

The Riddled Text: Borges and Arenas



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Oui: le poème, c'est bien la mère.

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In outlining a theory of the short story through the study of the work of O. Henry, Russian Formalist critic Boris Ejxenbaum stressed the compositional analogy between that genre and the riddle.¹ Following Poe's remarks in "The Philosophy of Composition," Ejxenbaum draws attention to the manner in which O. Henry (himself of course a reader of Poe) withholds certain information throughout the length of his tales only to present these facts as an unexpected solution on the final page. Ejxenbaum's theoretical interest is not so much in the nature of suspense, as it might have been were he studying Poe's own tales, as in the potential for parody inherent in the form of the riddle, as well as in parody's revitalizing force for a national literature. O. Henry's public, whose reading habits had been formed by popular romances and thrillers, could be easily misled in the deciphering of his riddles, allowing him to stage the comic effect of his surprise denouements.

Yet it is possible to construe the riddling nature of the short story otherwise than as a question of who shall have the last word, author or reader, in a power play of interpretation. For in texts more enigmatic than O. Henry's, the word that would solve the riddle may be omitted even from the final page, and this more thorough-going exclusion would then fracture the linear development theorized, if not always practiced, by Poe. Tzvetan Todorov,

¹ Boris M. Ejxenbaum, "O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story" (1925), trans. I. R. Titunik, in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978), pp. 227-70.

heir to Ejxenbaum and the Formalists, considered such a configuration in his studies of Henry James' stories.² In keeping with the emphasis on the signifier at the expense of the signified characteristic of the hey-day of structuralism, however, his conclusions concerning the Jamesian "figure in the carpet" constitute no more than a degree-zero of the riddle. In his analysis, therefore, one might say that the stories are structured by the process that Lacan designates as "forclusion," a rejection of reality so radical as to be anterior to the advent of symbolization: the riddled text is one which, having failed to learn the *Nom-du-Père*, will not be led out of the mirror stage.³

The price of this adhesion to the immediate, if infantile pleasures of the specular image and, in the Lacanian mythology, the mute relation to the mother, is, first, a vulnerability to hallucination whenever a father figure (the Lacanian *Un-père*) returns to reassert the unarticulated *Nom-du-Père*. In this respect the Lacanian structure is suggestive for the reading of James, not to mention Arenas, for either of whom the text frequently borders on or transgresses into the fantastic. Dissent may arise, however, insofar as the vision of the ineducable psychotic text not only leaves the literary analyst speechless, but silences the short story itself at precisely its most crucial moment. For that which has never been symbolized in the text can never come back in words.

Thus, while maintaining Ejxenbaum's notion of the riddle in delineating a poetics of the short story, I would nevertheless want to move beyond its exploitation within a Lacanian framework to a conception that would reconstitute a secret *in language*, however cryptic, to the text. Turning, then, to the short story in Latin America, one finds, as ever, that Borges has anticipated the theoretical discussion, in this case in "El jardín de senderos que se bi-

² Tzvetan Todorov, "Le secret du récit" and "Les fantômes de Henry James," both in his *Poétique de la prose* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), pp. 151-85 and 186-96, respectively.

³ On the concept of *forclusion*, consult the following texts by Jacques Lacan: "Introduction et réponse à un exposé de Jean Hyppolite sur la *Verneinung* de Freud" (1954) and "D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose" (1957-58), both in his *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 369-99 and 531-83, respectively. See also Lacan, "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je" (1949), in *Écrits*, 93-100. Todorov makes no reference to Lacan in the articles cited, but for a Lacanian reading of Henry James, consult Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" (1977), in Felman, ed. *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 94-207.

furcan" (1941).⁴ There, set within a plot structure that exemplifies Ejxenbaum's discussion, "un crimen cuyo propósito no ignoran [los lectores] pero que no comprenderán, me parece, hasta el último párrafo", according to Borges, a different model of textual proliferation is discussed by two of the characters, Yu Tsun and Stephen Albert. Speaking of a certain Chinese novel written by Ts'ui Pên, one of Yu Tsun's ancestors, Albert introduces his interpretive methodology by asking: "—En una adivinanza cuyo tema es el ajedrez ¿cuál es la única palabra prohibida?" to which Yu Tsun replies, "—La palabra *ajedrez*" (*Ficciones*, 109). Albert then proceeds to explicate: "—*El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* [the name of the Chinese novel in question] es una enorme adivinanza, o parábola, cuyo tema es el tiempo; esa causa recóndita le prohíbe la mención de su nombre" (*Ficciones*, 109).

Contrary, then, to Ejxenbaum's conception of the short story, which may now be more properly adumbrated as a text constituted by a riddle *and* its solution (the solution closing off the text), Albert enunciates a view of a text as riddle *only*, which thereby becomes "estrictamente infinito" (*Ficciones*, 106). A text of indefinite, if not infinite extension, it may be argued, is more appropriate to the novel than the short story, and in effect, Albert and Yu Tsun are discussing an exemplar of that "género subalterno" (*Ficciones*, 108). Nevertheless, as the superimposition of titles suggests, the commentary on Ts'ui Pên's *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, may be read in relation to Borges' own "El jardín de senderos que se

⁴ All references to this and other stories by Borges cited in the text will refer to Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1956). The critical literature on Borges is vast, of course, and "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" is frequently discussed. See, for example, J. M. Aguirre, "La solución a la adivinanza propuesta por Jorge Luis Borges," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 42, no. 3 (1965): 174-81; Jack Himelblau, "El arte de Jorge Luis Borges visto en 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'," *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 32 (1966): 37-42; D. L. Show, *Borges: Ficciones* (London: Grant and Cutler: Tamesis, 1976), pp. 39-44; Jaime Alazraki, *Versiones, inversiones, reversiones, El espejo como modelo estructural del relato en los cuentos de Borges (Madrid: Gredos, 1977)*, pp. 102-06; Roslyn M. Frank and Nancy Vosberg, "Textos y contra-textos en 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'," *Revista Iberoamericana* 43, nos. 100-101 (1977): 517-34; Ronald Christ, "Forking Narratives," *Latin American Literary Review* 14: 52-61; Stephen Rudy, "The Garden of and in Borges' 'Garden of Forking Paths'" in *The Structural Analysis of Narrative Texts*, eds. Andrej Kodjak, Michael J. Connolly, Kryrstyna Pomorska (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1980), pp. 132-44; and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "Doubles and Counterparts: Patterns of Interchangeability in Borges' 'The Garden of Forking Paths,'" *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 4 (1980): 639-47. Although critical attention to Borges' work has only increased since 1980, this particular story has not been the focus of concentration in recent years.

bifurcan" as a true Formalist "baring of the device," or what Borges might prefer to call a moment of "magia parcial." On the one hand, therefore, the riddle-structure that characterizes the short story for Ejxenbaum needs be seen as independent of genre, perhaps as its own genre, amongst whose identifying characteristics would be a claim to infinity. While on the other hand, the understanding of an infinite text must be redefined, shifting attention away from the final word (or page)—a false ending—which would now be taken as a mask for or distraction from an omission that literally riddles the text, placing it *en abyme*.

