in *Plata quemada* would go even further in its Gramscian hermeneutics of popular fantasy and pro-State representational systems. Perhaps it could be said of Piglia's campy novel that, like Walsh's testimonies or Brecht's hypothetical crime pulp, it belongs to a future genre that won't come into focus until after some massive social changes. Piglia seems to conjecture a recuperation of the testimonial and non-fiction genres that have largely lost their promise of political and social activism since the 1970's and 1980's.

This historical loss of faith in the political purchase of testimonial forms, which Piglia nostalgically bemoans as a kind of epochal tragedy, marks the work of Puig more fundamentally. All of Puig's novels are patchworks of voices and "testimonies", so selecting two for special consideration as his "most" testimonial would be almost arbitrary; instead, I'd like to focus more specifically on where testimonial form crosses over into documentary and politically-effective non-fiction, where that link between social critique and contemporary history are the most direct. Two of his novels, taken in isolation, strike me as a particularly dramatic before-and-after of Puig's experimentation with the political dimension of testimonial literature, so I will analyze them in terms that continue my discussion above of the minimal pair of Renzi and "Piglia." First, however, I'll situate that experimentation with testimonial forms in the broader context of his psychological and readerly exploration of melodrama.

Puig: Testimony and Confession, Active Readership and Readerly Complicity

*La narración, me decía [Fuyita], es un arte de vigilantes, siempre están queriendo que la gente cuente sus secretos, cante a los sospechosos, cuente de sus amigos, de sus hermanos. Entonces, decía él, la policía y la denominada justicia han hecho más por el avance del arte del relato que todos los escritores a lo largo de la historia. ¿Y Yo? Yo soy la que cuenta.*¹⁰⁵

—Ricardo Piglia, *La ciudad ausente*, 158

*¿Maldición eterna a quién? ¿Al policía que descubriese y leyese estas páginas?
¿Maldición eterna a cualquiera que las lea con malos ojos, con ojos de policía?*¹⁰⁶

—Puig, *Maldición a quién lea estas páginas*, 125

As we've already seen in Chapter 1's discussion of *Boquitas pintadas*, Puig's narrative project dovetails modernist hermeneutics of the reflexive and critical psychodrama with a melodramatic Hollywood apparatus; we've also seen how the project incorporated centrally the representational conventions of melodrama and the coded social commentary of the "crime melodrama" specifically, and how it appropriated devices from the more overtly sociological European variations of these traditions. However colloquial and vernacular Puig's narrative may seem, his foremost object of study is, in a word, subjectification, by which I mean the imbrication of power structures like the family, sexual identity, social structure, and the State in the formation of the subject and the psyche¹⁰⁷. Many of Puig's novels could be read as almost programmatic elaborations of theses from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in which narration itself (particularly the popular vernacular of romance) codifies desire and identity, rationalizing and regimenting it into bad consciousness.

In Puig's socially critical melodramas, gossip becomes a kind of currency, a pure form of power wielded within the family, by the police, and as the highest form of leverage in the closed system of a small town. "Valuable information" mutates as it is transacted and transferred between various, analogous representational systems: the police report, the intelligence report, the medical report, the variously codified (and never entirely sincere) epistle, the fashion column, the gossip column, and the crime column all figure in this informational landscape. The active readership that these texts condition and reward could be called "forensic," retracing the routes taken by leaked information and reconstructing cover-ups, euphemisms, and open secrets. Puig's particular brand of active readership, seen in all his work, is on the narrative level one of shifting through partial and contradictory testimonies be they oral, personal, or bureaucratic, and on the interpretive level one of reading through people's chosen words for occluded psychology, self-deception, and dishonesty.

The point at which Puig's novelistic project comes closest to Walsh's and enters into dialogue with the nonfiction genres that were accruing so much political importance across the 70's and 80's is the point at which, in Foucauldian terms, *History of Sexuality* spills over into *Discipline and Punish*. In the two works I'll be studying here the relation between confession and subjecthood is less causal or abstract than instrumental; these works represents confession

as a tool in the State's apparatus of *surveillance* in the most sinister and Benthamian sense of the word. Crucially, the central events of both texts I'd like to discuss in this chapter take place in prison: *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) is entirely set in closely-watched custody and *Maldición eternal a quién lea estas páginas* (1980) refers back to the custody and surveillance of that repressive period as an open and persistent wound. In a sense, the latter text rewrites the former reversing not only its relation of frame story to central narrative, but also its optimism about the outcomes of [public] memory-work. In the former, an allegory of reading that takes place in a prison is framed only retrospectively by an epilogue narrated "outside," in an occupied Buenos Aires no less closely watched; in the latter, the frame story is an historical inquest finessing the murky emotional barriers preventing the characters and the reader from accessing and deciphering the titular "prison notebooks". In both, a relatively privileged academic Marxist is brought into close and tense contact with someone who, if not an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense, has come to a congruous understanding of social power by experience instead of by consciousness-raising. The dialogical ways in which the protagonists in each novel grow in ideological and sentimental terms are thus crucially linked to the implicitly pedagogical relation between author and reader.

To wit, both novels train an active and reflexive readership motivated less by melodramatic readerly pleasures and psychoanalytic heuristics of truth than by a contestatory stance towards authority. The novel's stark representation of hegemony and authority as a prison leaves few shades of ideological grey: the prison's jailed and confessional texts demand urgently to be read in a way that disrupts the circuit of near-total surveillance in which they are trapped. The form taken by the novels, like the circuit of surveillance it depicts, privileges one register of desiring narratives over and against the others: sentimental, religious, and personal confessions are represented as merely incriminating subsidiaries of the criminal confession demanded at all times by the surveillance State. In both novels, as in the epigraph from Piglia, the State brokers confessions and narratives of desire to extract the secrets of its subjects; as in any deductive crime fiction, the reader is enticed to deduce the secrets sooner than they are revealed, and as in any crime melodrama the narrative can be reduced to a chain of events following from the safety or diffusion of secrets. I'd like to show by studying these two novels how Walsh's politicized pedagogy of active reading, though simpler and more optimistic than that of Puig's complicit and conflicted reading tutorial, paved the way for the latter's more reflexive exposés of national history and his confession-centric ethics of narrative.

I'd first like to address the testimonial backdrop of the earlier of these two works, *El beso de la mujer araña*, the most widely read and studied of Puig's works. While the overt didacticism of the finished product has steered most academic discussion about the book towards the education of the reader and the affective awakening of its two main characters, academic hindsight is increasingly showing the project to have retained much from the early stages, when its author was planning a historical and political investigation along surprisingly Walshian lines. Recent genetic studies of Puig's writing process during this period¹⁰⁸ show that political polemic (and local color) aren't so much absent from the text as deliberately obscured and ciphered by a process of "stylization" and fictionalization, which pushed a properly

Argentine polemic further and further into the register of euphemism and circumlocution while extending the cultural scope (and the language) of the work. Indeed, the initial conception of the novel was to loyally transcribe and partially fictionalize tape-recorded interviews, conducted in 1975 by Puig, with prisoners released in 1973 from the political unit of Villa Devoto prison. In the wake of death threats on his family from the AAA¹⁰⁹ and censorship problems with his controversial *Buenos Aires Affair*, Puig conceived of a polemic and testimonial project to demand transparency from a State that he saw progressing rapidly towards outright totalitarianism.

It's curious to note, however, that as he revised and reworked his interviewees' testimonies towards a narrativized product, he progressively edited *out* all of the working-class and carceral slang that would have authenticated the testimonial basis of the work for an Argentine audience¹¹⁰. In the process of removing these *palabruas-ganzuas* localizing and socially delimiting his text, Puig tailored his work to an international audience (his correspondence from the time shows that intelligibility to the broadest possible audience was paramount already), but this process of universalization shouldn't be overstated. Having already closed the "Argentine trilogy," and already doubtful that he'd live in Argentina much longer or ever again, Puig continued to analyze political problems and formations specific to Argentina in ways still recognizable to the knowing [Argentine] reader, even as he "generalized" the testimonial and psychological substance of his inquiry linguistically and thematically. A Walshian or Brechtian fidelity to working-class speech as a window onto a working-class imaginary is foreclosed by its geographic specificity, yet access to that imaginary is still essential to Puig's project for a broader reading public. Indeed, what occludes the kinship between Puig's project and Walsh's or Brecht's might be the simple fact that in Puig's work, a working-class imaginary is accessible through the *foreign* and *international* medium of reified, commercial film and its spectacular emotions. With *Beso* and a number of subsequent novels, Puig confronts an international middle-class reader with an Argentine crisis of liberalism that she is likely to know little about, understood as a Latin American problem more generally or by analogy to the crises of other repressive Latin American governments. Of both readerships, the knowing Argentine one and the international one reading the novel in translation, Puig assumes a familiarity with the testimonial and non-fiction genres that are the unmarked backdrop of the novel.

Though it is hardly marked as testimonial by the conventional paratextual and typographic conventions of that genre, Puig's final novel, having essentially jumped the dividing line between literary non-fiction and fiction proper, is nevertheless a definitively oral text. The texture and register deployed make that orality much more intimate and familiar to the middle-class reader than most testimonial texts which exoticize a dialogue marked as foreign to literary language and circulation, further obscuring the generic template of the politicized testimonial or the true-crime tell-all which had been Puig's starting point. That testimonial template which Puig deliberately obscured was very much topical, and probably would have been more recognizable in its partial obscurity to the contemporary reader's mind than it is today. Indeed, in a recent article comparing Walsh's use of the tape recorder to Puig's¹¹¹, María Moreno

argues that Puig's novel was published at the apex of the testimonial novel's importance in Latin America¹¹², at a time when Puig's public could not have missed the kinship between the work and the era's more overtly polemic oral histories and testimonials. Puig eschews the conceit and form of the testimonial interview proper, yet retains tangible traces of the structure of an interview scattered throughout like breadcrumbs. The reader senses gradually, almost viscerally, that what they are reading is less a natural conversation than a stilted interview: one participant is more active, more invested, more eloquent and more leading in their questions.

This slight imbalance has to be just noticeable enough to tease the active reader and hint at what Romero calls the "subterranean" plot that comes to structure the novel from the first pass of revision and novelization. Her terminology gracefully does double-duty in referring both to Puig's writing process, in which pivotal scenes or letters were drafted in detail and revised only to be removed from the final product as absent centers¹¹³, and to a crime-genre tradition whereby a reconstructed crime scene or ongoing "second plot" is illuminated and accessed by the successful endeavors of the foregrounded plot of investigation, a generic blueprint that Piglia adapts from Todorov's formalist formula (See Cain section of Chapter 1). According to Romero's account of how he wrote *Beso*, Puig considered both his transcribed interviews and his readings on radical tendencies in contemporary psychoanalysis to be novelistic "research". The frontier zone between crime fiction and journalism early on for a more properly novelistic structure and a more linguistically universalized endeavor, but much of the claustrophobic psychology of the prison and the dramatic power dynamic of the forced confession survives from these real-world sources. While the final product is neither an interview nor an interrogation, both modalities seem to hang behind the novel's overt parable of interpretation like a discreet subtext. Here more than anywhere else does Puig explicitly frame active readership as an *ethical stance* vis-à-vis a surveillance State.

Puig's finished novel begins conversationally *in medias res*, and with markedly minimal narration aside from dialogue, it stages its reading lesson as a negotiation of narrative, emotional, and ideological codes between two cellmates inside a special unit of an Argentine prison. The more passive conversational "object," Arregui, is a young Marxist revolutionary recognizable to the contemporary reader as a distinct social type, almost a stereotype. Puig's interview subjects, from whom he cribbed much of Arregui's language and demeanor, came he the same Trotskyist and intellectual wing of the far-left underground in which Walsh had recently played an influential and public role. (Both of Saer's characters discussed below would have been in the same social class and ideological camp as well). The conversational "subject" and protagonist is Molina, a working-class "loca" or "queen" from a pre-"liberation" generation of queer men. Although some readers have taken Arregui and Molina as generational archetypes for Puig's interview subjects and for Puig himself, I find such a maneuver reductive and deeply erroneous, particularly as a self-portrait¹¹⁴; reading against the grain of Puig's fictionalization to get to the original interviews would negate Puig's agency in orchestrating a subtler interplay of ideologies between sectors of society that interact rarely unless forced to by the institution of the prison. Molina's generational distance from a younger generation's

“liberated” and identitarian sexuality is, like Arregui’s youthful idealism and iconoclasm, crucial to that interplay of identities and interpretive modes that enables their deep and transgressive bond. Written and published (exclusively) in Spain in 1976, the year Argentina’s most repressive and totalitarian military *Junta* came into power definitively, the economic plot and clinical narration make didactically clear the stakes of the novel. Active reading isn’t just trained in the reader, it’s modeled by the characters whose learning is foregrounded as a form of resistance: only by “reading” each other is a coalition possible that gives its individuals the strength and the means to remain opaque even to torture, the repressive State’s more barbaric form of “reading” its subjects.

And how do these two prisoners read one another? One’s interpretation of the novel as a primer on reading depends largely on which generic formula you want to give more primacy in Puig’s amalgam: if you consider the work primarily as a spy novel, that Cold War offshoot of the postwar crime thriller, you might say, “suspiciously, slowly, and by cracking mysterious ciphers”; if you consider it a prison melodrama or a psychological romance, you might say, “sympathetically, withholding judgment, and subtly”. But as we’ve seen before with the earlier *Boquitas pintadas*, Puig’s fusion of the two genres shows their commonalities and compatibilities, just as, within the expansive conversations of the novel, Molina translates central plots between genres to circumvent Arregui’s prejudices and to chip away at the ostensible objectivity of Arregui’s Marxist and masculinist hermeneutics. The footnotes crucially offset this bilateral dynamic, though, introducing a third term in the negotiations and challenging the reader to read, if my reader will pardon the deconstructive pun, from the margins. In his classic essay on the rhetoric, sources, and importance of the series of footnotes, Daniel Balderston has compared this deployment of footnotes to those of Borges and analyzed it in terms of Julio Cortázar’s masculinist distinction between “active” and “passive” readers (“lector cómplice” and “lector hembra,”). I’d like to push Balderston’s interpretation further by comparing the active readership incited by Puig’s footnotes to Walsh’s radicalization of Borges’ reflexivity and playful marginalia, in “Nota al pie” and more generally. Formal similarities aside, the “marginal” forms of active readership demanded by “Nota al pie” and *Beso* also share a political and psychoanalytic dimension: the emphatic timing and placement of the footnotes invites the reader to connect their generalized, impersonal content to their emotionally- and psychosexually-loaded context. I’ll quickly proceed through the placement of some of Puig’s footnotes to show how this political dimension inflects the readerly experience of overreading the conversations in the foreground to elucidate that offstage “second plot,” i.e., the obliquely-linked enigmas of Molina’s sexuality, his motivations, and his complicity with the prison authorities.

But putting Molina’s motivations at the center of the “subterranean” plot shouldn’t imply that the active reader is only directed to question one character and not the other; the initial trajectory of the novel is more properly dialogical, focusing the reader’s curiosity on the improbable warmth and openness that so quickly and organically develops between the two characters. Puig’s text seems to assume from the outset a reader who will perceive both the political prisoner and the sexual deviant as crucially marginalized subjects afforded a special

scrutiny by the prison authorities and by the Argentine police State generally¹¹⁵. In the early chapters of Puig's text, the two marginalized prisoners repeatedly and overtly compare their respective special treatments in prison, and their prior marginalizations outside of it, as ways to find a common ground for communication. As Balderston has already argued convincingly, the footnotes initially appear to be distinct, topical essays but by the fourth or fifth cohere into a continuous commentary on the novel which, with progressively greater clarity, explains exactly that common ground in terms of a shared marginalization; even though the footnotes are absent from the first two and last five chapters, they are, to Balderston's reading and to my own, as important to the whole as the suicide note that runs alongside the entirety of Walsh's "Nota al pie". This running commentary begins at the exact point at which Arregui says to Molina, "yo de gente de tus inclinaciones sé muy poco" (56), taking up in an impersonal, intellectual vein that comparison of marginalizations that gets pushed, after that point, into the background or subtext of their increasingly intimate and reflexive conversation about interpretation. The second footnote, which continues with the "official" promotional copy where Molina's synopsis of the fictional Nazi propaganda film *Destiny* trails off, interrupts the series of eight footnotes that, concatenated, would otherwise flow like a straightforward academic literature review or topical survey.

In Balderston's focused essay¹¹⁶, he brackets off the second footnote about the film *Destiny* as an "interruption" to deal with the other eight as a miniature treatise on sexuality. I'd stress, however, that this distinct, outlying footnote, coming immediately after a conflict that threatens to end the conversation or at one of its natural breaks, also signals to the reader how to relate each individual footnote, as a topically distinct and extemporaneous analytic unit, to its position in the flow of dialogues and monologues in the main text. Just as the first footnote offers a reflection on sexual identity at the very moment of an impasse of the mutual understanding which is, by this point, clearly the subject of the novel, the second footnote provides the fodder and subject matter for a speculation as to how the conversation might otherwise have continued. This "continuation" of the film narrative also frames the relation of footnote to text in an ironic inversion of the critical commonplace of film language as a form of "dreamlogic." According to the theory elaborated in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, one of the key Freudian texts cited in the footnotes, dreams are composed from the day's interrupted narratives and arguments at the moment of sleeping. This would imply that according to the Freudian reading invited by the other footnotes, the filmic footnote's plot synopsis, far from explaining or supplementing the text, is, figuratively speaking, a dream of the text awaiting the reader's interpretation. The ironically *impersonal* tone of this boilerplate "dream" remains equally open to various interpretations, whether according to Arregui's ideological apparatus (as propaganda) or according to Molina's sentimental reading (as melodrama). Even more reflexively, the plot synopsis uses the Nazi film to thinly cipher various minor conversational skirmishes left unresolved at the end of their conversation: the gendering of art and political agency, the duplicity they mutually suspect in one another, and of course, the two characters' mutual marginalization by the repressive apparatus of their society all return in forms that a Freudian reading could easily recognize despite the playfully transparent Nazi cipher.

The Nazi pastiche also signals to the [hyper-] active reader broader themes less obviously germane to the preceding conversation. In the first paragraph of the synopsis, the Führer¹¹⁷ is quoted to authorize "health" as the basis of the Nazi ideal of beauty. This not only sets up the rhetoric, familiar to students of fascism, by which gender and political deviance are vilified as two interchangeable "degenerations," but it also parallels the rhetoric of the Fascist State to the rhetoric of the prison authorities in future chapters and the prescriptive, conservative psychological orthodoxy explicitly challenged in the other footnotes' essay on sexuality. This pronouncement from totalitarianism's highest authority not only integrates the synopsis into the serial essay on sexual repression, sublimation, and revolution, but also challenges the active reader to read "ahead" of the novel as a kind of fill-in-the-blanks exercise, taking up the tools that the footnotes present to her in a way analogous to Walsh's preface in *Variaciones*. Balderston's study of Puig's pre-writing organizational chart, in which the topics of as-yet unwritten footnotes are mapped onto the events narrated in unwritten chapters makes clear that the novel is largely structured by the periodic topical coincidences and points of contact between the inmates' relationship and the impersonal footnotes, which are themselves challenges to the reader to do the analytical work of the synthesizing, editorializing narrator completely and famously excised from all of Puig's novels. The footnotes challenge the reader to actively apply to the films, as they're being re-narrated, not only Arregui's and Molina's interpretive apparatuses, but also a third, that of the footnote-essay's, which provides a groundwork for a critical third perspective, subsuming the first two. That third perspective, which the reader eventually realizes corresponds to the "correct" way of reading the dialogues of the two prisoners, at first seems like a third voice, almost a third character.

But the Nazi film-dream (the only fictional film described in the novel) actually begins with a different voice: it begins with the Conductor (of Germany) pronouncing that "health" shall be criterion and basis for beauty in the totalitarian society of the film. This evocative detail is hard to overlook as a kind of critical foreshadowing, since the footnotes insistently spur the active reader to interpret the inmates, and their carceral micro-society, in terms of health and pathology. For instance, at the moment of the prison director's most masculinist goading in his pep-talk about poisoning Arregui, the seventh footnote relates masculine violence and psychosexual repression to social institutions and forces of order. And later, as Arregui falls asleep following the most dramatic of the scenes in which Molina nurses the poisoned Arregui, Molina first begins to picture himself as a nurse and Arregui as his patient, in a series of mind's eye tableaux intercut and italicized as a parallel monologue stylistically and thematically akin to his dreams. (These dreams, like the romances of *Boquitas pintadas*, come encoded in the cipher of racial melodrama). At this point, the footnotes detail the Freudian "heterodoxy" that frames itself as undermining and radicalizing the normative, socially repressive project of mainstream psychoanalysis, at that exact point where Molina's conflicted role as nurse and double-agent begins to tax his conscience and become over-determined with a morass of sexual and political images. Between this footnote and the next, the italicized inner conflict of Molina intensifies and obliquely occasions an abusive outburst on the part of Arregui, which sides in that moment with the forces of repression sketched out in the footnotes. He immediately repents and begs forgiveness, at which point a new footnote emphatically

interrupts its abstractions about repression to return to their initial emotional bond, namely, the shared marginalization and “rejection” (*rechazo*) that classes sexual deviants among ex-convicts, compulsive gamblers, alcoholics, and those marked by mental illness. This intellectual interlude occurs extemporaneously in the vignette-break across which they silently mull their “rejection” and reflect on how far their relationship has come; each seems to take, overnight and offstage, the final step towards connecting their sexual and political subversions.

At this point in the novel, it becomes clear how both the espionage thriller and sentimental romance are going to end, but one last footnote makes even more explicit the conclusion towards which the essay on sexuality is headed, framed once again as a “dream” of the text, immediately following the inmates’ goodnights. This final footnote, filling a pause in the narrative time with a kind of didactic intermission, tacks Puig’s own theory of sexuality onto the series of clinical and theoretical authorities in the field, a polemic thrust that he claimed was as important to him in writing the novel as the political statement about the Marxist cadre and its failures of empathy and coalition politics¹¹⁸. Balderston’s analysis of Puig’s pre-writing diagram makes abundantly clear the autofictional dimension of attributing Puig’s theories to an the apocryphal Danish doctor Anneli Taube¹¹⁹. Balderston also notes in passing that the surname Taube could have been translated into Spanish from German (of which Puig had a working knowledge) as “Pichón.” Balderston guesses that Puig chose the name for this drag alter-ego because ‘pichón’ is often used in Argentine slang as a mild form of emasculation, including as a term of endearment among some homosexual communities. In a curious coincidence, Saer had actually begun using “Pichón” as *his* autofictional moniker the year before in Paris¹²⁰, although it’s unlikely Puig would have read those short stories in Buenos Aires at the time of writing *Beso*.

What I find Walshian (as opposed to Borgesian or Cortazarian) about this final footnote is that its open-ended rhetoric overtly challenges the reader to apply to the novel and its historical moment Dr. Taube’s utopian thesis of a coming integration of political and sexual heterodoxies. That these roughly periodic footnotes should break off five chapters before the end of the book (having started three chapters in, thus accompanying roughly half the length of the novel) breaks the pattern of periodic interruptions at the most conspicuous time to do so. Effectively, the reading-tutorial and its “third perspective” end abruptly, seemingly mid-paragraph and without conclusion¹²¹, just before the espionage and romance plots build to their respective crescendos. In a way that I find subtly akin to Walsh’s affront in the preface to *Rosendo*, this conspicuous break in momentum makes the reader that much more self-conscious about the formulaic pleasures of the novel’s narrative arcs, tempting the active reader to continue the footnotes’ exterior line of commentary and their critical gaze forward into a future that might prove Dr. Taube right.

Four years later, Puig writes *Maldición eternal a quién lea estas páginas*, another almost completely conversational novel in which a relationship developed through ideological and affective pedagogy is pitted against political repression, or at least against its internalized after-effects. Although in the later novel, family dynamics and “father-figure” substitutions largely replace [directly] sexual tensions, the reader still feels implicated as the characters manipulate

one another; similarly, film narrative plays a far lesser role, but dream-logic remains essential to the readerly experience in the multiple scenes that the reader only realizes to be transcriptions of dreams once they're well underway. In *Maldición*, the relationship develops not in the prison but years later in the safety of convalescence, between two characters that each have something of Molina and something of Arregui, split instead across generational and cultural lines, as the younger American nurse Larry nurses back to psychological health the shell-shocked, geriatric Argentine exile Juan José Ramírez (the name is almost identical to the name that exiled Pozzi's assumes upon returning to Argentina in one of Puig's intervening novels, *Pubis angelical*).

The novel opens with an unsettling conversation in which Ramírez tries to explain to his recently-assigned nurse the affective aphasia he'll spend the novel trying to reverse, relearning what emotions are, the color and shape of states of mind, and in which body parts figural abstractions occur. With no footnotes, paratexts, or narratorial intrusions to frame the reader's relationship to the characters and the unfolding of their relationship, the reader assumes an even more overtly medicalized form of readerly guesswork than in *Beso*; to wit, the reader naturally tries to understand their conversation in terms of Ramírez's disingenuously literal (and haphazardly poetic) cognitive disorder. The reader is led once again to read between the lines for an understanding of the origins and workings of that mysterious post-traumatic aphasia at the same time as the emotional stakes for the ex-historian Larry come into focus: estranged from his family and having abandoned an academic career, Larry's emotional stake is equally enigmatic as he establishes with Ramirez a somewhat duplicitous father-son surrogacy. As the novel unfolds, the reader begins to read symptomatically into Larry's psyche as well, conjecturing beyond his minimally and defensively explained monastic rejection of a conventional emotion life and of academic labor. Rather than narrating, as *Beso* does, the elaboration of a common ground of meaning and interpretation that might reach outside the prison, the later novel narrates a problematic and largely unsuccessful talking-cure to reconnect with a history (personal and national) that's been severed by the human rights abuses of the prison State, contingent on this reflexive theatricalization of two different family dramas (reiterated and elaborated in dreams).

The major difference between *Beso* and *Maldición*, as parables of interpretation, is that while the former figures its ideological and affective conversion as a seduction, the latter figures its investigation and its healing as a form of filial theater, whereby the wounded psyches need to restage father-son conflicts to reactivate mental and interpretive faculties damaged by trauma. I don't need to dwell too much on the complexities of plot and readerly experience that this difference entails, but to interpret *Maldición* as a coda and revision to *Beso* it is helpful to consider this difference as one in how the two novels represent differently the power dynamics of the interview. From this minute psychological difference follow two radically different visions of the ethics of testimony. To wit, Molina's narrative and affective entrapment exceeds the control of the State power when it crosses over into a kind of egalitarian contract; Larry's less effective, more overt strategies of getting Ramírez to "open up," on the other hand, remain fundamentally exploitative and manipulative, however justified they may be by a

discourse of human-rights and historical record. The overlap between Larry's interests and Ramírez's are represented as uncomfortably contingent throughout the novel, and the conflicts between the two characters not only foreshadow the ultimate incongruity of their interests, but also replay each man's respective father-son conflict. In this novel more than in any other, the homology of State power and paternal authority is writ large and dissected as not only an ethical problem but even a hermeneutical one: what can we know without power and exploitation?

Jorge Panesi's interpretation of this novel as a revision of the father-son conflict at the core of Puig's first novel, *La traición de Rita Hayworth*, and Angel Rama's comparison of the work to Kafka's letter to his father and "The judgment," are both convincing interpretations of the enigmatic relationship driving the novel¹²². Proceeding further down those lines, I would argue that the Argentine father-figure and the American surrogate son re-enact their respective father-son conflicts with a difference and to some degree transcend them and break free of them, which in a less ambiguous novel could be seen as an allegorical release from the repetition compulsions of history. Romero even calls this a "happy ending" (152), in which Larry exacts vengeance on his father and even avenges Ramírez's son (whom he only knows through a letter the reader never sees). I would qualify this as a perversely and impersonally "happy" ending at best, in that some kind of historical catharsis is achieved and cycles broken, even at the expense of the conversation itself, of Larry's job, and of Ramírez' life, which is to say, a catastrophic ending for everyone except the reader. The broken Ramírez can't survive the memories he's tricked into reliving, and Larry rightly loses his job and his access to the prison notebooks that he thinks can restore his career, yet to find in their fraught mutual interpretation a redeeming psychic payoff requires the reader to interpret these unhappy endings as at least evasions of the "ojos de policía" that circumscribe the text implicitly. Larry has transcended his obliquely-described, internalized paternal disappointment (in the form of a self-destructively perverted work-ethic), while Ramírez's feelings of guilt at having "abandoned" his son are to some degree assuaged by caring for a surrogate and making some peace with that abandonment in restoring its historical and ideological context.

