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MANUEL PUIG: THE AESTHETICS OF CINEMATIC
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FICTION

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MANUEL PUIG: THE AESTHETICS OF CINEMATIC
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FICTION

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Manuel Puig: The Aesthetics of Cinematic
And Psychological Fiction

CHAPTER I

Introduction

One of the most prominent aspects of modern fiction is its ability to re-direct the reader into a shared participation with the author into the potential discoveries possible in written language. Explorations of mythical structures like those of Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez or the dynamic replay of crude and sometimes frighteningly subhuman interactions like those of Mario Vargas Llosa bring the reader into contact with a verbalization that is successful only to the extent that it involves the reader with the narrated experience. The author no longer relays specific information to the reader through the medium of the literary work. It is symptomatic of current prose that the author does not want to give the reader any particular message.

Writers for the most part attempt to construct a prose work which the reader can re-create and explore on his own terms without preoccupying himself with the author's intentions. The story, if there is one, can be restructured using an infinite number of angles so that the reader can continually remake and mold the story

line. Likewise, if there is no story, the language becomes the focal point, and each reader must discover on a one-to-one basis within the text the hundreds of points of contact with the possibilities in the work.

From James Joyce's Ulysses to Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio's Le Procès-verbal, the indications are that language is being revolutionized as a point of departure for the reader and that the work does not exist as a fossilized structure for the reader to study and put aside. Carlos Fuentes perceptively analyzes the situation and states that "Nuestra literatura es verdaderamente revolucionaria en cuanto le niega al orden establecido el léxico que éste quisiera y le opone el lenguaje de la alarma, la renovación, el desorden y el humor. El lenguaje, en suma, de la ambigüedad: de la pluralidad de significados, de la constelación de alusiones: de la apertura."¹ It is obvious that the opening leaves at times a big gap between the author's subconscious creation and the reader's redoing of the work. But this division in the approach to the work is, after all, what the new literature expects and welcomes, for it announces the new wave of objective correlation with the work. Of course, the new literature does not include every author nor does it rigidly confine the writers to a particular

¹ Carlos Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 32.

style. The fictional world is quite diverse in the different types of works being created as well as the artists doing the creating.

One of these new writers, the Argentine Manuel Puig, offers an interesting accumulation of material for analysis, material which does not seem, superficially at least, to have any close connection to that literature to which Carlos Fuentes addresses himself. The Mexican author proposes in his analysis of the possible death of the novel:

Lo que ha muerto no es la novela, sino precisamente la forma burguesa de la novela y su término de referencia, el realismo, que supone un estilo descriptivo y psicológico de observar a individuos en relaciones personales y sociales.... Inmersos en esta crisis, pero indicando ya el camino para salir de ella, varios grandes novelistas han demostrado que la muerte del realismo burgués sólo anuncia el advenimiento de una realidad literaria mucho más poderosa. Esta realidad no se expresa en la introspección síquica o en la ilustración de las relaciones de clase....²

Yet what Manuel Puig is most concerned with is (1) the effects of cinema, a social occurrence and problem, on people and (2) the underlying psychological problems of the characters he creates. In his biographical account, he recalls the year 1946:

² Carlos Fuentes, p. 17.

Started secondary education as a boarder in Buenos Aires because there was nothing beyond the grammar school in Villegas. School was awful the children cruel. I missed my mother tremendously. The only consolation was the Sunday matinee at a first-run theatre: my very first was Mildred Pierce. Other favorites: Saratoga Trunk, Frenchman's Creek. Sensational discovery of Freud in Spellbound.³

Of 1947 he says that he "became friends with a Jewish schoolmate, discussing Spellbound. Found out he knew everything about Freud."⁴ This fascination with Freud was to reappear in his prose work. The "personal and social relationships" of which Carlos Fuentes speaks are the backbone of Manuel Puig's three novels. Clearly, then, Puig does not seem to fit in with the new novel Carlos Fuentes is describing.

In discussing the novel in Spanish America, Carlos Fuentes advances ideas that serve to establish the difference between the French Novel and Hispanic-American Novel, and develops a thesis for the existence of three literary schools in the novelistic genre.

Curiosamente, sólo dos escuelas literarias se han empeñado en prolongar la vida del realismo burgués y sus procedimientos: el llamado realismo socialista de la época staliniana y

³ Manuel Puig, "Growing up at the Movies: A Chronology," Review 72 (Winter 71/Spring 72), p. 49.

⁴ Puig, p. 49.

sus derivaciones, que pretendía crear una literatura revolucionaria con métodos académicos y sólo producía solemnes caricaturas, y la antinovela francesa, que lleva los procedimientos realistas a su expresión final: la de un mundo descriptivo de objetos vistos por personajes en la etapa sicologista más fragmentada: el nouveau roman francés bien podría llamarse la novela del realismo neocapitalista.⁵

Fuentes sees the third, Spanish-American School, as that novel which expresses itself "en la capacidad para encontrar y levantar sobre un lenguaje los mitos y las profecías de una época cuyo verdadero sello no es la dicotomía capitalismo-socialismo, sino una suma de hechos ... que realmente están transformando la vida en las sociedades industriales: automatización, electrónica, uso pacífico de la energía atómica."⁶

In view of this, however, Puig seems more closely associated with the French Novel than with the Spanish-American Novel. In fact, Manuel Puig, in his interview with Professor Saul Sosnowski in responding to the question as to whether any writers, Latin-American or Argentine, have influenced him, even subconsciously, gives a resounding no.⁷ Earlier in the same interview

⁵ Fuentes, p. 19.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁷ Saúl Sosnowski, "Entrevista," Hispanamérica 3 (1973): 75.

he explains "Yo no vengo de ninguna tradición literaria." ⁸ Two pages later he categorically states "Lo que me gusta leer ahora es la biografía. Nada que sea ficción me interesa." ⁹ Yet in his chronological biography in Revista 72 he mentions that the first unabridged novel he read was Andre Gide's The Pastoral Symphony. Immediately afterwards he reveals that "By then the fashionable authors in Buenos Aires were Hesse, Huxley, Sartre. I read them all, and essays in psychology as well." ¹⁰ Whatever can be assimilated from these two reports, one element is clear; Manuel Puig's reading in fiction was for the most part European. The references to Gide and Sartre might lead one to suspect that there are strong influences from the French novel in his work. The role of the French or New Novel as far as background in Puig's work is concerned can best be understood by looking at one of the elements in the French novel that Manuel Puig uses as a point of departure for his own work.

In France the concentration on the object has been the focal point of the major writers immediately following the existential movement. Concerned with the subjectivism

⁸ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 73.

⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰ Puig, p. 50.

of literature that fails to establish a bond between the work of art and the reader, the new French writers for the most part have chosen to eliminate all evidences of the narrator in their work. In so doing the authors have sought to minimize the distance between reader and the novel. The reader should therefore form a clearly objective idea of the material he is being presented within the form of the novel. This theory implies that there is no separation between man and object and that the author's role, like that of a camera, is merely to present the phenomenon, allowing the reader to form his own conjectures and impressions. As José Ortega y Gasset maintained "Aunque sea imposible un arte puro, no hay duda alguna de que cabe una tendencia a la purificación del arte. Esta tendencia llevará a una eliminación progresiva de los elementos humanos, demasiado humanos...." 11

William Barrett goes one step further in his analysis and states that "he who would try to improve man might do well not to make him inhuman, but rather, a little more human . . . a touch of the average, the mediocre, may be necessary ballast for human nature." 12

11 José Ortega y Gasset, Meditaciones del Quijote: La deshumanización del arte (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpa, 1942), p. 172.

12 William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 196.

Departing from the formalism of the French novel, Manuel Puig has been investigating the relationships between fictional characters and real people and in essence showing that "more than ever . . . the proper study of mankind is man."¹³ The Argentine writer does not repudiate the value of form but chooses to study man from a decidedly human point of view, and his association with psychology serves to strengthen the belief that the writer has to concentrate on the human in order to produce a literature both provocative and meaningful to his readers. The most direct way to attain this goal seems to be exploring the realm of the mind in all its complexities.

The study of personality as a means to project certain aspects of characterization becomes extremely important, because, as Leon Edel maintained, ". . . . ours has been an inquiry into the capacity of language to record inner experience, and the capacity of the novel to convey it."¹⁴ We are drawn to explore that part of man which has no counterpart in the external world; that is, beings whose make-up does not correspond with the

¹³ F. L. Lucas, Literature and Psychology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 18.