The enigma signaled by Borges needs be regarded as a readable cover-up, the typical function of the detective-story plot in his fiction. Here the detective story does indeed come to an end with the apprehension of Yu Tsun and the revelation in the final paragraph that Albert is the name of the target city that he needed to communicate to his *Jefe* in Berlin. Yet this solution is undermined by the transgression of the generative rules of the riddle structure which Albert himself has outlined. The word "Albert," which should be prohibited if it is in fact the solution to the riddle, is pronounced in the text. This apparent anomaly points toward a trope of displacement from a primary to a secondary meaning of a word (the priority corresponding to the perspective of the *Jefe*), that is a "métonymie de mots" (as opposed to a "métonymie de choses"). The definitive meaning remains under the ban in this case, but not its *allosème*.⁵

The false riddle obfuscates a true one, namely the gap that opens between the first paragraph which recounts events pre-

⁵ I employ here the vocabulary introduced by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok for the discussion of *cryptonymie*, which underlies the whole of the present study. See, in this instance, their *Cryptonymie, Le Verbier de l'Homme aux Loups*, intro. "Fors," by Jacques Derrida, *Anasémies*, vol. 1 (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1976), pp. 117-18. I further note that their reexamination and thorough revision of Freud's famous Wolf-Man case may also be read as a critique of the concept of *forclusion*, itself rooted in Lacan's own study of the same case. In addition to Derrida's introductory essay, the reader may wish to consult Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 156-67. It needs be specified, however, that in the present example, the displacement of the principal meaning, the toponym "Albert", to the alloseme or alternative meaning, the personal name "Albert", does not constitute a case of cryptonymy. In true instances of the latter, the alloseme too would be silenced, and only synonyms of the alloseme would emerge. There is moreover a peculiar psychological motivation, altogether missing from this example, whose study I reserve for the analysis of Arenas' work below.

viously told “En la página 22 de la *Historia de la Guerra Europea* de Liddell Hart,” and the remainder of the text, “La siguiente declaración, dictada, releída y firmada por el doctor Yu Tsun” (*Ficciones*, 97), beginning with quotation marks and an ellipsis: “. . . y colgué el tubo” (*Ficciones*, 97). In contradistinction to the supposed conclusion of communication achieved, the quoted declaration begins, therefore, on a redoubled note of communication radically incomplete: the telephone conversation has no ending and the text of the declaration has no beginning. Hence, in spite of Yu Tsun’s last words (if they are such; there are no closing quotation marks, nor is the signature alluded to in the first paragraph appended to the text of the declaration), that is his closing reference to his “*innumerable* contrición y cansancio” (*Ficciones*, 111, my italics), the text of Borges’ story remains open due to the riddle of an overly precise enumeration. The first paragraph or prologue of the story would close with these Iaconic words: “Faltan las *dos* páginas iniciales” (*Ficciones*, 97, my italics), but one is left to question whether the remaining pages are numbered—as one says that a person’s days, be they Yu Tsun’s or Albert’s, are numbered, that is merely running out the course of a certain destiny—or if the narrator has given evidence of an acquaintance with the original text. Is the narrator, whose hostile stance in relation to the statement of Yu Tsun is made manifest in a footnote, responsible for the suppression of the initial pages? Has he substituted his version of Liddell Hart’s page 22 for the 2 pages of Yu Tsun in the plain view of the reader?⁶ The riddle that emerges is a tale of the purloined pages.

The two missing pages are never to be read; they are out of circulation. Nevertheless, the riddled text that remains in the absence of those pages might be approached as an effort to bridge the gap. While I will not pursue in detail the analysis that would carry the reading from the prologue to the body of the text (from the first paragraph to the quoted declaration), I would at least underline the rhetorical feature already noted in relation to the name “Albert”. On closer inspection, the prologue itself may be seen to constitute a riddle homologous to Ts’ui Pên’s “enorme adivinanza”; it anticipates the same solution by withholding the same word. Its theme is likewise time, specifically the time of a delay: a

⁶ Jaime Alazaraki’s “Registro de variantes” for Borges’ early work draws attention to a change in the number: Alazaraki cites the original edition as reading “En la página 252 . . .,” *La prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges. Temas-estilo*, 2nd rev. ed. (Madrid: Gredos, 1974), p. 391.

British offensive “había sido planeada para el veinticuatro de julio de 1916 y debió postergarse hasta la mañana del día veintinueve” (*Ficciones*, 97). This postponement, however, is figured forth not in terms of time, *tiempo*, but by reference to its alloeme, weather, *tiempo*: “Las lluvias torrenciales (anota el capitán Liddell Hart) provocaron esa demora—nada significativa, por cierto” (*Ficciones*, 97). But here the word “tiempo” is rigorously excluded in both of these senses from the text of the prologue, and will only be restituted in the body of the text through Stephen Albert’s careful analysis of Ts’ui Pên’s *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*.

This more radical exclusion of a word and its alloemes, wherein the latter, that is the secondary meanings, are the source for textual elaboration in word and image is the process to which I will turn in pursuit of “esa palabra bendita, maldita; única”⁷ that is always escaping from the fiction of Reinaldo Arenas, and leaving, in its absence, a riddled text. I will focus on one riddle in particular, the story “El hijo y la madre,” (1967)⁸ urging “la prise de conscience de l’extraordinaire exclusion dont étaient frappés certains mots et, par conséquent, le pouvoir véritablement magique que leur exclusion même semblait leur conférer” (Abraham and Torok, *Cryptonymie*, p. 117).

Before proceeding, I need add a cautionary note with respect to the analogy between the riddled text of “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” and that of “El hijo y la madre”. Borges, like Ts’ui Pên, but unlike the Arenas of this particular story, consciously employs a process of omission. Thus he can bring to light the word that has been excluded to the unconscious of the text; Albert comes to enunciate the absent and as it were magic word of the prologue. In order for this elucidation to take place, Albert, the “bárbaro inglés,” may be said to have learned two foreign languages: not only the Chinese of Ts’ui Pên’s novel, but also the Spanish of the prologue. The metonymic movement of words is inscribed in Spanish, in the word *tiempo*, and so imperceptible in

⁷ Reinaldo Arenas, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1980), p. 109.