But even if one entertains this most perversely optimistic of readings, Ramírez is still killed by the time bomb of his guilt at failing to save his family from the State, and Larry is even more complicit in this latter-day assassination than Molina is in Arregui's death. *Maldición* overtly revises the reading lesson of *Beso* by extending the prison State's dynamics of confession and surveillance into a civil society characterized by generalized manipulation and structural repression. Puig's grim latter-day reading lesson implicates the historian of contemporary conflicts (and the human rights discourse that warrants his research) in a variant of the ethical quagmire occupied by Molina in *Beso*. The stakes of interpretation here have more to do with the ownership and fungibility of personal memory than with the transparency of the individual to others or to the State—the precarious negotiations struggle to achieve an adequate common ground of trust and good faith for the exploration of the past, an exploration that turns disastrous when it proceeds without that common ground.

The active reading called for by the first part of the novel, all the more clearly to a reader familiar with Puig's elliptical narrative structures that eschew narratorial voice, involves guesswork and overreading. Not only is the reader led to doubt what the characters tell one another, she is also encouraged to resist and read beyond Larry's prying, symptomatic reading of Ramírez and his coded journals. Upon realizing that Larry was trained as a research historian and is a Marxist specialist in union struggles, his agenda becomes increasingly problematic; the role of reading figuratively "over Larry's shoulder" grows quite damning, as it's never entirely clear what differentiates Larry's somewhat opportunistic gaze, and thus our own, from the "ojos de policía" from which the journals were meant to be hidden. Indeed, a discarded portion of a working draft unearthed by Romero narrates a paranoid Ramírez failing to recognize his own writing and assuming to be written by "an enemy" (136). In some sense, the aphasic, latter-day Ramírez *is* his own enemy, as is the reader, ignorantly stumbling towards uncomfortable truths she's never entirely entitled to uncover. The reader follows Larry, authorized by ostensibly altruistic concern for the historical record, down a slippery slope from duty, to the vicarious thrill of dredging up evidence of State crimes, to a murky complicity.

Without crossing over too far into the realm of biographical and psychologizing criticism, I could reiterate that Romero and others before her have made a very well-documented case for Puig washing his hands of Argentina after *Maldición* and moving on to new "cycles" of novels treating less national themes for an ever more international market. This might be taken, then, as the pessimistic terminus of a progression that runs from Walsh's generational pronouncements and paragons, through the rebellious *Traición*, the critical [and markedly national] inquiries of *Boquitas* and *Buenos Aires Affair*, the more optimistic *Beso*, to *Maldición* as final farewell to Argentina and to her as-yet unresolved enigmas and surviving repressive apparatuses, experiential and psychological. But positioned less against Puig's intellectual biography than against a generational and historical shift in the terms of fictions representational ethics, *Maldición* could be a more skeptical revisitation of the presumptions made for the testimonial elaboration of *Beso's* utopian politics. In formal terms, *Maldición* could also be taken as a kind of limit-case of the testimonial form stripped even of the minimal paratextual framework offered by *Beso's* footnotes. The ethical corollary to this permutation is that *Maldición* signals the lack of an "outside" necessary to confession. The power relations implicit in testimony don't just make the genre's imagined historical and ideological transparency impossible; they make the reader complicit in their construction. Without assuming that construction as arbitrary and privileged, and without any journalistic and political claim to truth can only seem falsely rhetorical.

It is in light of this interpretation that I would now turn to the most testimonial of Saer's "Pichón" works, which by probing and testing the apparatus of memory offers a different kind of limit-case of oral history, a different parody of the testimonial claim to restitution implicit in the genre of post-dictatorship testimony.

Saer's forensic memory: modernism and formalism of the testimonial genre

*Si la obra de arte podía ser política, ya era otra cosa, empezaba a tener otra clase de valor, aunque fuera negativo. Podía existir un interés en comprarla en términos políticos, no ya para consumo de una élite, sino para su absorción, su neutralización: incluso porque el literato disconforme podía percibir antes que el aparato político los gérmenes de la insurrección, y en este sentido los escritores podían ser una especie de alcahuetes o policías. Proseguir.*¹²³

—Rodolfo Walsh, Journal entry, 1972, *Ese hombre*, 234

Over half the works of Saer's oeuvre are dialogue-driven ensemble pieces treating some subset of an autofictional milieu shared between them, based on Saer's generation of Santa Fe intellectuals and their forerunners, and referred to by many critics as the "Saerian universe". Some of these dialogue-pieces allegorize intellectual or ideological debates, while others treat (as enigma, as adynaton, or as inenarrable void) the historical events of the dictatorship period's suffocating cultural climate and permeating violence, like *Nadie nada nunca*, which I'll be studying in the next chapter. Although categorizing Saer as an "exile" misrepresents his biography, few critics would dispute that much of Saer's trademark melancholy¹²⁴ is fundamentally historical, written in Paris but set in a pre-dictatorship Santa Fe as idealized as Joyce's Dublin. Most of Saer's novels address contemporary history and Argentine society only very obliquely; in the few works that directly address certain ideological and perceptual changes his generation had undergone (*La grande*, *El río sin orillas*), Saer refers to the military governments of the 70's as enacting "crimes" against language and against memory, circumscribing the conversation about violence and the rule of law in ways that cannot be easily or directly reversed by another round of Orwellian "linguistic hygiene". The only way to reverse the effects of this "criminal" cultural shift is to rethink and revitalize the key concepts of democracy and social justice: the commons, the marketplace of ideas, the health of the body politic, the legitimacy of violence.

Unlike Piglia or Walsh, however, Saer does not borrow forms from crime fiction or journalism to represent those "crimes," choosing instead a more straightforward psychological form of the novel to study the ramifications of these shifts in the power of the State in the minds of subjects living through them. In this sense, Saer is, like Puig, painstaking observers of the mechanics of psychological processes of repression, fear, distraction, paranoia, and memory. Indeed, the work I find most germane to my discussion of true-crime and testimonial effects incorporated into the writing of Saer's generation doesn't actually incorporate crime fiction, journalistic, or testimonial genres in any direct way. Instead, it brings a highly active readership to bear on a dense jungle of highly intimate speech that is suddenly transformed, mid-novel, into oral testimony by a drastic change of paratext. What the reader has interpreted for more than half the novel as a personal memoir or an exercise in memory as an end unto itself is suddenly revealed to be somehow corollary to a courtroom testimony given by the same speaker; the painstaking reconstruction of memory being operated is not simply a literary or personal endeavor but a public and legal contribution to international proceedings against the agents of a criminal State.

Without any generic or formal nods to testimonial literature or journalism, Saer's formal dovetailing of literary and legal memory-work in *Glosa* (1986) shows a very timely shift of boundaries whereby the *memorial* function of literature, which might elsewhere have been the domain of self-referential formalism or poetry, is conscripted by a kind of testimonial drive. This generational hunger for memory-work puts literary hermeneutics to work for an agenda of human rights and reconciliation; by the time Saer wrote the novel, in 1985, the literary landscape had largely been transformed by testimonial works participating, directly or indirectly, in a collective airing of grievances and wounds. Although the enigma to be elucidated by this meticulous dredging operation is never explicitly explained, this testimonial backdrop leads the reader to deduce such a purpose from the narrator's oblique remarks to the effect that a.) this group of people would never again be reunited, and b.) its protagonist Angel Leto and the wife of his interlocutor will both go underground in the guerrilla war looming over the entire novel. Just as the works studied above demand to be read actively and "backwards" in the same breath as they bate the reader not to read "con ojos de policía," so too does *Glosa* tacitly set to its reader a forensic task: the reader is to unearth the "gérmenes de la insurrección" hypothesized by Walsh amidst the interpersonal and psychic minutiae of Argentine intellectuals of Walsh's and Saer's generation.

The narrative style and the specific modes of active readership in Saer's major autofictional novels (*Cicatrices*, *Nadie nada nunca*, *Glosa*, *La pesquisa*, *La grande*) are structured by a basic formula which is more closely aligned to the understatements, narrative lacunae, and epiphanic lucidities of Saer's modernist precursors and heroes (Marcel Proust, William Faulkner, and James Joyce) than to the sportive readership of crime fiction and the critical conventions of journalism. Some of them, however, bear consideration in a discussion of post-Walshian politics of active readership exactly because of what ideologies, reading habits, and relationship to literature those understatements and elisions assume of their readers. Whereas most of Puig's novels, written without a synthesizing narratorial voice, call for an active readership by pacing dialogues and documents whose oblique relation the reader strains to deduce, the formula in Saer's cycle of autofictional works is rather to create a tension between a foregrounded and heavily stylized narration and a fragmentary context or barely glimpsed horizon of meaning against which the narration is to be interpreted. In a word, Saer's dialogue novels make the context as hard to grasp as the subtext, or sometimes even harder. In most of these works, the reader is lead to guess at the implications and unmarked assumptions of the characters from the circumlocutions, elisions, and assumptions of decontextualized speech. This critical reading provides more of the tension and suspense of the readerly experience than the actual content of the characters' often quotidian speech and the novels' plots. (In some cases, it seems a stretch to even refer to a plot in any conventional sense). Whereas in Walsh, the reconstruction and illumination of an "oscuro trasfondo" is conceived of as a political act (in the sense of understanding the mechanics of social structures and the psychology of class), Saer's more cautious metaphysics of reading offers no such clear-cut rewards for the reader or for history, even in a work like *Glosa*, where the context being reconstructed is precisely a generation's guilty reflections on what they didn't see at the time, on political violence and on class identity.

Broken up into three chapters (“The first seven blocks”, “The following seven blocks”, “The last seven blocks”), the emphatically oral narration of *Glosa* takes over two hundred pages to meticulously recreate a conversation about a party which neither speaker attended as the two speakers walk across downtown Rosario, a distance of twenty-one blocks. The painstakingly citational narrator, whose “according to”s [*segunes*] pile up hyperbolically, sometimes recurring four or five times in one sentence to trace out the exact chain of hearsay, is a kind of hyperbolic mockery of testimonial veracity, bringing positivist rigor to the attribution of hearsay and the most trivial of utterances without making explicit to the reader what necessitated this precision. Like the *Plata quemada* and *Maldición*, many of Saer’s works deal with the domestication and co-option of the aesthetic and of the polemic, even if popular narrative genres are not as centrally present in them as in Puig or Piglia. *Glosa* presents one notable exception, in the scene where Tomatis nurses himself back from a divorce-related nervous breakdown by excessive television-viewing marathons (231) consisting of crime fiction, news shows, westerns, children’s programming, and the monologues of “*cuentistas criollos*.” These long-winded folk storytellers are present in the background of the novel as a kind of unmarked generic framework for the novel’s emphatic orality—the formalized flourishes (the mantra-like repetition of “yours truly,” for instance) seem borrowed from that overtly stylized speech genre. (In Chapter One, a similar effect was created by name-dropping Chandler’s crime novels early in *Cicatrices* to anchor an investigative reading of Leto’s chapter, and of the events of the novel generally).

While in the Walsh’s *Operación* and Puig’s *Beso*, a system of footnotes serves as scaffolding for a readerly challenge to read past or through the central text, no such extemporaneity glosses the steady and unmistakably oral flow of *Glosa*’s dense linguistic thicket, flashing forward and backward in time without so much as a typographic warning. Instead, the paratextual functions of the novel’s title, its dedication and its epigraph are maximally deployed to signal to the reader exactly what gloss will *not* be provided except by the reader’s own efforts. The dedication¹²⁵ sketches out for the reader the method by which the novel was composed and within what rubric it is intended to be read: qualifying as “true” the sciences (grammar, homeopathy, and administration) practiced by his friends implicitly sets a standard by which the novel’s loyal and oral intersubjective inquiry could be judged “scientific.”

To these scientific interlocutors, he offers the novel as a comedy in the classical sense of that term¹²⁶, and then follows this declaration of intent and audience with an erudite and roundabout declaration of literary method, by way of a short, uncited epigraph from a famous passage from Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*: “time is your misfortune[,] father said”. A longer excerpt and a bit of critical context are needed here to unpack what “scientific” conception of time Saer is invoking on Faulkner’s authority. “Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you’d think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said. A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged. You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity. Then the wings are bigger Father said only who can play a harp.”¹²⁷ Sartre’s famous essay, “On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of Faulkner,”

opens with an analysis of this very same passage: “Man's misfortune lies in being time-bound. [...] Such is the real subject of the book. And if *the technique Faulkner has adopted* seems at first a negation of temporality, the reason is that we confuse temporality with chronology. It was man who invented dates and clocks. [...] Quentin's gesture of breaking his watch has a symbolic value; it gives us access to time without clocks.”¹²⁸ In a nutshell, the dedication glosses the novelistic experiment that follows as an attempt at writing in “time without clocks”.

Like the courtroom epigraph from *Operación masacre's* second and later editions, the epigraph's quintilla¹²⁹ is uncited not because, as with the Faulkner quote, it is ostensibly assumed to be common knowledge among the “intended” three readers of the dedication, but rather because the book is quoting itself: it is a poem that one character, Tomatis, will recite orally to another, the Mathematician, on the twenty-one block walk narrated by four of the novel's five chapters. In the fifth chapter, the same poem will be re-read silently, years later on a plane to political exile in France. As such, the full meaning of the thrice-appearing poem in all its biographical truth and experiential roundness is here explicitly proffered as what the active reader should be trying to understand (or to put it glibly, as what the novel *Glosa* sets out to gloss). Thematically, however, the straightforward quintilla colludes with the uncited Faulkner passage to make death and mourning the frame through which the active reader parses the temporally-complex novel. Thematically, it functions, like the original epigraph to *Operación* from Eliot's play about historical violence, according to a more traditional logic of the epigraph, in that the death of another it mentions analogizes the deaths of key characters in the novel, structuring the retrospect of the novel and its piecemeal confrontation with the narrator's own mortality.

This horizon of interpretation, which would seem from the dedication and epigraph to be primarily philosophical and metaphysical, is nevertheless deeply political and historical, since these are political deaths, friendships founded on deep ideological sympathies even across major political and biographical divides (224), and the occasion of their meeting is a French human rights congress, the exact content and results of which is notably secondarily to the memory-work being operated almost in spite of its institutional demands. The confusion of personal and impersonal registers, legal and literary forms of memory functions as a kind of challenge to the active reader. The passing mention of the Mathematician's father having signed almost every writ of *habeas corpus* ever filed in Rosario on behalf of a political prisoner (26), along with the detailed discussion of his brother's loathsome class performance as foil to his own bohemian assumption of the same family legacy, gives a political dimension to the active reader's emotional investments, but one that must be pieced together as an echo of the subtext of war-crimes and disappearances, of subterranean “germens” of interest to forensic research.

While the human rights committees and investigators with “ojos de policía” would be digging through this oral history for the details of party affiliations and the specific dynamics of clandestine reunions, the mantle of his father's liberalism weighs more on the Mathematician's psyche than the State's role in the events themselves. The reader's personal investment in these characters and their relationships make the novel itself into a kind of narrative *habeas*

corpus, an alternate form of memory-work interested less in the punishment of the guilty and the public record than with retrieving and completing the mourning interrupted by secrecy and censorship, exile and upheaval. This is, like Puig's *Maldición*, a rejection of the testimonial novel as a middle ground between fiction and journalism, between critical analysis of contemporary history and its faithful recording. Here, Saer seems to be saying, is where testimony ends and only literature can proceed any further—here *and only here* is literature a social science, a set of heuristics and procedures for the elucidation and reconstruction of broken and foreclosed narratives. The form taken by the novel is inseparable, I think, from its almost combative stance *against* the testimonial novel as a literary contribution to a collective discourse of mourning and revisionist history.

Like all post-dictatorship works studied here in this chapter, the form of Saer's novel follows from that stance, perversely trying to push the novel of testimony to its limits and beyond them, to break and mock the formulae of testimonial writing. This is, I think, a fundamentally generational project that would have taken radically different form in the hands of authors that had not lived through Walsh's "martyrdom" and the autocritiques that followed the end of the virulently anti-communist dictatorships and of the Cold War generally. This generation's experiments with the fictionalization of testimony are caught in a kind of double bind, nostalgic for (and yet irrevocably skeptical of) a rhetoric of truth at the core of Walsh's work. Genres of "truth" and direct appeals to the reader appear in this generation's work circumscribed by their own impossibility or inappropriateness, as a kind of nostalgic fantasy for bygone certainties. Indeed, Saer circumscribes *Glosa's* testimony (and the legal and social function played by it) not only in the private meanings of his fictional "universe" but also in a kind of resolutely humble, inwardly-directed novel which could not be further from the reality-effects of testimonial interventions along Walshian lines or more contemporary ones. Yet this tension between testimonial writing or polemic autofiction and its suspension or erasure is the function that gives the novel its form: it is as much an anti-testimonial novel as *Maldición*, as much a treatise on the psychology of political investments as *Beso*, and as much a Brechtian estrangement of active reading and sensational sympathies as *Plata quemada*. In the retrospect of literary history, there is something prescient about how all these novels short-circuit the reality-effects and sympathy-dynamics of the semi- and auto-fictional genres, and it is this prescience which I would like to briefly consider before moving on to a different set of generic problems and operations.

Conclusion: Truth-Effects and Truth-Genres

[In Spivak's Reading of Menchú,] the limit of deconstruction in relation to testimonio is that it produces (or reveals) a textual unfixity or indeterminacy that not only misrepresents—in the sense both of 'speaking for' and 'speaking about'—but itself produces and reproduces as a reading effect the fixity of relations of power and exploitation in the real social 'text.' [...] Sklodowska is right to point out that the voice in testimonio is a textual construct, and that we

*should beware of a metaphysics of presence perhaps even more here, where the convention of fictionality has been suspended, than in other areas.*¹³⁰

—John Beverley, “The Real Thing” (1991), in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, 67-9

This passage is not about a true-crime novel or a journalistic exposé but rather about the paradigmatic international *testimonio* of the 1980’s—both the novel being discussed and the critical debates around it take place on a very different scene than the one where the novels I’ve discussed in this chapter were written and read. Yet I find it that both scenes are, in many ways, blanketed with the ideological fallout of the end of the literary Cold War, and the analogy, however counter-intuitive, might help reposition “the convention of fictionality” in our approach to these variously historical fictions. In the epigraph above, John Beverley, one of *testimonio*’s most eloquent and earnest theorists, is conceding and summarizing the substantial qualms about *testimonio*’s ostensibly unmediated access to historical truth (Elzbieta Sklodowska) and to subalternity (Gayatri Spivak). For Beverley, *testimonio* may be akin to other truth-genres constructed of reality-effects and elective political and historical sympathies, but more so than them, Beverley’s *testimonio* carries within in it a radical seed of alterity which, at its best, disrupts conventional authorship and the text’s position within circuits of private intellectual property. To put it less abstractly, the author-function and copyright of a text circulating in our culture of print are necessarily problematized by collective texts produced in dialogue with cultural agents variously removed from the conception of cultural products and historical narratives as property. From Beverley’s vantage in the American academy, *testimonio*’s overt self-politicization and thus circumvention of aesthetic values adjudicated by cultural institutions makes it, if not “antiliterature” as he dubbed it in earlier writings, at least a “new site of discursive authority, which challenged the authority of the ‘great writer’ to establish the reality principle of Latin American culture and development” (ibid., 77).

Perhaps few critics hold, today in 2012, this kind of faith in *testimonio*’s aptitude for speaking truth to power or even to other literature, but I find the formulation of Beverley’s claims for *testimonio* surprisingly germane when applied more generally to literature’s other genres of truth. Indeed, I find his synopsis of Sklodowska’s and Spivak’s skepticisms quite similar to the skepticism behind Piglia’s, Puig’s, and Saer’s nostalgic latter-day interrogations of the various truth-genres mined by Walsh for truth-effects, active readership-strategies, and poses of spontaneity and immediacy. This broader context, in which *testimonio* is not born *ex nihil* but stitched together from anthropology, journalism, and even from sensational popular texts of confession, sainthood, and repentance, is missing from many histories of the testimonial form and its uses. While none of works studied here are motivated by the drive to speak for a monolithic Latin America subaltern or disenfranchised subject, they are all deliberately engaged with the definitively internationalized genre of *testimonio* for specifically Argentine polemical ends. Against the universalizing gestures encoded in that genre, they try to combat with their darkly comedic gestures the “metaphysics of presence” and deflate the spectacular victimhood by which neoliberal hegemony turns the testimony of victims and subalterns into a cathartic (but hardly radical or mobilizing) form of middle-class tragedy.

The novels I've analyzed above all respond, in some way, to the legacy of Walsh and to the Cold War imaginary in which truth can be smuggled in and out of controlled territory, but they respond to it from a position of almost nostalgic impossibility and historical foreclosure of that conception of "truth." They are openly skeptical or even hostile to that metaphysics of presence whereby literature can afford access to the minds and lives of people that would otherwise be foreign or inaccessible. This faith in literature's capacity to bridge social divides was, in the 60's and 70's, a widespread ideology, or more precisely, an ideological fantasy of literature's future deeply linked to other (optimistic) political ideologies, be they democratic or socialist, reformist or radical. This fantasy creeps in wherever fact and fiction are blended, particularly with political intentions, and with it a journalistic mode of reading that suspends much of literature's overt subjectivity. That suspension was exactly what these authors sought to pre-empt and circumvent with an "active" reading weaving in and out of claims to truth and their generic scaffoldings.

Recent literary history has perhaps made to seem prescient these authors' experiments with, and their reservations about, the genres of "truth". The very loose category of the "autofictional" and semi-fictional (I'm thinking, for instance, of a whole range of writers from María Moreno to Diego Meret to Mario Bellatín) and the ironic cross-breeding of crime genres and testimonial genres (Roberto Bolaño's *Amuleto*, *Estrella distante*, and even *Pista de hielo* all come to mind), two central veins now being mined by the contemporary neoliberalized literary scene, seem to owe a certain debt to this earlier generation's crises and aporias with testimonial and journalistic forms. Crucially, however, this divide cannot be reduced to historical context and political ideologies—what changed, perhaps, is that these authors' prescient and critical skepticisms about truth in literature became generalized, became less the exception than the rule, less a coincidence of individual agendas than kind of precept or pose of literary form.

But returning to the generation of Puig, Piglia, and Saer, we could conceive of their work as putting brackets around the claims to truth encoded in their generic sources. The paradoxical retention of testimonial structures and voices, within a framework that precludes an effective appeal to history or to the reader of the kind they promise, effects a kind of bait-and-switch with both realism and interventionism. Mourning is indulged, and yet withheld; justice and restitution is gestured towards, but only as an impossible goal and theoretical construct; the reader is flattered and insulted, alternately lulled into and jarred out of a realist contract. This kind of generic pastiche operates on the non- and semi-fictional genres similar operations to those brought to bear on melodramas of crime in the previous chapter, with similar intentions: to make crimes of the State both recognizable as crimes and yet somehow unfathomable, unspeakable, inenarrable in their scale and scope. Nowhere is this operation more effective (and yet harder to understand as such) than in the thriller, which contains many sensational and melodramatic narrative structures and a mode of reading that is, if not active in the same way as Walshian prose, at least split, reflexive and at times even stagey. The playful and sensational core of psychopathology at the core of the thriller lends its narrative forms a complex and self-contradictory form of sympathy best understood as a perverse twist on the

contract between crime fiction and its reader that allows the latter to suspend her values and decorum. Furthermore, the thriller in both its North American form and in its Argentine adaptation is crucially a Cold War literary form, plagued with persistent doubts about the exceptionality of its nightmares and the validity of the social order it relishes in interrupting with vicarious chaos and pathology.

Endnotes

- ¹ “Rodolfo Walsh doesn’t exist. He is only a fictional character. The best character in all of Argentine literature. Just a detective from a crime novel written for poor people. And one who will never die” (tr. mine).
- ² Note in particular Piglia’s influential lectures on “The Three Avant-Gardes” (circa 2003), culminating in a seminar he gave structured around three authors, Saer, Puig, and Walsh, as the three most salient and developed examples of three different directions literature has taken since Borges. A syllabus and reading guide can be found on the website of the Centro for Investigaciones Artísticas: <http://www.ciacentro.org/node/808> (accessed 26 April 2013).
- ³ The grandiloquent open letter Walsh penned to the regime he knew would soon be exterminating him within the month has been transformed into a privileged text by the academic and public institutions of post-dictatorship hagiography and cultural restitutions. Indeed, the work has been circulated, cited, and turned into epigraphs and paratexts for so many other texts that it may, in recent years, have circulated even more widely, or more consequentially outside of the literary sphere, than *Operación masacre* itself.
- ⁴ I’m thinking here of Mempo Giardinelli’s references to Walsh throughout his novels and in his critical overview of Latin America’s tradition of Left-revisionist crime fiction, *El género negro*, and to the Spanish-Mexican organizer of the annual *Semana negra* conference in Gijón, Spain, Paco Ignacio Taibo II. One of Taibo’s novels (*Sueños de Frontera*, 1990) bears an epigraph from the preface to Walsh’s *Rosendo* discussed below at length. There are many other writers one could include in this “generational” wave of wide-readership Leftist bestsellers with Walshian aspirations to historical impact and consciousness-raising: most, if not all, of the so-called “neopolicial” boom of the 1990’s (most famously studied in Argentina, México, and Spain, but present throughout Latin America) shows overt or implicit debts to Walsh, directly or via Taibo and Giardinelli. For a particularly Walshian genealogy of the neopolicial, see De Rosso, Ezequiel and Taibo’s critical writings; for more exhaustive surveys of the period, see Close, Glen and Pellicier, Rosa.
- ⁵ With respect to these multiple roles in literary history (as an heir to Borges’ ludic mode and as an explorer of modes of active reading), it’s worth noting that within Argentina, at least, Walsh was almost as renowned as his contemporary Julio Cortázar, whom some biographers say Walsh saw as a kind of superstar rival—a point to which I’ll return below.
- ⁶ Reprinted in RW, vivo, p. 179. Hereafter I will abbreviate the many anthologies of apocrypha and criticism thusly: Rodolfo Walsh, vivo as RWV; Ese hombre y otros papeles personales as EH; El violento oficio de escribir as VO; Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh as Textos; and Cuentos para tahures y otros relatos policiales as Tahures. “As for the manner of informing—or deforming—used by the agencies and the media in general, all I can think to say is that its consequence is that people don’t believe anything. Neither the journalists nor the readers do. In everything except soccer scores, a form of reading backwards has come into use.” (tr. mine).
- ⁷ I’m referring to Viñas’ “Rodolfo Walsh, el ajedrez y la guerra” in *Literatura argentina y realidad política* (Buenos Aires: J. Alvarez, 1964; Sudamericana, 1982, 1985...) and Piglia’s “Walsh y el Lugar de la Verdad,” a versión of which appeared in *Crisis* in 1987 and which has been re-edited in various versions, most notably that which ran

in *Fierro* with an adaptation in comic-book form of *Operación masacre* (reprinted in *La argentina en pedazos*, 1993).

⁸ The respective contributions of the all the aforementioned except Rama in Lafforgue's 2000 anthology, *Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh*, along with Rama's article in *Literatura y clase social* and reprinted in *RWV*, provided the foundation of this study, and are recommended reading for anyone concerned with Walsh vis-à-vis the crime genres; see also Pesce's somewhat polemic epilogue to the 1987 anthology of Walshes crime texts, *Cuentos para tahures y otros relatos policiales*, later re-editions of which sadly saw some of its key essays on crime genres mysteriously excised.

⁹ As Lafforgue phrases it, preceding a thorough bibliography; *Textos*, 300. See also Viviana Paletta's "El primer Walsh: El género policial como laboratorio," in *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana*, Vol. 36 (2007), pp. 79-93.

¹⁰ See, for example, *R. W. en cuba*, 25.