¹⁴ Leon Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), p. 137.

customary stolid appearance of objects. People are evasive, troublesome, indefinite, and at times more like objects than the objects themselves. Tremendous variations in mental fantasies indicate the inexhaustable storehouse of personalities that are possible both in real life as well as in literature. Professor Emir Rodríguez Monegal comments that:

Suddenly, powerful complex fictional beings are emerging from the anonymous masses of the great cities. This dramatic change--it corresponds sociologically to the growth of the conurbations, but it also reflects the spreading influence of psychoanalysis and existentialism--has not spared the novelists who stick by and large to rural themes. ¹⁵

Any development of character formation in the fictional world depends on the author's perception of human behavior and the motivation behind such behavior. The author's conception of what people do and why they act as they do reveals a great deal of his understanding of the human condition. To the extent that the emphasis has shifted from the repeated analysis in fiction of what was done to why it was done, the validity of more penetrating psychological studies in literature has increased. Whether the work of art be an attempted reflection of well-defined psychoanalytical theories or a journey of undefined proportions through the thought

¹⁵ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "The New Latin-American Novel," Books Abroad, XLIV, 1 (Winter 1970): 45.

processes of fictional beings, the character development of modern fiction relies heavily on fundamental psychological interpretation. Literature and psychology are irrevocably linked in that character portrayals reveal predominant aspects of societal behavior patterns. Lucas correctly states:

If our world grows neurotic, all the more urgent need to understand neuroses. Much psychoanalytic theory may still be speculative and controversial, much harm, as well as much good, may be done by it; but its foundations are laid. It has given us a multitude of new data, however rival schools may dispute their explanations. This seems to me the absorbing interest of psychological case-histories--here are facts more fantastic than any fiction. ¹⁶

Regardless of how fantastic the actual facts may be, the compilation of such material is not literature. Conversely, while psychological data can help in the artistic creation of a character, literature does not pretend to communicate specific medical information as do authoritative clinical studies. That would be quite impossible since both the author and the reader lack expertise in the field of psychiatry. Actual case-histories, for the most part, attempt to relay as impersonally as possible a situation in which the reader can never really participate. Fictional case-histories

¹⁶ Lucas, p. 19.

and works that deal with emotional deviations offer material meant to draw the reader into a participatory experience with the total work of art. It is through this merging of consciousnesses--the reader's and the author's--that the novel becomes a vital and meaningful part of our human totality. Grossvogel maintains that " . . . though there is no phenomenal object to provide the term of reference for a writer, there is a reader in whose consciousness parallel though unrelated memories may endure." ¹⁷

Manuel Puig concentrates his efforts on the presentation of material that will allow the reader to comprehend what he sees as a major problem--the distortion of reality through neuroses. Puig approaches the different neuroses from two angles--the dissolution of family unity with its resulting problems and the overpowering influence of media on the individual. Puig's fiction is important in that it attempts to force the reader to examine the trends in society from the standpoint of critical and deteriorating institutions. Puig's originality results from his manipulation of the cinema and other media such as the radio to explore the alienation that is so much a part of modern life. He points out man's inability to

¹⁷ David I. Grossvogel, Limits of the Novel: Evolution of a Form from Chaucer to Robbe-Grillet (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 268.

readapt or remove himself from the conventionalized images constantly imposed on him by radio and films. The author has only written three novels, La traición de Rita Hayworth (1968), Boquitas pintadas (1969) and The Buenos Aires Affair (1973), but an examination of the author's manipulation of character formation with reference to Freudian analysis and the role of media influence in these novels will indicate that Manuel Puig's work merits reading and critical evaluation.

CHAPTER II

La traición de Rita Hayworth

La traición de Rita Hayworth delves into the conscious and subconscious configuration of one character's mind--José Luis Casals, commonly called Toto by his family and close friends of the family. In presenting Toto, the author Manuel Puig interweaves dialogues between family and friends of the Casals, interior monologues and written pieces by Toto, his family and acquaintances. What emerges is a highly complex individual of whom the reader is not completely sure and must strive to understand and complete in his own mind. Alfred J. MacAdam in his study of La traición comments that "In reality, La traición has no protagonist in the usual sense of the term so that it is impossible for us to identify with any of the characters."¹⁸ But Manuel Puig suggests in his interview with Saúl Sosnowski that he had a protagonist in mind when he mentions "De ese modo el lector debía repetir la experiencia del protagonista. . . ." ¹⁹ By any criteria, Toto is indeed the base around which the entire novel revolves and is therefore very much a

¹⁸ Alfred J. MacAdam, "Manuel Puig's Chronicles of Provincial Life," Revista Hispánica Moderna, 36 (1970-71): 51.

¹⁹ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 72.

protagonist. Thus Toto is of prime importance in the novel. It is no accident that Toto invariably appears in every dialogue, in every interior monologue and in every written subsection of the novel, even in the diaries and the anonymous letter sent to the director of the boarding school.

Through Toto the reader begins his voyage into the realms of rural consciousness. Professor Rodríguez Monegal perceptively points out that "it is in the character of Toto that Manuel Puig explores most searchingly the undercurrent of frustration of the slow poisoning of the romantic imagination by films and books, of total alienation."²⁰ Puig, exclusively interested in Toto and his surroundings, gives the reader in his interview with Saúl Sosnoski an idea of the main focus in the novel. He says "A mí me interesaba que sobre todo esos personajes que yo había conocido en mi infancia me entregaran sus secretos, su intimidad. Tenía muchos datos de ellos pero nunca se puede conocer del todo a un personaje, se puede intentar reconstruirlo de algún modo...."²¹ Puig's interest in the intimacies of his characters are revealed by their connection with Toto,

²⁰ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "A Literary Myth Exploded," Review 72 (Winter 71/Spring 72), p. 62.

²¹ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 72.

and so any attempt to penetrate the innermost secrets of these beings will necessarily start with Toto.

Professor MacAdam in his provocative study of La traición provides the key to one approach to the work in his statement that "The author's interest (aside from his desire to delineate personalities) is divided between sociology and psychology." ²² Puig's development of Toto is primarily an investigation into the two major psychic elements of Toto's personality; (1) the frustration of his sexual urges and (2) the social pressures that dominate his world and their clash with his attachment to the cinema and its make-believe world. Clearly, the elements of cinematic influences and sexual leanings are inextricably intertwined and continuously blend and separate Toto's consciousness so that his personality is in a constant state of flux. But of the two, Toto's tie to the cinema surfaces as the element from which all manifestations of his personality ultimately emanate.

The cinema is a social process, and like all social processes it tends to reflect man's values at a particular time in history. At the same time it forges and reinforces the existing values. Man has no conception of values when he is born. Everything that he is and everything that he

²² MacAdam, p. 58.

will imitate consist to a large degree on what he absorbs in the formative years of his life. As Walcutt says "Man is perhaps not 'naturally' anything; his sense of self is that he thinks about the world and his place in it, and this is not a product of nature but of society and culture."²³ This is where Toto's problems begin. His mother's addiction to the movies and her attraction to the media surfaces in the dialogue between Mita's mother, her sister Clara and a friend, Violeta. Violeta mentions that "el marido de Mita es idéntico a Carlos Palau, siempre lo dije."²⁴ Carlos is a famous movie star whom Mita once dated. Moments later, when Violeta has left and Mita's sister Adela has entered, Mita again is the subject of the conversation:

Hoy Violeta no hizo más que
criticar a Mita, porque Mita tenía
la locura del cine. . . .
Que Mita tenía la manía del cine
y que siempre hace su capricho y se
casó con Berto que es igual a un
artista de cine. (p. 20)

Two aspects of this dialogue stand out. First, Mita's preference for the cinema appears in a past tense, and the reader soon discovers that Mita, like her family,

²³ Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask. Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 4.

²⁴ Manuel Puig, La traición de Rita Hayworth, (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1971), p. 11. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear within the text.

has not lost her interest in the movies. Second, no one denies the accusations made leading the reader to suppose that there exists an element of truth to Violeta's conjecture that Mita was attracted to Berto because of his resemblance to Carlos or some other movie idol. Vallejos being a small town with little excitement, Mita takes whatever leisure time she has for her favorite pastime--going to the movies. Her husband, not fond of the cinema and too busy worrying about his financial affairs, does not accompany her. Thus it is that Toto becomes her companion on these outings. The overall effect on Toto of this early exposure to the type of drama and literature his mother enjoys becomes apparent in his opening monologue.

Toto is six years old at the time of his first interior monologue but already manifests the effects of the constant exposure to the motion pictures his mother forces upon him. Toto prefers particular movies only because they are the ones that his mother enjoys and discusses with him. Together they draw pictures of the artists in the movies and color them. Toto's collection pinpoints the preference for the sentimental romance with an abundant supply of dancing and singing. The favorite is El gran Ziegfeld, and Toto refers to it constantly: "... a la siesta me va a hacer otra cinta, la dan este jueves y es la cinta más linda de bailes que

dice mamá que vio unas fotos y es de más lujo que todas las otras." (p. 39) Toto's judgment of the piece comes directly from his mother, so that his final estimation of the film is pre-determined. As the date for the showing of the film approaches, Toto is still considering it from the point of view of his mother's evaluation, " . . . pero en los cartoncitos mamá dice que la cinta que más lujosa va a quedar es El gran Ziegfeld que por fin la van a dar el jueves." (p. 44) There are exceptions to Toto's predetermined choices, and one is the film of sea life which Mita tries to edit for Toto by telling him not to watch certain portions. The boy, his curiosity whetted, disobeys and watches the carnivorous plant devour the fish. Once exposed to the films, Toto reacts by associating segments of the plot with his own flow of conscious and subconscious thoughts.