⁸ Arenas’ “El hijo y la madre” was first published in *Unión* 6, no. 4 (1967), 222-26; it was included in the unauthorized edition of his short stories, *Con los ojos cerrados* (Montevideo: Arca, 1972), published while Arenas was still in Cuba. After Arenas went into exile the collection was republished in an authorized edition (including a new title story) as *Termina el desfile* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1982). All citations of Arenas’ stories will refer to *Termina*; references to “El hijo y la madre” are cited by page number only.

the English in which Albert and Yu Tsun would have conducted their interview. Borges has rendered his riddle accessible through translation, much as Albert himself, working as translator of Ts'ui Pên's novel. Hence, just as the prologue offers a condensed Spanish version of Liddell Hart's history, the body of the text is a foreshortened Spanish version of Yu Tsun's English declaration, where the first two pages are precisely what get lost in translation. And if in the former case the thrust of the translation would overturn the authority of historiography, specifically the military history of Liddell Hart, the latter undermines the originality of fiction by presenting itself as a story conceived in translation.

The process of language acquisition that I have outlined with respect to "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," whereby the text acquires its mother tongue as though it were a foreign language, constitutes the language lesson of "El hijo y la madre" and Arenas' fiction generally. Yet if his texts are monolingual and, as I have already suggested, less deliberate than those of Borges, I would assert that even Borges' conscious polyglot ventriloquism serves as a veil for a missing magic word. For Borges it is a mourner's veil, which, in its uncanny persistence, becomes rather the sign of an enduring melancholia. Thus his fantastic stories may be said to be structured not so much like a psychosis, nor even like the Lacanian unconscious, as like the crypt discovered by Abraham and Torok. His riddles will only apparently be resolved by the *forçage* of a Lacanian analysis which would impose a word from outside. The missing pages of "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" are not beyond but *within* the text.

In so far as I will be contending that "El hijo y la madre" is a cryptophoric text, I would pursue here briefly the riddle of "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," in order to found the analogy between the stories and to suggest their genealogical relation. In this regard I would displace attention from the enigma of the plot and the purported solution to *Ashgrove*, the place discovered alongside the name of Albert in Yu Tsun's initial research in the telephone book.

Ashgrove first appears in the context of a cover-up or false clue in the detective-story plot: Yu Tsun declares: ". . . iba a la aldea de Ashgrove, pero saqué un pasaje para una estación más lejana" (*Ficciones*, 100). There is a double subterfuge, at least. First, Borges does not allow Yu Tsun to divulge "el nombre del único hombre capaz de transmitir la noticia" (*Ficciones*, 99), but rather reveals

only the toponym "Ashgrove" in place of the personal name "Albert." So too Yu Tsun, bent on criminal intent and closely pursued by the British counter-spy Captain Richard Madden, withholds the name of Ashgrove from the ticket agent. I would suggest, however, that this simple ruse discovers a textual strategy for the story at large. "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" will likewise carry beyond the name of Ashgrove to the name of Albert in the denouement of the plot, without changing, I contend, the true destination.

In this light I recall the moment when Ashgrove is thematized in the text and indeed presented as a riddle:

Preveo que el hombre se resignará cada día a empresas más atroces; pronto no habrá sino guerreros y bandoleros; les doy este consejo: *El ejecutor de una empresa atroz debe imaginar que ya la ha cumplido, debe imponerse un porvenir que sea irrevocable como el pasado.* Así procedí yo, mientras mis ojos de hombre ya muerto registraban la fluencia de aquel día que era tal vez el último, y la difusión de la noche. El tren corría con dulzura, entre fresnos. Se detuvo, casi en medio del campo. Nadie gritó el nombre de la estación. *¿Ashgrove?* les pregunté a unos chicos en el andén. *Ashgrove*, contestaron. Bajé. (*Ficciones*, 101).

Borges, one of the most powerful dissidents against the Freudian revolution, consistently tropes a heightened self-consciousness, in particular a self-consciousness of the scene of writing, where psychoanalysis would find the unconscious. In this rich passage, the moment of proleptic disfiguration of Yu Tsun's final destination (the naming of a more distant station for a closer one), reappears as a direct address to the potential, that is future reader of his own text—a unique break in the otherwise impersonal and as it were self-centered discourse of the confession. But such heightened awareness of the act of writing, I am suggesting, is a mark of a textual repression in Borges' work. Or more precisely, the implicit dialogue of narrator and narratee doubles an anterior dramatic scene. In "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," the *yo* that arises in the break into italics, here and elsewhere in the text, is not Yu Tsun, and in fact that *yo* enunciates more than he or even Borges are able to acknowledge. The voice that emerges in the proleptic image of "mis ojos de hombre *ya* muerto" speaks through the narrator from within the textual crypt.

The murder of Albert, I am arguing, is a blind, a detour in the text that leads away from its cryptic story, whose theme is rather the riddle of Ashgrove. Indeed, the murder of Albert is su-

perfluous. In this regard Yu Tsun's closing words instigate a rereading beyond his ken. If, as he declares, "Ayer la bombardearon," referring to the city of Albert; "lo leí en los mismos periódicos que propusieron a Inglaterra el enigma de que el sabio sinólogo Stephen Albert muriera asesinado por un desconocido, Yu Tsun" (*Ficciones*, 111), then the simultaneity of the reports belies the vain intention of a causal relation. The *Jefe* must have ordered the bombing before reading of the murder. The murder of Stephen Albert, therefore, like the annihilation of the French manufacturing town of Albert, "an open, unfortified town, whose inhabitants the Germans could not accuse of taking any part against them," was entirely purposeless.⁹ The plot of the military history runs parallel—not consequent—to the detective plot, or rather the two represent forking paths in Borges' garden.

Returning, then, to the riddle of Ashgrove, I would stress the "ya" in the passage cited above, because the words that pretend to prophecy there are in fact already hindsight, and not least of all because the prediction of future atrocities from the setting of the First World War is actually but the confirmation of the historical reality at the time of the writing of the story, with the Spanish Civil War over and World War II underway. In this story the future is as irrevocable as the past because both past and future are merely repetitive enactments of a single deep structure. When the for-eigner, Yu Tsun, murders Albert, the recreator of *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, the text manifests but one of many Todorovian transformations of the phrase, "Intruder kills resident" (in other versions, the roles are played by Madden and Hans Rabener alias Viktor Runeberg; the *forastero* and Ts'ui Pên; and the *intruso* and Fang, with regard to whom Albert, explicating Ts'ui Pên's novel, provides a whole array of narrative transformations [*Ficciones*, 107]).¹⁰

It is literally one who is already dead that has appropriated the narrative to his own ends in this passage. In consequence, the text of "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" is riddled not so much by the *visible* conundrum of the detective plot nor even the enigma

⁹ Francis Whiting Halsey quotes this eye-witness account of the bombardment of Albert in October 1914 in *The Literary Digest History of the World War. Compiled from Original and Contemporary Sources: American, British, French, German and Other*, 10 vols. (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1919-20), vol. 2, p. 181. See also the essays of Himmelblau and of Frank and Vosburg.