¹¹ See Ferro's introduction and the glosses in the 2009 critical edition (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 2009).

¹² *CGT, Panorama, Crisis, Primera Plana, Siete Días* and *La opinión*; cf. the Lafforgue bibliography in Ford (ed.), 297-8. In this period he also novelizes another series of investigative reports, done over a decade earlier, as *El caso satanowsky*

¹³ The organization of detective fictions in "cycles" named after their titular detectives is entirely conventional to the genre; since the 19th century, many authors have written simultaneously in multiple "cycles," thus keeping subgenres and thematic circles distinct. On Borges' taboo for the "hard-boiled," see the Introduction and Chapter 1.

¹⁴ The history of publication of the original stories in progressively more popular newspapers might, of course, have had a lot to do with a corresponding stylistic evolution towards more "gritty" and hard-boiled tones. See Ferro.

¹⁵ "It's a big country, said Commissary Laurenzi. You see cultivated fields, deserts, cities, factories, people. But the secret heart of man, you'll never fathom. And that's worrisome, because I'm a policeman. No one is in a better position to see the extremes of poverty and madness. But the thing is, you're still a human being. After a time, we get tired, we let things just flow over us. Always the same concentric ellipses, the same passions, the same vices. With three or four words we can explain away anything: a crime, a rape, or a suicide. Look, we just want to be left alone.

I'd feel sorry for you if you brought me a problem that couldn't be resolved in simple terms: money, hate, fear! I can't tolerate, for example, that you go out and kill someone without a reasonable or concrete motive."
(trans. mine).

¹⁶ Reprinted on page 311 of Roberto Ferro's 2009 critical edition.

¹⁷ For a more detailed genetic analysis of the progressive loss of "literary" language and style between editions, see "Penúltimas noticias de Rodolfo Walsh," in *Quimera: revista de literatura*, no. 308-9, July 2009, also available on his blog: <http://patriciopron.blogspot.com/2009/10/penultimas-noticias-de-rodolfo-walsh.html> .

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- ¹⁸ Perhaps it's not irrelevant to mention the critical commonplace of his apparent fixation on the Catiline Orations of Cicero in his final days in seclusion in the Tigre Delta, a biographical tidbit readily corroborated by a careful reading of the open letters that were his final works.
- ¹⁹ On Walsh's incorporation of the Old Testament into his history of crime fiction, see his "Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial" (analyzed below and reprinted in the first edition of *Tahures*).
- ²⁰ The article, titled "Rodolfo Walsh: La narrativa en el conflicto de las culturas," is reprinted both in Rama's *Literatura y clase social* (1984) and in RWV.
- ²¹ For a detailed account of the bifurcated system of writing, translating and distributing crime fiction in the 40's and 50's, see Rivera and Lafforgue's *Asesinos de papel*, 1977/1997
- ²² "Written with perspicacity and within Borges' linguistic orbit [sphere of influence?], they are not offered to an elite public but to that *undifferentiated* one that reads crime novels *without heed to who signs them*."
- ²³ "The journalist-whistleblower, the one only beholden to the truth, the one who discovers secret deals and brings them to the light of day with the written word, the guardian of honesty, the incorruptible servant of justice, in sum, that latest descendent of North American liberalism, more mythic than real, in which persist some values central to a past moment in North American culture, even though we now know that in that image lies an ideological exertion on the part of the journalistic profession trying to buck restraints put on it by the [corporate power] system. That idealized journalist comes from the films of the Progressivist decade of the "New Deal," which in turn follow the literary model set down by Sherwood Anderson in the 'Ohio' stories" (tr. mine).
- ²⁴ "The various plots structure the three books as multi-level: a police case, an obscured socio-political backdrop, the investigations of both levels that passes through the press and the courts, and lastly—or firstly—a choice of reader that predisposes the literary devices, language, and form to be used" (tr. mine).
- ²⁵ "If someone wants to read this book as a mere crime novel, that's their business" (tr. mine).
- ²⁶ Ross MacDonald, for instance, is a Canadian-American Leftist author held up, particularly in the Spanish-language hard-boiled tradition, as a key fore-runner of the radical offshoot of hard-boiled crime fiction, whose Lew Archer novels of the 1950's and 60's built on the streak through Hammett and his earlier followers. The schism between "radical" and "mainstream" hard-boiled fiction had been present since the genesis of the hard-boiled style in the 20's, but was markedly widened and exacerbated by Spillane's anti-Communist Mike Hammer works (best-sellers from the first novel, in 1947) and by Hammett refusing to point fingers for the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953. See, in particular, Mempo Giardinelli's *El género negro* (Córdoba, Op Oloop: 1984), which even includes an interview with MacDonald, or the brief introduction to Persephone Braham's *Crimes against the State, Crimes against Persons: Detective Fiction in Cuba and México* for an English-language, if less in-depth and historically thorough, genealogy of Latin American readings of the hard-boiled tradition.
- ²⁷ "It was useless in 1957 to demand justice for the victims..., just as it turned out useless in 1958...[to demand it] for the assassination of Satanowsky, just as it is useless in 1968 to demand justice for the victims [in this case]" (tr. mine).

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- ²⁸ "Can I return to Chess? / Yes, yes I can. To chess and to the fantastical literature I read, to the detective short stories I write, to the 'serious' novel I'm planning to write a few years from now, and to other things I do to earn my living and that I call journalism, although they aren't journalism" (tr. mine).
- ²⁹ "Violence has splattered my walls, there are bullets in the windows, I've seen..." (tr. mine).
- ³⁰ "What happens is that one grows to believe in the crime novels one has read o written, and one thinks that a story like this, with a dead man that speaks, is going to have the editors fighting each other, one thinks that one is racing against the clock, that any minute a big daily is going to send a dozen reporters and photographers *like in the movies*. Instead one finds only a crowd of people passing the buck." (emphasis mine).
- ³¹ Horacio Verbitsky has analyzed this debt at length: <http://www.perio.unlp.edu.ar/oficios/articulos.html>.
- ³² "And all of a sudden, after looking for both [trees] for a good while, I saw it. It was fascinating, something out of a Chesteron story" (tr. mine).
- ³³ "I know it's a mistake—or maybe even an injustice—to take Daniel Hernández out of the solid world of reality and reduce him to a mere fictional character" (tr. mine).
- ³⁴ See, for instance, the diary entry of 8-12-68: "El intelectual en su trampa. Cuatro meses, quiero decir, cuatro meses *entirely devoted*, totalmente dedicado a la clase obrera, que lo aprecia a razón de veinte mil ejemplares por mes, que no son nada, para lo bien que está hecho ese periódico [el semanario del CGT]. Viendo, de todas maneras, pasar a mi lado a la gente, las mil cosas absurdas que suceden a cada rato en la calle, o divertidas en la casa, y también fatigosas en cualquier parte, viendo y pensando, eso, eso es lo que habría que contar. Sin tiempo para contar nada..." (*Ese hombre* 104); also, 11-2-1969 and 11-3-1969: " 'No entiendo nada,' parece que dijo Raimundo, '¿Escribe para los burgueses?'" / "Cosa que me molestó, lo que dijo Raimundo, que yo escribía para burgueses. Pero me molestó porque yo sé que tiene razón, o que puede tenerla. El tema me ha preocupado siempre, aunque no me lo formulara abiertamente. La cosa es: ¿para quién escribir si no por los burgueses? Tendría que preguntarle a Raimundo qué literatura le gusta a él, qué novelas no están escritas para los burgueses y qué cuentos pueden escribirse 'para' los obreros" (*EH* 158)
- ³⁵ "They tell us he's not in, but he's there, and it's just a matter of getting past the protective barriers... One steps out of the glare of the sidewalk sun into the shade of the porch, one asks for a glass of wáter and one is inside, in the dark, one pronounces lockpick-words..." (tr. mine)
- ³⁶ Of "Las tres noches de Isaías Bloom," which a young, undiscovered Walsh sent in to a contest judged by Borgies, Bioy Casares, and Leónidas Barletta, Victor Pesce writes: "El lenguaje, con bastante diálogo y vocabulario usual, incluso lunfardo, es propio de un costumbrismo urbano al que el otro jurado—Leónidas Barletta—había aportado lo suyo, desde *Cuentos realistas* (1924); see also Paletta, Viviana, 2007. For the language of populism in the modernist period more generally, see Sarlo, Beatriz, Buenos Aires: una modernidad periférica, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1988.
- ³⁷ See, for instance, a conversation glossed later in the above-quoted diary entry about writing "for" workers: "Debe ser posible, sin embargo, escribir para ellos. El otro día discutimos con Ernestina si existían dos tipos de pensamiento—eso decía ella—, uno que se llamaba coloquial, y otro abstracto, y que el primero era propio de las clases bajas, un pensamiento siempre en diálogo consigo mismo, teatralización interior, una especie de

pensamiento concreto (digo yo ahora, quizá usurpando o malusando la expresión), que enfrenta personajes o personificaciones de los hechos, de ideas, los hace chocar entre ellos, y los vierte al exterior en forma de diálogos, 'le digo yo,' 'me dice él,' 'yo me pregunto,' siempre mediante la prueba y el error, la confrontación de las partes separadas de la realidad, de sus términos dialécticos, pero sin la síntesis abstracta que hacemos los intelectuales, sic. ¿Cuál sería la expresión literaria? La personificación constante, la diferenciación mediante el diálogo, el estilo de Hemingway" (*EH*, 159).

³⁸ See, for example, *Theory of the Novel*, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971.

³⁹ A novel would be something like a representation of events, and I prefer their simple presentation... [the events of *Rosendo*] have more literary value when presented journalistically than when they are *translated* into that second instance that is *the system of the novel* [...] What's in crisis—at least as far as I'm concerned—is the *very concept* of the novel. Which is to say, the entire novel [form], what we could call the *false relationships of the genre as such*." (tr. mine).

⁴⁰ Quoted in Pesce, 49.

⁴¹ "To narrate his social group and his class from within, to narrate the world of civilization, the great narrative genre of the 19th century in Argentina (the narrative genre par excellence, I should say, which is born, suffice it to say, with Sarmiento) is that of autobiography. The class tells of itself to itself in the form of autobiography, and tell of the Other in fiction" (tr. mine).

⁴² A discussion of the equally Cainean caricature of the insurance agent, Alvarado, will have to wait for a more appropriate occasion.

⁴³ "Perhaps the only classical Northamerican author completely unknown in this language" (tr. mine).

⁴⁴ "It struck him as incongruous that Raimundo would have been killed by a bullet. The brilliant Harvard alum and firearms seemed elements of different worlds" (tr. mine).

⁴⁵ "It surprised him that a man that seemed to be living a purely intellectual life should kill himself brutally, shooting himself in the head, *like a common bankrupt salesman*" (tr. and emph. mine).

⁴⁶ "Raimundo Morel, man of letters, brilliant essayist, wrote *like a farmhand*, like a drunk" (tr. and emph. mine).

⁴⁷ I am sure that all of us have, somewhere in the world, an exact double, so similar to us, except in the accidents of its condition, that if we were to meet them we would love them like a twin. I know that I have my double somewhere in the United States. I'm sure that there is some Englishmen exactly like me (I'm convinced he must aspirate his h's, since *I doubt that the Danish Prince would have remained faithful to Ophelia had she called him 'Amlet* [...] every one of them, *if he had been born in the house* with dutch tiles where I was born, and had cultivated my garden *and had grown up in my library* between the shelf with Walton's Polyglot Bible and the one with Elzevir's Tacitus and Casaubon's Polybius, *and had been surrounded by all the complex influences around me*, he would have been so similar to me I would have loved him like a brother [...] Because perhaps, after all is said and done, it's possible that my Only Reader isn't the person who most resembles me (tr. and emph. mine).

⁴⁸ I use the plural "sciences" because Poe's Dupin pits his science against the banal one of criminology, and also to emphasize the felicitous intertext of Martín Fierro's famously plural sciences.

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- ⁴⁹ "in a heterogenous mix, the latest thriller and the most recent Nobel Prize converge with massive tomes of surgical pathology and the suggestive covers of fashion magazines" (tr. mine). There is, of course, a long history in Spanish literature of staging cultural hierarchies as library shelves, stretching from Cervantes' satirical raid on the bookshelves in book II of *Don Quixote* to Borges' paternal library and young Roberto Arlt's library-robbery in *El juguete rabioso* (1922).
- ⁵⁰ "[In 1956 I was] a very obscure journalist that wrote pieces—occasional pieces—for *Leoplán*. But I didn't live from that, but rather from translations from the French and English. I also wrote crime stories, sometimes with my name and sometimes with a pseudonym" (tr. mine).
- ⁵¹ Another biographical aside: in Arrosagaray's testimonial biography, David Viñas also mentions that Walsh would recite Shakespeare to him from memory in his later days, living in hiding without his library.
- ⁵² It seems to me safe to assume, given the references elsewhere to the real paperback series *Rastros*, *Evasión*, *Naranja*, and *Andromeda* (95), that *Jalones del Tiempo* is a nod to Borges and Bioy Casares' *Puerta de marfil* series, mentioned in Chapter 1.
- ⁵³ "Am I complaining? No. You always favored with your help, the House was never unjust with me in the slightest" (tr. mine).
- ⁵⁴ On impotence, see also *EH*, 107.
- ⁵⁵ "I'm alone, I'm tired, *I'm useless to everyone and what I do is, too*. I've supported myself by perpetuating in the Spanish the essential lineage of imbecility, *the specific chromosome of stupidity*. In more ways than one, I'm worse off than when I started. I have [only] a suit and a pair of shoes like I did then, and I'm twelve years older" (tr. and emph. mine).
- ⁵⁶ The relevant excerpts of the *Prison Notebooks* can be found in Daniel Link's fascinating compendium of crime-genre theory, *El juego de los cautos*, Buenos Aires: La Marca, 1992.
- ⁵⁷ As if to corroborate this very reading, Walsh refers, in a 1964 personal letter to Donald Yates, to the second edition of *Operación masacre* being deployed in the Argentine Congress as an argument for restitutions to the families of the victims as "mi pequeño caso Dreyfuss" (*Gato negro*, no. 5, 3).
- ⁵⁸ See, for instance, a 1968 diary entry: "¿Me gustaría escribir como Arlt? Me gustaría tener *su fuerza*, *su resentimiento*, su capacidad dramática, su decisión de enfrentar los personajes, como quería Shaw...pero no me gustaría escribir una sola de sus líneas," / "Would I want to write like Arlt? I'd like to have *his force*, *his resentment*, his capacity for drama, his determination to confront his characters, as Shaw wanted... pero I wouldn't want to write a single line of his prose" (*EH*, 113-4; tr. and emph. mine).
- ⁵⁹ "From time to time I've argued with you as to whether the fall of Peronism that killed the demand for crime novels" (tr. mine).
- ⁶⁰ "At first my interest revived. Later, it was the same. Strolling through the landscapes of Ganimedes or tuning into the Great Red Spot of Jupiter, I saw the colorless spectre of my room" (tr. mine).
- ⁶¹ Haycraft's essay is included as Chapter 15 of *Murder for Pleasure*.

⁶² “En los dos o tres primeros años de Perón hubo una relativa libertad de prensa. Después, en cambio, muchos escritores buscaron en la novela policial un derivativo, una evasión de la realidad. Como no podían hablar de temas políticos y sociales, se dedicaron a inventar ficciones policiales. La falta de libertad y de democracia en el plano de la “elite” intelectual puede así considerarse como factor decisivo en el desarrollo de la novela policial, contrariamente a la tesis de Haycraft. Y con los lectores—clase media—ocurre lo mismo: como no tienen nada interesante que leer, porque todos los diarios peronistas repiten las mismas estupideces publicitarias, se vuelcan en masa hacia la literatura policial, creando una gigantesca demanda que ya no se satisface con las traducciones de autores extranjeros. Ésta es la época de oro de los editores de libros policiales. Se publican centenares de novelas policiales, y se leen por millares, en ediciones baratas. El peronismo—hábil en eso—no reprimió la literatura policial, inofensiva para él. Hasta es posible que le haya estimulado, como en la Rusia comunista se estimula hasta la hipertrofia la práctica del ajedrez, que colectivamente es un opio para la inteligencia de las multitudes (y conste que personalmente me apasiona el ajedrez). / Con la caída de Perón, refluye la marea. El lector de novelas policiales encuentra un material mucho más apasionante, vivo y actual en las innumerables revistas y periódicos que con lujo de detalles describen la corrupción, los negociados y la arbitrariedades del gobierno de la revolución [Libertadora], que en un principio contó con bastante apoyo popular, acumula desacierto tras desacierto. Entonces nace la prensa política opositora, que en escaso tiempo conquista una inmensa masa de lectores. Revistas semanales como *Qué*, periódicos como *Azul y blanco* y *Resistencia popular*—que critican implacablemente al gobierno—tienen tiradas semanales que oscilan entre los 100.000 y los 150.000 ejemplares cada uno. ¿Y quién los compra? El mismo público de la clase media que antes leía novelas policiales. [...] / Lo cierto es que la venta de novelas policiales cayó verticalmente. Hay colecciones enteras—como la Serie Naranja de Hachette—que están paralizadas. Los autores locales ya no tienen posibilidades de publicar sus libros. Yo mismo tengo uno terminado, y ni siquiera he intentado venderlo. De donde se deduce que, al menos en este país, el retorno a la libertad de prensa ha aniquilado la novela policial, o poco menos. Conclusión que asombraría a Mr. Haycraft... Claro está que sería arriesgado extraer de eso una norma general. La prensa política prospera gracias a los colosales errores del gobierno. Si el grupo Aramburu, además de permitir la crítica, le hiciera caso y gobernara bien, los semanarios opositores no tendrían nada que decir y perderían rápidamente su público... Por ahora, eso es sólo una remota posibilidad. (EH, 38-40)

⁶³ Anibal Ford’s bibliography for the anthology *Textos de y sobre RW*, compiled at Stanford and published on Alianza in 2000, is still the most thorough in print—it shows the exact publication dates of the stories included in *Cuentos para tahures*.

⁶⁴ See the aforementioned letter in *Gato negro*, for instance; publication of the entire corpus of Yates-Walsh correspondence is still forthcoming over a decade after *Ese hombre*.

⁶⁵ Towards the end of his life, Walsh explicitly rejected all literary forms except the testimonial, which he writes about in his journal as the highest form of literature soon to be recognized in a more just social order. “Ahora mismo, vgr., *fantaseo* que la Novela es el último avatar de mi personalidad burguesa, al mismo tiempo que el propio género es la última forma del arte burgués, en transición a otra etapa en que lo documental recupera su primacía. Pero *tampoco estoy seguro de esto*, que puede ser *una excusa* para mi momentáneo fracaso.” (EH, 126, emphasis mine). See, also, EH 120, 215, 225-6, 324-5.

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- ⁶⁶ In her testimony, his ideological break with the leadership was simultaneous with (and implicitly a precondition of) his returning to literature and to individual subjectivity ("*a ser Rodolfo Walsh*"), spending his last months working on his memoirs "contra estos hijos de puta," in a phrase she attributes to him.
- ⁶⁷ The tripartite structure she mentions ("escribía también sus memorias, que había organizado en tres temas: su relación con la literatura; su relación con la política; y un tercero que se llamaba 'Los caballos'. 'Los caballos' eran el campo, la tierra, los amigos, la infancia, las mujeres, es decir la dimensión afectiva de su existencia," 199) bears some corroboration in a 1970 diary entry (*EH*, 194), as does her assertion of a "return to individuality" in another from 1969: "Siento a veces que he perdido mi interioridad, que he matado un mundo. Por ejemplo, ¿podría escribir?" (153). See also Piglia's "reconstructed" 1987 version of the 1970 interview, quoted and cited below, for another gloss on this apocryphal memoir.
- ⁶⁸ "The rules of classic crime fiction find their purest form in the fetish of pure intelligence. [...] In the *noir* novel, there doesn't appear to be any other criteria of truth than that of experience: the detective throws him- or herself, blindly, into his or her encounter with the facts. [...] They are two [distinct] logics, positioned on opposite sides of the facts. In the middle, between the enigma-novel and the hard-boiled novel, lies journalistic narrative, the crime section [of the newspaper], true stories.
- ⁶⁹ "On the one side, mastery of the autobiographical form of the real-life testimony, of the pamphlet, and of the diatribe... The author [here] is a historian of the present, he speaks in the name of truth, he denounces the manipulations of power. [...] On the other side...fiction is the art of the ellipsis, it deals in allusions and the unsaid, and its construction is incompatible with the urgent aesthetic of compromise and the simplifications of social realism. [...] The two poetics nevertheless meet at one point which will serve as the structuring axis of the whole body of work: the investigation as one of the basic modes of giving form to narrative material. The process of deciphering, the search for the truth, the work of the secret, the rigor of the construction: these texts are built on an enigma, an unknown element that is the key to the story they tell. Short stories like "Fotos" or "Esa mujer" or "Nota al pie" are not very different, structurally, from *The Satanowsky Case* or *Who killed Rosendo?*. The story revolves around a void, around something enigmatic that must be deciphered, and the text juxtaposes traces, facts, signs, to the point of constructing a giant kaleidoscope that allows one to capture a fragment of reality" (tr. mine).
- ⁷⁰ Elsewhere in the 1976 collaboration, his importance as forerunner of the genre's translation and appropriation is discreetly signaled, while still keeping discreetly mum about the political dimension of his mature and recent work; within a few years of democracy, all the collaborators had written articles and homages about their blacklisted hero. See, for example, the pride of place given to Walsh in Jorge B. Rivera's 1986 *El relato policial en la Argentina*, in the 1996 re-edition of Lafforgue's *Asesinos de papel*, or in the 1987 issue of the revived *Crisis* in which Rivera, Lafforgue, and Piglia all write about Walsh as central to Argentina's native crime fiction tradition.
- ⁷¹ Ironically, the Walsh installment in the series was the only one excluded from the relatively popular and widely-distributed 1993 book edition, *Argentina en pedazos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Urraca).

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- ⁷² Piglia is arguing that Walsh was "influential" on Argentine literature in general, but particularly on his own. Even more so than elsewhere in his critical writings, one could substitute Piglia's name and his detective-driven hybrid works for Walsh's in these passages quite easily.
- ⁷³ For those unfamiliar with the works mentioned, a brief explanation should suffice: "Esa mujer" is at once a historical intervention and a formalistic exercise in irony, euphemism, and double-entendre which communicates volumes without ever naming the subject of the interview it narrates in a colloquial, restrained present tense; "Fotos" is an episodic and historicist family drama told in condensed vignettes modeled on Joyce's *Dubliners*, which (like the proposed geological novel) is full of the language of the Infamous Decade whose atmosphere and worldview the story implicitly strives to analyze at least as centrally as the characters themselves.
- ⁷⁴ "If the current volume should be met as warmly as we hope" (tr. mine).
- ⁷⁵ Lest the reader overinterpret the tone of the piece as a function of self-aggrandizing hubris or of puffing oneself up for a fratricidal stab at Borges, it should be stated that Walsh was, *Variaciones* notwithstanding, not yet an established journalist or household name, and unknown on a national level outside of specific literary circles. *La nación* was, in the early 1950's, something like Argentina's paper of record, and Walsh may have a little heavy-handed in his performance of the role of cultural critic largely because the invitation to write such a piece fulfilled, as Daniel Link writes, a personal fantasy and criteria of professional success (VO, 21).
- ⁷⁶ More biographically-oriented critics might find a certain kinship between this insistence on orality as a way back to the populist origins of the genre and almost mythic anecdote with which Walsh was apocryphally supposed to open his memoirs, as mentioned above, with a nine-year-old Walsh reading *Les Misérables* aloud in the infirmary.
- ⁷⁷ See *Antihéroos: México y su novela policial*, Ciudad de México: J. Mortiz, 1993; also available in translation as *Antiheroes: Mexico and its detective novel*, Madison, NJ : Fairleigh Dickinson University Press ; London ; Cranbury, NJ : Associated University Presses, 1997.
- ⁷⁸ See, for instance, "La (otra) novela policíaca," adapted from a conference given at the University of Illinois, and printed in *Los cuadernos del norte*, vol. 8, no. 41 (March-April 1987): 36-41.
- ⁷⁹ Simpson, Amelia, *Detective fiction from Latin America*, Cranbury, NJ : Associated University Presses, 1990; Braham, Persephone, *Crimes against the state, crimes against persons : detective fiction in Cuba and Mexico*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004; Close, Glen, *Contemporary Hispanic crime fiction : a transatlantic discourse on urban violence*, New York, N.Y. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- ⁸⁰ For a radically different, and more detailed, revision of the figures of Poe and Dupin, see Boileau-Narcejac, *La novela policial*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1968 (in David Viñas' "Letras mayúsculas" series), which I'll be discussing in detail in Chapter 4.
- ⁸¹ "I noticed that I was going sloppy [as a policeman], and it's because I wanted to think, to put myself in the shoes of everyone else, to assume responsibility. I doing that I made a few blunder that led to my retirement" (tr. mine).

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- ⁸² For a particularly thorough and demystifying study of crime fiction's politics and the politics of its readership, see Sean McCann's *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Raleigh, NC: Duke U.P., 2000).
- ⁸³ See, for instance, the statement Piglia attributes to "Walsh" in his 1987 "reconstruction" of his 1970 interview, in all likelihood a pastiche of apocrypha found in Walsh's posthumous papers: "Abandoné el género hace años ya, aunque de vez en cuando se me ocurren situaciones que podrían servir de germen a una trama policial. A veces pienso que de todas las historias posibles, las menos posibles entre nosotros parecen ser aquellas en que el "inspector" recoge del suelo una cigarrera, dice: "Ah", telefona al laboratorio, viene el juez, se lleva al asesino y lo condena a 20 años. *Yo también he escrito historias así, pero ahí está la crónica diaria para revelar que las pruebas no significan nada*, que se puede opinar sobre una pericia y que de todas maneras el asesino sale el mes que viene" (*Crisis* no. 57, 1987, 20, emphasis mine). ["I abandoned the genre years ago, although once in a while situations occur to me that could serve as the kernel for a crime-fiction plot. Sometimes I think that of all these possible stories, the least plausible among us [i.e., here in Latin America] are those where an 'inspector' picks a cigarette up off the ground, says, "Aha," calls the lab, the constable shows up, takes the murderer away, and sentences him to twenty years. *I've written stories like that too, but here's the daily press to show that proof like that are meaningless*, that expert testimony can be given and, all the same, the murderer is on the street a month later." (tr. and emph. mine)]
- ⁸⁴ See the English-language anthology *Brecht on Art and Politics*, edited by Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles, London: Methuen, 2003, in particular, "Let's Get Back to Detective Novels!," "On Being a Suitable Spectator," "On New Criticism," "The Crime Novel," and of course the classic text, "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth".
- ⁸⁵ Most notably Elsa Drucaroff's thriller, *El último caso de Rodolfo Walsh*, Buenos Aires: Norma, 2010.
- ⁸⁶ After the critical renown that accrued to the investigative (and cartoonishly "hard-boiled") frame-story of "Homage to Roberto Arlt," treated at length in the previous chapter, Piglia's 1980 *Respiración artificial* makes more central, and quite overt, the analogy between historical inquiries, relations of power, and active readership, juxtaposing dozens of investigations and enigmas in a baroque unfolding of the central trope of repressed research and ominous oversight. The baroque mirroring of investigative plots in that work, the ways it Piglia tropes censorship, its emphatic staging of representational crises as enunciative aphasias, and the book's central rhetorical maneuvers of circumlocution and euphemism could all be interpreted as ideological and formal debts to Walsh; I will be discussing the work at length in Chapter 3. After *Respiración artificial* follows a series of narratives about murders and cover-ups that denounce specific historical crimes or states of exception, organized more plainly as investigations following a Walshian model. The central historiographical gesture of *Prisión perpetua* consists of framing proscription and the repression of contestatory politics as crimes within and against the family, interrupting "the flow of life" and the continuity of Argentine history. *Ciudad ausente*, with its disorienting juxtaposition of crime genre, dystopic science fiction, and high-modernist registers, is the first to pit this historiographical-detective trope and murder-mystery stakes against the homogenizing and disciplinary memory-work of post-dictatorship Argentina.
- ⁸⁷ There is among [Brecht's critical ideas] one very suggestive notion: that there exists a form of gesture [or body language] and a use of language that condenses social meaning. As if one were a foreigner and moving

through a whole reality, watching the functioning of that new society from outside, solely through a use of language and a certain kind of posture, and of systems of organizing social networks: how people salute one another, how they feel, etc etc. That helped me veru much to give to my work on *Burnt money* a sense of meaning beyond just naturalism or *costumbrismo* [i.e., picturesque social custom presented as an end unto itself]. How does one work out a closed world, whose language seems to us a foreign tongue, without making of the project a mere anthropological reconstruction or a *costumbrista* vision of the speech of certain sectors of society? For Brecht, there must be bound up in that [i.e., in the social code of language and gesture] meanings that speak to the whole social structure and not just of that one sector" (tr. mine).