One of the ways he associates is merely to fantasize and combine reality with the cinematic world to produce a vague, undefined never-never land which allows him to explore his growing awareness of the world, its dangers and delights. In one particular instance, Toto merges warnings received from the servant with the need to urinate to create a romantic melodrama. Felisa, the servant, has told the boy of gypsies' habit of kidnapping children. Toto's need to visit the bathroom puts him in a predicament because he is used to going with his

mother to the ladies' room. However, Mita is working and therefore unable to attend the show. Toto attends the benefit with his father who apparently does not wish to be bothered with Toto's condition. Out of this situation Toto develops the following jumbled scene:

. . . 'un gitano malo cara de carbón con brazo peludo que roba a los chicos que están bien vestidos y se han escapado', porque yo un día me escapé solo a la plaza. Una puerta abierta en el corredor y yo me asomé pero no era el baño, los chicos más grandes se están disfrazando para el número de la gavota y colgada en la percha no alcanzo a agarrar una careta rosa ¿cuál de los chicos se la pondrá? ¿un chico o una chica? La luz está prendida en el baño de las mujeres es como el baño de casa pero no hay bañadera ¿y la nena alcanza a la luz? la luz ya estaba prendida, y la nena no cerró la puerta, me puedo escapar, Felisa ¿detrás de la puerta? el gitano pone a un chico en la bolsa y en la calle no se dan cuenta pero un policía lo mete en el calabozo porque sabe que es un gitano, sí, pero el gitano se pone la careta rosa y le dice 'en la bolsa llevo un gato rabioso con sarna' y si el chico gritó en ese momento cuando el gitano después lo suelta donde están las carpas de los gitanos? (pp. 33-34)

In the scene Toto's mind wanders to the door, lights, his escape, kidnapping by the gypsy, near rescue by a policeman, treachery of the gypsy, and final revenge of the gypsy. The whole episode is a mini-serial in which tension builds up with every passing association Toto infuses in his ever-widening story-remembrance. It is a well-constructed drama that provides evidence to the

reader that Toto is rapidly becoming familiar with the dangers outside his intimate world of family and friends. The associative process here casually hints at a problem which later develops between Toto and his father but, more than anything, allows Toto to give free rein to his subconscious fears (the outside world) and delights (the rosy mask and the show itself).

In another burst of cinematic association, Toto works with the childish fantasy of heroes and mythical worlds. On this occasion, Toto extracts the essence of the Shirley Temple films: "Shirley Temple es chiquita pero es artista y es siempre buena, que la quieren mucho. . . ." (p. 44) Toto is of course associating himself with Shirley because he is small, not only in age but also in size, and because he intuitively sides with the good. His imagination takes over and creates a situation in which he can be a romantic hero for his friend and idol, Shirley.

Y atada a un carro cerca de los caballos
está la Shirley Temple. Pero yo no
soy un pescadito malo, yo soy un
pescadito bueno y le desato la soga y
la Shirley Temple se escapa. Porque
yo voy a ser bueno como la Shirley.
(p. 45)

The process employed by Toto here is more complex. In the sea film mentioned earlier the small fish were eaten by a carnivorous plant as a result of their wandering into its trap. "Yo en vez de bajar la vista miré porque

en el agua clarita del fondo del mar esos pelo [sic] como serpentinas que flotan se juntan de golpe y los pescaditos que van pasando por entre esos pelos quedan agarrados."

(p. 41) Bad boys, like bad fish, rush into the hands of the waiting kidnapping gypsy. Toto has imagined himself earlier as a bad boy who escapes from the girl who accompanies him and thus is metamorphosized into a fish and dropped into a fish tank where a plant or, metaphorically, a gypsy can capture him. His negation of his bad boy status results from his strong identification with the cinematic representation of Shirley Temple.

But a little boy's fears of the boogie man and simple hero worship through imitative identification are not all Toto can manage when it comes to combining the cinema and his life. Equally adept at modifying mature movies and roles to his own particular style with its applicable ending, he takes a Louise Rainer movie ending and restructures it:

. . . y mucho mejor sería que en eso suena el timbre y Luisa Rainer va a abrir y es uno que cree que se equivocó de puerta, que es el tío de Alicita, pero Luisa Rainer está tan cansada después de levantarse a hablar por teléfono que se desmaya ahí mismo en la puerta, y él entra y la levanta y llama en seguida al mandadero del hotel, porque están en un hotel de lujo. . . . (p. 75)

First, Toto resuscitates Louise Rainer from a very sudden demise in the picture because he dislikes her replacement

as protagonist, Myrna Loy. Next, he introduces a real life person into the drama and projects himself into the picture in a role not found in the movie. To do this, he changes the setting of Louise Rainer's habitat from a private dwelling to a hotel where a bellboy would be handy and inconspicuous. All of this indicates a marked manipulation of the cinema through his associations with the reality that surrounds him.

Even more emphatic is the boy's fusion of the motion picture with his reality when it involves a deep-seated problem area. Here the associations are directly related to the character's reaction to his environment and family relationships. In the situation that develops when the three, Berto, Mita, and Toto, see the only picture they ever see together, Sangre y arena, starring Tyrone Power and Rita Hayworth, the reader can easily penetrate the associations that provide the basis for the title and the novel. Thinking of the character played by Rita Hayworth, Toto reveals

Y a veces pone cara de mala, es una artista linda pero que hace traiciones . . . que si pasan Alicita y la madre yo quería que lo vieran a papá que estaba todo vestido con la camisa blanca y el traje azul marino que nunca se pone, y la cara linda sin la barba y el pelo con gomina. Y ya se lo estaba por decir . . . pero en la esquina del cine estaban los empleados del negocio y lo empecé a tironear a papá pero agarró para donde estaban ellos. . . . Voy a escribir en letras grandes R. de Rita y H.

en letras grandes, le dibujo de fondo
 un peinetón y algunas castañuelas.
 Pero en Sangre y arena traiciona al
 muchacho bueno. No quiero dibujar
 R. H. en letras grandes. (p. 81-82)

From this passage one can sense Toto's desire to see his father in a more appealing or cinematic pose. He mentions that his father never dresses elegantly and from what follows the reader realizes that Berto shaves irregularly and only reluctantly applies hairgrooming aids. This can only be a source of conflict to the boy accustomed to seeing handsome, well-dressed, clean-shaven movie actors singing and dancing across the stage.

Hayworth's role in the picture introduces the theme of betrayal, but in Toto's mind the betrayal involves his failure to impress Alicita and her mother with his idea of what a father should look like. To Toto this failure comes from Berto's refusal to eat in the restaurant and his decision to talk with friends about sports. Thus, Berto comes to play Rita's part in Toto's microcosm. This point is further reinforced when Toto refuses to draw the letters of Rita Hayworth and mentions her betrayal of the good boy. Toto has already determined this good boy status with his identification of Shirley Temple. Furthermore, Tyrone Power's role of a thwarted lover has been taken over by Toto. In concrete terms, the relationship of a woman abandoning her lover in the movies has been superimposed on that of a father's

completely severing the boy's cinematic illusions of fatherhood.

Toto's use of the cinema to cloak and metamorphosize reality into fiction is not a fool-proof system. He may imagine, convert, and even engage in massive wishful thinking, but the harshness and confrontation cannot be postponed indefinitely. Toto can not completely shield himself from the intrusions of the world. He must cope with each wound as best he can. When Luisito kicks him at the birthday party, Toto faces the double humiliation of having Alicita witness his tears and the knowledge that he is completely helpless to defend himself. He is also painfully aware that his father will be angered by his passiveness. Berto lets him know he should have struck back, to which Toto wisely and intuitively adds subconsciously " . . . debe ser cuando Luisito está mirando para otro lado, en la barriga, y la puerta preparada para correr ¿y cuándo me ve otra vez a la salida de inglés?" (p. 74) The plan must remain inactive for no one knows better than Toto that any action on his part would be futile. Later, his reminiscence of the shameful scene that Alicita observed produces a fantastical flight: "y no se dio vuelta? me subo a una palmera? . . . y salto de un techo al otro y con una sogá del companario pego el envión y volando sin sudar llegar hasta La Plata a ver la vidriera de los

juguetes. . . ." (p. 89) But Toto is aware that his escape is a temporary expedient. Just as in his restructuring of the Louise Rainer picture in which he admits that the bellboy "ve que Luisa Rainer tiene los ojos llenos de lágrimas: es que el tío de Alicita se ha ido, y ya no vuelve más, porque ahora la tía de Alicita tuvo un nene y él no puede ir más a lo de Luisa Rainer después del Banco porque es casado." (pp. 76-77) The fictionalized world must necessarily vanish and the external world with all its banality and responsibility will reappear.

But Toto is not just a sentimental boy who spends all his time daydreaming without any awareness of what occurs around him. MacAdam says that "Toto's intelligence is also understanding: not only does he assimilate information but he is also capable of intuition." ²⁵ But more than that, he responds with cinematic re-creation to situations through an association with the choreographic movies. His strongest insights deal with affective behavior; at least that is the predominant characteristic in the two interior monologues. The pecadillos and most frequent occurrences of the romantic melodrama he sees are those dealing with lying and love situations. It is these to which Toto responds best.

²⁵ MacAdam, p. 54.

Thus, he is capable of inventing lies, is keenly aware of them and receives personal enjoyment from masquerading or distorting the truth. In re-creating his conversation with Felisa he says, "Y la Felisa 'contame la cinta de bailes' y le dije mentiras. . . . La Felisa se cree todo y es mentira. . . ." (pp. 37-38) He is not only aware of his own falsehoods but also penetrates other people's attempts to mislead him with false information. Of Alicita's latest behavior he thinks "Pero si Alicita no está en penitencia me quedo sin jugar con ella hasta las tres. Alicita dice siempre que la ponen en penitencia y por eso no puede jugar, pero un día era mentira porque la madre le guiñaba un ojo." (p. 72) The fact that Alicita lies does not seem particularly to bother Toto. He accepts that facet of her personality as easily as he accepts the changing reflection of sunlight on her hair. Adroit at handling fiction himself, it is not expecially surprising that he views other made-up stories as natural or even commonplace.