¹⁰ Todorov, "Les transformations narratives," in *Poétique de la prose*, pp. 225-40.

of simultaneous and forking plots, as by a story that lies buried at Ashgrove, or more precisely, in "Ashgrove". For the word "Ashgrove" is a cryptonym, concealing more than revealing.

The passage marks a point of confluence, a crossroads where at least three stories by Borges meet. One may follow the forking path that leads ahead to the analogous setting of Borges' later story, "El sur" (1953) where "El tren laboriosamente se detuvo, casi en medio del campo," at a station "un poco anterior" to that for which Juan Dahlmann has purchased his ticket (*Ficciones*, 192). There Dahlmann, an autobiographical figure for Borges, meets his death by creating, much as Yu Tsun advises, a future as inevitable as the past. (Indeed Dahlmann's death permits a revision of Yu Tsun's dictum: the past is precisely what one has escaped, but the future is implacable.) Or one may reflect back upon the alternative path, back, that is, to Borges' earlier "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1940). Adopting now the strategy of Yu Tsun's own cryptography, one may read here too a personal name for a place name: thus one hears *Ashe's grave* in Ashgrove.

Herbert Ashe is "uno de los modestos demiurgos" (*Ficciones*, 31) of the clandestine project to invent a world, and a friend of the narrator's family in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." A remark by Borges' biographer, Emir Rodríguez Monegal to the effect that Ashe was "modeled on Borges' father,"¹¹ points in the direction of the contents of the crypt; here, however, I will limit discussion to a further elaboration of the mechanism of encrypting that riddles "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan." For the guardian of Borges' secret will return to haunt Arenas.

Reading the first and most evident of the polyglot echoes of the name, the interment of *ash* casts this crypt as an *urn burial*, which sheds new light on the enigmatic concluding paragraph of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius:" "Entonces desaparecerán del planeta el inglés y el francés y el mero español. El mundo será Tlön. Yo no hago caso, yo sigo revisando en los quietos días del hotel de Adrogué una indecisa traducción quevediana (que no pienso dar a la imprenta) del *Urn Burial* de Browne" (*Ficciones*, 34).¹² The interplay of languages, including the invented language of Tlön, is

¹¹ Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges, A Literary Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1983), p. 63.

¹² See Marina E. Kaplan, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius y 'Urn Burial'," *Comparative Literature* 36, no. 4 (1984): 328-42.

fundamental to the constitution and interpretation of the crypt. Cryptonymy is a translation-effect.

Aside from English and "el mero español," Borges signals French as a constituent language of his text in the closing passage of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," and it will remain so for "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," whose World War I setting returns Borges to the period in his life when he mastered French while living in Switzerland. In causing the detective plot to turn upon a point of false homophony, if true homonymy, Borges commemorates the vicissitudes of that language acquisition.¹³ The English surname, Albert, is distinguished from the name of the French city by their pronunciation, most notably, by a silent letter, the final *t*. The name of the taciturn Englishman incorporated in "Ashgrove" needs likewise be read in French (with or without its *e muet*), and so pronounced like the French letter *H*: again, a silent letter. Herbert Ashe is, then, a Monsieur H. H.

H. Ashe: the name does not speak its secret, but rather is the sign of silence, of secretiveness itself. Albert, Ashgrove, Ashe . . . Borges has already mapped *el Aleph* as his silent-capital:

For in Hebrew the consonant *aleph* represents nothing more than the position taken by the larynx when a word begins with a vowel. Thus the *aleph* may be said to denote the source of all articulate sound, and indeed the Kabbalists always regarded it as the spiritual root of all other letters, encompassing in its essence the whole alphabet and hence all other elements of human discourse. To hear the *aleph* is to hear next to nothing; it is the preparation for all audible language, but in itself conveys no determinate, specific meaning.¹⁴

Ashe was a "fantasma," even in life (*Ficciones*, 17), or what Abraham and Torok would call a *fantôme*, not eloquent in the metaphorical language of symptoms, but on the contrary, deceitful: "Si un fantôme revient hanter c'est pour mentir: ses prétendues 'révélations' sont mensongères par nature."¹⁵ Borges' Aleph, I am

¹³ Borges, "An Autobiographical Essay," in Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933-1969*, Norman Thomas di Giovanni, ed and trans. (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 215.

¹⁴ Gershom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 30. See also Saul Sosnowski, *Borges y la Cábala: búsqueda del verbo* (Buenos Aires: Hispamérica, 1976), pp. 76-81.

¹⁵ Abraham, "Le fantôme d'Hamlet ou le VI^e acte, précédé par L'entr'acte de la <<vérité>>," in Abraham and Torok, *L'écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1978), p. 449.

suggesting, is a fantom. The purported crypts at Albert and even at Ashgrove are empty; these urns contain dust and ashes only. The secret lies elsewhere—not indefinitely shifting along a Lacanian chain of signifiers, but elsewhere—in “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan,” for instance, the silent capital (head, chief), *el Jefe*, is all eyes and ears in Berlin.

II

“El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” provides a critical perspective by which the model of an ineducable text may be replaced with a paradigmatic process of language acquisition undertaken by the text itself. Paradoxically, however, the language thus acquired by the text is riddled by silent letters, such that for this text, acquiring a language is equivalent to learning to reduce speech to silence so that a secret may remain undisclosed. The short stories of Reinaldo Arenas may be read as just so many language lessons. Their riddled speech requires a decrypting.

In focusing on “El hijo y la madre,” I will bring this aspect to the fore in a text which presents the fundamental situation of Arenas’ fiction in its minimal configuration: a son enclosed within the maternal home and a male visitor approaching from without. Yet it is just this boundary between inside and out that Arenas’ fiction questions through a topographic *invagination*.¹⁶ And if I follow Derrida here where he is most indebted to Abraham and Torok, it is in order underline with his critical metaphor the decisive step that they have taken beyond the Lacanian *Nom-du-Père* in framing a psychoanalytic theory of the acquisition of language. Just such a metaphor is called for with respect to “El hijo y la madre,” and for Arenas’ work as a whole, wherein the task of the language lesson is quite literally the learning of the mother tongue.

Invagination or the drawing inward of borderlines is for Derrida, first of all, the recitation of opening lines within the body of the text. In “El hijo y la madre” this recitation of the poem of the mother, the prologue printed in eight anaphoric verses, constitutes in itself the process of language acquisition. The verses of the prologue appear as follows:

La madre se paseaba del comedor a la cocina.

La madre caminaba dando salticos como un ratón mojado.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Survivre,” in his *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), pp. 117-218.