⁸⁸ "The voice came in distorted, in falsetto, the typical voice of a pig, twisted and overbearing, devoid of any sentiment besides a will to torture. Guys who scream, certain that the other will have to obey or else be sunk. That's the voice of authority, the one that you hear coming out of loudspeakers in dungeons, in the corridors of hospitals, in the paddywagon that take prisons across the empty in the middle of the night to the basements of police stations to be worked over with rubber hoses and 'the machine'." [electrotorture] (tr. mine)

⁸⁹ In *Ricardo Piglia: conversación en Princeton*, Princeton, NJ: Program in Latin American Studies, Princeton University, 1998.

⁹⁰ In the same interview cited in the epigraph, Piglia recounts: "Leí sobre todo esos libros periodísticos de los setenta que comenzaban a incorporar una novedad importante: se utilizaba un grabador para recopilar las historias. Los libros de Oscar Lewis, por ejemplo: *Los hijos de Sánchez* y *La vida*, un libro sobre las prostitutas portorriqueñas en Nueva York. En ellos aparecían las voces vivas de los narradores, y esto produjo un corte en relación con los sistemas de representación de la voz y de la narración. Lo que me interesó fue hacer esto ficcional."

["I was reading, above all, those journalistic books of the 70's which began to incorporate an important novelty: they used a tape recorder to compile stories. The books of Oscar Lewis, for example: *The Children of Sanchez*[: *Autobiography of a Mexican Family*, 1961] and *La vida*[:*A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York*, 1966], a book about Puerto-rican prostitutes in New York. The living voices of their narrators appeared in them, and that produced a break with the [existing] systems of representing voice and narration. What interested me what fictionalizing that [process]" (tr. Mine).]

⁹¹ "The stoolpidgeon was a tango singer who went by [literally: "made people call him"] Fontán Reyes" (tr. mine).

⁹² The joke here is that everyone involved in any way in the violence of the 1960's and 70's, from Leftist guerrillas to State-backed deathsquads to apolitical criminals to Walsh himself, was initiated and trained in clandestine operations in the Peronist underground—this hyperbole that recurs in many historical accounts of the period from various different political perspectives.

⁹³ Clearly, the retrospectively prophetic comment refers less to contemporary paranoia triggered by Ernesto Guevara's publicized visits to Algeria in 1965 or to the Algerian insurgency itself than to the well-documented training of Argentine officers, insurgency experts, and torturers by French "experts" who'd developed the protocols and theory of counter-insurgency warfare in the Algerian rebellion. Various military historians and torture specialists had long speculated as whether there were more direct (or provable) links between Argentine and French practices than the assignment of works by Roger Trinquier to Argentine officers, and

recently investigative journalist Marie-Monique Robin set out to prove that actual training seminars and direct classroom instruction had taken place in Buenos Aires, Paris, and Santiago to explicitly replicating Algerian techniques in South America. The resulting book and documentary, if somewhat over-polemic at moments and derailed by some critics as too circumstantial, at least gather most of the extent evidence and testimonies in one place. *Escadrons de la mort, l'école française* (Paris: Découverte, 2004); *Escuadrones de la muerte: la escuela francesa* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2004); *Death squadrons: the French school*, a film by Marie-Monique Robin (Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films, 2003).

⁹⁴ As my colleague Paula Sozzi Saslow has studied *a propos* of madness in Roberto Arlt's theatrical works, José Ingenieros' fixation on false madness goes back at least to his doctoral thesis of 1903, *La simulación de la locura*; presumably, Roberto Arlt wasn't the only journalist or author of popular fiction responding to Ingenieros' analysis of moral and psychological weakness in the 1920's and 30's, as it was largely popularized in the penny press and journalism of the day, through the same influential channels as the works of Freudian psychoanalysis largely foundational to Ingenieros' national project. On Ingenieros' importance in structuring the cultural and ideological landscape of the 20's and 30's, see, Fernando Degiovanni's *Los textos de la patria* (Rosario, Arg: Beatriz Viterbo, 2007).

⁹⁵ Detective Croce, cynical old Peronist friend of Laurenzi and truth-obsessed historian waiting to be transferred to the Melchor Romero asylum, serves as mouthpiece to the theory behind the aesthetic of *La ciudad ausente* and, to some extent, the two later novels: "La historia sigue, puede seguir, hay varias conjeturas posibles, queda abierta, solo se interrumpe. La investigación no tiene fin, no puede terminar. Habría que inventar un nuevo género policial, *la ficción paranoica*. Todos son sospechosos, todos se sienten perseguidos. El criminal ya no es un individuo aislado, sino una gavilla que tiene el poder absoluto. Nadie comprende lo que está pasando; las pistas y los testimonios son contradictorios y mantienen las sospechas en el aire, como si cambiaran con cada interpretación" (284-5).

⁹⁶ See, for instance, Francine Masiello's analysis in "Traducir la historia," in *Ricardo Piglia: una poética sin límites*, Pittsburgh, PA: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2004: "En Mil mesetas Deleuze y Guattari se refieren a la maquina estatal que hipercodifica y compartimentaliza, a las estructuras binarias que organizan el pensamiento hasta el punto de tornarlo rígido. Contra este aparato definido por el estado, notablemente presente en la Argentina, Piglia—tal vez como Deleuze y Guattari—suministra otro instrumento, Impulsado por la imitación y la invención. Al respecto, escriben los autores de Mil mesetas: "La imitación es la propagación de un flujo; la oposición es binarización, el establecimiento de una binaridad de los flujos; la invención es una conjugación o una conexión de diversos flujos" (223). A partir de esta clase de invención, las múltiples "maquinas deseantes" emergen para establecer la posibilidad del dialogo y la redención comunal a través del arte. Y, en la medida en que la máquina de Piglia traduce siempre de un lenguaje a otro, nos recuerda el estado fluido de la transmisión oral, trae a la memoria el efecto transformador del relato de historias como un arte que, según Benjamin escribiera, sostiene siempre un pacto entre los oyentes y ofrece resistencia al estado. En la novela de Piglia, la invención oral también facilita una comunicación que elude las demandas del mercado. El relato de historias en esta instancia es empujado fuera del estado a través de la maquinaria de la traducción" (150-151).

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- ⁹⁷ "In any event, destiny had already begun to lay its plans, to weave its intrigues, to tie together in one point (in the words of the kid at the El Mundo crime desk) the loose threads that the ancient Greeks had named *mythos*" (tr. mine).
- ⁹⁸ "As if I found myself before an Argentine versión of a Greek tragedy. The heroes decided to confront the imposible and to resist, so they choose death as their destiny" (tr. mine).
- ⁹⁹ Persico-Rodriguez' essay, originally a lecture from a 2000 conference, is reprinted a critical anthology she edited, *Ricardo Piglia: una poética sin limites*, Pittsburgh, PA: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2004; Levi-Strauss' article, originally a 1977 radio interview, is reprinted in English in *Myth and Meaning*, New York, NY: Schocken, 1979.
- ¹⁰⁰ Included in *Cuerpo del delito: un manual*, Buenos Aires: Perfil, 1999, published the same year as *Plata quemada*; also available in translation, as *The corpus delicti: a manual of Argentine fictions*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004.
- ¹⁰¹ "He was his friend, not just any old guy, he was an old-school gunman, an idealist, Malito, capable of turning into a popular hero like Di Giovanni or Scarfó ore ven Ruggerito or the forger Alberto Lazin or any of the scoundrels that had rallied behind the national cause" (tr. mine).
- ¹⁰² "On everyone's minds were recent images from the Vietnam War" (tr. mine).
- ¹⁰³ "People had gathered in the área and were making idiotic declarations into the microphones and in front of the cameras as if they all knew what was happening and were direct eyewitnesses. It was through the televisión screen that the Kid and the Gaucho realized it was drizzling outside" (tr. mine).
- ¹⁰⁴ "The cameras panned over the wounded because it was the first time in history that it became posible to transmit live, without censorship, the faces of the dead, fallen in the battle between crime and the Law" (tr. mine).
- ¹⁰⁵ "Narration, [Fujita] told me, is the art of watchmen, they always want people to tell their secrets, to snatch on the suspicious, to tell them about their friends, their brothers. That's why, he said, the police and so-called Justice have done more to advance the art of the story than all the authors in history. And me? I'm the one that tells the story" (tr. mine).
- ¹⁰⁶ "Eternal curse on whom? On the police that find and read these pages? Eternal curse on anyone who reads them with the wrong eyes, with cops' eyes?" (tr. mine).
- ¹⁰⁷ Many critics seem to prefer Puig's own, more plain-language version of this thesis to the more academic formulation I'm making, but the difference might be less substantial than the nomenclature would imply. In interviews, Puig frequently made declarations along the lines sketched out in *Traición* and developed more programmatically in *Beso* and *Maldición* about the "family drama" as training-ground and battle-ground of nascent political ideologies, and power structures. For a recent and succinct formulation similar to my own but nevertheless grounded entirely in Puig's own words and archival sources, see Julia Romero's *El mapa del imperio*, particularly pp. 69-89. Romero's genetic and theoretical work in that volume has been central to my reading in this chapter: see, for instance, this formulation from her introduction: "Considero que es el melodrama la matriz estética a partir de la cual Puig compone sus textos, y es, a la vez, el macrogénero que

facilita un pacto de lectura que recorre toda su producción, muestra sus variaciones estéticas y atraviesa también diferentes públicos. Es este macrogénero—sostengo—el que específicamente sujeta (acentuando todos los significados de la palabra) una forma de composición transgresivamente popular, al tiempo que establece otra *forma de leer los movimientos del campo intelectual*. Lo estudiamos aquí con relación a la génesis, el pacto de lectura con el público y con el modo de leer de Puig la historia argentina” (16).

¹⁰⁸ See Romero's work mentioned above, but also the critical anthology *Puig por Puig*, Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006, and Graciela Goldchuk's article “La travesía de Valentín: De “La vida real” a “El beso de la mujer araña,” *Hispanamérica*, vol.27, issue 81, p.47.

¹⁰⁹ The Alianza Argentina Anticomunista was a far-right terrorist group splintered off from the right wing of the Peronist underground of the late 1960's, publically claiming many of their violent actions in the mid-1970's and suspected of involvement in many others. Contemporary suspicions and later historical research both linked them to older and later non-governmental far-right groups, as well as to a covertly State-funded counter-insurgency and secret police apparatus already very well-funded and elaborated in 1973.

¹¹⁰ “Si *Traición...* se generaba a partir de la voz de una mujer e iniciaba a Puig en el camino de la literatura por un desvío genérico que hizo estallar esa voz en otras, y el boceto de guión se convertía en su primera novela; *Beso* se generó a partir de las voces de otros excluidos: las de los ex- presos políticos liberados en 1973 (Cf. “Anotaciones de la cárcel,” en Puig, 2002: 331-347). Homosexuales e izquierdistas aparecían—o intentaban aparecer—en una ucja que reivindicaban política. Esas voces se borronearon en el proceso de textualización, se despojaron de los matices del lunfardo carcelario, se elidieron y desvanecieron mediante un proceso de estilización que se ejerció sobre aquella transcripción de la oralidad. Sobre los trazos de los discursos múltiples, y casi desaparecidas, subyacen a las voces de los personajes de Puig” (Romero, 129).

¹¹¹ “Doble casetera,” in *Página/12*, Radar section, 10/24/10. Also available online at: <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/9-6558-2010-10-24.html>

¹¹² As noted above, 1976 is the same year Walsh penned his famous apocrypha about abandoning fiction completely in leiu of the genre of the future.

¹¹³ In a 1978 interview, Puig overtly frames this device as a structure of active reading: “Suelo escamotear partes de mis relatos. Es una forma de... no subestimar la inteligencia del lector. Es una forma de buscar la participación más profunda del lector” (from “Con Manuel Puig en Nueva York,” Pérez Luna, Elisabeth, 70-72; cited in Barcarisse, 170).

¹¹⁴ Puig's writings on gender and sexuality make clear that Molina is, at most, a caricature of one aspect of Puig's persona and gender performance, or, more feasibly, of how he may have imagined his interlocutors in prison to have read that persona; the avowed apolitical nature of Molina, despite Puig's deflections in interviews, couldn't have been based on Puig himself, whose biographers and personal correspondence show to be an acute and close observer of Argentine and international politics.

¹¹⁵ In *Plata quemada*, it bears mentioning, the “symbiotic” lovers met in a cell block exclusively for “inverts” remembered as a “basurero” ('trash-can', 59), while ringleader Nando learned his cellular organization and terrorist tactics in a similar concentration facility for political prisoners.

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- ¹¹⁶ Reprinted in the 2002 Archivos edition of *Beso*.
- ¹¹⁷ Puig translates *Führer* as *el Conductor*, which many critics have interpreted as a deliberate nod to Perón, who early in his first regime used “conductor” as an official epithet, a usage preserved in the Peronist March. Given the degree to which Argentine-specific political euphemisms are made into a crucial plot point in many of his novels (and even taught explicitly to a Mexican interlocutor in *Pubis angelical*), the choice of translation seems worth noting at least in passing. The comparison between Argentine and Third Reich totalitarianisms runs through all of Puig’s novel, usually very understatedly but sometimes explicitly, as in comments made throughout *Pubis angelical* by Pozzi, a character that bears strong resemblances to Ramírez, the traumatized exile of *Maldición*.
- ¹¹⁸ See Jill-Levine, 258-262.
- ¹¹⁹ Lucille Kerr, writes, “Puig admits not only to constructing ‘paraphrases’ of the work of existing authors, but also to authoring a theory of his own [...]. In our personal interview, he virtually admitted to being Dr. Anneli Taube” (Balderston, 235f).
- ¹²⁰ See “Me llamo Pichón Garay,” a micro-narrative in the “Argumentos (1969-1975)” section of *La Mayor*; reprinted in *Cuentos completos*, p.199. The piece, like all the Pichón narratives that follow it throughout the rest of Saer’s work, is grimly exilic and foreshadows many of the thematics of memory-work so crucial to this chapter.
- ¹²¹ “Mucho de esto [el conflicto entre movimientos radicales de política y sociales]...empezó a cambiar en la década de los sesenta, con la irrupción del movimiento de liberación femenina.... / La posterior formación de liberación homosexual sería una prueba de ello” (182).
- ¹²² Panesi, Jorge, “Manuel Puig, las relaciones peligrosas,” *Revista iberoamericana* No. 125; Rama, Ángel, “El último Puig. La máxima ambigüedad,” *El universal*, Mexico D.F., 31 Jan 1982.
- ¹²³ If the work of art could be political, it would already be something else, it started to have another kind of value, albeit a negative one. There might exist an interest in buying it in political terms, not so much for the consumption of an elite, as for its absorption, its neutralization: even because the dissenting literary figure could perceive before the political apparatus did the seeds of insurrection, and in this sense writers could become a species of snitch or watchmen. To be continued.
- ¹²⁴ Note that the most thorough critical survey of all his works, by fellow French-resident Argentine and long-standing Saer expert, Julio Premat, is titled *La dicha de Saturno: escritura y melancholia en la obra de Juan José Saer* (Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo, 2002).
- ¹²⁵ “A / Michel, Patrick, Pierre Gilles, / que practican tres / ciencias verdaderas, / la gramática, la homeopatía, y la administración, / el autor les dedica, / por las sobremesas de los domingos, / esta comedia: // *but then time is your misfortune father said.*” / “To / Michel, Patrick, Pierre Gilles, / who practice three / true sciences, / grammar, homeopathy, and administration, / the author dedicates, / for the Sunday banquets, / this comedy: / *but then time is your misfortune father said.*” (tr. mine).
- ¹²⁶ Gabriel Riera has analyzed this generic rubric with notable philosophical and philological rigor in his *Littoral of the Letter: Saer’s Art of Narration*, Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 2006, 103-108.

¹²⁷ From the 1984 corrected text, New York: Vintage International, 1990, pg. 104.

¹²⁸ In *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson. London: Rider, 1955; emphasis mine. For a thorough discussion of Sartre's uneasy relationship to Faulkner's influence and legacy, see Simon, John K., "Faulkner and Sartre: Metamorphosis and the Obscene," in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer, 1963), pp. 216-225.

¹²⁹ "En uno que se moría / mi propia muerte no vi, / pero en fiebre y geometría / se me fue pasando el día / y ahora me velan a mí."

¹³⁰ Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Chapter 3: The Criminal State, the Thriller, and the Literature of Paranoia

Introduction: A Paranoid Genealogy across Genres

La literatura policial instaura una paranoia de sentido que caracteriza nuestra época: los comportamientos, los gestos y las posturas del cuerpo, las palabras pronunciadas y las que se callan: todo será analizado, todo adquirirá valor dentro de un campo estructural o de una serie. Se trata de teorías de la lectura que, cada vez más, se aproximan a la máquina paranoica de Salvador Dalí o Jacques Lacan¹.

—Daniel Link, *Como se lee*, 104

La literatura se ha hecho cargo cada vez más del desarrollo del imaginario de la amenaza de la vida cotidiana puesta en peligro. [...] Uno podría decir que hay un estado de la narración, un estado de la novela, que se afirma en la existencia de estos géneros —sobre todo el policial— que hacen de esta problemática uno de sus materiales centrales, toma esos subgéneros y exaspera este campo².

—Piglia, “La literatura paranoica,” *Clarín*, 1-10-1991

Since the time of writing *Respiración artificial*, Ricardo Piglia has referred to “paranoid fiction” (or sometimes, “paranoid literature”) as a literary genre currently coming into focus and imminently growing more important to cultural criticism³. Piglia uses the term a bit more broadly than would be proper to a single fiction genre *per se*, and over the years he has offered various, slightly contradictory definitions and genealogical sketches. Across interviews and critical works, he traces its primary sources back to the North American crime fiction canon, and at various times and in various contexts, also credits other sources as fundamental to the novel’s vision of history and its manipulation of the reader (most commonly, dystopic science fiction and Cold War satire, such as that of Philip K. Dick and Thomas Pynchon). Piglia describes this genre as the perverse or jaded continuation of the crime genres beyond the stage of their development where truth could resolve a mystery and justice could restore order, a periodization that assumes crime fiction was originally and essentially structured by detectives and by the restoration of a social order. Piglia’s detective-centric short-hand may seem dubious in light of our methodology in the preceding chapters and in light of the breadth of his own work as translator, critic, and author, but it is worth recuperating with an eye to elaborating a more comprehensive generic schema.

What’s more, Piglia’s own examples imply that this thematic tradition cuts across various genres, such as when, in a recent interview à propos of *Blanco nocturno*⁴, he “jokingly”

cites Kafka's *Trial* as the initiator of this transgeneric paranoid tradition. From there, he goes on to connect his own work to this Kafkaesque mode by an intermediary generation of pulpy crime thrillers almost devoid of detectives and investigators: Cornell Woolrich, Patricia Highsmith, and Puig's *Buenos Aires Affair*. Even a superficial familiarity with these thrillers, or with the Lacanian and Deleuzian influences which critics have analyzed in Piglia's own fictional work⁵, makes clear that what Piglia is playfully framing as a new genre evolving out of the detective genre is really a disparate sequence of *psychoanalytic* experiments, related more to each other than to detective fiction⁶. The heterogeneous lineage that Piglia is claiming for paranoid literature and for his own novelistic project is best understood as cross-cutting popular genres and psychological fiction, opportunistically poaching narrative structures, affective strategies, and even stock characters from both. What unites this lineage is that all are structured by a "theory" or modality of paranoid reading that, as Daniel Link points out, is both psychoanalytic and symptomatic, structured by affects of anxiety, uncertainty, menace, and self-doubt.

Without attempting to trace or define this heterogeneous lineage *per se*, this chapter will simply study a few transgeneric appropriations of structures and strategies as pivotal moments in Argentina's own evolution of this paranoid mode of representing history. I would first like to sketch out what makes the "psychological thriller" crime fiction's most "paranoid" genre and thus most akin to other "paranoid" developments in mid-century popular fiction more transparently political in scale, such as the "paranoid style" of Thomas Pynchon or the political satires of Norman Mailer. Indeed, Piglia's intention in appropriating the term "paranoid" from this specifically North American critical tradition⁷ seems to have been to foreground the explicitly political dimension of what might otherwise pass for apolitical kitsch or ludic postmodernism, a gesture I would like to repeat and substantiate. To elaborate a critical apparatus which might position the "psycho thriller" within the realm of politicized readerly paranoia, I'll analyze the psychological thriller's constitutive readerly affects of anxiety and menace as essential to its style, and then unpack the oblique capacity for social commentary that inheres in its concomitant narrative structure, particularly the social purchase of the simultaneously exceptional and typical figure of the psychopath. Once I've shown Puig's political appropriation of these stylistic and narrative traits of the "psycho thriller" for Argentine literary history, I'll then show how Saer and Piglia took up Puig's groundbreaking historico-psychological thriller, *The Buenos Aires Affair*, as a key inspiration for the equally trans-generic pastiches of their respective 1980 "dictatorship novels," *Nadie nada nunca* and *Respiración artificial*.

Most North American genre surveys and critical accounts class the psychological thriller as a kind of "second generation" whereby, after psychotherapy rises to hegemonic stature in American society, the sensational crime melodrama of the 1930s and 40s (studied in Chapter 1) trades in its moral framework for a psychological one (see Hilfer, Seltzer). In North America, this generational differentiation may seem like a minor shift in structure reflecting relatively minor changes in cultural values and tastes, but in Argentina this later "generation" of paranoid thrillers had a more politically-charged and socially critical afterlife than their melodramatic

forebears. In political and social terms, the institution of psychoanalysis meant something very different in Argentina in 1969 than it did in the United States in 1945 or in 1960. Furthermore, one structural aspect of the psychological thriller central to Argentina's selective adaptation of the tradition is its "investigative" dimension, i.e. its foregrounding of psychological inquiry as a structuring narrative tension by analogously to investigative crime genres. By freighting this psychological inquiry with political and sociological consequences, Puig turned the often apolitical musings of the thriller into an X-ray of the political violence overtaking Argentina in 1969. Furthermore, a central intertext which Puig credits with much of his novel's affective structure and tone, Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960), comes from the psychological thriller's most denigrated and presumed apolitical subspecies, the "serial-killer thriller," which resurfaces in subtle, yet important ways in the 1980 works of Piglia and Saer.

Though Puig's radical appropriation and its source material were both undervalued at the time by a literary establishment ideologically hostile to any politicization of kitschy "minor genres," the prescience of Puig's psychological reading of contemporary history, as well as the formal innovations of his oblique politicization of genre fiction, provided a model for further inquiries into the psychopathology of violence during the State Terror years. To dismiss the melodramatic thriller as inherently innocuous or inconsequential, as many critics of the 60's and 70's did, shows how deeply ingrained and unquestioned the Manichean opposition of base melodrama to intellectual critique was through all the cultural realignments of the Argentine 1960s. In this sense, it's worth noting that even Walsh's otherwise iconoclastic project for an anti-State, critical crime novel (studied in Chapter 2) inherited from the intellectual tradition of Borges and Ocampo certain prejudices about melodrama and realism, and therefore redeemed only a certain realist (and *transparently* critical or political) subset of the crime genre family from the realm of innocuous kitsch. It is a fundamental ideological and methodological assertion of this work that all genres of crime fiction descend variously from melodrama, even if some genres (detective fiction, hard-boiled realism) seem to downplay or eschew their melodramatic lineage to heighten the gaming pleasure of investigation as a disinterested end unto itself and as the exclusive narrative drive. The largely overlapping designations of "suspense" and "thriller" lie on the other side of that fundamental schism, on the side of the openly melodramatic narration of crime and punishment as *liminal* experiences. There is little critical consensus on the issue, particularly if one goes back further than two decades, but the 21st century contradistinction that I use throughout this chapter is essentially an affective one rather than a narratological one: suspense novels build a more conventional, realist sympathy for a menaced protagonist, while thrillers sacrifice psychological realism and even plausibility to maximize the menace and anxiety induced in the reader, leaning more on atmospheric and insinuation than on situational suspense.

Within the tradition of crime fiction, these categories map onto distinct narrative subgenres quite tidily. It is rare in either the criminal-focused suspense tradition descending from James M. Cain or the victim-focused thriller tradition descending from Cornell Woolrich to structure a narrative around an investigation, or to represent the Law as an effective and just apparatus for the maintenance of social order. The popular plot formula elaborate by James M.

Cain, in which a crime is made necessary, schemed, attempted, then variously foiled or uncovered by investigators that represent corporate and/or legal authority, achieves its pleasurable unpleasure from narrative suspense, often at the expense of characterization and psychological depth (see Chapter 1). Woolrich, on the other hand, achieved bestseller status and exerted a seminal influence on popular culture in both North America and Argentina⁸ by working out every variation in another, often cartoonishly implausible plot formula centered on a terrified victim: the cornered and paranoid Woolrichian protagonist spends the bulk of each novel trying to investigate, outwit, or prove their way out of an elaborate trap or an improbable frame-up for a crime they didn't commit. (Presumably, it was to the panicky atmospherics of Woolrich's novels that Piglia alludes when he named Woolrich as a key forerunner of paranoid fiction in the crime-fiction tradition in a recent interview⁹). The central tension in all of Woolrich's persecution novels is between the possible and the probable, or to put it another way, between a protagonist and a reality-principle: in a kind of allegorized persecution fantasy, Woolrich's protagonists must prove common sense wrong, must prove the evidence damning them to have been elaborately planted, must disprove sound inferences. They play directly on the reader's anxieties about the State monopoly on violence because they are paranoid conjectures as to the imperfections and vulnerabilities of the Law, which can never be fully coextensive with truth or justice.

The psycho-thriller descends, in various admixtures, from these two lines of crime fiction over the course of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s¹⁰, and in moving the affective core of the novel from suspenseful events and theories of events to the psychology of its characters, it tends to be more diverse in its points of view and its plots. Its protagonism and narrative structure cannot readily be generalized, but what unites all psycho-thrillers is that their primary narrative and thematic focus is not the story of a crime but its mysterious roots in the psyche, which is presented as more ambiguous and worthy of investigation than factual events. In this sense, the criminal, social or moral investigations of the crime fiction tradition are supplanted by a psychic one, and often at the expense of any other inquiry. As its name implies, a psycho-thriller transmutes the specific unpleasures, anxieties, and menaces of psychopathology into sensational pleasures, thrills, and entertainment: a melodramatic form of popular psychology elevates the sickness represented to a kind of educational spectacle and refigures morbid curiosity as a form of sympathy, however voyeuristic¹¹. Unlike the reader of a realist text, whose catharsis comes from a vicarious experience of the protagonist's desires and risks, the reader of the paranoid text experiences as pleasure the endurance and overcoming of the thriller's desperate and "unpleasurable" affects of paranoia, dread, and anxiety. Works like *Buenos Aires Affair* and *Respiración artificial* appropriate this melodrama of unpleasure and its voyeuristic mode of sympathy to achieve a readerly state of paranoia; they then radicalize this mode by imbuing its melodramatic plot structures with historical critique and allegory. I'll begin with an analysis of this genre's perverse form of sympathy and the unique form of "active" reading it entails, closer to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* than to Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, as the generic framework Puig creates for his novel; later, I'll turn to the genre's narrative structures to show how Saer and Piglia combined that framework with other genres and other forms of readerly paranoia.