In the same way, he reacts to situations demanding a demonstration of love with the proper attitude. When Mita's second child dies of a respiratory malfunction, Toto, overcome with grief, succumbs to the supposedly unmanly action of crying. Mita rationalizes his sentiment by saying "Pero el Toto llora porque tiene el entendimiento de un grande." (p. 144) Closer to the truth is the

fact that Toto is associating with a particular film, as Mita herself reveals when she states of Toto, ". . . y el Toto me dice 'si se muere es como en Hasta que la muerte nos separe, que se le muere el nenito recién nacido de Barbara Stanwick . . .'" (p. 138)

The same could be said of the parting scene between Johann Strauss and Carla Donner. In Toto's reworking of The Great Waltz, Carla, after her informative discussion with Strauss' wife, decides that it would be better for Strauss to sever their relationship when the musician is at the height of his career. There is nothing wrong with Poldi's argument nor is it particularly unusual. What strikes the reader is the heroic sacrifice of Carla so typical of third rate melodramas; but then they are Toto's specialty, complete with the bittersweet ending. The boy's assimilation of movie values is so complete it is hard to tell when he has made a perceptive judgment based on intelligent evaluation and when he has merely copied a similar situation he has seen on the screen.

Morello Frosch explains that in Puig's novel "the real world of films and their re-creation constitute but another mere fiction, a fiction alien to the characters themselves, thus intensifying their isolation and inability to escape themselves."²⁶ Actually, in

²⁶ Marta Morello Frosch, "The New Art of Narrating Films," Review 72 (Winter 71/Spring 72), p. 52.

Toto's case, the real world seems more of a fiction than does his view of the motion picture ambiance. The external world at times appears to interrupt the well-established, predetermined system of values Toto has constructed with the aid and influence of his mother. The reader can hardly assert with complete confidence that either fiction is more real to Toto since his very existence wavers precariously between the two. Morello Frosch insists that "At no time do the characters want to be like the heroes of the screen . . . It is in this respect that we see the presence of the motion picture as a final vestige of one form of communication whose result is alienating, since this type of language is exterior and totally alien to one's experience."²⁷ On the contrary, Toto is very much interested in wanting to trade places with the heroes he observes. He identifies with Shirley Temple, he flies like Ginger Rogers dances, and he fantasizes himself into the role of Strauss. It is obvious that the films have an alienating effect, but Toto feels the world as alien, not the movies. He is at home with the screen and relates to the action on a one-to-one basis even though he modifies it a bit from time to time. His main problem results from the gap between his fiction created out of movie values and the external world's fiction created out of traditional

²⁷ Morello Frosch, p. 55.

archetypal values.

When Toto is growing up, the world's fiction is predominant and has to be confronted. Puig says in his interview with Sosnowski: "Nací en un pueblo de la pampa donde la vida era muy dura, muy difícil--diría casi de Far West--. El prestigio de la fuerza. El machismo no se cuestionaba para nada. La autoridad tenía el mayor prestigio posible. Se practicaba un catolicismo de conveniencia. Esas eran las coordenadas. La debilidad, la sensibilidad no tenían ningún prestigio. Un mundo que yo rechazé [sic]." ²⁸ Toto, like the author, attempts to reject conventionalized values. Neither set of values is absolute, but Toto eschews the values accepted as the norm. Even though both sets of values are creations of man, one becomes relegated to the inferior position of fiction, while the other is upheld as the unalterable reality. This explains why Toto seems confused and disoriented. Rodríguez Monegal suggests that "We get an image of Toto as an adolescent, rebelling against the conventions of his society, as a blasphemous young man, and at the same time as an intellectual...." ²⁹ The boy is all this, and yet the reader senses a Toto of wider domain, a child who has flashes of perceptive

²⁸ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 69.

²⁹ Rodríguez Monegal, p. 59.

awareness that all is not well, a young boy who strives to submerge himself in the stylized conventions of the day without much success. Torn between two worlds, he fits neither with any degree of permanence.

The Scottish psychologist R. D. Laing points out that "the term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relations with himself." ³⁰ This definition, superficially at least, applies to Toto's situation. There are two realities within Toto that struggle for dominance, each one containing elements that Toto sees as advantageous. As Morello Frosch states, "The film in Puig's novel is an other reality, not a refuge nor an exclusive playground for an underdeveloped imagination." ³¹ If the pictures provide one set of values for a particular reality that conflicts with another set of values provided by society for another reality, then the pictures can be seen as an alienating force in the life of Toto. The screen supposedly attempts to reflect the values inherent in the culture. But how can the movies, by

³⁰ R. D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (New York: Pelican Books, 1965), p. 17.

³¹ Morello Frosch, p. 52.

tradition a manifestation of people's dreams, goals and accomplishments, do any more alienating than the culture itself which produces the movies? Rodríguez Monegal believes that ". . . it is not the movie-going in itself that alienates, but rather that movie-going is symptomatic of alienation. Toto, for example, is not alienated by going to the movies every afternoon, but in doing so he illustrates his alienation, which has deeper causes. . . ." ³² To a certain extent this is true; however, the reader is aware that Mita began taking the boy to the show at a very early age. One either assumes that Toto feels alienated before six, which is not impossible but certainly improbable or one sees the films as the single or partial factor leading to Toto's state of isolation. Toto, because of Mita, has a definite preference for movies. His attendance and response to movies in general demonstrate that the cinema is an important factor in determining the boy's attitude toward life. The total variety of possibilities within the cinema world and the selection Toto makes indicate that other elements resulting from the cinematic influence produce the personality Toto exhibits.

Equally responsible in the formation of Toto's personality is his inability to mature sexually. This

³² Rodríguez Monegal, p. 64.

inability is caused by two main problems: his physical stature and his failure to develop a normal pattern of libidinal drives. Toto's status as a midget accounts for much of his feelings of inferiority and frustration. Toto could hardly ignore his lack of growth as everyone taunts him openly with it. In the first interior monologue, the boy reveals his displeasure with the dance number of the smaller children. It is quite obvious that his feelings are distorted by his awareness of his own shortcoming. Toto does not particularly dislike smallness in itself as evidenced by his imaginary transformation of the Ginger Roger's film into a child's fantasy dominated by an especially charming, small bird. The source for Toto's dislike comes not from being small, but from the frustration of realizing that smallness must give way to growth in order for one to be fully efficient and operative. There are certain things that require strength and courage of which Toto would like to be a part. With the exception of Shirley Temple, his heroes are grown-ups who inspire love in their partners because of their maturity and responsibility. Men earn the love and respect of women, at least in part, because of their force and protective qualities. To love and be loved, in the dramatic romantic way Toto imagines, a man must exhibit those characteristics. Toto dreams of those characteristics and would very much like to possess them.

What makes it especially difficult for Toto centers on his recognition that his situation will remain permanent. Toto can only excel in areas not requiring physical strength and continue the best way he can. Even so Toto feels an aversion for his body that subconsciously surfaces from time to time. In his adaptation of The Great Waltz he reveals, ". . . y se vuelve a detestar con más fuerza que antes todavía, él quisiera ser ese estudiante que vio bajo la glorieta, bello y fuerte para no dudar de que Carla lo va a amar."

(p. 249) Toto's attempts to ignore his problem are futile, for even the minor characters think of him in derogatory terms. Paquita demonstrates this with these words: ". . . y el Toto ya se tragó el anzuelo, enano idiota" (p. 180) Most of the characters react to Toto in a negative way; he has no friends and never seems to establish any permanent relationships with those of his age group. The hostile reactions he evokes are commonplace in the novel. What is out of the ordinary is his parents' position in regard to this matter.

Toto is under constant pressure from his father to align himself with the traditional efforts and pastimes of young boys on the verge of adolescence and manhood. Berto, very much interested in sports, would like to see his son master the art of swimming. Unfortunately, Toto's first bad experience with diving and the teacher's

roughness provide the justification for Toto to abandon swimming lessons. Berto neither forces the boy to continue nor does he cajole Toto into taking more lessons. He makes a half-hearted effort to persuade the boy that the teacher is simply interested in helping him continue in the program but fails to get the boy motivated.

Berto's most emotional and vigorous reactions surface when Toto is attacked by boys his own age. He insists that Toto return Luisito's kick. At one point he becomes quite angry when he hears of the fear Toto has for Pocho: "Berto al volver de jugar al tenis negro de rabia, 'el Pocho tiene la misma edad, el padre viene en la cancha y me dice si el Toto lo había inventado para escaparse de la clase de inglés. Y yo le dije que sí . . . y tanto lío con la crianza y ¿qué es la madre del Pocho? una empleada de tienda era, ¿y ella salió criando al chico mejor que vos?'" (p. 148) As he so often does, Berto places the blame on Mita for his son's unmanly behavior. He regards Toto's values as unworthy of his sex and accuses Mita of being solely responsible for the boy's inclination away from sports and stoicism to movie fantasies and maudlin sentiment. "' . . . la culpa es tuya si el chico no aprende que los hombres no lloran' Berto cada vez que lloramos 'y vos mocoño un poco de obediencia a tu padre que no te quiere ver llorar

más' y tiene razón porque él y el Héctor se las aguantan" (p. 144)

The reader, however, knows that Berto's accusations are only partially true since Tete, Toto's cousin, in her interior monologue, has already laid at least part of the blame for Toto's ways on Berto's refusal to punish Toto "Y no le pegaron porque Berto no la dejó a Mita que le pegara . . . que al Toto me dijo la Paqui nunca nunca lo retan porque es el mejor de todo el colegio y no rompe nada y come todo y nunca está enfermo. . . . Berto le dijo que no iba a jugar más a la tienda y a pintar vestidos y caras. . . ." (pp. 109-11) Tete's recollection reveals several things about the father. First, Berto interferes with Mita's intended discipline and therefore is partly responsible for the boy's continued interest in dolls. Second, Berto's leniency is based on his concern for his son's intellectual progress. It is a source of pride for the father. Third, Berto knows all along that Toto has been playing with and coloring dresses. This is in direct contrast with his statement in the discarded letter of 1933 in which he expresses a desire to supervise the upbringing of the boy, "así lo puede criar bien como yo quiero. . . ." (p. 291) Berto's desire never comes about, and he discards his role to Mita. Completely abandoned by his father, Toto can only turn to his mother.