La madre estaba sentada en la sala y se balanceaba en el sillón.
 La madre miraba por la ventana.
 La madre tenía las manos llenas de pecas diminutas.
 La madre dijo: Ah.
 La madre se puso de pie y caminó hasta la cocina.
 La madre estaba muerta (105).¹⁷

and thereafter they are dispersed in the text, where they are repeated with variants but in their proper order, and signalled by italics. There is a major break, if not to say breakdown, in the recitation at the moment when the visitor arrives at the door, and which, finally, will be the focus of my attention. But first I would elaborate the map of Arenas' textual topography, momentarily enlarging the scale to the broader terrain of the *pentagonía*.¹⁸

Briefly stated, one may recollect that the family home in *Celestino* has no running water, so that the house is extended outdoors to the twin points of the *pozo* and the *excusado*. These points mark a circular domestic economy of water drawn from the earth and returned thither, and represent, moreover, a primitive, that is to say infantile theory of the maternal anatomy: a womb-urethra and an anus, loci of life and death, whose dialectical relation ultimately

¹⁷ Compare the related anaphoric series near the close of the author's first novel, *Celestino antes del alba* (Havana: UNEAC, 1967), p. 212, where the definite article of the story finds its antecedent in a possessive adjective: "Mi madre . . .". The novel has since been republished by under the same title (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1980) and later in a revised edition under the title *Cantando en el pozo* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1982)—the new title is taken from the same passage with the anaphoric recitation, "Mi madre . . ." (*Cantando*, p. 208). All citations in the text will refer to the UNEAC edition.

¹⁸ The *pentagonía*, a novel in five volumes, includes *Celestino* (or *Cantando*); *El palacio*, *Otra vez el mar* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1982), already in print, and two projected volumes. (see Enrico Mario Santí, "Entrevista con Reinaldo Arenas", *Vuelta* 47 [1980]: 21-22.) All of Arenas' short fiction, including the stories collected in *Termina* and, more recently, *Arturo, la estrella más brillante* (Barcelona: Montesinos, 1984), are closely associated in a unified ambience and may be read as adjuncts to the *pentagonía*. Most critical attention to Arenas' work has focused rather on *El mundo alucinante* (*novela de aventuras*) (Mexico: Diógenes, 1969; republished without the parenthetical subtitle [Barcelona: Montesinos, 1981]); recent exceptions include Flora González, "Repetición y escritura en la obra de Reinaldo Arenas," in Alejo Carpentier, Emir Rodríguez Monegal et al., *Historia y ficción en la narrativa hispanoamericana: coloquio de Yale*, Roberto González Echevarría, ed. (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1984), pp. 395-408; and Jorge Olivares, "Carnival and the Novel: Reinaldo Arenas' *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*", *Hispanic Review*, 53 (1985): 467-76. To my knowledge there have not as yet appeared any studies devoted to Arenas' short stories.

collapses at the close of *Celestino*, where death by drowning—in the well—anticipates the fate of his later incarnation in the son of *Otra vez el mar*.

The move from the countryside to the city in *El palacio* entails the introduction of indoor plumbing. The outer boundary of *pozo* and *excusado* are incorporated within the house in an internal space that remains nonetheless alien, heterogenous to the rest of the dwelling. The bathroom again confounds the separation of sex and death, which are rather superimposed therein. Both Fortunato and Adelanta seek out this place apart, locking themselves into the bathroom, out of the shared space of domestic life, the former for his impassioned masturbation, the latter for her no less passionate suicide. Thus where *Celestino* is organized around two holes in the ground, so to speak, *El palacio* is centered upon one, the *tragante*: “No hay bañadera. Aunque Adolfina diga que sí y se crea bailar en ella. No la hay. El agua cae sencillamente en el suelo y se desliza por un tragante que carece de reja protectora. Es por eso que a veces el tragante termina ‘tragándose’ el jabón” (*El palacio*, 63).

If one looks into the *tragante* of *El palacio*, one finds a ring: “Por ese mismo tragante, dice Fortunato, que se le perdió un anillo” (*El palacio*, 63). Read as a metaphor, the ring recalls the structure of forclusion: a text circumscribing a *trou* of wordlessness (Lacan, *Ecrits*, 517). That ring, however, is not a hollow object, but rather a resounding word, in fact a citation. The *anillo* is not mentioned elsewhere in *El palacio*, but its antecedent is to be found in *Celestino*, where it had served as a fairy-tale recognition device. Its return *fantomatique*—it has returned only as already lost: swallowed by the *tragante* in *El palacio*; submerged in the dirty water of a sink full of dishes in *Otra vez el mar*—still serves to authenticate identity. By this “contraseña” (*Otra vez el mar*, 392), Hector, like Fortunato before him in *El palacio*, is recognizable as an avatar of Celestino, and, recalling now the topographic question, the *tragante cum anillo* reproduces the final fusion of the *excusado* into the *pozo* (“anillo” may be read here as a diminutive *ano*). Rather than a metaphor of forclusion, then, the ring marks the *incorporation*, as Abraham and Torok might say, of one novel in the other and the *tragante*, therefore, is precisely that invaginated opening in which an identifying word is swallowed up and lost thereafter to the text.

Separated from the outside world by a door, the interior of “El hijo y la madre” is likewise oriented on an axis of height and depth

measured from the son's room, "el único cuarto en los altos" (105), to the main floor below. In addition, the prologue is literally *superimprinted* above the body of the text (see Derrida, "Survivre," 127), which begins "El hijo bajó . . ." (105). The movement of the language lesson as well as that of the son is one of descent. The son takes temporary refuge in his room when the visitor's knocking at the door interrupts the invagination of the prologue, but thereafter the text will recommence the process of language acquisition as the son "bajó de nuevo:" "En la casa todo era un gran silencio. Caminó a tientas por la sala vacía. Llegó hasta la cocina vacía, y, a tientas, vació de un *trago* un litro de leche" (110, my italics). In sum, the descent enacts incorporation, and the process of language *acquisition* is thereby disfigured as *hoarding*. The son and his text imbibe their language lesson not in order to speak out—indeed the son will refuse to do so even at the narrator's behest, though it cost him his idyll with his visitor—but rather to eat their words, a convenient colloquialism which must here be modified insofar as the words that are swallowed are not their own.

In "El hijo y la madre," that is, the son acquires his mother's language precisely in order not to speak. The reduction to silence is first manifested in the mother's twin injunctions: thou shalt not read nor listen to the radio; thou shalt have no contact with—more particularly, no words from—the world outside the door. This same process may be seen in relation to the mother's own speech as well. The only intercalation into the hypogrammatic text of the prologue verses as they are redeployed in the body of the text are the following italicized phrases, an imaginary citation of words the mother never says: "—La comida está servida en la mesa—dijo la madre, ya en la sala, de pie junto a él. Y él pensó que no había necesidad de tanta palabrería; que hubiese bastado con decir *ven a comer, o ya está la comida, o ya está, o ya*" (106). Here he appropriates her language, but in effect enacts a regression toward speechlessness, the condition of the milk-drinking *infans* to which he will return more visibly when "—Mamá—dijo, como en otros tiempos, cuando todavía era joven y era hijo. —Mamá—dijo; porque no había aprendido a decir otra cosa" (110).