Puig's Psychoanalysis: Joycean Pastiche and Paranoid Active Reading

*Joyce...leyó en Freud una técnica narrativa y un uso del lenguaje...percibió que había ahí modos de narrar y que, en la construcción de una narración, el sistema de relaciones que definen la trama no debe obedecer a una lógica lineal y que datos y escenas lejanas resuenan en la superficie del relato y se entrelazan secretamente.*¹²

—Piglia, “Los sujetos trágicos,” in *Formas breves*, 76-77

Puig's third novel, *The Buenos Aires Affair: novela policial*, is rightly remembered as a literary scandal and a censorship case for its deliberately off-handed representation of contemporary political violence, systematic torture, and unhealthily violent sexuality. At the same time, the work's intertextual dialogues and transgeneric form suggest a very different relation to history than that assumed by many critical debates over the novel. While the first two chapters (the abandoned mother, the clinically-described bedroom scene described as if in an intermission between two crimes) set up the expectation of a conventional crime melodrama or investigation (i.e., a crime narration from any other crime genre), the twinned case-studies of Leo and Gladys and the titillating way the compulsions and lacunae of their interiorities are represented soon make clear that no crime or criminal investigation will be as important as their psychic mysteries. In terms of its pacing, its structure of revelations and twists, and its narrative arc, Puig's novel could be classed as a psychological thriller; it would even qualify as an entirely conventional one if not for its Joycean ironies and resonances, the demanding omission of a synthesizing narrator, and its calculated political details. The addition of these devices, however, renders it a paranoid and deeply political thriller.

The difference between merely classifying this work as a crime novel and the more specific designation of it as a psychological thriller might seem like hair-splitting, but I think it has major consequences within the tradition of Puig scholarship. Namely, this terminological shift makes the thriller (*Buenos Aires Affair*) and the crime melodrama (*Boquitas pintadas*) two episodes in the ongoing elaboration of a melodramatic and psychoanalytic apparatus of active reading with a crucial historiographical dimension. The categorical shift also shows the generic model of *Affair* is not so different from that of *Boquitas pintadas: folletín*, with which Puig established and refined the melodramatic arc and narrative formula that would structure all his future novels¹³. Just as the subtitle of *Boquitas* and its overarching conceit of an experimental “folletín” divided contemporary critics along ideological lines, prompting sterile discussions of alienation and bad conscience, so too did the subtitle of the *Affair*, “*policial*,” engender equally circular debates about how to name the distance between the actual novel and the alienated crime genre it systematically frustrated, “undermined” or parodied¹⁴.

As if to fortify his novel against this renewal of debates over the ethical status of his characters' alienation, Puig prominently incorporated Joyce's *Ulysses* and Freud's case studies

of neurotics as structural and recognizable intertexts alongside the Hollywood and melodramatic ones. But the trans-generic pastiche operated by Puig went beyond the mere pasting together of narrative source material from different genres: he also combined different genres' modes of active reading and readerly pleasure, in particular their respective modes of representing interiority as readily *interpretable*. This narratology of interpretation, dovetailing fiction and clinical practice, is clearly not new to Puig or to postmodernism, but a central vein through Freud's methodology famously foregrounded in Lacan's rereading of the Oedipus myth¹⁵. Puig extends this approach to include a broader range of fictions and psychological theories, combining the most current and advanced theoretical models from clinical psychology¹⁶ with the most clichéd and glib forms of "popular psychology." The way these different modes of active reading are overlaid quietly assembles a kind of psychoanalytic family tree of textual registers and investigation narratives that cuts across genres and disciplines.

While this overlaying of registers is authorized and organized by the prototype of Joycean pastiche in *Ulysses*, claiming centrality for Joyce's intertext would overlook the drastically different relationships to interiority and truth that organize Joyce's novel and Puig's: the latter is concerned less with the writerly limits of novelistic representation than with the readerly limits of psychoanalytic interpretation. The subtitle can similarly be misleading: it is the talking cure, not crime and punishment, that drives the demanding narrative and the readerly pleasure of Puig's "*novela policial*." What Puig draws from both paragons is a voyeuristic form of inquiry that his text demands of its active reader: curiosity is more of a driving force than catharsis in this form of readerly pleasure. This voyeuristic "work" exerted by the reader on the narrative material, like the work of Oedipus in Lacan's reading of Freud, is a kind of psychoanalytic missing link, central to both Puig's conceptions both of Joyce and of the "*novela policial*"¹⁷ in its broadest sense.

As in Joyce's novelistic precedent, this voyeurism and the information it feeds on exceed the parameters of the foregrounded psychological inquiry, spilling over into all of the unremarked political and historical minutiae comprising the backdrop of the novel. Daniel Link's prophecy, quoted above, for a coming society in which "everything will be read" takes to its logical end the readerly anticipation of elucidation which all the popular crime genres condition in their reader. Puig's novel is no exception, in that its active reader rightly expects some explanation or meaning to accrue to its minutiae. Puig's two police-department scenes, clearly modeled on *Aeolus*, the seventh chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, recast major historical forces and ideological debates as banalities of everyday speech and unremarked newspaper headlines with deliberate off-handedness that incites the reader, already primed to active reading, to analyze thematically and ethically. The contentious reports about economic unrest and international aggression in these scenes and others are presented as neutral and inconclusive details, a meaningful backdrop against which to depict the paranoia and psychosexual dysfunction foregrounded by the novel's psychological inquiry.

But Joyce is only one of the many roads that lead to Freud¹⁸ when we try to decompose the key intertexts of *Buenos Aires Affair*: a very specific cross-section of Puig's own encyclopedic knowledge of film serves crucially as another source of the pastiche. Taking

further the formal and ideological centrality of film in Puig's markedly Joycean first novel, *Traición de Rita Hayworth*, the epigraphs to each chapter frame the events of *the Affair* in the stilted interpersonal sensibility that the under-socialized and awkward Gladys learned from the films quoted. Gladys sees the world not through the lens of film culture *per se* or of specific personae from the star system's glory days; nor does she prize violent crime films or misogynistic *films noirs*, as one might expect from the novel's subtitle, Gladys' masochistic sexuality, or Puig's personal viewing habits; nor does she treasure the tradition of films about artists and outcasts that would correspond more obviously to Gladys' gently-lampooned middle-brow literary tastes, typical of her existentialist generation.

Instead, and in true Freudian fashion, the silver-screen dialogues that have been branded in Gladys' mind comprise a canon that speaks directly to her innermost libidinal dysfunctions and the self-destructive drives trained by her family drama. Gladys inhabits a neurotic world populated by stock characters from, and echoes of, a highly gendered cross-section of "women's films" and "weepies" where women love foolishly and suffer nobly, a gender-reactionary canon¹⁹ of hysterical sexuality and Madonna/whore complexes that encircles her like a hall of mirrors. The reader, particularly the reader familiar enough with that canon to know some of the films and imagine the rest, not only interprets the events of each chapter according to the melodramatic epigraphs, but in so doing also reconstructs something like a psychic substrata for the character of Gladys after realizing, in her case study in Chapter 3, that these clips are the dramatic climaxes of her repeatedly-watched favorites (41). What makes this cross-section of hysterical film so interesting is the way in which Gladys herself interprets the events of her relationships to her mother, her lovers, and her friends by overt analogies to these films, comprising an effective apparatus of "popular psychology". These tear-jerking films about social obligations and impossible loves are, importantly, films that the masochistic Gladys watches alone and cries through (98); compare this to sadistic Leo's compulsive phobia of being seen alone in a theater and his rejection of Fellini's contemporary work²⁰ as pretentious and loaded with "simbología freudiana de bolsillo"²¹ (139), i.e., the schematic and heavy-handed stuff of popular psychology. The epigraphs from Gladys' favorite films prompt the reader to follow her self-destructive and martyrological example, even if we, like Leo, "know better".

Leo's and Gladys' filmic tastes are key psychological indices that the novel prompts the reader to interpret unequivocally. Just as Joyce loaded Leopold's and Molly's interiorities with the flotsam and jetsam of dime-novel clichés (particularly dense near the libidinal eddies of their sexual fantasies), so too does Puig structure his representation of interiority around a kind of filmic bovarism foregrounded by the series of Gladys' epigraphs. Their viewing habits understood in the most literal sense, however, are just as crucial to Puig's dual portrait of sadomasochistic dynamics, and harder to parse. That requires historicizing epochal changes in film viewership and incorporating into our discussion Puig's other major intertext, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). *Psycho* was, by 1969, acquiring a seminal status not only for its industry-changing openness to the formal possibilities of substantial work in popular genres, but also for its equally revolutionary demands on theaters to impose a new discipline on the

viewing habits of their publics. In interviews, Puig referred to *Psycho* as the stylistic and formal "starting point" for his composition of the novel, beginning with the crime scene, which eventually became chapter 2. Many critics have taken this nod of credit at face value, even as they dismiss as false humility his claim to have pilfered a technique or two from *Ulysses*. In what follows, I will argue that at the level of active reading and genre, *Psycho* is much more than a starting point for Puig's novel. Though *Psycho* has largely been overlooked as a central intertext for the novel in criticism to date, Puig's novel owes at least as much to Hitchcock as to Joyce.

At its core, Puig's novel is a narrative game that begins with a clinically and neutrally described "crime scene" only to frustrate the generic and affective expectations it thus conjures. To depict that scene in anxiety-inducing neutrality, he turned to the restraint and oblique manipulation of Hitchcock's "camerawork" in *Psycho*²². Taking the term "camerawork" in its broader sense of not just composition and camera movement but also editing, score, and pacing, it seems most likely that Puig refers specifically to the scenes late in Hitchcock's film where the "Bates mansion" is explored first by the private detective Milton Arbogast (Martin Balsam) and then by Marion's sister Lila (Vera Miles). In both these scenes, mostly comprised of slow-panning but fast-zooming first-person camera work edited together frenetically and jumpily, the compositional focus alights on a series of objects (dressing-table, furniture, toys, kitsch decorations), all of which are essentially "red herrings" (i.e., false clues) and opaque material indexes of the as-yet enigmatic characters of the Bates family. The prose equivalent of these unnerving "pans" and "cuts" organizes the terse pacing and the concatenative syntax of Leo's apartment in Puig's breathless second chapter; equally opaque interpretative dead-ends are provided by the clinical listing of interpretive facts in something like a false free-indirect discourse: "the most expensive item in the room is...", "the largest is...", "the smallest is...".

But Puig poached more than just an aesthetic of withholding from "the Master of Suspense": the intertext of *Psycho* resonates in Puig's playful and structural frustration of viewer expectations, in his formal elaboration of a specifically psychoanalytic and voyeuristic active viewing, and in the generic irony of his novel's romantic overtones and the perversity of its readerly sympathies. In ambitiously extending the generic reach of his pastiche method of composition, Puig must have been drawn to Hitchcock's model for having brought Hollywood up to speed on European experiments in genre-bending and high-low pastiche. But Hitchcock's film is also a model of Freudian stylistics as original and epochal as Joyce's: *Psycho*'s particular blend of formal rigor and "light" content made it a masterpiece of perverse manipulation and induced anxiety, raising the bar for the thrilled audience's screams and squeals. To this end I'd like to analyze the film formally and in the context of film history before returning to the Argentine ends to which Puig adapted his intertexts.

Puig's Hitchcock: the pleasures and the subjectivity of *Psycho*

*Truffaut: Would you say that the *Psycho* is an experimental film?*

Hitchcock: Possibly. My main satisfaction is that the film had an effect on the audiences, and I consider that very important. I don't care about the subject matter; I don't care about the acting; but I do care about the pieces of film and the photography and the sound track and all of the technical ingredients that made the audience scream. I feel it's tremendously satisfying for us to be able to use the cinematic art to achieve something of a mass emotion. And with Psycho we most definitely achieved this. It wasn't a message that stirred the audiences, nor was it a great performance or their enjoyment of the novel. They were aroused by pure film.

—Hitchcock interviewed by Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 1967²³

Having already mentioned certain formal devices of neutrality in Hitchcock's first-person scenes of investigation, I'd now like to turn to the sensational and manipulative structure of the film as a whole and the "mass emotion" it elicits. The rest of Hitchcock's slow-moving and plot-light film could be characterized by a transparent excess of *psychoanalytic* information and visceral manipulations of the reader's or viewer's investments and sympathies. As Hitchcock explains it to kindred formalist Truffaut, the film is willfully devoid of Aristotelian drama, novelistic richness, or didactic "message," achieving instead a kind of "mass emotion" by purely formal means specific to film and operating, as it were, directly on the unwitting viewer's psyche (or, as he puts it later in the interview, "playing [the audience] like an organ"). Truffaut's book-length interview compendium is a milestone in the evolution and spread of *auteur* theory beyond academia²⁴, and it cemented the formalist reading of Hitchcock's "mastery" of the film medium: Truffaut and a generation of critics appropriated Hitchcock's kitsch masterpiece as a key event in the narrative whereby "experimental" and "pure" film evolved from the limiting purposiveness of narrative-driven Hollywood melodrama and mass culture. Given his lifelong devotion not only to popular and academic film journalism but also to trade papers, Puig could neither have missed these changing interpretations of the film's "mass emotion," nor could he have missed the influence of Truffaut's book in the 3 years between its first publication and his composition of *Buenos Aires Affair*.

With an eye to Puig's pastiche appropriation in mind, however, we should be careful not to interpret Hitchcock's phrase "pure film" as an antonym of "popular film"; the distorting retrospective fetish for artistic "purity" can obscure other histories in which the film also marks a watershed. In a somewhat polemic article from 1999, Linda Williams sketches out some of those other histories and argues that *Psycho*'s privileged place in academic film history is largely a function of a "modernist" critical narrative in which "pure," formally experimental *auteur* film transcends its inheritance from Hollywood "classicism" (variously defined) and triumphs over vulgar tastes for narrative, acting, the star system, and production design as an ostentatious pleasure unto itself. Indeed, in Williams' view, a generation of critics whose attitudes towards "visual pleasure," identification, and enjoyment ranged from ideological suspicion to outright "anathema" discussed in exhaustive detail the workings of the film medium's construction of the viewing experience while leaving aside the affective substance of that experience²⁵. The irony of his least critically-approved and most populist works being canonized first by Truffaut and other *auteur* directors, then by a pleasure-phobic generation of Lacanian film theorists and

academics, didn't escape Hitchcock's notice: he once quipped that this whole subset of his films had gone "from being failures to masterpieces without ever being successes"²⁶. American and British critics objected loudly to *Psycho*'s lurid sensationalism as unbecoming the "Master", as well as to its visceral manipulations of the audience, its tawdry atmospherics, and the *deus ex machina* of its pop-psychological ending. In a nutshell, they objected to all the cheap tricks that had made it such an unprecedented popular favorite and such a watershed in the evolution of audience tastes generally, and of the thriller genre specifically (I'll return to this subgeneric history shortly). Contemporary mainstream criticism as much as later academic criticism could not forgive (or could not read as camp²⁷) Hitchcock's deliberately *cheap* crowd-pleaser; it was categorically incapable of reconciling high-brow (or as some might argue, a middle-brow) narrative criteria with an effective low-brow spectacle. Having recently watched as the ideological camps of 60's literary criticism first rejected, then celebrated, his first two novels as case-studies in alienation and indictments of the bad consciousness of kitsch, Puig would have understood more than anyone Hitchcock's frustration with the schizophrenic reception of his "unsuccessful masterpieces"²⁸.

Returning to Williams' revision of the film's role in a broader history of film reception, it is telling that she sidesteps these drastically different criteria to analyze the film's reception in terms of a leveling and populist conception of "fun," elaborating an extended comparison between Hitchcock's intended (and enforced) viewing experience and a roller-coaster ride or carnival amusement²⁹. In 1969, *Psycho* was still largely known as the occasion for Hitchcock's near-mythic imposition of a draconian, almost Foucauldian discipline on the commercial theater environment to better "play his audience like an organ". Hitchcock contractually demanded that theaters showing the film enforce a closed-door policy against untimely admittance (at the time, few movies had set show times or queues) and gave birth to the then-revolutionary dogma of the "plot spoiler" (put forth not only on the movie's poster but even in internal promotional materials directed at theater operators). This quantum leap in the director's control over the sensory spectacle of the film maximized not only the viewer's "suspense" but also her emotional and psychic investment in the film, even as the film markedly lacked, for contemporary audiences, the most conventional vehicles to that investment (the intertextual typecasting of the star system, stilted and unrealistic dialogue, an aesthetics of unworldly glamor, rich backstories, narrative tension, etc.).

Of course, Hitchcock's (and later Puig's) "mass emotion" was all the more effectively elicited in the absence of these conventional modes of investment by alternative structures eliciting affect and sympathy; indeed, the "roller coaster" effect described by Williams is reinforced not only by the sudden twists of expectation and sympathy, but by their overt perversity. The unexpected death of the film's female protagonist, and only real star, less than halfway through the film not only fulfills the posters' promise of secrets worth keeping and show-stopping thrills, it also puts Anthony Perkins' sympathetic psychopath in the role of protagonist both by narrative default and by subtle operations of cinematographic perspective. In one of the most influential studies of the film, Kaja Silverman famously wrote, "what *Psycho* obliges us to understand is that we want suture so badly that we'll take it at any price" (*The*

Subject of Semiotics, 227), which is to say, having a psychopath for a protagonist and an object of sympathy must be better than the unimaginable absence of either. Clearly, Silverman chooses *Psycho* (and not, say, other perverse and voyeuristic thrillers like *Rear Window* or *Vertigo*³⁰) exactly because it is Hitchcock's most amoral, ideologically suspect, and perverse film from the standpoint of viewer identification, which in Silverman's Lacanian argument about film's undertheorized powers of suture and interpellation makes it Hitchcock's *strongest* film, and his most sadistic. But to explain away the popular success of this perverse sympathy sustained through the bulk of the film, Silverman's reading relies on an Althusserian form of Marxist "bad consciousness": how else could the masses find enjoyment in these sadistic games and alienating jokes at their expense? Silverman, like Puig's harshest contemporary critics, could not see the "fun" in perverse sympathy, psychic surprises, and anxiety-inducing atmospherics, even as these had long been the defining traits of the popular genre that came into maturity and wider popularity with the record-setting success of Hitchcock's film. Puig, taking up Hitchcock's film and the psycho-thriller genre it redefined, was nothing if not acutely aware of the "fun" and "thrills" to be had in unpleasure.

Excursus: The "psycho-thriller" genre and the doors opened by Hitchcock's serial-killer

The lead character in a psycho thriller is often engaged in a death struggle with the destructive, violent impulses of his or her own mind, or entangled in a contest of wits with a more-or-less equally matched opponent...The universe in which these characters clash is both existential and deterministic...the psycho thriller [critiques] the deleterious impact of social institutions upon psychological development. The tone of much fiction within [this genre], and many others that are cousin to [it], is one of paranoia. We fear that the institutions we depend on for our shared experience are not only fundamentally unsound but downright rotten. The psycho thriller enacts this fear for us.

—Philip Simpson, "Noir and the Psycho Thriller," 193-7³¹

No previous film had ended with such an unanswered, grinning question mark as Psycho does...There is no rational answer to the questions the film raises, certainly not those offered by the smug psychiatrist in the cop house—that place of order that can impose order on nothing.

—Kolker, "introduction", *Psycho: A Casebook*, 18

While clearly the "serial killer" was not born with Hitchcock's film, it was largely made into a household term by it, which for Puig's attention to the popular imaginary might be more important³². What's more, there are also two important difficulties in defining Hitchcock's contribution to the thriller genre generally or his idiosyncratic take on the figure of the serial-killer in *Psycho* in particular. First, his carefully-manipulated public-relations epithet, "the

Master of Suspense," reinforced his central and influential role within the suspense and thriller genres, making his evolving aesthetic almost coextensive with the parameters of both. Secondly, it should be noted that proper definitions of the thriller genre and of the serial-killer subgenre were both constituted retrospectively years after Hitchcock's blockbuster successes had changed the course of that genre's evolution. Working with Cornell Woolrich and Patricia Highsmith to adapt their own influential works, Hitchcock decisively molded not only the narrative conventions but even the canon of this structurally psychoanalytic and atmospherically paranoid tradition. In their original form in the novels of Woolrich and Highsmith, narratives that pretend to explain the irrational (without ever really delivering on that promise) offered a perverse entertainment value, inducing anxiety and release instead of investment and catharsis. These narratives, although popular and imitated by lesser-known pulp authors and film studios, were not grouped together as a genre, much less a mainstream genre, before Hitchcock's appropriation of them. For all these reasons, it seems more pertinent to Puig and to his generation to define the thriller post-Hitchcock than to dwell on its pre-Hitchcock elaboration in the North American pulp press of the 40's and 50's; it is largely owing to Hitchcock's self-constructed role as thriller *auteur* and revolutionizer of popular forms that Puig strove to emulate him in constructing his own authorial myth.

Central to *Psycho*'s intervention in the thriller tradition is Hitchcock's transformation of the stock character of the compulsion-driven and opaque serial killer (rarely more than a gothic bogeyman or adventure-novel super-antagonist in previous films and novels) into an unnerving psychic spectacle and an ambiguous, potentially damning embodiment of the failings of the social order. Puig appropriated this potential for social critique in the figure of Norman Bates as a Freudian caricature of Oedipal subjectification taken too far, going further in his depiction of Leo Druscovich's blind compulsions and violent negations and its legible roots in his socialization. To understand both *Psycho* and the *Affair*, it is important not to confuse this socially freighted and narratively complex variant of the serial killer with the simpler, often commonplace serial killers present in less psychological genres of crime fiction³³; the serial killers in Hitchcock and later in Puig are fascinating yet impersonal figureheads around which rotate oblique allegories of subjection and power. In his cheeky character-portrait, Hitchcock essentially turns a stock character into a capacious "theoretical construct," as Mark Seltzer writes three decades later in a cultural-studies analysis of the "information-age" anxieties expressed in the serial killer post-Norman Bates³⁴. This construct is clearly quite far removed from the realm of conventional sympathy, yet possesses a fetishized uniqueness and illegibility that puts it at the center of a highly reflexive readerly experience that could be called curiosity-driven, more than character-driven. In works like *Psycho* or Highsmith's influential novels from the 1950's³⁵, this fetishized mystery of abnormal psychology drives the narrative and stretches sympathy and protagonism to their limits, if not justifying violence and crime then at least offering a contingent legibility to the sick mind.

Even in less radical thrillers in the psycho-killer tradition, there is always a certain ambiguity inherent in the concept of psychopathology that goes back to Freud, whose widely read case studies of neurotics could be said to found the tradition of the psychopathological

page-turner (if not to found *all* of twentieth century literature, as Puig used to quip provocatively in interviews). It is in chapter 12 of Freud's early bestseller, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), that Freud not only muses about the arbitrary distinction between serious and quotidian neuroses, but also the even more consequentially arbitrary one between the paranoid's overreading of the world and the psychoanalyst's overreading of the words and actions of her subject. It is these linked interpretive impasses that render so inconclusive or platitudinal the dime-store psychological inquiry operated by the psycho-thriller; yet this very inconclusiveness is part of the conceit that warrants the suspension of morality and the willful, self-conscious perversity of sympathy that are the trademarks of the psycho thriller at its most radically relativistic.

This psychological conceit might seem to preempt a conventional social critique of the realist sort in directing inquiry away from the social or institutional conditions of history. Conceiving of social critique more broadly, however, the conceit of a tentative scientific answer to social questions can also be a critique of the historical effects and social functions of that ostensibly impartial science. This is exactly the kind of critique produced by a satirical and reflexive representation of psychoanalysis, such as those of Hitchcock, Highsmith, and Thompson³⁶. In Joseph Stefano's bleak screenplay, which adapts the spirit, if not the plot structure, of Ernst Bloch's more police-investigation-focused novel *Psycho* (1959), the police are reduced to a parodically ineffectual plot complication. If anything, the enigmatically ineffectual patrolmen and detectives are present only to be dramatically evacuated from the central role of restoring order that they would occupy in an investigative crime film; instead, this role is supplanted by the authoritative psychologist Dr. Fred Richmond, played by hard-boiled character actor Simon Oakland³⁷. Not only did Hitchcock cast an actor famous for playing tough cops in crime films, he famously told Oakland, "Thank you, you've saved my film," after Oakland delivered the most deadpan and hard-boiled performance he could (Lila Crane: "Did he kill my sister?" Dr. Richmond: "Yes. And no."). Perhaps what Puig most responded to in Hitchcock's film is its satirical vision of a strong, reassuring, and paternal voice restoring order to the digressive and unruly narrative and trumping the befuddled small-town police like some kind of alienist Auguste Dupin. It is a triumph of psychoanalysis over law and morality, but a pyrrhic one underwritten by Hitchcock's cutting and campy irony: as Kolker puts it, the restoration of "order" and rationality is meant to ring hollow and inadequate when followed by the evocative closing shots of the swamp being dredged and the double-exposed face of Norman/Mother smiling madly and cackling in two voices.

Puig's Sado-masochistic Zeitgeist: A Psychopathology of History

"At one extreme, the 'abnormal normality' of the serial killer, utterly absorbed in psychotic fantasies, appears as a sort of reservoir of the psychic order itself—the 'psycho,' or something like the drive in person. At the other, the 'too normal' character of the serial killer

appears as nothing but the social determination of the individual from the outside in: something like the mass in person."

—Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, 42

Oficial [a María Esther]: ¿Cómo es la mirada de un asesino?

[...]

Reportera [imaginaria]: ¿Cómo es la mirada de Leo Druscovich?

Gladys: No sé, un ciclón me arranca de la tierra y me lleva a zonas desconocidas, donde me alcanzan rayos que leen el pensamiento, o electrizan, o matan, o dan vida. No lo sé.

[...]

Leo [a María Esther]: ¿Por qué no te gusta mi mirada? ¿Qué tiene mi mirada?

—Puig, *Buenos Aires Affair*, 73; 112; 147

Puig doesn't just appropriate *Psycho* as vernacular fodder for his Joycean-Freudian "novela policial," borrowing formal devices and atmospherics for cheap but effective thrills; he also appropriates it as a generational *Urtext* of the imaginary that sees the serial killer as a modern boogeyman and social remainder, an embodiment of the death drive yet also a conspicuous failure of modern society and Law. The first epigraph I've taken comes from a curious scholarly work that attempts to theorize this serial-killer imaginary, as it appears in true-crime and clinical non-fiction as well as in popular fiction. Seltzer's sociological argument about North American "wound culture" is essentially that the serial killer's constitutional ambiguity as an exceptional yet *invisibly* pathological individual, a freakish abnormality hiding, like Poe's purloined letter, in plain sight, mocks the surveillance State and all its psychological and criminological institutions. In this sense, Seltzer's basic claim about the sensational and masochistic form of pleasure produced and exploited by the serial-killer genre is that it should be the first, not the last, place we look to understand North America culture's paranoid conception of history, largely because it represents violence as an irrational and always mysterious exception in an otherwise functional and rational society. While I find this argument difficult to extend beyond North America for its often unstated and undertheorized historical assumptions and preconditions, I do find quite useful to Puig's novel the analysis of the serial killer's ambiguous position with respect to theories of societal determinism. It is, in short, this ambiguity that warrants Puig's effective and focused social critique of contemporary Argentina, yet makes it oblique enough to occur entirely at the level of insinuation and inference. The serial killer's importance, for Seltzer as for Puig, lies in his problematic typicality—he is outside of our society yet blends in easily, he is a product of our society yet our society does not know what to do with him or how to protect us from him.

What really sets Puig's novel apart from the serial-killer vernacular, however, is that his social commentary inheres less in his portrait of a psychopathic *porteño* Leo Bloom than in the

reciprocally deluded relationship he depicts between the violent sadist and the complicit masochist. The misdirected and compulsive violence of the frustrated revolutionary and the apolitical, ineffectual passivity of the deeply wounded girl next door are always presented as psychologically and structurally interdependent. As the title ironically promises in the register of Gladys' women's-film imagination, Puig is writing contemporary history as an *affaire*, a glamorous and irregular engagement between two deeply complementary pathologies narrated in parallel. Gladys and Leo are very specific caricatures of their artistic-intellectual social milieu as a microcosm of their generation, but they are also archetypal limit-cases of a specific organization of sexuality, desire, and gender performance that Puig obliquely but programmatically overlays with *political* meaning and historical consequence throughout. Gladys and Leo are not just complementary and codependent in their emotional and sexual sadomasochism: they are also artist and critic, extrovert and introvert, cynic and idealist. The most polemic and offensive thing about the novel for Puig's contemporary Argentine readers was not that Leo and Gladys were familiar and politically legible characters, but rather, that they deserved one another and led each other into further blindness and self-delusion.