In so doing the child realizes that his mother's

attitude toward his physical appearance is unclear at best and contradictory at worst. Mita, like Berto, defends her son from the standpoint of his grades at school. In her reply to Berto's remark that Pocho is a better child because he is more rowdy she says, "¡qué mejor, qué mejor no hay que ser injustos, no hay que decir lo que no es, no hay que mentir, no hay que mentir! el Toto vale más que todos juntos, los chicos de Vallejos, pero si alguien vale todos lo odian, . . . el Pocho le tiene envidia porque el Toto es el mejor de la clase . . ." (p. 148) She also rationalizes her son's behavior with an adult comprehension and sensitivity, ". . . pero el Toto llora porque tiene el entendimiento de un grande." (p. 144) That suffices for the moment because Mita is feeling despondent after the loss of her second child.

Mita's compassion for her son and her lip service to his superior understanding only go so far. She acknowledges that Tete's father is right when he suggests that Toto spends too much time with the girls. After the incident in which Toto is discovered in the chicken house with little girl's playthings, Mita burns all the colored drawings she and Toto had made of the films. Then, later, upon recalling the scene, she attributes her actions to motives of anger at other people rather than shame or indignation with Toto for playing with dolls, "Fuera

de quicio por esa mocosa de la Teté, al resumidero fueron a parar los cartoncitos de antes, ¿o fue por las peleas con el Héctor?" (p. 137) Before the monologue is over Mita plans to reconstruct new drawings for Toto. Mita ignores good advice she knows would benefit her son's upbringing and continues to provide the means which help produce the personality configuration that she subconsciously abhors in Toto.

In her reconstruction of the time before Toto's stunted growth became obvious, she dreams of a very distinct Toto ". . . y me crece y crece y de un verano para otro ya nadie lo reconoce, que se hizo grande, como el Héctor la misma cara de Héctor, y los hombros son como troncos de árbol, los hombros del Héctor, que no creo que en Vallejos haya otro más lindo entre los muchachos. . . ." (p. 149) Mita clearly admires her nephew more than her own son because of his physique. Even in arguments between Toto and Héctor, Mita seems aloof, almost negligent. In one quarrel Mita hears ". . . y el Toto 'vos porque no lo conociste y porque vos sos un animal' y el Héctor 'y vos maricón mientras llorás te creés que estás en una película. . . .'" (p. 140) Strong language in both boys, but there is quite a difference in calling someone an animal and calling someone a homosexual particularly in this region where manhood is so esteemed, yet Mita accepts this calmly referring to the episode as an ordinary fight

in spite of the fact that Héctor's insult is much more severe and is directed at her own son. If there is proof of Héctor's labeling or if there is not, her immediate reaction borders on indifference.

Mita does not feel indifference, however, but a controlled fury that lies beneath the surface, visible only in sudden revelations, as in the case when she projects the type of boy her second son would have been had he lived: ". . . con él sí que iba a estar contento Berto, no con este flojo, con este . . . gallina del Toto. . . ." (p. 145) At times her fury explodes into verbal expression directed at her son. Her friend Delia recalls "Que no crece el Toto siempre quejándose Mita, 'mocoso de mierda ¿por qué no creces?' le decía en la cara al nene, y el nene se fue a lección de piano. . . ." (p. 119) Crushed and humiliated by his mother, Toto cannot help but feel small both physically and psychically. These feelings naturally play a major role in his sexual growth.

The problems that Toto has with his world and the cinema's and with his aberrant physical growth are matched in intensity only by the tremendous impact that sexual frustration has on his personality. Emir Rodríguez Monegal points out that "Sexual frustration is the instrument which Manuel Puig uses to denote all the basic

myths from the ones of the family to those of society." 33

In speaking of his novels, Manuel Puig affirms that "El tema de represión sexual creo que es muy evidente." 34

In spite of Toto's supposedly mature understanding, the reader is immediately aware of his lack of information about the most elementary aspects of sexual activities. It is no surprise that Paquita has to blurt out the word "fornication" to Toto to begin the mock game of seduction or rape and even then Toto has no idea to what she is referring. After all, he is only six when this happens. But Teté's remark, when Toto is nine, ". . . y Toto no sabe un pepino, que es un poco más chico que nosotras pero todos los varones saben esas cosas aunque sean de primero inferior, pero el Toto tiene nueve años y todavía cree en la cigüeña, él no dice nada pero se calla," (p. 98) is somewhat unusual. Toto, in the interior monologue of 1942, confirms Teté's suspicions when he imagines Raúl and the first year teacher having a baby

Y piden un nene, ella se pone a rezar a Santa Teresita para que le haga tener un nene, y no sabe si va a venir o no, y el viaje es largo que no se termina nunca, y por ahí ella ve que se le empieza a poner grande

33 Rodríguez Monegal, p. 61.

34 Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 79.

la barriga que se le está llenando de leche que le va a dar al nene, y una mañana se siente mal de tanta barriga que tiene y le dan mareos y Raúl García la cuida, y trata de consolarla que ella no da más del viaje tan largo, siempre en ese bote salvavidas, y están en eso cuando oyen un nene que llora, y se miran entre ellos . . . y lo manda a él a que busque al nene, que Dios lo ha dejado escondidito adentro de una sogá arrollada. . . .

He knows little about sexual reproduction and he is reluctant to learn.

Y me empezó a explicar que querían decir óvulos y genitales y líquido del macho y todo el nacimiento porque estaban dibujados unos racimitos amarillos y un lío de cañitos de aquí y de allá. . . . Y la maestra '¿entendés lo que te digo?' y yo 'sí' y no entendía nada porque me puse a pensar en otra cosa a propósito y ni le oía lo que decía . . . que me aburrió . . . y para mis adentros le decía 'escorchona', que me explotaba la cabeza de tanto hacer fuerzas para pensar en otra cosa. (pp. 70-71)

His lack of knowledge, even at nine years, is a manifestation of his preference for the cinema, which at the time was hardly risqué or even particularly informative about sexual matters, and of his lack of boyhood friends. His only friends are girls, and even though they try to give a few details, Toto remains ignorant of basic sexual matters. The family also fails to teach Toto fundamental material.

The key figure here is the father and his relationship with his son. Professor MacAdam, speaking of the

letter Berto wrote and the importance of placing it at the end of the novel suggests "However, none of this has any direct bearing on the book's dramatic action, and more importantly, it has nothing to do with the creation of a plot." ³⁵ But the author himself explains "Yo creo que toda la clave de la novela está en la ausencia del padre." ³⁶ Early in the novel, the reader encounters everyone except the one person whom Toto desperately needs. Of course the reader hears about him and forms a vague idea of what he is like through the other characters, but he never reaches a consciousness level of awareness of the man. In this way the reader, just as much as Toto, is looking for the father. Puig says "El lector re-vive la experiencia del protagonista que es la búsqueda de una figura que no está en ninguna parte y que recién se da al final." ³⁷

The search is obvious from the beginning where the reader discovers the conflict between the boy's image of a father and the father's true nature. Toto's expectations are created by the screen projections of fathers. Toto's father, on the other hand, does not correspond with the ideal father. He is handsome and could presumably

³⁵ MacAdam, p. 51.

³⁶ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 72.

³⁷ Ibid.

improve his image, but Berto worries too much about his business to care about his appearance. Toto is ecstatic when Berto accompanies him and Mita to Sangre y arena, because his father has taken on the desired semblance. Yet Toto fails in his effort to make permanent or even extend the time in which Berto corresponds to his mental picture. Berto unwittingly refuses to become an object of his son's admiration and in a sense destroys the only link Toto could possibly establish with him. Furthermore, Berto is unable to construct any relationship with his son. The letter Berto writes in 1933 presents a very understanding, typical father, but the reader, like Toto, finds most of this information contradictory if not completely fallacious. For Berto, Toto is "un negrito precioso." He writes of his preoccupation with the future of the boy and insists

Pienso cuando el mío empieza el colegio,
aunque yo tenga que salir a asaltar
a la gente por la calle le voy a dar
todo lo que necesite para estudiar,
y que tenga su título, después
posiblemente le va a parecer que
el padre es poco para él, hay hijos
que dan muy mal pago, pero no me
importa, así se va a salvar de la
lucha infame que tuvo el padre, la
verdad Jaime es que no le deseo a
nadie la lucha que estoy teniendo,
sin ningún arma, las uñas nomás.
(p. 293)

Actually Mita pays the bills, finances Toto's education and provides for the family. The only battle on Berto's hands involves people disturbing his nap. Still Berto

has a fairly good impression of himself, rationalizing his failures by blaming his life style on his older brother who inconveniently withdrew him from school and put him to work.

Berto's views of his patriarchal position clash violently with the attitude Toto has of his father. In the sad culmination of the Louise Rainer scene, Toto projects his sentiments in this manner: ". . . y el mandaderito llora todas las noches, bien despacito para que el padrastro nervioso no se despierte y le grite. . . ." (p. 77) Not only is this person a tyrant, he is also not a real father to Toto; Toto has disassociated him from the family. It is obvious why Toto has done this. Unavailable to Toto during his demanding naps and inconsistent with Toto's image of the father figure, Berto has no functional part in Toto's life or childhood background. The psychologist Sigmund Freud in his analysis of Three Theories of Sex states that

Among the occidental factors that influence object-choice we have found that frustration (in the form of an early deterrence, by fear, from sexual activity) deserves attention, and we have observed that the presence of both parents plays an important part. The absence of a strong father in childhood not infrequently favours the occurrence of inversion.³⁸

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Trans. and ed. James Strachey, VII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 146.