The son's silence is objectified as an incapacity to touch (*tocar*). The son fails to grasp, as it were, not the meaning of a word, but the word itself. His inability to touch the mother is replayed in an analogous vacillation that finally prohibits him from placing his hand upon the doorknob and opening the door to his visitor. This

latter incident is the climactic moment in the story and it is marked by a textual aberration. Here at the door the son enters into direct conflict with the narrator, questioning the text's own choice of words. The son will come to challenge the validity of the text he inhabits, in particular by questioning its source: who enunciates the descriptions that he will denounce as hallucinatory?

The rupture of the body of the text is introduced by a breakdown in the assimilation of the prologue. Just prior to the arrival of the visitor, in the place where the prologue anticipates the penultimate seventh verse, "La madre se puso de pie y caminó hasta la cocina," the text reads instead: "*La madre caminaba ya por un costado de la sala. Algunas veces parecía que iba por los aires, o que caminaba en un solo pie. La vio al fin desaparecer por la cocina. Allí se puso a hablar sola*" (109). The division and reversal of the coordinate clauses of the hypogrammatic verse represent a moment of dyslexia marring the acquisition of the language of the prologue, which is nonetheless experienced as a sexual excitement in the disguise of a heightened apprehension of the uncanny. This disturbance in the language lesson of the text points on toward the major textual disruption in the offing, and, more immediately, to a further reduction in the maternal language begun with the previous italicized intercalation. The regressive trajectory now carries the mother's speech to the inarticulate, even bestial "cuchicheo . . . infernal" (109).

It is at this moment that "se oyó el primer toque en la puerta" (109). I will insist here upon the verb "tocar" that resounds in this *toque*. For once again the text will be riddled by an unaccomplished *toque*. Whereas the first, second and fourth knocks are reported, the third is absent:

Sonó el segundo toque, más fuerte que el ruido infernal emitido por la bestia de la cocina.

—¿Quién dijo la bestia?

Sí, la bestia que ahora echaba espumas y se agrandaba al tú quedarte de pie, indeciso. . . . Pero el hijo . . . se acercó a la puerta y tomó el pomo.

—¿Qué pomo? Esta puerta nunca ha tenido pomo.

Tomaste el pomo y ya ibas a abrir.

Pero entonces llegó la otra llamada; y el hijo miró a la madre, pequeña, ahogándose en el charco de sudor que habían formado [las] manos [de aquél]. Y vaciló. Y tuvo miedo de romper el pacto."

(109)

The narrative voice, allied with the visitor, will seek to open the door of the text. The narrator, for instance, will read aloud the terms of the pact: "El pacto que hiciste con tu madre, el pacto que siempre has sostenido y que ahora te hace dudar: 'Mi hijo no tiene amigos', 'mi hijo no recibe a nadie en la casa' 'mi hijo' . . . El pacto que por otra parte siempre estás traicionando aunque sea con el pensamiento" (110). Nevertheless, her *llamada* has effectively drowned out the menacing *toque*, allowing her magic word to escape unavowed, drowned within the watery crypt of Arenas' fiction: *charco, mar, tragante, pozo*. The sleight-of-hand has been accomplished by a *metonymie de mots* in the form of a *rime*, as Abraham and Torok refer to the constellation of words that take the place of the one word buried in the crypt and so barred from expression in the text. The "magic" power of the missing word has transformed the threat of *tocar*, synonymous with divulging, into *tomar*, an anti-metaphor for incorporation. The secret of the text has been swallowed once again.¹⁹

III

The language lesson of "El hijo y la madre" has produced a cryptic text, whose riddle may now be delimited with precision: the enigma resides in the unspoken word of *la otra llamada*. In order to respond to the question of the call, a question which may be quite simply *¿cómo se llama?* one may begin both before and after the language lesson, that is in the prologue and epilogue of the text.

The former evidences an omission through the repetition of the relational term, "la madre," which implies the existence of a child, *el hijo*, as the title has already announced. His absence from those eight verses, I would suggest, is not a transparent exclusion, but rather an occulted inclusion. Just as the son cannot see the mother in the empty space of the darkened house after the departure of the visitor, so too he himself cannot be seen in the prologue because in the one as in the other, he is as yet *inside* the mother, swallowed up, like a ring, encrypted in her womb. But like the ring, the incorporation of the son objectifies the loss of a word,

¹⁹ On *rimes*, see Abraham and Torok, *Cryptonymie*, pp. 229-37. That "tocar" and "tomar" should be a rhyme in the ordinary sense of Spanish assonance is merely a felicitous chance. On "anti-metaphor" see, for instance, Abraham and Torok's remarks on "démétaphorisation" and "objectivation" in "Deuil ou mélancholie, introjecter-incorporer," in *L'écorce*, p. 261.

which, if pronounced, would constitute an *arrêt de mort*, banishing all hope of future resurrection. In short, the son is the word—with all the parodic christological implications—that must be hushed. For this reason the language lesson has inculcated a reduction of his speech to silence. Yet in spite of the stipulations of the *pacto* between the son and the mother that would enclose his tell-tale word under the seal “ya no tienes escapatorias” with which Arenas’ collection of stories ends (*Termina*, 180), the word is always escaping.

The language lesson is completed with the acquisition of the final verse of the prologue by the body of the text, recited this once without alteration: “*La madre estaba muerta*” (111). But the son lives on to pronounce thereafter a word of his own:

En la oscuridad, el viejo caminó hasta una de las paredes de la sala.

—Luces—dijo, prendiendo el enchufe, como un nuevo creador automatizado (111).

This epilogue proffers a revelation, an apocalypse, in the form of a parodic genesis, attained at great cost. In becoming “el viejo” the son sacrifices his identity within the relation with his mother. Thus he has at last broken the pact, which, contrary to the analysis of the narrator, reads not “mi hijo” but “el hijo y la madre” and whose seal was the conjunction of the *unité duelle*.²⁰ At the same time he relinquishes to the *desengaño* of the past the *espera* and *esperanza* of some transferred bond to the visitor. But the son admits these affective losses in order to achieve a compensating gain in creativity. He is with his word.

Like the Old Testament creator whom he mimics, the son would bring that word out of himself, unmindful of a matriarchal stratum buried in the darkness. The text he enunciates, however, is subject to her magic. Thus the son speaks in the cryptic rhetoric of demetaphorization. He both enunciates and enacts literally a simple figure of speech, *dar a luz*, with which he brings the labor of the text to a close. The regressive trajectory of the language lesson has carried over into the epilogue. The son returns in the end to his beginning, regressing beyond his first word to his first cry upon emerging from the womb. And that cry, however inarticulate, says *luces*, says *dar a luz*, announcing his own arrival.