Puig's novel is both a psychological thriller about compulsive violence and a tawdry and perverse love story, continuing his prior novel's psychoanalytic critique of the self-destructive mythologies of sentimental romance. Moving from the formal to the thematic level of analysis, we could say that Puig doesn't just combine the Freudian formalism of Joyce's *Ulysses* with the psychopathological cheap tricks of Hitchcock's *Psycho*—he also creates a disjunctive blend of the erotic relations (Leopold/Molly Bloom, Norman/Marion) at the core of each intertext that heightens the reader's uneasy and vicarious investment in the titular *Affair*. How Puig appropriates *Psycho*'s style and its effects of perspective and sympathy is thus as much about Hitchcock's oblique presentation of character psychology as it is about his presentation of suspenseful events. The alternately static and unnervingly mobile camerawork and the stagey, unsettling mis-en-scène of *Psycho* make murder and reconnaissance scenes more suspenseful and opaque, but they also, crucially, make the film more effective *as romantic melodrama*. Indeed, the camerawork's calculated rhythm of neutrality and subjectivity isolates its characters from an indifferent world and clears a space for the conversations between Norman and Marion to become the most important in the film, foregrounding their chemistry for the uncomfortably complicit viewer.

The crime scene in Puig's second chapter short-circuits *Psycho*'s narrative game by superimposing Hitchcock's bawdy opening scene in the Phoenix love-motel and the landmark crime scene in the shower at the Bates motel. To put it another way, Puig collapses the false-start of a film about Marion Crane, embezzler, and the beginning of the distinct film about Norman Bates, sympathetic and vulnerable psychotic, into one parallel narrative about two lovers, upping the ante and putting his novel on the side of madness. While Hitchcock's lurid thriller only *insinuates* such a sinister romance between Norman and Marion in the chemistry, the pacing, and the framing of their few scenes together, Puig takes this latent sadomasochistic subtext of the melodramatic *noir* tradition and makes it a determinant supertext. Puig's lurid affair is a brutal allegory of delusion and exploitation operating, at the individual level, as the

violent gendering and disciplining of sexuality and, at the societal level, as repression and collusion. What's more, the reader is encouraged, by the sequence of chapters, the title, and the epigraphs, to sympathize with Leo by way of Gladys' emotional investment in him, and thus, her complicity, making the reader's own vicarious stake in the events doubly complicit and even unsettling above and beyond the novel's abundant comic relief.

But as noted above, thinking of the novel in terms of a romantic core and political and historical trappings or comic relief is ingenuous, given that the novel challenges the reader to unite both registers through a unifying allegory of psychosexual power relations and social structures. As in all of Puig's novels, sexual power and political power aren't just analogized by some kind of microcosm-macrocosm relationship, but rather are shown to be two expressions of a common essence. Various interlocking mysteries are established in Chapter 1, in which Gladys' mother frets over her daughter's absence and her failing mental health, the diminishing purchasing power of her pension, and the theater closed to the public for ambiguous reasons of "public hygiene": while the novel *foregrounds* Gladys' story, oblique references throughout the novel direct the reader's attention back to the politically suggestive *background* in which political violence abounds unremarked. Macro- and micro-economics periodically impinge on the foreground (Gladys' inherited and transparently neurotic penny-pinching, Leo's carefully-budgeted prostitution habit, the references to front-page news coverage of economic crises in both newspaper chapters); in both, the exact distinction between political and sexual violence is never made clear (was "hygiene" a euphemism for a sexual or a political crack-down on the public of the theater? Was the sodomized corpse of Leo's nameless victim presumed to be a "tortured" political casualty, like the two others mentioned in newspaper stories later in the novel?).

Of course, for Puig as for Freud the distinction between sexual and political violence is moot, not just for narrative reasons but for ideological ones as well: Puig's novel as a whole offers an oblique theory of the psychology of violence as the byproduct of socialization, organizing contemporary Argentina's various interrelated forms of sexual and political "repression" on a spectrum from masculine excess to hypermasculine psychosis. While Gladys' case study quite literally frames her breakdowns and crises as categorically "hysterical" and her gendered neuroses as sexual in origin, Leo's repressed homosexuality is no more subtle, writ large across the entire novel in a flagrant camp of Freud's case-study of Schreber (and with a few knowing nods to Anthony Perkins' famous tics and twitches in the role of Norman Bates). Leo's compulsive violence stems so obviously and directly from his neurotic repression of homosexual impulses and Oedipal misogyny as to be laughable at various points to the reader familiar with the cliché: his brief but intense engagement with politics ending in expiatory torture (punning on the two meanings of the word "resistance"); the Schreber-like religiosity with which he both endures and associates that "martyrdom" (93-94); his chapter-and-verse citation of Joachim Winckelmann's foundational, and notoriously homoerotic, treatise on the aesthetics of Greek sculptor Praxiteles (transcribed from his "innermost thoughts" during the climax of his *ménage à trois* with Gladys and María Esther, 187); and, in a parody of Freud's prose style as well as his interpretive system, the fantastically *direct* way in which his

anonymous-omniscient case-study narrates sublimations, misdirections, and repressions as straightforward facts rather than interpretations (100). Puig's parody of Freud's over-logical narration is not just deterministic, but over-determined: Puig's historical and cultural critique isn't so much implied or stated but obliquely laid alongside Leo's pathology (and the historical context) for the active reader to complete the analytical operation.

Of course, Leo's situation leads him directly where the case study foreshadows it will, to paranoia and escalating violence: whenever Leo's masculinity (or erectile function) is called into question, he responds automatically with violent paranoia, as traced by the ridiculous and irrational "reasonings" narrated in Chapter 12. But this novelistic satire of Freud's paranoid repression of homosexuality is not, as some might assume, a satire of Freud's pathologizing of homosexuality; instead, on some small scale, Puig anticipates the seminal re-reading of Freud's paranoia three years later that arguably launched queer studies as an academic discipline. I'll quote at length Eve Sedgwick's concise abstract of the argument of that work, which I find surprisingly congruous with Puig's oblique reading of homophobia dangerously internalized:

Queer studies in particular has had a distinctive history of intimacy with the paranoid imperative. Freud, of course, traced every instance of paranoia to the repression of specifically same-sex desire...The traditional, homophobic psychoanalytic use that has generally been made of Freud's association has been to pathologize homosexuals as paranoid or to consider paranoia a distinctively homosexual disease. In *Homosexual Desire*, however, a 1972 book translated into English in 1978, Guy Hocquenghem returned to Freud's formulations to draw from them a conclusion that would not reproduce this damaging non sequitur. If paranoia reflects the repression of same-sex desire, Hocquenghem reasoned, then paranoia is a uniquely privileged site for illuminating not homosexuality itself, as in the Freudian tradition, but rather precisely the mechanisms of homophobic and heterosexist enforcement against it. What is illuminated by an understanding of paranoia is not how homosexuality works, but how homophobia and heterosexism work—in short, if one understands these oppressions to be systemic, how the world works. (Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 2003, 126)

In a nutshell, Puig *did* understand these oppressions to be entirely systemic, often explaining the family dynamics at the core of *Boquitas pintadas* and *Traición* as straightforward filial allegories of political power. To this end, the historical stakes of the novel are quite generalized, having set as its goal the "understanding of paranoia" as if Leo's all-too-typical paranoia were a social-psychological bomb to be diffused, or at the very least a privileged site for the understanding of violence and its misdirections.

This systemic critique concentrated in the figure of an exceptional-yet-typical sadist depends on a particular understanding of psychopathology, whereby socialization and subjectification are most legible in their failures and defects, and a particular narrative structure whereby this is made readily legible to the conditioned active reader. But this psychological legibility has often been shoehorned into the kind of straightforward political allegory that Puig satirizes and trivializes in the way politics is reduced to psychopathological

symptom. Despite the concrete mentions of uneasy and short-lived relations with the Peronist Left, the Communist Party, and the proletarian community during his years in the tenement, I think it would be inadequate to read Leo as representing a specific political ideology or historical class. It would be more accurate, and more in the spirit of the novel's satirical representation of how individuals get psychically invested in politics, to generalize Leo's Argentine biography as the logical end in that time and place of a heightened, almost caricatured, surplus of privilege and social capital for which radical or progressive politics is an elective affinity and an intellectual pursuit (interchangeable with, say, art history, film criticism, or aesthetic philosophy). Leo's paranoia stands in for his generation's loss of faith in political authority and his sublimations are the coping strategies of an upward-mobile middle-class that came into its own during an endless volley of repressions and an uninterrupted series of foreign and internal menaces.

Leo's defensive attempts to channel his compulsions take their full meaning against the ambient violence of the historical backdrop sketched minimally in the second newspaper chapter, Chapter 10, flanked on one side by Leo's confession and on the other by Leo's lucid dreams, laced with torture imagery interweaving his political and personal lives. The mediations between individual violence and societal institutions are winkingly reduced to simple and legible processes of cathexis, negation, and fantasy—the combination of psychologies and intertexts maximizes this legibility to a wide range of readers and publics, whatever their tastes. Puig's democratic vision of the popular novel freights the *Affair* with a critique of the violence latent in contemporary Argentine society, which is everywhere and nowhere in the novel. Indeed, the novel's humor is at its blackest when it points outward to real menaces in contemporary society, which it would be superfluous to signal any more explicitly as the subject of the novel's satirical inquiry. Little appreciated in its time for its indirect and symptomatic method of representing history, in retrospect it has come into focus as a kind of "missing link" between the paranoid pulp of the 1960's and later experimental novels that strove to psychoanalyze the apparatuses of the totalitarian State in terms of the playfully legible commonplaces of pop psychology and popular narrative.

Saer's *Nadie Nada Nunca*: Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Le voyeur* as Serial-Killer Intertext

The mechanism of symptom-formation in paranoia requires that the internal perceptions—feelings—shall be replaced by external perceptions.

—Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia,"
Standard Edition 12:63.

In sum, the Nouveau Roman is the crime novel taken seriously.
--- Janvier, Ludovic, *Une parole exigeante: Le nouveau roman*³⁸.

"Playfully legible" is not a phrase many readers would readily apply to Juan José Saer's *Nadie nada nunca* as a whole, which stands as one of Juan José Saer's most important and widely-read novels, and as one of Argentina's most formally demanding and experimental literary approximations to the paranoid experience of daily life in the dictatorship years. Published originally in México, D.F., it has come to be central to the international corpus of "Dictator Novels" and literary "resistance," largely for the verbal opacity and formal complexity with which it induces an unsettling sense of deep paranoia in its reader. Saer's novel achieves this effect by obliquely derailing narrative arcs and juggling various contradictory genres; the only playfulness to be found is in Saer's juxtaposition and short-circuiting of readerly expectations and his derision of them as mirages of an escapist fantasy. The presence of the structures and affects of the popular "thriller" are hardly the most salient family resemblance to strike the reader of Saer's novel (critics tend to dwell on similarities to Robbe-Grillet, or to the cinema of Antonioni or Tarkovsky), but Puig's novelized and historicized paranoia in the *Affair*, I would argue, is the most important structural intertext to Saer's formal experiments and intertextual recombinations. Just as Puig's novel frustrates readerly expectations by combining the structures of various popular crime genres and psychoanalytic discourses, Saer's later novel confronts the reader with a trans-generic Frankenstein's monster of half-narratives and incompatible ideological frameworks for communicating experience. (In this regard, and in its intertextual structure as well, it resembles the earlier *Cicatrices*). Although the final product cannot be called a psychological thriller in the same structural sense that Puig's novel can, the structures and stereotypes that Saer lifts from the crime genres, largely second-hand, are central to his distinct blend of reflexive active reading and paranoid self-doubt on the part of his reader, with the same goal of bringing a psychopathological analysis to bear on contemporary history. And just as Puig reconsidered and complicated the Freudian apparatus of his earlier works when striving to represent a new stage in contemporary history as paranoid, deluded, and menacing, so too does Saer reconsider the "objectivism" of his early works in light of new historical realities, rendering its totalizing neutrality a kind of mirror to a paranoid state of consciousness.

Of course, "objectivism" is a somewhat vexed term for Saer's painstakingly neutral and externalized mode of narration in works like *Unidad de lugar* and the chapter of *Cicatrices* studied in Chapter 1, but it's a term requiring caveats and scrutiny to position in the family tree of paranoid literature. The term "objectivist" was launched into general usage by Barthes' seminal 1950's essays³⁹ on the early novels of Robbe-Grillet which proved integral to the establishment of both their careers, but Saer has often resisted the applicability of the term and downplayed the centrality of Robbe-Grillet to his own personal pantheon despite his intertextual presence⁴⁰ in much of his work. One reason for this is Saer's insistence on the more decisive, and earlier, influence of Antonio di Benedetto, a northern Argentine writer half a generation older than Saer. Indeed, Saer has often polemically insisted⁴¹ that di Benedetto had independently developed a categorically "objectivist" style years before Robbe-Grillet⁴², untheorized and underappreciated in a literary periphery⁴³. More strategically speaking, one

could feasibly conjecture that Saer, like Di Benedetto before him, worked hard against being pigeon-holed as an "Argentine Robbe-Grillet," particularly as Saer's definitive critical recognition came long after Robbe-Grillet's star had started to fade both within France and internationally. All of this notwithstanding, I see an early novel by Robbe-Grillet, *Le voyeur* (1955), playing the same role for *Nadie nada nunca* that Hitchcock's *Psycho* played for Puig's *Affair*, and that Faulkner's *Light in August* played for Saer's earlier *Cicatrices*: Saer's novel rewrites Robbe-Grillet's, taking its basic premise and structure as a mold within which to experiment with the representational system of "objectivism" and with that imminent form of active reading that tied the Nouveau Roman to the crime genres.

Here, then, is Barthes' working theory of objectivism from 1955 on the basis of *Le voyeur*, a reading that highlights Robbe-Grillet's instrumental deployment of crime fiction's sensationalism and the purposiveness of its distinct mode of active reading:

The repetition of a theme postulates a depth, the theme is a sign, the symptom of an internal coherence. In Robbe-Grillet, on the contrary, the constellations of objects are not expressive but creative; their purpose is not to reveal but to perform; they have a dynamic, not an heuristic role: before they appear, there exists nothing of what they will produce for the reader: they make the crime, they do not betray it: in a word, they are literal. Robbe-Grillet's novel remains, then, perfectly external to a psychoanalytic order: no question here of a world of compensation and justification, in which certain tendencies are expressed or counter-expressed by certain acts; the novel deliberately abolishes all past and all depth, it is a novel of extension, not of comprehension. The crime settles nothing (above all, satisfies no desire for a crime) [*le crime ne compense rien (en particulier aucun désir de crime)*], never provides an answer, a solution, an outcome of crisis.... And if we are tempted to read rape and murder in *The Voyeur* as acts deriving from a pathology, we are abusively inferring content from form: we are once again victims of that prejudice which makes us attribute to the novel an essence, that of the real, of our reality. (54-55)

Barthes' evocative mention of our "unsatisfied desire for crime" motivating a readerly tendency towards "inference" is telling: the voyeur of the title is not the highly visual narrator of Robbe-Grillet's novel but its reader, implicated in the projections and vicariously sinister fantasies that lead her to believe the dubious and banal narrator is a murderer. *Le voyeur's* resistance to transparency and interiority and its rhythmic repetitiveness facilitate its exploitation of the stereotypes and conventions of the serial-killer genre to *insinuate* a violent psychopathology beneath the surface of its obsessive and symptomatic first-person narration without ever corroborating that inference. What's more, these insinuations and enigmatic associations are essentially the entire substance of the novel, with precious little chronological or factual information narrated at all. This structure comprises what critic Kathy Phillips calls a "double trap"⁴⁴: the novel gives its reader nothing to cling to except a psychotic stock-character and a cliché murder-narrative, then disappoints that narrative and sends the reader home to think about what she's done. The novel is mostly remembered as a formalist experiment in anti-psychological literature, or in some cases as an episode in high literature's gradual appropriation of popular crime fiction, as in the epigraph from Janvier.

In Saer's hands, however, Robbe-Grillet's novel becomes a particularly oblique and formalist episode in the evolution of a postwar literature of paranoia that addressed contemporary Cold War history, most thoroughly theorized in the North American context⁴⁵. The readerly experience of that "double trap" induces a kind of paranoia and self-doubt in the reader brought about by empathy, rather than sympathy, for the unemotional and psychologically opaque narrator. See, for instance, how Saer describes the readerly experience of Di Benedetto's *El silenciero*, another "objectivist" and opaque novel that also relies on an investigatory/criminal premise to dovetail diegetic and exegetic investigations:

La conciencia a la vez omnipresente y discreto de ese narrador sin nombre diagrama los acontecimientos hasta que a cierta altura del relato *percepción y delirio, sentido común y racionalización paranoica, se vuelven, sin énfasis y sin discursos explicativos, psicológicos o de cualquier otro orden, imagen vivaz de la doliente complejidad del mundo: que la anomalía esté en la conciencia o en las cosas es a decir verdad un detalle insignificante que no presenta ninguna utilidad para la resolución del problema. Mundo y conciencia, trabados en lucha secreta pero constante, ruedan juntos a su perdición. (La narración-objeto, 67, emphasis mine)*

Saer's characterization of this procedure is subtly psychoanalytic even as it eschews the methods of representing interiority as legible that literary history conventionally attributes to psychological fiction in the broadest sense. The reader of these radically materialist and anti-psychological novels is made to experience along with its opaque protagonist a psychological state that exteriorizes and projects outward all emotion or affect and interprets everything to the point of self-doubt. In this sense, "objectivism" could be considered the literary analogue to the process of "externalization" by which Freud defines paranoid logic and its characteristic writing style in the epigraph above. Saer's novel takes quite seriously and programmatically⁴⁶ this imperative to subvert and avoid all the conventions of psychological "expressionism," which is why so much Saer criticism characterizes his works as "cinematic," "impersonal," "two-dimensional," and "anti-novelistic."

Robbe-Grillet's formalist novel could be called the purest possible novelization of this paranoid objectivism, as the novel (or "anti-novel," as many have called it) resists any content, factual, critical or otherwise. (Barthes, having recently theorized a "zero-degree" of writing, naturally celebrated this as the novel's great accomplishment, rendering any content the uncooperative reader could glean an "abusive inference"). Robbe-Grillet's novel is resolutely ahistorical to maximize its readerly experience of unmitigated paranoia and interpretive frustration: it is set somewhere in Brittany, but this Brittany is framed as unexceptionally provincial and essentially devoid of historical specificity. Saer's novel, on the other hand, is every bit specific to a loaded historical period troped as oppressive and unrelenting by insistent descriptions of the sweltering Santa Fe summer as ominous, exceptional, and stupefying. The historical horizon of bloody repression and guerrilla operations alters not only the interpretive reading demanded by the piece as a historically-specific image of the "*doliente complejidad del mundo*," but it also modifies the structure of the novel, in ways worth setting out explicitly.

Robbe-Grillet splits his novel into two long chapters, with a temporal lacuna in between: everything leading up to that break in the narrative leads the reader to believe that in the lapse of unnarrated time, something inenarrable will happen, namely, the murder that the first-person narrator cannot name or admit, but which every detail insinuates according to the conventions of the psychopathological thriller. The second half of the novel might initially appear to follow the narrator smoothing over his inenarrable episode, were it not also the site of a score of readerly disappointments and contradictory details: it seems harder and harder to be certain it wasn't all just a fantasy, narrated as it is in imagistic neutrality. The second half, far from resolving the narrative expectations built up by the first, only highlights and compounds their frustration reflexively.

Saer's novel, on the other hand, might not be immediately recognizable as a re-write exactly because of how much he adds to this formula: a whole ensemble of minor characters, other intertexts (including a 10 page critical discussion of de Sade's *Philosophie dans le boudoir* to which I'll return below), televisions, newspapers, and unambiguous references to the apparatuses of State Terror and anti-State guerrilla strikes. But through all this historical content, the basic premise and structure is recognizable, with a key difference. At the core of Saer's novel is not an inenarrable lacuna, but exactly the opposite, a commonsensical and self-confident scene of story-telling. The naturalistic orality of this narration scene feels like a welcome counterpoint to the rest of the novel's suffocating atmospherics of menacing uncertainty and the clinical neutrality of its paranoid prose. Whereas Robbe-Grillet's formalist caesura heightens the suspense for the reader, bringing to the foreground thereafter the fundamental question as to whether the novel's murder-plot is reality or fantasy, Saer's commonsensical monologue of neighborhood gossip neatly reverses this operation: the "murder-plot" is stripped of its narrative importance, its allegorical significance, and its allure to be reframed as a mere misdirection of attention away from the imminent violence foregrounded by the paranoid atmospherics and the historical subtext of the novel's "exilic" production and publication.

As comes to be repeated twice in the novel after the neighborhood gossip's monologue halfway through the novel, the horse murders benefit and warrant the State regardless of who is responsible for them or why they are being committed: there are other police operations underfoot that might have just as much, or more, to do with the populace avoiding each other's glances in the street. This theme of "avoided glances," narrated objectively and without comment as if it were a purely climatological circumstance, weighs on the novel's peculiarly hostile and paranoid sociability in a way that crucially appropriates the overdetermined glances of *Le voyeur*. While Robbe-Grillet's paranoid novel is overflowing with meaningful glances and stares whose meaning and content is never reliably given, Saer's novel elaborates across entire vignettes a whole system of minute variations that signal interpretive differences between each vignette's protagonist. For instance, the glances shared between Gato and the horse are interpreted differently by each character who witnesses them, just as various characters' fantasies about the horse-assassin are couched in an impersonal passive-voice ("se ve"); hearsay is reported journalistically by both the lifeguard's informant ("se vieron muchos

coches," 113) and Tomatis ("algunos testigos vieron," 181); Elsa finds something apocalyptic about the town at siesta time ("ningún obrero es visible," 150; "no se divisa un alma en el pueblo," 152). With each mention of a glance or a face, this objectivist refusal of the conventions of interiority marks the difference between its prose and that of realism, journalism, and everyday language.

One particular instance of this entirely off-stage and opaque ocular economy may show not only how Saer repurposes Robbe-Grillet's formalist exercise as a paranoid mode of representing history, but also how Saer's novel is indebted to Puig's thriller in its representation of the off-stage and opaque machinations of the totalitarian State. While everyone else's observations are framed as impersonal, at times almost free-floating pieces of visual information, the lifeguard's reflexivity (and by extension, the reader's) about what he sees takes the form of a comparison between the crisis he sees and what the reader knows he otherwise sees *routinely*, encapsulated by the phrase "sabía ver" (181). By communicating his noticing of this crisis as a mere visual contrast, without any interiority or judgment, the novel puts the active reader in the position of the "El bañero," who is, after all, a professional observer of body-language, an objectivist profession if ever there was one. But his vocation fails to convince the military personnel operating the roadblock at novel's end, which can only strike the reader as successively tragic and ironic: while much in the novel is doubtful and speculative, the basic facts of Gato's death by military hands are not. The episode, one might argue, shares a crucial irony with that analogous episode in Puig's *Affair* where María Esther fails to convince the police of Leo's "*mirada de asesino*": the form of active reading cultivated and trained by the novel, produces in its reader the same legitimate interpretation that is rejected as paranoid by the State's deaf ears.

Sadism, Serial Killing, and Enlightenment in Saer's *Nadie Nada Nunca*

Los cuerpos ajenos eran para Dolmancé los elementos de una construcción personal: los iba poniendo, uno a uno, como un chico sus cubos de colores, en el lugar de su fantasía. Pretendía ir ordenando el mundo según su propia locura, hasta que llegaba un punto en el que el mundo se borraba y no existía más que su locura. Pero como el Caballero no era más que un simple cubo de colores en la construcción, le daba lo mismo quién disponía las formas y que el destino se confundiera con la locura de Dolmancé.

—Saer, *Nadie Nada Nunca*, 176

Le traían, de noche, detenidos ilegales, para que los sometiese al tratamiento. Era un profesional, un técnico, incapaz sin duda de determinar el justo valor de las informaciones que obtenía. Casi un artista, un naïf, había dicho Tomatis, capaz de extraer los sonidos más inaccesibles de un instrumento, pero privado de la facultad de insertarlos en un sistema.

—Saer, *Nadie Nada Nunca*, 193

While Robbe-Grillet's caesura moves the focus of the novel from the unspeakable crime to what may or may not be its psychological effacement and "cover-up," Saer's caesura moves from the individual suspect to a broader context in which that individual criminality is eclipsed by generalized suspicion and collective anxiety. This is true not only on the diegetic and formal levels but also at the exegetic level: after the novel's tension-releasing pause, it turns the focus of its reflexive analysis of sadistic fantasy incrementally from the individual level to the collective one, largely by turning to the very origins of the word sadism in the writings of the Marquis de Sade. The novel's alternation of decontextualized vignettes analogizes and even deliberately confuses two different concepts of sadism embodied by two different characters: Gato displays an Oedipal sadism, the violent expression of which may or may not have been directed towards horses [*caballos*], while a very different form of sadism for hire is practiced by the expert torturer referred to by his nickname, "el Caballo." Compounding both the wordplay and the ethical and historical dimension to this analysis of sadism, Gato spends ten pages paraphrasing and analyzing the role of "el Caballero," a minor character in de Sade's porno-philosophical dialogue, *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir* (1795). I would argue this scene of reading is as central to the novel as the serial-killer fantasy foregrounded by the allusions to Robbe-Grillet's serial-killer novel, particularly given that Saer returns to both intertexts over a decade later⁴⁷ to produce yet more cerebral analyses of contagious and systematic madness afflicting "whole nations." Since I would like to read *Nadie* as a more urgent and visceral thriller that immerses its reader in that same systematic and nation-wide madness that set in after the coup of 1976, I'd now like to dwell for a moment on de Sade's *Boudoir*, which posits a perverse and opaque systematicity in violent, amoral madness.

Modeled on the Platonic dialogues, de Sade's pornographic satire narrates second-hand how the sister of *el Caballero* corrupted and initiated a *debutante* before murdering her mother; Gato muses on the novel coolly to position his own narrative in a longer tradition of inquiries into violence and terror. Indeed, *Boudoir* has long been a key text in the political re-interpretation of de Sade since at least Klossowski's 1947 treatise, *Sade, My Neighbor*. Just as Klossowski's 1947 text urges its reader to interpret the aftermath of World War II as the logical end of the Enlightenment and its instrumental rationality, and to read de Sade as a prescient harbinger of these limits of the Reason liberated by revolutionary Terror, so too does Saer turn to de Sade's libertine theater as another mode of circumlocution with which to analyze the "inenarrable nothing" around which Saer's own novel is structured. In this sense, choosing Klossowski's de Sade as a critical shorthand for WWII as the terminus of Enlightened rationality works in much the same way as Piglia's contemporary deployment, in *Respiración artificial*, of Adorno's Paul Celan (and thus, of Adorno's famous aphorism about "poetry after Auschwitz") to similar ends. In both cases, German totalitarianism serves as a cipher for Argentine totalitarianism, and the adynatons and representational crises of European art in the 1940's serve as landmarks for the Argentine intellectual stranded in the hopeless 1970's.

Although Gato's interpretation of the rather futile and over-emphatic heresy of de Sade's blasphemers does seem to echo Klossowski, there is also a more basic and diegetic reason for Gato to focus on *le chevalier*, the brother of de Sade's protagonist, Madame Saint-Ange: Gato is Pichón's brother, the same Pichón who sent the book from Paris. Pichón Garay is, as has been mentioned in previous chapters, Saer's autofictional alter-ego through all the novels set in Argentina and/or France (including playful doubles in the historical fictions), just as Saer's real-life grandfather gets a kind of cameo in *Nadie* as well (104). Gato's focus on how a minor character participates in the "system" of madness orchestrated by Dolmancé is reflexive and ironic given that he himself is an emphatically *minor* character in various senses of the word. In the grand scheme of Saer's interlocking novels, "minor character" might even be something of a euphemism for this bohemian with a screw loose, addressing envelopes from the phone book and using the Garay family's vacation home as a kind of off-season love-nest or hide-out.