Berto is absent in the sense that he is inaccessible to Toto at all times. The fact that Mita supports the family in an environment of machismo indicates that Berto is not a strong, dominant father. The inversion which this situation favors can be seen in Toto.

To begin with, Toto senses he must replace Berto with someone who can protect him. He first adopts a father in his version of the Louise Rainer story:

Y corre y lo abraza y le da un beso
fuerte en los cachetes al hombre que
tiene esa cara linda de bueno bien
afeitado, bien peinado con gomina,
y le dice ' no voy más con mi padrastro!'
(p. 76)

He rejects the unattractive father he has, relegating Berto to a nonfunctional step-father role and supplants him with a meticulous bank employee, financially secure and able to protect him from danger. To do this he constructs another fantasy romance a la Nelson Eddy-Jeanette McDonald with just himself and the uncle.

. . . él no debe tener miedo a los
truenos ni refucilos como los leñadores
o de la policía montada del Canadá, que
lindo irnos a vivir a una cabaña, porque
con la fuerza que tiene puede matar a
los osos y si yo me quedo en el trineo
desmayado en la nieve viene y me salva
y en la cabaña tiene preparado un cóctel
de cerveza con sándwiches que trajimos
del pueblo, y yo le cuento todo como es
Buenos Aires. . . . (p. 84)

The inversion here is clear, with Toto assuming the female role, clinging to the strong male in a scene of implicit erotic fantasy. But Toto is not what Sigmund

Freud calls an absolute invert; he merely is searching subconsciously for someone to fill a need he desperately feels. His choice falls on Alicita's uncle because he combines Toto's cinema expectations with the ability to defend, hold and shelter Toto from the world.

One can hardly deny that there are latent inversion tendencies in Toto, but the case is not clear-cut. Some ten pages later Toto again fantasizes about the uncle with a slightly different twist in the fantasy. In a mystic extravaganza Toto creates this vivid impression of their union:

. . . y en brazos me tiene contra el pecho y me tiene bien fuerte para que nadie me arranque de un tirón, y mejor todavía sería que nos quedáramos pegados, porque entonces nadie puede tironearme para otro lado y arrancarme, entonces voy a estar pegado al pecho de él y por ahí sin que se de cuenta me paso para adentro del pecho del tío de Alicita, que ya no nos separa más nadie, porque voy a estar adentro de él como el alma está adentro del cuerpo, yo voy a estar al lado de él, envuelto en el alma de él. (p. 94)

This is a complicated superstructure for a boy of ten, but it reveals that Toto wants to be an integral part of whatever impressions the uncle has made upon him. He literally has become the uncle, body and soul. Professor MacAdam, using Freudian psychology, analyzes the union in this manner.

The practical result of this fusion is that Toto can kiss Alicita (she had refused him before), but the spiritual

result is that Toto assimilates the idealized figure of his own father (who is not among the saved) to have his mother to himself. His mother's role is assumed here by Alicita, a female image who softens an otherwise too real Oedipal picture. In sexual terms, however, the situation is not Oedipal because the relationship between the boy and his mother simply opens the door of the real sexual drama: the blending of Toto and Alicita's uncle. It is he, beginning with his appearance in "The Great Ziegfeld," who is the object of Toto's fantasies, it is he who receives kisses there and it is he who saves Toto (in this case physical contact is a metaphor for sexual union.) ³⁹

There are several problems with this analysis. The idea that Toto's fantasy incorporates a need to have his mother to himself seems contradictory because that is precisely Toto's problem--that he has his mother all to himself; he goes everywhere with her, discusses movies with her, and spends a large part of his time drawing and coloring with her. Spiritually, what he lacks and wants is a father, not a mother. The implication that the kisses, in an earlier scene, create the situation for the metaphorical sexual union of Toto and the uncle has no basis in the novel. The kisses that Professor MacAdam refers to are given on the cheek and are those of a newly-adopted son who has just rejected his former step-father. The earlier scene deals specifically with the love of

³⁹ MacAdam, p. 57.

Louise Rainer and the uncle. Only incidentally does it concern Toto and then symbolically as a boy in search of a father figure. In this scene, which incorporates Alicita, her uncle, and Toto, the uncle becomes a bridge between Toto and Alicita. Toto becomes interested in the uncle as an approach to Alicita. Finally, the scene culminates with an expansion of Toto's imaginary deception and enjoyment of Alicita. Toto's union with the uncle seems more inspired by a desire to take advantage of Alicita than it does by a sexual interest in the uncle, though one cannot deny that there are very peculiar characteristics in the boy. The situation here indicates that Toto has some very conflicting drives within his personality. Professor Morello Frosch has labeled Toto a potential homosexual, and Professor MacAdam, at least in substance, apparently finds enough evidence to support tentatively a similar attitude. Freud, who so impressed Manuel Puig, provides key remarks that shed some light on Toto's personality.

Speaking of the possible types of inverts, Freud makes three general classifications:

(a) They may be absolute inverts. In that case their sexual objects are exclusively of their own sex. Persons of the opposite sex are never the object of their sexual desire, but leave them cold, or even arouse sexual aversion in them. . . .

(b) They may be amphigenic inverts, that is psychosexual hermaphrodites. In that case their sexual objects may

equally well of their own or of the opposite sex. This kind of inversion thus lacks the characteristic of exclusiveness.

(c) They may be contingent inverts. In that case, under certain external conditions--of which inaccessibility of any normal sexual object and imitation are the chief--they are capable of taking as their sexual object someone of their own sex and of deriving satisfaction from sexual intercourse with him. ⁴⁰

The remarks Freud gives on sexual deviations help only so far as the reader can manipulate the subconscious and conscious mind of Toto. This is especially difficult in Toto's case because both of the interior monologues reveal a boy who has scarcely reached puberty and because his sexual development is abnormally influenced by cinema fantasy and interfering social conventions. In the time period given, from six to fourteen years, and with the information available in the novel, the reader can reasonably eliminate the first type of inversion, the absolute, as a model for Toto. He takes an interest in girls and there is no evidence that he explicitly desires boys sexually. The other two areas, amphigenic and contingent, may or may not apply. They would only apply if Toto had chosen an object of his own sex for sexual activity.

⁴⁰ Freud, pp. 136-37.

That Toto has a problem with normal development is clear. Likewise, it is clear that Freud serves as a base for his presentation. Herminia says of Toto ". . . cada vez me hace recordar mas a ese antipático invertido, que está muy afeminado de modales." (p. 284) Whether it can be classified or fully explored or not, Toto does have a problem that is partially recognizable by other characters as well as the reader. In fact, he even makes a separation of male-female roles himself: ". . . pero yo me escondo en el baño de las mujeres y la nena me alcanza y de penitencia me pone una pollerita por haberme metido en el baño de las mujeres. . . ." (p. 46) The boy realizes he should not be in the ladies bathroom and receives punishment for it. But this conscious knowledge is not incorporated in his instinctive drives. When his cousin Teté and her parents come to visit, Toto is approximately nine years old. Yet even at that age Toto is not concerned with anatomical differences or functions. Teté recalls about Toto: ". . . no quería bañarse, pero después quiso si es que íbamos a jugar en la bañadera mientras Mita lo bañaba pero papi no quiso porque el Toto es varón." (p. 108) As he grows older, Toto becomes aware of the dichotomy that exists within him. He senses the role he must play to be accepted by society while at the same time he is attracted to the totally masculine individual he wants to imitate.

In striving to achieve some harmony between the two, he lies about his involvements with the opposite sex, disappears in Héctor's shadow, becomes intensely dependent upon hero worship and fantasizes about his own heterosexual relationships. Struggling to maintain his outward attraction for girls, he ends up by becoming a go-between for his cousin Héctor. He tells Esther, "Nada, mi primo ya te va a decir lo demás, vas a aprender mucho con él." (p. 230) His role as go-between becomes increasingly difficult because the girls tire quickly of his tagging along and sometimes give him a tongue-lashing. Esther, in one of her more vindictive moods, scornfully says ". . . te creés gran cosa y sos un mocosito maricón todo el día metido entre las chicas ¿y a qué tanto hablar de Adhemar? ¿estás enamorado de él acaso? andá sabiendo que nunca vas a ser como Adhemar porque no sos más que un mariconcito charlatán." (p. 234) Esther guesses that Toto would like to be more like Adhemar since the latter has such outstanding features. His desire to look like Adhemar so overpowers him that he finds it almost impossible to separate his wishful thinking from fact. He tells Herminia when she asks who the blond in the picture is, "Me daba vergüenza decirte pero resulta que es el más buen mozo del colegio y una chica me dijo que yo me parecía a él, y que al llegar a quinto año yo voy a ser como él." (p. 285) Clearly, Herminia is not

blind and could easily tell for herself whether there is any resemblance, but Toto is so intent on believing it himself that he ignores this fact. He also turns Esther's statement into one that is more harmonious with his subconscious desires.