²⁰ See, for example, Abraham’s “L’Enfant majuscule ou l’origine de la genèse” and “Notes du séminaire sur l’unité duelle et le fantôme,” in *L’écorce*, pp. 325-33 and 393-425, respectively.

The apocalyptic *luces* reveal what was occulted in the prologue by omission and further disguised in the body of the text as the arrival of the visitor from outside, namely the mother's unavowed pregnancy. Furthermore, as in the closing lines of *Celestino*, a temporal inversion is unmasked in the epilogue; the birth announcement is not belated in response to the narrator's urging to call out to the visitor—"¡Oh llámalo!" (110)—but rather arrives too soon. It is not the mother who is unaware of the immanent arrival of the visitor, but the father who is ignorant of the impending arrival of the son. The cry of *luces* will drive him away, as Arenas narrates explicitly with respect to the birth of Fortunato in *El palacio* (186-89). Hence, the recurrent resurrections of Arenas' fiction, his greatest enigma, may be explained as a compulsion to repeat the death, the loss that is another's: his mother's loss of the father in the interrupted, illicit idyll from which the son issues forth.

In "El hijo y la madre" that death drive becomes a return to an earlier state of language, to the inarticulate cry of the new-born. Yet the story only confirms in brief compass Arenas' unrelenting tragedy of the will to write: that the son's acquisition of language, even from the first vocalization, serves only to accuse himself of bastardy. The body of the text learns to speak this language of illegitimacy, *bastardía*, when it incorporates the poem of the mother in italics, *bastardillas*.

It is in the light of the epilogue, then, that I return to decrypt *la otra llamada*. When the son *tomó el pomo*, according to the narrator, he never seized an object, but rather swallowed a word. "Door-knob" is the displaced alloeme of *pomo*, whose principal meaning in Arenas' fiction is that of the small bottle or flacon. Celestino's grandmother, for instance, collects discarded *pomos*, only to have them stolen by Celestino, in an act that prefigures Fortunato's theft of paper from his grandfather. The empty *pomos*, however, are not so much blank *hojas* upon which Fortunato will write, as the words themselves, such that the coveted "botella de Agua Florida," the exalted *pomo* that Celestino never obtained, becomes an analogue of the unique word—blessed and cursed—that escapes throughout the *pentagonía*.

In order to decrypt, at last, the missing magic word of "El hijo y la madre" and perhaps of the *pentagonía* as a whole, one must learn to read the contents of the *pomo*. Thus, passing from the alloeme of doorknob to the vessels that are flacons, listening for the *rime* in *pozos*, one arrives from the *pomos* to *fuentes*: crypt and source. Yet

even *fuentes* is an alloseme of the magic word, or missing name, Fuentes—Reinaldo Arenas Fuentes: the full name with which the author signed his first stories; the name he suppressed before the publication of “El hijo y la madre;” the name that lies buried in the crypt of that text. Fuentes, a missing matronym, a magic word.²¹

Oui: le poème, c'est bien la mère.

IV

The trope of containment, fundamental to the whole of Arenas' fiction is elucidated—literally brought to light in “El hijo y la madre”—by the decrypting of the matronym. *Fuentes* informs such figures as the *pozo*, *excusado* and *tragante*, and indeed permits a re-reading of all bodies of water in his work as images of the mother's body. Thus the well is but an invaginated sea, and the sea, the ultimate figure of containment in Arenas' dissident vision of Revolutionary Cuba, becomes his ideologically motivated revision of Lezama Lima's mythological inflation of the image of the island as a founding trope for Cuban letters.

In Arenas' revisionary metonymy, the transformation of water from contents to container, denial masquerades as self-denial: the *pomos* are always represented as *vacios*. The son may renounce the pleasure of receiving his guest, but in so doing he is reenacting the encrypted scene of his mother's secret. He denies admission to the visitor—once his father—in the mother's name, and thus obtains the privilege of manipulating the *mot-fétiche*. Hence, Arenas' tropology is marked by the transformation of one container into another, the exchange of one form of imprisonment for another, while contents are encrypted in the text. The chaining of Fray Servando in *El mundo alucinante* is perhaps the paradigm for this process in Arenas work, but the search for the *lagartija* in “Termina el desfile” provides an example of the same process of runaway metonymy in the context of the Cuban world of the *pentagonía*.

²¹ In the absence of a comprehensive bibliography, I offer these notes on the history of a name. I believe the earliest publication by the author to be “La punta del arco iris,” *Unión* 4, no. 1 (1965): 113-119 (never reprinted), where his name is listed as “Reinaldo Arenas Fuentes”. His next published story, “Con los ojos cerrados,” *Unión* 5, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1966): 12-15, again gives the full name. The last publication under the name “Reinaldo Arenas Fuentes” is the UNEAC edition of *Celestino* in May 1967; “El hijo y la madre,” published seven months later, is, as I have argued, the crypt of “Fuentes”.

A Lacanian reading of Arenas' metonymy might posit an endless chain of signifiers barred from any firm grounding in a corresponding signifier. Further, Frederic Jameson's twist to the Lacanian schema, whereby the Real is equated with History (Lacan's and then Jameson's capitals), suggests a perspective that renders forclusion relevant once again to the study of Arenas.²² In the process of forclusion, that which cannot be symbolized from within because the *Nom-du-Père* is never granted authority, must inevitably return from without either as the Real or as psychotic hallucination—and the son's visitor might be either in "El hijo y la madre." Arenas' revisionary trope of containment suggests that an ideologically weighted history, in particular the mythology of the Revolution, presses upon the domestic dimensions of his early fiction. And in fact for Arenas revolutionary history always arrives from outside, whether in the realistic mode of state-owned tractors in "La Vieja Rosa" (1966), or the hallucinatory double of "Los heridos" (1967).

Yet the discovery of the matronym buried in the text as a cryptic sign of the mother's clandestine love and unwanted pregnancy motivates the metonymic chain of signifiers, which run away from that damaging secret. And if this is the case, then the riddle of Arenas' fantastic should reside ultimately within the text, rather than in the Lacanian explication of psychosis.

In this connection, one may consider the moment when the text breaks into the fantastic mode for the first time. The son and the mother sit quietly in the living room, the son awaiting the arrival of his visitor of whom the mother remains as yet in ignorance, when suddenly: "[El hijo v]io el cuello de la madre estirarse; lo vio husmear la primera persiana; lo vio topar el techo con la cabeza y romperlo. El cuello seguía creciendo. Entonces una de las hojas de la ventana fue abierta con violencia por el viento y golpeó la nariz del hijo, reduciéndosela. La madre soltó la risa" (107). And although the mother stops laughing long enough for the text to regain the composure of realism, the fantastic will quickly reassert itself in her "ademanos teatrales:" "[La madre s]e ponía de pie sobre el asiento que se tambaleaba. Su cabeza cambiaba de colores, girando. Hasta que toda la sala no fue más que un torbellino lu-

²² Frederic Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," in Felman, ed. *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, p. 384.

minosos que a él le parecía desolador" (108). The son, meanwhile, remains transfixed: "—Mamá—dijo el hijo," in a moment to be recuperated in the final regression to infancy already cited above, "y quiso tocarla; pero sintió sus manos tan sudadas; tan sudadas, que ya frente a su asiento se formaba un charco de agua, y no lo hizo para no empaparla. Y pensó, al verse las manos como manantiales, que un signo monstruoso, o tal vez maravilloso, lo diferenciaba del resto de los seres y hasta de las cosas" (108-09).