Both of these minor plot points, the menial seriality of his addressing envelopes and his functional, unromantic arrangement with opaque and unsentimental Elisa, have generated a lot of critical discussion about a Zeitgeist devoid of meaning and about human relationships in terrified times. What eludes easy explanation, however, is the overt homology between Gato's free-indirect-discourse during sex and his gloss of de Sade's incestuous accomplice: the former reads "Pero nada, de nuevo: los mismos gemidos, la misma convulsión común, sin llegar a ninguna parte... no habíamos como quien dice avanzado nada" (58), and "largo corredor rojizo...y así al infinito," (47), while the latter muses, "Debía admitir que cuando todo terminaba lo único que le quedaba era la sensación desagradable de no haber progresado nada... ni un milímetro más adelante. Nada.... Era víctima de un error de óptica" (179-80). The *chevalier* is a kind of intermediary who is not quite a foil however much he argues against the excesses of Dolmancé's heretic philosophy, and yet not quite an ally or full-fledged libertine in the sense of sharing the ideals of his sister and Dolmancé. Similarly, Gato's participation in the shadowy plot to assassinate el Caballo seems to extend no further than being nominally an accessory to the unnamed occupants of the barely-mentioned car. By extension, is Gato an innocent bystander "mixed up with" unstable elements, a sly revolutionary, or just a minor character from any perspective? Like Gato scratching his head trying to pin down the motivations and opinions of *le chevalier*, it's essentially unknowable from what's stated on the opaque surface of the novel. The blurry morality of Saer's objectivist snapshot of the period seems to position Gato, who may be a sadistic horse-mutilator and may be prone to violent fantasies, in his own "error de óptica."

This eccentric metaphor seems lifted from the Enlightenment theorist of freedom, but it also relates crucially to the novel's insistently pictorial objectivism, positioning the reader's investment as a kind of voyeurism that never feels far enough from a vicarious form of sadism and *schadenfreude*. The emphatically visual nature of Saer's narration is inseparable, in my interpretation of the novel, from a systematic implication of the reader in the novel's macabre and sadistic fantasizing. To some degree, Saer's background in film and his particular appropriation of Robbe-Grillet's objectivism seem to dovetail as sources for these strategies of

implicating the reader in her own sensationalism. For as much as Robbe-Grillet resisted a psychoanalytic reading of *Le Voyeur*, its visual economy and its implication of the viewer-cum-voyeur fundamentally align it with the psychological tradition within *film noir* generally, and the subgenre of serial-killer thrillers in particular, which is not only predicated on variously vulgarized or popular psychology, but even structured by it. The wave of pulp imitators issuing forth from psychosexual character-studies like Thompson's novel *The Killer Inside Me* and Ernst Bloch's deadpan non-fiction novel *Psycho* were bestsellers in France by the time of Robbe-Grillet's subversion of the genre; for Robbe-Grillet's generation, and just as much so for Saer's, the serial-killer permutation of the psycho thriller genre was a readily-accessible substratum of narrative and interpretative commonplaces. Indeed, the only overt reference to this tradition in Saer's novel is curiously both filmic and fictional: Simone argues that the rumors of military and para-military operations are far more feasible than the excessively "*novelesco*" horse-killer narrative proposed in the press, based, in Simone's interpretation, not on novels but on Peter Lorre's canonical portrayal of a deranged child-murderer in Fritz Lang's *M* (1928).

To expand on this voyeuristic implication of the reader's inferences and active reading in moral and psychological terms, it might help to mention some unnamed filmic intertexts of the novel. In particular, I refer to three films contemporary with Saer's stint as a teacher of film theory in Santa Fe (and entirely canonical by the time of his writing *Nadie*) that we might stop to dwell on momentarily, since all three implicate the guilty gaze of the viewer in their critiques of the voyeurism of visual spectatorship and of the power dynamics of visual narrative. In a 1992 interview about film apropos of the Argentine release of *La pesquisa*, Saer expressly cites two of the three films, and the director of the third, as central to his personal filmic pantheon⁴⁸. I'm thinking of Hitchcock's *Rear window* (1954), Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up* (1966). I can hardly take credit for grouping them together as a series; they comprise something of a sadism-voyeurism cycle, subjects of so many critical analyses that their study in tandem is something of a cliché in film studies⁴⁹, which makes Saer's offhand remark in 1992 that they influenced his work *as a group* all the more conspicuous. Just as Robbe-Grillet and Puig assume a certain pop-psychological heuristic in his reader and use it to critique that mode of reading as voyeuristic, these influential films (both generationally and for Saer specifically) pushed that reflexive and formalist critique of voyeurism further by annexing it to the broader psychological and ethical critique of sadism, with its respective historical and political subtexts. Saer's novel strives, I think, to continue this line into the novel, inducing the same kind of uncomfortable complicity in its reader.

This reflexively psychosexual vein is not encoded or insinuated so much as declared on the emphatically exteriorized surface of *Nada nadie nunca*, with its seemingly opaque succession of terrifying images that obliquely and imagistically link ("sugiriendo subliminalmente," in Julio Premat's phrase, 109) Gato's perception of sexuality, his vivid fantasies, and the serial killings of the horses. Julio Premat teases out the Oedipal implications of the images that Saer conjugates in a "procedure" indebted to Robbe-Grillet: the heavy blanket of "nothings," darkneses, and "*negruras*" overlaid onto every major scene of the first half of the novel all but forces us to interpret the novel's palpable threat of compulsive violence

in terms of a Lacanian lack, a schema completed by sharing the word “tajo” [‘gash’] between sex scenes and crime scenes. (This last touch, a classic shock tactic and pop-psychological cliché of the serial-killer genre since Jack the Ripper, isn’t lifted from Robbe-Grillet, from de Sade, or from any of the three films, but from the clichés and conventions of serial-killer fiction, like much of Saer’s later return to that genre in *La pesquisa*). It bears mention that the same blunt genital allegory is central to Lacan’s famous essay on de Sade, “Sade avec Kant,” which he wrote as a preface to *Boudoir* for a 1963 recompilation of de Sade’s complete works. Here, more emphatically (and more genitally) than in Klossowski’s writings or in Adorno and Horkheimer’s “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” does Lacan argue for a reading of *Boudoir* alongside Kant’s *Critique of Reason* (published eight years prior) as a key moment in the elaboration of Enlightened rationality. De Sade, in Lacan’s phrase, “stopped, at the point where desire is knotted together with the law”: his verbal transgressions preserved a certain boundary (typified by Lacan in the mother’s parodied, yet maintained, genital taboo!) that make him still a thinker from inside of reason, inside of civilization, despite all his verborreic claims to the contrary.

The loaded intertext of de Sade, then, stands in not only for sadism and the limits of the Enlightenment, but also in a more formal sense as a kind of benchmark of the inadaptable, the unimaginable, the dense, and the obtuse. Roland Barthes, a thinker that as we’ve already noted is central to Saer’s theory of literature and culture, wrote extensively about de Sade in 1971⁵⁰ and famously bemoaned *Salo*, Pier Paolo Pasolini’s adaption of the *120 days*, in *Le Monde* in 1976. The telling kernel to be extracted from the anecdote is that Barthes writes of Pasolini’s film as a “flop of figuration,” too literal to represent de Sade’s rich universe, of which “no image is possible”, and too simplistic in its analogy of philosophical Sadism with the psychology of fascism (i.e., lowercase-S sadism) to shed any light on either. Barthes writes, “fascism is too serious and too insidious a danger to be treated by simple analogy, the fascist masters coming ‘simply’ to take the place of the libertines. Fascism is a coercive object: it forces us to think it accurately, analytically, philosophically.” Claiming de Sade’s verbal free play of pain to be unrepresentable, and claiming that Passolini cheapens fascism by making it a mere caricature of de Sade’s libertinism, Barthes’s position might explain the representational strategy behind Saer’s parodic incorporation of clichés about the psychology of sadism and the social psychology of Terror, infusing them with the paltry pop-cultural gothic of the serial-killer. Saer’s novel sets itself up deliberately to fail as a critical portrait of totalitarian violence by following Passolini’s lead, as if to further prove Barthes’ reading of fascism and of de Sade as two objects beyond fictional and visual representation.

In light of this critical tradition, we could conceive of *Nadie nada nunca* as a rich and surprisingly hybrid text that stumbles around the elephant in the room: while its intertexts are varied and wide-ranging, Robbe-Grillet’s paranoid novel functions as the prism through which the boogeymen of de Sade, Hitchcock, and Lacan are recast as nightmares not easily dismissed or ignored. This strange amalgam of the novel of ideas with the paranoid thriller functions quite differently from other works poised at the intersection between the two traditions, largely because it is structured by a rhetoric of adynaton vis-à-vis State Terror, and because it is the product of a decades-long engagement with the family tree of sensational crime genres

that I've shown in previous chapters. Appropriating Robbe-Grillet's formalist experiments with the thriller, Saer piles various readerly effects and manipulations cribbed from both literary and filmic thrillers onto an already exhaustive catalog of high-literary codes and devices for representing anxiety, menace, compulsion and powerlessness. Yet far from being a mere overlay or superficial effect, they structure the readerly experience as one of expectation and suspense, waiting for answers or information to relieve the surplus of menacing atmospherics.

Indeed, this fetishistic affective structure of waiting for what won't happen and disbelieving what is evident extends to every level of the reader's experience of the novel, including its generic hybridity and its oblique characterizations. The textual and psychological homologies that connect Gato to El Caballo to *el Caballero* are sensational in a way the novel invites its reader to continue to entertain even after they have been foreclosed within the universe of the novel's form and content. In much the same way, the paranoid serial killer fantasy distilled from popular culture by Robbe-Grillet somehow permeates the readerly experience of Saer's whole novel even after it has been superseded by a more banal form of evil and sadism embodied in unquestionable military force. This remainder of readerly affect is a narrative recreation of the sensation of paranoia, making *Nadie* one of Saer's most manipulative novels, and the closest he ever wrote to a conventional "thriller". The novel twists the de Sadean "boredom" and serial structure of the genres of suspense and shock into a readerly experience of anxiety and paranoia exceeding every piece of the novel's disjointed narrative. In retrospect, this readerly experience might be Saer's major contribution to the literary traditions of violence and totalitarianism generally: a thriller of adynaton, an airless novel of ideas in which all the generic and ideological recombinations experimented by the novel's open form prove equally inadequate to representing the wordless and stultifying fact of violence.

Respiración artificial: A Paranoid Reading of the Historical Present

The definition of inductive reasoning as...“sideways movement from one example to the next,” however, can also be a rather apt description of narrative movement, or—dare I say—plot. Inductive reasoning is paranoid reasoning; it is plotting the plot, reasoning that moves from example to example with faith that there will be revealed a comprehensive mountain overlook beyond the forest of contingencies ‘on the ground.’ The paranoid as well as the mythmaker will spin narratives from the examples s/he identifies. Paranoia, like plot, is based in inductive reasoning that never arrives—that is, ends not in the drawing of necessary logical conclusions but in style and self-evident presentation.

—Amy Elias, “Paranoia, Theology, and Inductive Style”

“Escuche,” dijo el Senador. “¿Ve? Ni un sonido. Nada. Ni un sonido. Todo está quieto, suspendido: en suspenso. La presencia de todos esos muertos me agobia. ¿Ellos me escriben?”

¿Los muertos? ¿Soy el que recibe el mensaje de los muertos?
—The Senator to Renzi, *Respiración*, 49⁵¹

I read Ricardo Piglia's eventless and yet nerve-wracking novel of ideas in much the same way as I read Saer's novel of the same year: in both, the unspoken subtext of imminent State violence is narrated indirectly using techniques derived from that of the "thriller" but without its narrative closure or its readerly satisfactions. But Saer's novel alternates between vastly different narrative modes and the atmospherics of various different genres to submerge its reader in the suffocating and airless historical moment that surround its characters; Piglia's novel, on the other hand, induces a kind of paranoia less at the level of atmosphere and sympathy than at the level of exegesis, a kind of slow-burning narratological anxiety. What's more, the reader feels herself perpetually exterior to the psychology of its always two-dimensional characters, who express less fear and panic than resignation, boredom, and dread. In formal terms, this effect of flatness and opacity is achieved and maximized by a novelistic technique that denies its reader both social exteriority and psychological interiority, maintaining an uncomfortable middle-distance from its characters, familiar but not intimate, private but not personal. Even on the level of setting, the reader gets almost no description that might anchor the reality of the novel in any reassuring objectivity: the space of Piglia's novel, comprised entirely of dusty, closed-up rooms where someone cannot speak freely, serves as an anonymous and colorless background for conversations that might as well take place anywhere else. Elias' topographic contrast between a compulsive "sideways motion" and an impossibly distant "comprehensive mountain overlook" aptly maps the affective landscape of the novel, which stitches together so many historical, philosophical, and literary quests, all of them undercut by an airless and flat present that no character seems capable of escaping or interested in explaining.

Elias' description of paranoid thinking also describes Piglia's narrative structure and dialogical structure, where neither the frame story nor any of its digressions or parlor-discussions arrive at a "logical conclusion." Renzi experiences no epiphany, Maggi makes no historical discovery, and Tardewski arrives at no philosophical breakthrough, even after the novel's exhaustive tour of modernist predecessors organized around their respective aesthetic strategies of epiphany and revelation. It is emphatically a novel about ciphers and secrets, but it reads like a kind of Moebius strip, beginning in medias res and ending no more conclusively than a minimalist short story. Many critics have called it an experimental or intellectualized variant of the detective novel for this abundance of interrupted investigations⁵², but I would argue that this misses the point of the novel's conspiratory epistemology entirely. The mistake made by this reading is seeing the detective novel's intellectual pleasure of interpretation and ratiocination at the novel's core where instead I see its exact opposite: a playful variant on the thriller's anxious *unpleasure* of paranoid, endless speculation and induction. First, I will address the hybrid generic framework within which Piglia preempts the linear investigation in lieu of a more circular and endless paranoid re-reading. This interpretive circularity exceeding any investigation or closure enacts neatly Piglia's theory of paranoid fiction as an outgrowth of

crime fiction, where doubt drives narrative but is ultimately contained. Then, on the basis of this alternate view of the affects conditioned by this perversely uneventful *thriller*, I will show how desperation and dystopia are not just reproduced but induced by the novel.

Returning, then, to the very limited sense in which *Respiración artificial* can be called a detective novel, I would argue that neither Renzi nor the largely opaque narrator claims at any time to be investigating Maggi's political and legal situation. This self-evident and unspeakable difficulty is, of course, obvious and below investigation: the novel sidesteps any mention whatsoever of how the government treated citizens marked as suspicious in 1979. If Renzi is investigating anything, it is Maggi's historical and intellectual project, to which he is designated himself a kind of heir. As a criminal or journalistic inquiry, Renzi's investigation never turns up anything but open secrets, inconclusive theories, and red herrings. To put it another way, Maggi's "secrets" and his obsession with dissent, espionage, and proscription, clear signs of danger in 1979 Buenos Aires, are mentioned so casually and uneventfully as to diffuse any suspense or secrecy. The nature of those imminent "difficulties" and "setbacks" that Maggi euphemistically mentions are hidden in plain sight, like the King's letter in Poe's "Purloined Letter". Idelber Avelar makes a similar point in *The Untimely Present* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U. P., 1999, pg. 99):

Most studies of *Respiración artificial* have replicated Arocena's procedure by reading the novel as an epiphenomenon of censorship, that is, by assuming that the text took the form it did because Piglia 'could not' say what he wanted 'explicitly' and had to 'resort' to 'veils', 'metaphors', and 'allegories'..., as if the story could somehow have been told in transparent fashion under different political circumstances. By doing so, these critics prove to be bad detectives in Poe's precise sense...[by looking] for a secret where there is none. (99)

Where my reading of the novel diverges from Avelar's, however, is that I see the short-circuiting of an investigative frame story less as the precondition for a speculative philosophy of the problem of experience than as a kind of mourning for the conception of direct literary agency presumed by the that frame story. But *Respiración* does just mourn the impossibility of writing a Walshian novel in 1979; it also proposes a hypothesis of what might come *after* such a conception of literature—what *critical* agency the novel might have, what freedom and consolation can inhere in anxious speculation when nothing else is ceded to the literary sphere.

The novel's speculations begin, in my reading, where Renzi reaches his limits as an interlocutor, critic, and investigator: Renzi's agency, diametrically opposed to that of a conventional detective, is placed under a kind of liberating erasure, making him not exactly an anti-hero but at least an ineffectual and hobbled hero. Indeed, all four of Piglia's novels seem to be structured around Renzi investigating a conspiracy, yet in all four the efficacy and meaningful reception of his Walshian ideal of activist *reportage* is circumscribed by his sociohistorical context: in *Respiración*, it's an openly repressive and censoring State apparatus, but in the next three novels, neoliberalism makes just as moot his efforts at the level of enunciation and reception. As throughout this study, I'm arguing that plot and narrative structures matter less than strategies of manipulation and structures of readerly affect in crime

fiction generally and in its appropriation by these three authors: the open secret of Maggi's disappearance is the experience to which the novel keeps circling back compulsively, attempting again and again to restore some meaning to the experience. Indeed, by turning to Benjamin and other modern epistemologists to address the novel's explicit thematization of the problem of "experience," Avelar never addresses its epigraph from a poem by Eliot, whether on its own terms as a late modernist, catastrophic reading of WWII⁵³, or as a nod to the precedent of Walsh, whose most important denunciatory novel about crimes of the State is framed by an Eliot quote that ponders how to interpret the experience of historical violence.

Instead of interpreting the novel in plot terms as a perverse or abortive detective novel, I would interpret the novel in affective readerly terms as a paranoid fantasy and a perverse "thriller" of hopeless waiting. Much of the novel's framing and content signal this kind of purposes, from the epigraph's announcement of [Cartesian] self-doubt, to the content of the novel's philosophical discourses, to the repetitive, compulsive readerly experience of being lead along through circular and concatenative narrative structures. As I've tried to show in the preceding chapter, the literary detective-figure of Emilio Renzi stands in not just for Piglia *per se* but for the Walshian alter-ego of Piglia's early years as a writer, plucked from a utopic fantasy of writerly omnipotence, utility, and independence. What's more, in *Respiración* in particular, Renzi's theorization of the link between experience and meaning (or between history and literature, if one prefers) enters into dialogue with Maggi's and Tardewski's in ways marked explicitly by Walshian concepts explored in the previous chapter, right down to the level of Renzi's writing style (as opposed to that of Maggi, Arocena, and the narrator). Compare, for instance, Renzi's "I advance, then, to continue, with a vertiginous slowness in this species of novel I'm attempting to write", to Walsh's real-life correspondence, in which he defines the writing process as a "laborious advance through one's own stupidity"⁵⁴.

What circumscribes Renzi's protagonism, then, is his insistently reiterated lack of experience and his skepticism about experience itself⁵⁵, which is the grounding of his Walshian poetics of truth. What follows this Walshian *ars poetica* makes clear that what he has instead of meaningful experience and truth is desperation and doubt, which is to say, sure signs of inhabiting the universe of the thriller: "¿No era eso una... de esas aventuras que yo había tenido, sin buscarlas, cuando tenía 18 años? ¿A esta desesperación habían quedado reducidas mis aventuras?" (37). The figure of Renzi is native to another genre that Piglia might rather be writing in, a genre from which post-lapsarian Piglia has been expelled, like Walsh from chess and chess-like detective fiction. When Piglia "returns" to his unfinished work with that genre in neoliberal 1999, the result, *Plata quemada*, can only inhabit it nostalgically and extemporaneously. Renzi is a modernist private detective trapped in a persecution-thriller à la Woolrich or Kafka, defined by desperation instead of adventure and hopelessness instead of risk. Rodolfo Walsh's investigative nonfiction, and his eternally postponed plans to experiment a new form of "geological novel" closer to history and testimony than to fiction, are clearly present in the novel as a subtext, but one foreclosed by a historical context gestured to by almost every character's "desperation" at being spied on, caught, or otherwise silenced and made to disappear.

In fact, “desperation,” as we saw in Chapter 1, is a watchword for Piglia, laden with Arltian pathos and the perverse romanticism of outcasts, criminals, and misfits. It’s worth noting that Piglia uses the word 19 times in *Respiración*, to describe a moment of panic or hopelessness experienced by every major character in the novel: we could call it the defining mood of the novel and its sentimental key. The novel proceeds, in some sense, from a logical, moral, and linguistic error: young Renzi misinterprets the title (and thus the ideological framework) of a story about the trial of his uncle, his family’s “only hero,” clipped from the crime section of a newspaper. The title suggests to Renzi persecution and catastrophe, but there is mysteriously a kind of protagonism implicit in this desperation: “Siempre me emocionaba ese título, como si aludiera a acciones heroicas y un poco desesperadas. ‘Convicto y confeso’: repetía y me exaltaba porque no entendía bien el significado de las palabras y pensaba que convicto quería decir invencible” (14). Much later in the novel, an unnamed translator (Ricardo Piglia himself? Renzi in the future?) writes a desperate letter from Bogotá after being mugged; another (or the same?) translator feels “exalted” by second-hand desperation reading Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby*, as young Renzi did reading about his “hero” Maggi. Maggi says of Sarmiento’s generation that they are merely “copistas desesperados” of European thought (111), terrified of being left behind and unenlightened, and explains his “suicidal obsession” with Ossorio as a way of surpassing the limitations of that generation. Ossorio’s defiant suicide note refuses to renounce “either my desperation or my decency” (31), while Tardewski struggles desperately to maintain his dignity (123) after arriving on a boat full of Europeans desperately fleeing WWII (165). With an ironic turn of phrase, Tardewski understates the “desperate situation” of the Polish embassy, which was at that time the orphaned embassy of a political entity dissolved by Hitler (166). Indeed, Tardewski’s biographical and national sense of despair dovetails seamlessly with his philosophical desperation, inherited from Wittgenstein’s own aporia of European history (163). Desperation seems both historical and hereditary in the novel, since the bastard Ossorio is born of his mother’s “forced desperation” (74), and Renzi bemoans his “desperation” (37) in the same breath as he wonders how to narrativize the meaningless of his Uncle’s desperate “vida insensata” (36).

Desperation is thus the kernel of every biography contained in the novel, and the sign under which all the novel’s interpretation proceeds like Maggi, trying to extract some meaning from a meaningless life (and a more meaningless death). Desperation, rather than investigation, is what drives the affective economy of the thriller and the curiosity of its reader. In a novel by Cornell Woolrich or by Franz Kafka, a desperate and panicked protagonist struggles against an invisible and omnipotent conspiracy; the comic and theological desperation of a Kafka protagonist shares with the flummoxed everymen of Woolrich a similarly totalized threat, while the reader of both is immersed in the protagonist’s contagious, paranoid doubts. The readerly experience that Piglia intends is one where the seemingly endless concatenation of desperations and conspiracies blends together, insinuating a unified theory but disappointing that promise. If there is a unified theory along the lines of Ossorio’s Vico or Tardewski’s Descartes, it is a negative one, a theory of inescapably repeating catastrophe rather than progress and Enlightenment.

Desperation is thus a thematic euphemism for catastrophe, or more precisely it is the novel's insistent allusion to contemporary history as catastrophic, determinant, and conspiratory: it is how paranoid fiction names the experience of living with State Terror and its openly practiced repression. This menace is imminent even before the first sentence of the novel, in the very epigraph, particularly if one reads the abstract couplet from Eliot as an echo of Walsh's epigraph to the first edition of *Operación massacre*. Walsh took that earlier epigraph from one of T.S. Eliot's historical dramas framing State violence as a transformative watershed for the poet. Piglia extends this historiographical gesture further by excerpting one of the bleakest moments in Eliot's poetic oeuvre, from "The Dry Salvages," written during the London air-raids of 1941. Looking at a longer excerpt from that poem, we can see Eliot's argument about the meaningless devastation of WWII and how Piglia appropriates both Eliot and Walsh to frame his exploration of Argentina's contemporary scene as another nightmare of history:

It seems, as one becomes older,
 That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence -
 Or even *development*: the latter a partial fallacy
 Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,
 Which becomes, *in the popular mind, a means of disowning the past*.
 The moments of happiness - not the sense of well-being,
 Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,
 Or even a very good dinner, *but the sudden illumination* -
 We had the experience but missed the meaning,
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form, beyond any meaning
 We can assign to happiness. I have said before
 That the past experience revived in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations - not forgetting
 Something that is probably quite ineffable:
 The backward look *behind the assurance*
Of recorded history, the backward half-look
 Over the shoulder, *towards the primitive terror*.
 Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony
 [...] are likewise permanent
 With such permanence as time has. We appreciate this better
 In the agony of others, nearly experienced,
 Involving ourselves, than in our own.
 For our own past is covered by the currents of action,
 But the torment of others remains *an experience*
Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition.
 (1941, emphasis mine)

The analogies between this Eliot, the Kafka that Piglia fantasizes (largely through the lens of Adorno) at the end of the novel, and Saer's Marquis de Sade are clear: Europe's "developmental" narrative of Enlightened progress is belied by the sadistic catastrophes of World War II as clearly as Argentina's "civilization" is belied by those inflicted on a substantial portion of the nation's populace. The novel is not so much a historical conjecture as a

backward look behind the assurance of *recorded* history, reflecting on the agony of others not only silenced but written out of history. At the novel's end, Tardewski is telling Renzi what should be clear to any reader familiar with Eliot, with Walsh, or with the historical moment of the novel: as historian Tulio Halperín-Donghi puts it, Maggi has clearly "joined the ranks of the disappeared." His disappearance is the "unqualified experience" that the novel doesn't investigate so much as contemplate. If anything, the novel's inquiry is about how to name, how to qualify, how to attribute meaning to the moot fact of that disappearance and the many thousands it metonymizes.

Within the novel's philosophical speculations, literature's loose relationship to history (marked by "utopian" and "dystopian" tendencies) makes it the site of a potential restitution of meaning to experience. As such, there are three scenes of reading that I think stand reconsidering: the Senator's, Arocena's, and Ossorio's. The first to appear in the novel is that of the Senator, the only male oracle⁵⁶ in Piglia's long line of revelatory madwomen studied in Chapter 1. He tells Renzi that only Maggi can uncover the "secret" of Ossorio's "heroism" (58), because only Maggi can "divine" it "in spite of the corpses floating in the waters of history" (62)⁵⁷; earlier in their conversation, however, the occasionally delirious and sporadically lucid Senator confesses to being surrounded by death, to *being* Death, to being witness to death, to receiving messages from the dead (49), and that the messages might be imaginary or forgeries penned by Arocena (46). Maggi's reading of Ossorio's suicide is what the novel is ostensibly investigating and circling around like a dangerous and secret thing, but clearly Maggi is a *bad reader*, or at least, a paranoid and unreliable one.

Yet the madness of the Senator, and his own self-doubt, don't make the deathly spectre of Arocena, uncorroborated by any other character, any less "real" to the reader (in much the same way that the spectre of a serial killer haunts Saer's *Nadie* despite being dismissed as groundless and silly). Arocena's is the second scene of reading I'd like to collate, encapsulating as it does the purest form of paranoid reading possible, even a caricature of it:

Era como *moverse a ciegas*, tratar de captar un hecho que iba a pasar en otro lado, algo que iba a suceder *en el futuro* y que se anunciaba de un modo tan enigmático que jamás se podía estar seguro de haber comprendido. El mayor esfuerzo consistía siempre en eludir el contenido, el sentido literal de las palabras y buscar el mensaje cifrado que estaba debajo de lo escrito, encerrado entre las letras, como un discurso del que sólo pudieran oírse fragmentos, frases aisladas, palabras sueltas en un idioma incomprensible, a partir del cual había que reconstruir el sentido. Uno, sin embargo, tendría que ser capaz (pensó) de descubrir la clave incluso en un mensaje que no estuviera cifrado. Por eso cuando al final se dedicó a leer la última carta y encontró la clave casi a primera vista y vio aparecer otro texto dentro del texto, Arocena se sintió a la vez satisfecho y decepcionado. Demasiado fácil, pensó, como si lo hubieran puesto ahí para que yo lo viera. (96)

The paranoid delusions of the Senator and his son-in-law Maggi dovetail nicely here with historical fact: in some secret corner of the police apparatus of the Argentine State, there were many Arocenas trained in WWII-era cryptography combing intercepted correspondence for secrets of a more mundane nature than Ossorio's secret heroism. Arocena's cartoonish

reduction of letters to *fichas* ('index cards') is a kind of worst-case-scenario for reading, clearly a dystopia of reading by a literary thinker who returned to the topic, decades later, to write a book-length series of essays on modes of reading and scenes of reading.