The most interesting of his attempts to control and harmonize his dual internal conflict is the fantasy creation of The Great Waltz. In this creation, Toto begins a metamorphosis that takes him from his conflicting world to a position of glory and sexual satisfaction, the two elements so lacking in his everyday environment. Toto has written a school composition on the relationship between Johann Strauss and Carla Donner, loosely based on the motion picture The Great Waltz. In the beginning, the account is fairly objective, utilizing the third person narrative:

La última pareja está ya por abandonar
el local vasto, la modorra ha conquistado
su última víctima cuando un violinista
de la orquesta, joven e impetuoso,
ejecutando el último compás de la
partitura no deja caer su arco y guiñando
el ojo a un oboísta rollizo ataca un
nuevo compás, repiqueteante, alegre
y rápido. (p. 239)

Gradually, Johann begins to change, imperceptibly at first, into a figure whose consciousness closely resembles the parallel consciousness of Toto. Upon being knocked down by Hagenbruhl, Johann tries to find the means to fight back ". . . trata de sacar fuerzas de

flaquezas y busca con la vista entre la concurrencia una señal de apoyo, o tal vez busca un cuchillo afilado sobre una de las mesas para suplir la fuerza limitada de sus puños. . . ." (p. 243) This scene recalls the two episodes in Toto's life, the attacks by Luisito and Pocho, in which he was unable to defend himself. Toto also tries to come up with an attack plan, to hit and run, and finally does nothing. Both plans are less than heroic and both result in a passive state of inaction against the attacker. The only means of escape for both is flight.

In Toto's version of the story Johann and Carla escape in a carriage, drive around all night, and towards dawn approach an inn. Near the Inn, a couple is visible and the description of the young man

. . . él apuesto y de ojos renegridos y cabellos rubios como un maizal, de ánimo bueno pero nadie por ello se va a aprovechar a molestarlo, pues tiene no sólo las espaldas anchas sino también los brazos fuertes y diestros para la defensa. (p. 246)

reminds the reader of Esther's remark about Adhemar ("Adhemar es más lindo que Héctor? bellos ojos renegridos y cabellos rubios como una maizal." [p. 235]), of Toto's attraction and hero worship of Adhemar, and of the problems Toto has with growth and limited strength.

The narrator here is no longer an impartial third person. Toto's subjectivity increasingly enters the account

because he is subconsciously identifying with the musician and merging the two roles into one.

Johann mira el ramaje y hacia arriba el cielo azul y hacia abajo el cielo reflejado en el lago en el cual también se refleja inevitablemente él mismo, y se vuelve a detestar con más fuerza que antes todavía, él quisiera ser ese estudiante que vio bajo la glorieta, bello y fuerte, para no dudar de que Carla lo va a amar. (p. 249)

In attributing his own characteristics--his hatred for his own dwarfed body and his admiration for the strong and beautiful--to Johann, Toto completes the union of his consciousness with that of Johann's. The union complete, Toto can feel triumphant in this fantasy meeting of himself with the girl, because it conforms to his high standards and yet will also fulfill the requirements of society's rules on normal heterosexual relationships. However, Toto's triumph is shortlived even in his own composition.

Due to circumstances completely beyond his control--Poldi's meeting with and persuasion of Carla to leave him--Strauss is abandoned by his lover. Thus, his escape to happiness and sexual fulfillment is crushed and he returns to his former state. The last waltz poses the question for what do lovers search, but Johann, like Toto, does not know the answer. Toto elucidates further:

". . . y Johann, que nunca la supo, no se puede unir al coro, en cierto modo porque está algo sordo debido a la

edad y principalmente porque lo entristece morir sin saber lo que tanto quería saber, y es tal la pena, que maldice a este mundo y al otro." (p. 259) The bitterness implies that the conflict is far from being resolved and still of paramount importance to Toto.

Toto likes both boys and girls for different reasons. Imitative of the more masculine boys and men, he wants to merge himself into their masculine being. This is nothing more than hero worship out of which he may or may not grow. His preference for Alicita and the Russian classmate are signs of an appreciation for the opposite sex which again signals an element in his personality which may or may not be nurtured and developed.

One of the last references to Toto is the anonymous letter sent to the director of the boarding school. In the letter, dated 1947 when Toto is fourteen or fifteen, are three pieces of information that again demonstrate the dual nature of Toto's libido. The information reveals (1) that Toto and another boy have arranged dates with two girls and claim to have had sexual intercourse with them--the writer of the letter dismisses the claim as pure invention--, (2) that Toto has a one-sided romance with the Russian girl, and (3) that Toto has very unusual tastes and still manifests a strong imitative attraction for Adhemar. All three are actions that can be considered, to a certain extent, pre-puberty developments.

The broad outline of this character is one of an individual who is frustrated sexually, has poor familial ties, and becomes caught in a vicious cycle of conflicts between the reality around him and the fantasy configurations of the motion pictures he so enjoys and wants to imitate. How Manuel Puig manages to manipulate this character is a product of his point of departure. First of all, one confronts the situation that the author had no pre-established ideas about the novel or its structure. He mentions in the interview with Saúl Sosnowski, "No sabía como describir los personajes, no encontraba el vocabulario."⁴¹ As a matter of fact, he admits to not being terribly interested in fiction at all. After his disappointment in his film career, he reexamines his life to search out the reason for his present situation to see if he can express his findings in a written work. He recalls this attempt,

Traté de hacer un guión sobre amores de un primo adolescente en mi pueblo. Era material autobiográfico que estaba muy dentro mío y que no podía ver con la debida distancia. Para aclararme mejor esos personajes, decidí hacer antes de los diálogos, antes de redondear la trama, etc., una pequeña descripción de cada uno para aclararmelos.⁴²

⁴¹ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 71.

⁴² Ibid, p. 71.

Since he knew very little about character description, he decided to utilize the recollections of one of his aunt's conversations to begin his character depiction. What resulted was a form of interior monologue. Feeling comfortable with the formation of the character, he proceeded to delineate his other characters using the method until he had written eight monologues. And so his first novel came to light:

Así comenzó mi primera novela, La traición de Rita Hayworth que es un poco mi infancia y la explicación de por qué yo estaba en Roma, a los treinta años, sin carrera, sin dinero, y descubriendo que la vocación de toda mi vida--el cine--había sido un error, una cuestión neurótica y nada más. . . . Escribir esta novela fue tratar de comprender el por qué de este fracaso. 43

Thus, the reason why Toto emerges so dynamically is that he is not so much a creation as he is an autobiographical sketch of the author's early years. The novel is a psychological expose of the author's own frustrations as a child and adolescent. Manuel Puig makes no attempt to disguise the novel as anything but that. The two references for his biography constantly refer to the autobiographical material in the novel. Mita's career closely resembles the career of Puig's own mother of whom he states: "Mother, a city girl working as a chemist at the country hospital, her first assignment after

43 Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 71.

-graduation. . . ." ⁴⁴ His attraction to motion pictures, like Toto's, comes from frequent visits to the cinema with his mother: "Una sola sala que daba todos los días una película diferente, yo iba con mamá por lo menos cuatro veces por semana." ⁴⁵ Naturally, then, the author achieves profundity in the development of the central character, and since the novel mainly concerns this character, the work maintains an overall unity. There are gaps, of course, such as the transition of Toto's feelings for Alicita to Esther to the Russian girl, and the intensity of competition between Toto and Hector, but, nonetheless, Toto surfaces as a character who can be explored and examined from many angles, which, after all, is Manuel Puig's purpose. The same cannot be said of the other characters, with the possible exception of Mita.

Mita's importance in the novel derives from the fact that she initiates Toto into the cinema world. She reflects much more clearly in a mature adult state the alienation inevitably resulting in a person who aspires to more than a rural town's mediocrity. Although the author utilizes only one monologue for the presentation of Mita's thought processes, the other characters

⁴⁴ Manuel Puig, "Growing up at the Movies: A Chronology," p. 49.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 69.

provide enough information so that the reader can determine the essential features of her personality.

Mita's unhappiness at living in the country stems, partially, from the differences between Buenos Aires and Vallejos. From the discussion of Mita's family, one assumes that while Buenos Aires pleases the eye with its many varieties of plants, trees and grass, Vallejos has almost no greenery at all. That this bothers Mita is apparent from Clara's remarks: "Hay unos pocos árboles, que se ve que crecen a duras penas, pero lo que no se ve es césped, por ninguna parte. Mita plantó pastito inglés ya dos veces, calculando especialmente el mes de abril, y sin embargo no le creció." (p. 10)

The barren landscape reflects the lack of excitement in Mita's life; her two pastimes are sleeping and going to the movies. Choli complains to her friend Mita: ". . . te veo levantarte de la siesta toda ilusionada con los ojos hinchados de dormir." (p. 57) In all fairness to Mita, her numerous naps are not principally her idea; they originate with her husband, who insists on taking a nap every day. Mita, always fond of the cinema, uses it as an escape from boredom. She relies on the movies so much as a diversion that she makes Toto, her companion, a fanatic of the screen.

Her marriage reflects the dullness in her life. Her husband, a small-time businessman, invests money in

cattle and loses the money when they die. His disposition as bad as his business knowledge, he blames his present position on his brother's interference with his training and has to use Mita's salary to provide for the family. Always worried about his declining business, Berto exhibits a constant state of nervous agitation. Suffering from periodic headaches, he prescribes for himself a daily nap which requires absolute silence on the part of the rest of the household. Mita is forced to take her nap with him whether she wants a nap or not. Lastly, Berto becomes accustomed to staying at home. Mita never formulates any plans for going out because Berto is busy saving every penny he can. Even when she does go out to the movies, Berto rarely accompanies her; instead he sends Toto.