Todorov's hypothesis of a hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations as a definition of the fantastic finds no foothold here.²³ The reader will not vacillate in recognizing this vision of the mother as a giant penis in ecstasy as phantasmagoria, while the son himself does not question here the reality of this hallucination. But then Todorov cedes his place to Freud at the close of his study, which, as he admits, cannot be extended to the fantastic of Kafka *que engendró a Borges que engendró a Arenas*. . . . Yet while Freud's suggestion that the uncanny may be linked to regression to superannuated stages of mental life is instructive for the reading of "El hijo y la madre,"²⁴ psychoanalysis, both in its classical and Lacanian modes will meet an embarrassment in leading the text to a recognition of an Oedipal conflict. The cut of the castrating *hoja* is received by the son with the orgasmic release of his sweaty palms. But it is the word that wounds, and insofar as it falls under the spell of the missing matronym, the text may yet rejoice in its capacity to guard its secrets by generating riddles. Castration itself, as Abraham and Torok have observed in the analysis of cryptophoric subjects, can be placed at the service of a magic word (Abraham and Torok, *Cryptonymie*, 128).

It is here, I would suggest, that both the political and psychological dimensions of intrusion are conjoined in "El hijo y la madre." The *hoja* has a rich field of dissemination in Arenas' work. It is most directly the ejaculatory leaves that threaten the patriarchy in "A la sombra de la mata de almendras" (1967), causing the mother and the aunts to chop down the tree. Further, a simple paronomasia in *El palacio*, "Da hojas, da hijas" (66) signals an identifica-

²³ Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris, 1970).

²⁴ Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, general ed. James A. Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), vol. 17, pp. 217-56. For a study of Freud's essay informed by the theoretical work of Abraham and Torok, see Nicholas Rand, "La traduction conseil," *Cahiers Confrontation* 10 (1983): 173-77.

minoso que a él le parecía desolador" (108). The son, meanwhile, remains transfixed: "—Mamá—dijo el hijo," in a moment to be recuperated in the final regression to infancy already cited above, "y quiso tocarla; pero sintió sus manos tan sudadas; tan sudadas, que ya frente a su asiento se formaba un charco de agua, y no lo hizo para no empaparla. Y pensó, al verse las manos como manantiales, que un signo monstruoso, o tal vez maravilloso, lo diferenciaba del resto de los seres y hasta de las cosas" (108-09).

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It is here, I would suggest, that both the political and psychological dimensions of intrusion are conjoined in "El hijo y la madre." The *hoja* has a rich field of dissemination in Arenas' work. It is most directly the ejaculatory leaves that threaten the patriarchy in "A la sombra de la mata de almendras" (1967), causing the mother and the aunts to chop down the tree. Further, a simple paronomasia in *El palacio*, "Da hojas, da hijas" (66) signals an identifica-

²³ Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris, 1970).

²⁴ Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, general ed. James A. Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), vol. 17, pp. 217-56. For a study of Freud's essay informed by the theoretical work of Abraham and Torok, see Nicholas Rand, "La traduction conseil," *Cahiers Confrontation* 10 (1983): 173-77.

tion whose fantastic consequences are realized in the conclusion of Arenas' "Bestial entre las flores" (1966). The cutting edge of the window pane recalls, however, that the *hoja* is also a blade, and in the form of a *cuchillo* appears in a crucial episode of Arenas' Revolutionary drama: the effort of the son to disarm a *casquito*. Fortunato makes the attempt in *El palacio*, only to be arrested and executed. The analogous episode is played out by the narrator in Arenas' early "Comienza el desfile" (1964), and if he escapes execution in the wake of his failure, he suffers nonetheless a figurative castration (*Termina*, 21).

Yet the threat of castration represented by the *hoja* does not initiate the son into language in "El hijo y la madre," as Lacan would have it, but rather constitutes the silencing of language. Or, as Abraham comments, "L'erreur lacanienne consiste à mettre la <<castration>> à l'origine du langage alors qu'elle n'est que son contenu universel."²⁵ More perplexing still for a Lacanian or classical Freudian analysis, is the sexual excitement registered in the orgasmic release of the son's sweating hands, "tan sudadas, que ya frente a su asiento se formaba un charco de agua" (108), and the corresponding textual excitement of the break into the fantastic mode that result from the castrating blow. These may be explained, however, by recognizing that Arenas' fantastic is founded upon a double process of cryptonymy. Inheriting the fantastic of Borges, he acquires a language already riddled with silent letters, as has been argued above, whose secret then passes from the unconscious of Borges' text to the unconscious of the text of Arenas, without the latter having ever been conscious of it. Hence the figure of silence encrypted in Borges' polyglot language may pass from his French into Arenas' monolingual writing, where it is transposed, *à son insu*, into Spanish. Borges' *Ashe*, that is *H*, pronounced like the French *hache*, 'axe,' penetrates Arenas' early fiction as the "hoja"—which is ultimately the leaf of paper, and itself a metonymic shift from the tree trunks upon which Celestino writes his poetry—as well as the

hachas

hachas

hachas hachas hachas hachas hachas hachas hachas hachas hachas . . .

(See *Celestino*, 81-89; I cite a fragment from page 85.)

²⁵ Abraham, "La source de signifiance du langage: communion dans le mensonge sur le désir anasémique de cramponnement," in *L'écorce*, p. 386.

that reduce his poetry to silence, and, laying waste to the countryside, drive the family to the invaginated space of city-dwelling.

The castrating blow of the *hoja*, therefore, does not merely cut off the son's nose to spite his tongue. Rather it signals the acquisition of a cryptic and fantastic language apt for maintaining silence. The riddle of the text is posed as an impending arrival, whose secret the son guards in the name of the mother. For the visit translates a double burden for the mother to bear: the father is not arriving but departing, because the son arrives not from without but from within. Thus the threat of emasculation contains a promise for the son: not so much that he will be like his mother, but that his own immolation will perpetuate her name. In their overflow, his hands literally become *fuentes*, a manipulation of the magic word that launches the text into the fantastic. Simultaneously, the mother's tongue is reduced by the cutting edge of the same *hoja* to an inarticulate *cuchicheo*, to the ineffable *otra llamada*, in short, to a Borgesian *Aleph*: "La madre volvió a sentarse y dijo: *Ah*" (108).

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