The third scene of reading to consider describes an otherwise unknown character referred to only as "The Protagonist" by Ossorio, by this point as mad as the Senator; he is the protagonist of Ossorio's epistolary utopian novel, but also, he is a playful double to the paranoid ideal reader of *Respiración* itself. Ossorio writes in his diary of an epiphanic realization of the form his utopic novel would need to take to condense his historical "secrets" and his insights into the future. This epiphany is presented without rationale or explanation, as a self-evident fact: "El Protagonista recibe cartas del porvenir (que no le están dirigidas). Entonces un relato epistolar" (83)⁵⁸. Continuing to parse the letters he's intercepting, Arocena comes across this later excerpt from the same diary: "¿Cómo descifrar entonces esas cartas? ¿De qué modo comprender lo que anuncian? Están en clave: encierran mensajes secretos. Porque eso son las cartas del porvenir: mensajes cifrados cuya clave nadie tiene. ¿De qué modo entender allí lo que viene y se anuncia? El Protagonista sospecha, insiste, *se mueve a ciegas*" (95)⁵⁹. Which is to say, he suspects, he insists, and he proceeds blindly, like Arocena.

Piglia's novel doesn't offer much explanation on how to interpret these three juxtaposed scenes of reading. Ossorio has written a novel comprised of letters from 1979, and Arocena is reading letters from 1979 in the same way Ossorio imagines in his diary. Both sections of the novel end with Ossorio's writings, ostensibly in the hands of Renzi after the events of the novel. The juxtaposition of these scenes offers less a challenge to its reader than an aporia: when we pick up *Respiración* and read these letters from the dead, which scene of reading are we replicating, that of Ossorio's ideal reader or that of the Senator's persecution-nightmare, Arocena? The way I interpret the novel, Renzi's frame story offers no foothold for interpreting its constituent subplots and anecdotes, which unfold meaninglessly and pathetically, and much less for interpreting the novel in its totality. Getting from dystopia back to utopia is beyond the scope of Renzi's investigation; escaping the conspiracy represented by Arocena (which is more real than even the Senator knows) might be less a matter of Woolrichesque adventure than a matter of Kafkaesque fate and irony.

Conclusion

Si la historia puede ofrecer metáforas que hagan tolerable la evocación de un terror todavía demasiado cercano, ella tiene muy poco que enseñar acerca del terror.

—Tulio Halperín-Donghi, "El presente transforma el pasado: El impacto del reciente terror en la imagen de la historia argentina" (1987)⁶⁰

Many critics have taken as entirely and directly autobiographical, and as the "thesis" of Piglia's *Respiración*, its most-cited passage, from the postscript to the letter from an exiled

translator in Venezuela: “A veces (no es joda) pienso que somos la generación del ‘37. Perdidos en la diáspora. ¿Quién de nosotros escribirá el *Facundo*?” (77)⁶¹. I think this reading as literary polemic might misconstrue the real question of the novel, which is not so much how to write as how to *read*. In 1980, it was a question all three of my authors were grappling with: in the same year, Saer wrote a disjointed novel that resists a unified reading more so than any of his others, and Puig, retracting his hopes for testimony and confession in the novel, wrote *Maldición* as a curse on those that would read the agony of others through “ojos de policía.” In a sense, all three novels set up investigative fictions as inadequate—the crimes of the State were on a scale beyond what a mere individual could investigate and lay bare, and the experience of Terror itself was beyond even the most paranoid representation, beyond transmission, beyond interpretation. These authors brought to bear on these representational problems some experimental recombination of all the representational modes available, from popular narrative to film to psychoanalysis to historiography to the epistolary novel, and the resulting novels remain a unique historical and formal achievement marked by anxiety, confusion, irresolvability, and adynaton.

These novels shifted the ground of the historical novel and the crime novel alike in ways yet to be traced in the literature since. This work would demand more robust theories of crime fiction and of appropriation, and I hope this study has made some tentative advances in those directions. Of all the novels studied here, I believe these last three are the most complex and the most hybridized, which might help to understand what in them illuminates their own time and what in them remains contemporary now to us in the 21st century. As Cold War anxieties give way to neo-liberal ones and Latin Americans grow habituated to ever more diffuse, almost *quotidian* violence, these writers shifted the terms with which the novel could approach violence, the State, and the abstraction of crime itself. These novels brought a complex toolkit of affects and interpretation to bear on State Crimes and institutional violence, moving beyond the merely denunciatory, journalistic, and moral registers to which the bulk of narrative about State Violence is still limited to this day. Their influence on later generations is still coming into focus, as the meeting-ground of literature, journalism, crime, and history continues to be central to the political life of narrative in Argentina and internationally.

Endnote

- ¹ "Crime fiction finds a paranoia of the senses that characterizes our age: the behaviors, the gestures, the body language, the words pronounced and hushed: everything will be analyzed, all will acquire value within a structural field or a series. I'm talking about theories of reading that come closer and closer to the paranoid apparatus of Salvador Dalí or Jacques Lacan."
- ² "Literature has increasingly taken on the charge of developing the menacing imaginary of day-to-day life imperiled. [...] One could say that there is a state of narration, a novelistic state, that grounds the existence of those genres—especially the crime genres—that makes this problematic into one of its central subjects, taking those subgenres and exhausting the field [with them]."
- ³ *Blanco nocturno*, an early version of which Piglia started writing after *La ciudad ausente*, notably tries to both practice and theorize this future modality of the novel when Renzi muses, "Habría que inventar un nuevo género policial, la ficción paranoica" (283).
- ⁴ <http://www.theclinic.cl/2011/02/06/ricardo-piglia-%E2%80%99Clas-novelas-me-llevan-mucho-tiempo-he-cumplido-70-anos-quiero-publica-otra-seria-mejor-que-empezara-a-apurarme/>.
- ⁵ While Deleuze is most often mentioned as one postmodern framework among others by major critics of his work (indeed, this generalization covers the majority of works in both book-length anthologies of Piglia criticism), there are also a number of published works that impose, at times dogmatically, the primacy of a Deleuzian reading of cultural forms. See, for instance, Gisle Selnes' overtly Deleuzian "Parallel Lives: Heterotopia and Delinquency in Piglia's *Plata quemada*": "Piglia's novel challenges the stochastic flow of money and desire which absorbs the delinquent into the capitalist machine. By this move, *Plata quemada* also supplements the impasse of schizophrenia as a clinical phenomenon (embodied in Dorda) with a deterritorializing 'schizophrenic' line of flight." (Ciberletras, v.15 (2006), in "Sección Especial. La novela policial hispánica actual."). For a detailed Lacanian reading of the same novel, see Jagoe, Eva-Lynn, "Attuned Listening in Ricardo Piglia's *Plata quemada*" (*Revista Hispánica Moderna*, Volume 62, Number 2, December 2009, pp. 143-161).
- ⁶ It's not the first time he's glibly folded the core texts of psychoanalysis into literary history, of course: see, for instance, his polemic assertion that Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* is a landmark in the evolution of autobiography as important as Rousseau's *Confessions* ("Crítica y ficción," Santa Fe, 1998: Univ. Nacl. Del Litoral, p. 14).
- ⁷ For an overview of this tradition and a recent revision of their theoretical framework, see in particular the roughly contemporary studies by Patrick O'Donnell and Timothy Melley, respectively, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (Durham: Duke U.P., 2000) and *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 2000), respectively. Both address this distinct form of paranoia as representative of a Zeitgeist and as a new periodization in 20th century literary history. The two studies analyze largely overlapping corpuses from the late 1950s through the 1970s, pride of place in both going to Thomas Pynchon, William S. Burroughs, Norman Mailer, Don DeLillo and Kathy Acker. Both argue that the psychology of paranoia and the historical context of Cold War foreign policy and domestic repression not only unite these texts but explain their particular relevance and historical timeliness, offering insight into a

constitutive episteme of the Cold War. The Americanist Melley cites few theoretical texts and focuses more on the historical narratives surrounding Hofstadter's *Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1953) and North American intellectual traditions of libertarian self-reliance dating back to Thoreau, Mill, and Emerson, while the much more theoretically-oriented O'Donnell squarely frames his genealogy of conspiratorial realism in the readymade critical formulations of Jameson's "political unconscious" and Žižek's "symptomatic" Lacanian cultural studies.

⁸ It's worth noting that Cornell Woolrich (particularly under the pseudonym William Irish), was prolifically translated and published in both Barcelona and Buenos Aires throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and was particularly important to Argentine film history through the work of directors Carlos Hugo Christensen, Daniel Tinayre, and León Klimovsky. Rodolfo Walsh translated many novel-length works by Woolrich in the 1950s and 60s, and in the 1970's various of his novels were reprinted in the crime-pulp series directed by Ricardo Piglia and by Juan Martini for Centro Editor de América Latina (CEAL) and for Burguera, respectively.

⁹ See the interview "Las novelas me llevan mucho tiempo..." in Chilean online magazine *The clinic online*, February, 2011. Accessed June 2011: <http://www.theclinic.cl/2011/02/06/ricardo-piglia-%E2%80%99Clas-novelas-me-llevan-mucho-tiempo-he-cumplido-70-anos-quiero-publica-otra-seria-mejor-que-empezara-a-apurarme/>. Web.

¹⁰ See Simpson, Philip L., *Psycho Paths* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, c2000), but also his more genealogical overview of the tradition in *A companion to crime fiction*, where instead of the hazy categories of "mythology" and the "gothic," his guiding categories come from scholarship on films noir and thrillers. Simpson's basic historical account is the following: Cain and Woolrich elaborate the atmospheric and narrative conventions that will become the psychological thriller while writing their best-selling paranoid narrators in the 1930s; the potboiler mills and B-movie studios of the 1940s exhaust permutations and derivatives; in the 1950s, intellectual crossover-figures Alfred Hitchcock and Patricia Highsmith bringing the paranoia-inducing formulae to maturity and critical apotheosis with the added bonus of their respective modes of social critique.

¹¹ Of course, there is plenty of science in the crime fiction tradition before the infusion of popularized psychoanalysis. See also Piglia on the 19th century origins of crime fiction in the conjuncture of the gothic aesthetic sensibility and 19th century rationality: "Si unimos el saber científico con el mundo de los terrores, quizá lo que sale es un género como el policial. Yo creo que lo que tienen en común con el gótico es algo que podríamos llamar la seducción del mal. La tentación de la muerte. Porque en el gótico y en el policial, está la idea de que hay un mundo más tenebroso que el mundo cotidiano, y que ese mundo tenebroso que en el gótico se traslada a épocas distintas, castillos abandonados, zonas extrañas, etc., en el policial se instala en el mundo cotidiano pero es la misma atracción por ese universo un poco pulsional o siniestro. A eso Poe lo ilumina con la pura luz de la razón, pero sigue siendo el mismo mundo, en el sentido de su universo temático." Piglia is referring specifically to Poe, but he might just as well be speaking more broadly about de Quincey, Suè, etc. "La ficción paranoiac y el nacimiento de la novela policial," Camilo Hernández-Castellanos and Jeff Lawrence, in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 29, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011).

¹² "Joyce... read in Freud a narrative technique and a way to use language...he saw that there were [new] ways of narrating there and that, in the construction of a narrative, the system of relationships that define the plot

don't have to obey any linear logic and that events and distant scenes can resonate on the surface of the telling, secretly interrelated."

- ¹³ I'm referring, of course, to the impersonal juxtaposition of different points of views, organized into two halves of approximately the same length and approximately the same number of chapters. On Puig's methods of composition, see Jill-Levine.
- ¹⁴ One of the more useful and sensitive interpretations from this debate is Juan Armando Epple's analysis, "The BAA y la estructura de la novela policial," in *Revista de Literatura Hispanoamericana*, 10 (Enero-Junio 1976), p.28; reprinted in *Aproximaciones al neopolicial latinoamericano* (Santiago, Chile: ELAR, 2009).
- ¹⁵ "With [Oedipus'] guilt so obvious, the motivations and import of his crimes remain hidden until they are revealed through some thorough detective work...The drama of Oedipus is one of revelation rather than action. The exposition of the layers of the Oedipus narrative... dooms Oedipus to his ultimate fate. As Lacan points out, the audience witnesses the revelation of the tragedy of Oedipus, which has already occurred... Most of all, the Oedipal tragedy is one of identity—it is the truth that wounds." (Marshall Needleman Armintor, *Lacan and the Ghosts of Modernity: Masculinity, Tradition, and the Anxiety of Influence*, New York: P. Lang, c2004, p. 29).
- ¹⁶ Puig even had practicing Lacanian analysts review working drafts of the novel as he was finishing it: "Pepe Bianco and Enrique Pezzoni were among Manuel's consultants who read drafts and chapters of his new manuscript; Luis Gusmán and Beatriz Castillo helped him clarify his views on the Oedipus complex, Freud's interpretation of dreams, and Lacan's 'mirror stage'... Manuel knew more about Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and Freud, Luis Gusmán recalls, than his friends suspected. Another novelist who was also a therapist, Osvaldo Lamborghini's wife, Paula, who specialized in treating guerrillas and terrorists and drawing out their guilt about killing, was Manuel's most fertile source of Freudian and Peronist rhetoric." (Jill-Levine, *Spider Woman*, 237, emphasis mine).
- ¹⁷ Indeed, it could be argued that the primary tension across Puig's novels as a series is between faith in the possibilities for confession and the necessity of analysis to make good on confession, putting the active reader at various positions along the spectrum from voluntary confessor to investigative analyst. According to this schema, *Traición* marks the confessional pole of the spectrum for the relative transparency and sincerity of its soliloquy-like interiority, while the *Affair* marks the analytical pole for its clearly signposted lies and general opacity of therapeutic and criminological testimony; *Beso* and *Maldición*, as I've explored in Chapter 2, mark a frustrating synthesis of the two systems whereby confessions abound but the active reader nevertheless undermines their transparency in the cynical retrospect of the narrative's resolution.
- ¹⁸ As Puig repeated verbatim in multiple interviews, "La novela moderna empieza con Freud"—the modern novel begins with Freud.
- ¹⁹ For a survey (and insightful ideological reading) of the academic usage of the term "women's genres," see "Women's Genres and Female Agency," in Brunson, Charlotte, *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera* (London: Oxford U.P., 2000); for the filmic intersection of crime genres and women's genres, see Cowie, Elizabeth, "Film noir and women," in *Shades of Noir*, ed. Copjec, Joan (New York: Verso, 1993).
- ²⁰ The film in question is *Spirits of the Dead* (1968), an "omnibus" film for which three different directors (Federico Fellini, Louis Malle, and Roger Vadim) each adapted a different short story by Edgar Allan Poe: Fellini's segment,

starring Terence Stamp (who would go on to star as a bisexual homewrecker in Pasolini's arty *Teorema* later in the same year), is an adaptation of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Poe's satire of the "metaphor-run" Boston Pond Transcendentalists and of the presumed moral didacticism of the short story form.

- ²¹ "Pocket-size [i.e., paperback or dime-store] Freudian symbolism," or as Suzanne Jill-Levine translates it (and attributes it to Orson Welles), "dollar-book Freud" (*Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman*, 60).
- ²² See Jill-Levine, 236-7.
- ²³ Also cited at length in Robert Kolker's *Psycho: A Casebook*, London, New York, Buenos Aires: Oxford University Press, p.18.
- ²⁴ On Puig's relation to auteur theory, see Jill-Levine (69-72) and Speranza.
- ²⁵ I am, of course, greatly simplifying Williams' nuanced argument here for my Puig-focused purposes.
- ²⁶ Spoto, *Dark Side of Genius*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1983, pp. 456-7 (cited in Kolker, 167).
- ²⁷ While few critics have applied the terminology of "camp" to Hitchcock's film in the Susan Sontag sense of a perverse or subversive relation to hierarchies of cultural capital (as laid out in her 1964 "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation and other essays*), I take it to be latent in Williams' concept of "fun" and in Hitchcock's own references to television aesthetics and Stefano's script as "uninteresting"—a polite euphemism for lacking value by conventional criteria of cultural value. Indeed, the fetishistic pleasure of viewing a "shock film" (knowing it's silly and yet...) makes the thriller a privileged site of camp, as it is not only a site all but structured *a priori* by "bad taste," but because its very nature as spectacle is reflexively assumed as a guilty pleasure vis-à-vis more tasteful forms of film.
- ²⁸ In not only his own critical fortunes and but also in his close reading of film criticism, Puig was acutely aware of the widespread taboo on pleasure and immersion that dominated his generation's literary and filmic intelligencia. Before writing fiction, Puig studied film at Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, then dominated by a draconian form of Neo-realist dogma hostile to his aesthetic experiments with kitsch and his deep engagement with the star system (Jill-Levine, 82-89): it could be argued that this formative experience had lasting effects as much for his view of critical establishments as for his theories of pleasure and kitsch.
- ²⁹ Of course, the simile is corroborated by a quote from Hitchcock himself: "The processes through which we take the audience, you see, its rather like taking them through the haunted house at the fairground" (167).
- ³⁰ Hitchcock's psychoanalytic apparatus had been pivotal in his many "successes" and masterpieces to date, most notably in *Rear Window* (1954), a masterpiece of paranoid aesthetics adapted from a short story by Cornell Woolrich, the bestselling author of the 1930s and 40s whose work was and is central in any history of the thriller generally. Freudian portraits of psychopathological murderers abound in many of his most popular successes: the pioneering "serial killer" of *Shadow of Doubt*, 1943, the passion-killer of *Suspicion*, 1941, the homoerotic overtones of *Rope*, 1948, and of course his collaboration with Patricia Highsmith, adapting her first hit novel, *Strangers on a Train*, in 1951. Hitchcock even camped his debt to Freud to the point of self-parody in *Vertigo* (1958) and *Spellbound* (1945), the latter a personal favorite of Puig's and major influence on his understanding of narrative before writing *Traición*. In all these films, erudite in-jokes to Freud's writings rub shoulders with concessions to the public's more simplified understanding of the apparatus of psychoanalysis;

any and all of these films bring psychoanalysis into the crime film *structurally*. For a reading of *Psycho* as coda and synthesis of this line of formal and thematic evolution, see Samuels, Robert, "Psycho and the Horror of the Bi-Textual Unconscious," in Kolker (ed.), 149-162.

³¹ In *A companion to crime fiction* (ed. Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley, Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 187-197.

³² Similarly, Puig's novelistic project (beginning with *Traición* but continuing in *Beso* and elsewhere) and his personal correspondence both signal throughout the central importance for Puig of Hitchcock's first explicitly Freudian film, *Spellbound* (1940), which brought not only Freudian psychoanalysis into the popular imaginary, but also surrealism and dream analysis, with elaborate set designs and backdrops made by Salvador Dalí's only substantial foray into the Hollywood studio system.

³³ In detective fiction or police procedurals, for example, serial killers are often deployed as *dea ex machina* precisely because they are exempted from the otherwise axiomatic requirement of a legible *motive* susceptible to deduction.

³⁴ See "Introduction," *Serial killers: death and life in America's wound culture*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

³⁵ I'm referring to Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train* (1950) and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) in particular, but also to *Deep Water* (1957), *A Game for the Living* (1958), and *This Sweet Sickness* (1960). Highsmith's conspicuous absence from Puig scholarship has always struck me as odd, given his mentions of her in diaries and personal correspondence, perhaps because until quite recently she was not widely read in translation in Argentina. One exception to this critical scarcity can be seen in art historian Rafael Cippolini's insertion of Highsmith (along with Hitchcock and de Quincey) into Josefina Ludmer's genealogy of the 1970's "Moreira Generation" in *Corpus delecti*, a theoretical survey I treat at length in my introduction (Cippolini, "Arte, crimen y electrodomésticos", in *Contagiosa paranoia*, Buenos Aires: interzona, 2007; 164).

³⁶ Jim Thompson, blacklisted in America but quite popular in France through the 1950s and 1960s, may have been a conscious or unconscious precedent for Puig's basic operation: Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me* (1952) narrates in the first-person the killing spree of a compulsive psychopath who serves as a West Texas sheriff and, importantly, torture expert. While Thompson's psychopath shares little with Leo in terms of a tangibly ill-repressed homosexuality, the similarities in their psychology otherwise bear mention, as do the similarly off-hand treatments of torture and political violence as both topics for the psychology of sadomasochism and as open secrets of contemporary society.

³⁷ Before and after the film, Oakland was effectively typecast as a "heavy" in crime dramas and Westerns, mostly working in television. On the category of the "heavy" in the classical Hollywood studio system, see Appendix A to Wheeler Winston Dixon's *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U. P., 2009.

³⁸ "En somme, le Nouveau Roman, c'est le roman policier pris au sérieux." Paris: Minuit, 1964, p. 185. On the relations between the Nouveau Roman and crime fiction, see also Michel Sirvent's article, "Reader-Investigators in the Post-Nouveau Roman: Lahougue, Peeters, and Perec" in *Detecting texts: the metaphysical detective story from Poe to postmodernism*, ed. Merivale, Patricia, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, and Smyth, Edmund, "Parodying the Polar: Robbe-Grillet and the Detective Story" in *Crime scenes:*

detective narratives in European culture since 1945, ed. Mullen, Anne, and O'Beirne, Emer, Amsterdam ; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000.

- ³⁹ All three are included in *Critical Essays*; translation and page numbers below are from the Richard Howard translation (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972).
- ⁴⁰ See Nicholas Michael Kramer's 2009 UCLA dissertation, "Writing from the Riverbank: Juan Jose Saer and the Nouveau Roman," for a detailed breakdown of the presence of Robbe-Grillet, but also Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, and Claude Simon, in Saer's work as a whole. See also "El 'objetivismo' hispanoamericano" in Bermúdez Martínez, María, *La incertidumbre de lo real: bases de la narrativa de Juan José Saer*, Oviedo, Esp.: Universidad de Oviedo, Departamento de Filología Española, 2001, pp. 128-135.
- ⁴¹ See, for instance, Saer's essay on Benedetto in *El concepto de la ficción* or his preface to *Los suicidas* in *La narración-objeto* (Barcelona, Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 1999).
- ⁴² On the relationship between Di Benedetto and Robbe-Grillet, see Castellino, Marta Elena, Antonio di Benedetto: renovador de la narrativa argentina, Mendoza: Ediciones del Canto Rodado, 1999, or "Di Benedetto y los lazos secretos de su escritura," *Los Andes*, 10-7-2006, also available online: <http://www.losandes.com.ar/notas/2006/10/7/cultura-209831.asp>
- ⁴³ Since Saer's death, however, this underappreciation seems to be on the wane, partly due to Bolaño's tribute to di Benedetto in *Llamadas telefónicas* and subsequent critical attention, as well as to three recent film adaptations: *Los Suicidas* (Juan Villegas, 2005), *Aballay* (Fernando Spiner, 2010), and the recently announced Lila Stantic production of *Zama* (Lucrecia Martel, 2014). For an interesting interview with Villegas on his film, see *Página 12*, 10/4/2006, also available online: <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/5-4032-2006-10-04.html>.
- ⁴⁴ Kathy J. Phillip. "The Double Trap of Robbe-Grillet: A Reading of *Le Voyeur*," in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 323-331.
- ⁴⁵ See the introduction to this chapter and its footnotes for the North American critical tradition around politics and paranoia at mid-century.
- ⁴⁶ Indeed, even the wink to the reader with which Saer credits Robbe-Grillet's novel as model is a conspicuous, almost dogmatic example of "externalization". Rather than allude directly to an intertext via the modernist convention of offhandedly mentioning a book as materially present (as Saer alludes to *Light in August* in *Cicatrices*⁴⁶), Saer refers to *Le voyeur* by citing a platitude that Robbe-Grillet's narrator compulsively repeats to himself as an exteriorized thought which pops inexplicably into the head of *Nadie's* Gato upon seeing an unremarkable seagull (207), a sighting repeated ad nauseum on almost every page of *Le voyeur* and, in some editions, even literalized on the cover. Saer makes Robbe-Grillet present in his novel by a kind of Pavlovian association presented as a mere inexplicable fact of the externalized, paranoid mind—which is, perhaps, exactly how Robbe-Grillet would like to be present in literary history, as a persistent tic or symptom.
- ⁴⁷ *La pesquisa* (1994) returns to the Robbe-Grillet intertext of *Nadie* and its echo-chamber effect of the serial-killer's pop psychological profile, while his following novel, *Las nubes* (1997), return to this Sadean intertext as an occasion for discussing the socially "contagious" and political dimension of madness. In *Las nubes*, Saer

returns to de Sade's play to focus on another minor character, the subaltern Augustine, to study more overtly her loss of moral bearing in light of a national epidemic of terror, madness, and violence.

⁴⁸ El Amante, No. 34, Dec. 1994.

⁴⁹ Laura Mulvey's famous 1975 essay on "visual pleasure", discussed at length in Chapter One, takes *Rear Window* as the clearest example of what's definitively sadistic (and definitively misogynistic) in Hitchcock's visual system, while in Kaja Silverman's 1984 Lacanian study, *The Acoustic Mirror*, she conjures all three films as a constellation before dwelling specifically on Powell's unnerving and gender-troubled serial-killer film.

⁵⁰ *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971; *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976. "Sade-Pasolini", *Le Monde*, 1976 ; translated as "Pier Paolo Pasolini: The Poetics of Heresy" in *Stanford Italian Review*, Vol. 11,2: Fall 1982. 100-102.

⁵¹ "Listen," said the Senator. "See? Not a sound. Nothing. Not even a sound. The presence of so many dead people stifles me. Do they write to me? The dead? Am I the one who receives the message of the dead?" (tr. mine).

⁵² As we've seen throughout, Piglia's own tendency to blur and unify crime genres in his critical writing is one obvious cause for this tendency. In this case, it is also understandable to read the first novel of the "Renzi Trilogy" through the lens of the fundamentally investigative narrative structure and readerly affects of the rest of the trilogy, *La ciudad ausente* and *Blanco nocturno*.

⁵³ Indeed, few critics include Eliot in the novel's litany of aesthetic predecessors and philosophers of catastrophe (Kafka, Gombrowicz, Wittgenstein, Joyce, etc), despite the explicitly catastrophic imagery of the poem.

⁵⁴ "Avanzo, entonces, para resumir, con una lentitud vertiginosa en esa especie de novela que trato de escribir," *Respiración*, 37; "Un avance laborioso a través de la propia estupidez," *Este hombre*, 15 (See Chapter 2).

⁵⁵ "No puede pasarnos nada extraordinario, nada que valga la pena contar. Quiero decir, en realidad, es cierto que nunca nos pasa nada. [...] Ya no hay experiencia (¿la había en el siglo XIX?), sólo hay ilusiones" (*Respiración*, 28).

⁵⁶ Perhaps one could argue that he is feminized when Maggi "courts" and marries him by proxy, at the risk of overinterpreting the episode in light of recurring devices throughout his work.

⁵⁷ Ossorio himself seems to have Eliot's "Dry Salvages" on his mind as well with this image: "People change, and smile: but the agony abides. / Time the destroyer is time the preserver, / Like the river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops, / The bitter apple and the bite in the apple."

⁵⁸ "The Protagonist receives letters from the future (that aren't addressed to him). Thus, an epistolary novel" (tr. mine).

⁵⁹ "How to decipher these letters? How to comprehend what they announce? They are in a key: they hide secret messages. Because that's what cards from the future are: ciphered messages whose key no one has. How to understand what is announced there as coming? The Protagonist suspects, insists, and proceeds blindly" (tr. mine).

⁶⁰ “Although history could offer metaphors that made the evocation of still very present terror tolerable, it had very little to teach about terror.” In *Ficción y política: La narrativa argentina durante el proceso militar*, ed. Daniel Balderston et al.; Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1987, pp. 94-5.

⁶¹ “Sometimes (no bullshit) I think that we are the Generation of 1837. Lost in the diaspora. Who among us will write the *Facundo*?” (tr. mine).

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