Mita's relocation to Vallejos soon begins to influence her behavior. Her friend Delia says about her:

Mita con la barriga que sí le crece y se le nota el encargue, yo le digo 'Mita, usted se insulta sola' y ella 'así me desahogo un poco, de lo que me hacen rabiar estos mierdas.' Una mala palabra detrás de la otra. Si se lo digo a Yamil no me lo cree, y Estela que me dice 'vamos a la farmacia Modelo, que me gusta conversar con la señora Mita que es tan fina', antes sí, pero ahora. . . .
(p. 119)

Mita's increasing use of obscene language derives from her frustration. Her attempts to beautify the yard around the house fails because nothing will grow in

Vallejos. All the pride she has in her son Toto begins to vanish when she realizes he cannot grow tall and strong like Hector. Her last hope to provide Berto with a healthy son of whom they can be proud disappears with the death of the baby. These three incidents have a great deal to do with the growing cynicism Mita exhibits in her monologue.

Total cynicism never overpowers Mita because the cinema furnishes her with an escape from her problems. Like her son, she is equally adept at creating new situations, based on familiar plots, which uplift her spirits and prevent her from feeling completely depressed. She uses a Romeo and Juliet movie to forget temporarily the death of her son by fantasizing a colorful new ending for the story. Whatever problems she has, she can always lose herself in the world of cinema reality. As a result of her training, Toto very early in life becomes accustomed to manipulating the harsher aspects of his life into fantasies that are more enjoyable. Mita, then, is directly responsible for her son Toto's conflicts with reality.

The delineation of the other members of Toto's family suffers from wide areas of superficiality that prevent the reader from exploring to any degree their subconscious or conscious machinery. The author used one interior monologue for Héctor. In that monologue, Héctor is

revealed only in his macho role to the exclusion of all else. Strong and aggressive like his namesake, the valient soldier of the Trojan war, Héctor, unlike Toto who spends more time dreaming than doing, believes in action. His main function in the novel alternates between a constant symbol of society's true male image and a source of conflict and competition with Toto. Beyond that, the character of Héctor has no depth or possibility of expansion or re-creation on the part of the reader. Toto's father weaves in and out of the novel as a background figure who is so elusive he reveals one of Toto's major conflicts--the perpetual absence of the father. Essential to the delineation of Toto's struggle to replace him, Berto must necessarily play the same role for the reader who searches through the work trying to grasp him physically and psychically. His letter at the end only serves to point out that his appearance is no longer important to Toto or the reader, for he has no immediate function. In a sense, Berto symbolizes the letter he throws away, an empty gesture.

The other characters are static figures that lack a consciousness level that can be reworked or manipulated through various interpretations. They contain only the barest of outlines of personality; though they often provide information that helps in the delineation of Toto's character. Some are solely pathetic like Esther

and Herminia, while others, like Cobito, at times approach a mediocre vulgarity that becomes comical, "... cómo se la come Bigotitos con los ojos 'Muchachos, hoy vamos a hablar de los fenicios . . . ' y el trasero de la Laura no tiene nada de fenicio ¿a qué mierda se lo mira?" (p. 201)

On the whole, the characters point to Toto without having a solid base of their own. Thus, the novel's success depends on the figure of Toto, who is not essentially a literary creation, but a modified biographical sketch; that is, unlike many fictional characters who are created solely for the novel in which they appear, Toto existed as Manuel Puig long before the novel was created. Puig says that "La primera novela era un intento de comprender por que habían sucedido ciertas cosas; estaba todo centrado en mí como chico, después como adolescente."⁴⁶ La traición is, in essence, Manuel Puig's struggle against the hold the cinema had on him during his youth. While the ordinary reader would probably not be aware of this, and there is no reason why he should, the novel can be investigated and enjoyed without biographical information on the author, the added data does furnish important details in the study of Puig's development as a writer. Manuel Puig's first

⁴⁶ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 73.

novel is an experiment in presenting consciousness. True, it is his own, but it sets the pattern for his subsequent work. The author, then, had to remove himself from the work, expand his technique of manipulating interior monologue and combine his resources, so that his work might be considered more of a literary work and less of an autobiographical revelation.

CHAPTER III

Boquitas pintadas

The two major elements of La traición are the cinema and its function within the novel and the thematic development of sexual repression in the main character. Manuel Puig compacts these elements into a psychological study of one consciousness that feels the effects of a cinema reality and demonstrates a precarious confusion of its sexual role in life. Having written his novel about Toto, Puig moves on to expand his vision of the provincial life of Coronel Vallejos. Speaking to Saúl Sosnowski, Puig recalls his return trip to Argentina and his re-encounter with former acquaintances. He says

Al ver el punto de llegada de esta gente, muy frustrada, me animé a intentar escribir una novela, una interpretación de los hechos que me habían llenado de maravilla . . . , de esa gente que había creído en los cánones de una época, que habían aceptado las reglas del juego y les había ido, por lo general, muy mal. 48

This, then, is the point of departure for his work, a work grounded in an attempt to understand and interpret

48 Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 74.

the human condition. His motivation and inspiration here closely resemble those that helped foment La traición, a socio-psychological study. The author says of his intentions: "Boquitas pintadas es un intento de comprender a esta gente en base a los datos que recogí al volver a mi país después de once años fuera." 49

Since the form in Boquitas pintadas differs greatly from that of La traición, there can be no question that it has a large role in the novel. Severo Sarduy explains

No se trata de un libro pop--excepto en el sentido en que lo practica Roy Lichtenstein en quien los contenidos, prácticamente nulos, son menos importantes que el señalamiento de los medios de difusión que utilizamos para transmitirlos--, ni de un objeto camp, ni de un texto tautológico, sino de un archivo, de una arqueología de lo novelesco, de una parodia de la novela. 50

Parody has been defined by C. Hugh Holman as "a composition burlesquing or imitating another, usually serious, piece of work. It is designed to ridicule in nonsensical fashion, or to criticize by brilliant treatment, an original piece of work or its author." 51 While Puig loosely bases his novel on the serial form and explains

49 Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 74.

50 Severo Sarduy, "Notas a las Notas a las Notas . . . A Propósito de Manuel Puig," Revista Iberoamericana, 37 (1971): 556.

51 C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1972), p. 380.

that he fully intended to publish the work as a serial before he ran into censorship problems, some of the structural forms in the novel, such as the letters, highlights of the fair, confession of Mabel and the prayers, make it difficult to conceive of the material as strictly serial. Thus, Boquitas pintadas remains an imitation only in the broadest sense of the word. It is possible that the serial form itself is being parodied, that Boquitas is the Don Quijote of the serial world in that the parody exists on two levels--form and content.

In a sense, all serials are near parodies since they capitalize on the nonsensical pathos appeal of humanity's errors and transgressions. The difference between Boquitas as a parody of life's values and Boquitas as a parody of a particular type of novel can be seen in Manuel Puig's attitude toward the genre. He says of the serial form: "Yo no creo que el folletín y la novela policial sean géneros menores, porque son los que me gustan, por eso trato de demostrar su validez."⁵² Puig both questions and explores the values society has in the serial because he prefers that type of writing, not because he wishes to satirize the genre.

This style of writing presents a special element of interest to the author which is the emotional bond

⁵² Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 73.

between the reader and the serial. The emotional tie comes about when the reader becomes a part of the continuing saga of the story-line. That is, there is no barrier between the reader and the people he is reading about or watching. He is there; involved in what is happening; living each day with the characters. He is just as important to the characters as they are to him. As MacAdam states "The only element which cannot disappear from the folletín's aesthetic system is the public."⁵³ In a very real sense, this is nothing more than audience participation. Puig works on the reader to draw him into the work and thus places him in the position of responding personally to the characters and situations. The writer reveals in the interview

Te diré que ciertas cosas más participan de eso en el sentido de que no trato de juzgar, de pronunciarme sobre algo, sino de dar datos para que el lector saque sus propias conclusiones.⁵⁴

The difference between this particular role of the reader as envisioned by Puig and the fiction which demands a reader to interpret data given in the more or less objective manner of the New Novel is one of distance. Deciphering a novel by exploring all the possibilities

⁵³ MacAdam, p. 62.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 77.

that exist within it and yet remaining aloof from the interior movement of the novel serves the reader interested in the New Novel quite well. For instance, in the novel Rayuela by Julio Cortázar, the core of the novel, the situation of Horacio Oliveira-Traveler, never merges with the reader's total emotional consciousness. The material is there and the varying angles can be examined almost without bound, but the link between the novel and the reader is intellectual rather than emotional. Any investigation into the characters of the New Novel, whether it be external behavioral relationships or the innermost workings of the mind, involves a separation of consciousnesses, an erected gap meant to be minimized, but existing nonetheless. In Puig's fiction, there can be no gap, for the very nature of the serial demands a complete surrender of the reader into the work. Without the surrender the work becomes clouded in a veil of phoniness, nonsense, and irrationality just as the soap operas do to those who are not devoted fans. This emotion is the bridge between the characters and the participating reader who becomes a part of the work and can feel himself move and react within the drama.

The reader achieves an integrated role in the novel of Manuel Puig as a result of the author's continued interest in maintaining the bridge between the story and the reader. Puig says "Me interesa la comunicación, que

sea accesible la lectura." ⁵⁵ The entirety of the author's projected purpose reveals a concern in returning to the common man in order to examine the individual manifestations of the cultural canon. It is the individual and his consciousness that attracts Puig. The all-encompassing self and its problems take on a significance still inexhaustable in Puig's eyes.

Puig concentrates on the fusion of the reader's mind with the character's to insure that the attention of the reader does not waver. One of the ways he maintains the interest of the reader is through the increased emphasis on the form. The shift from the structure of La traición to that of Boquitas involves radical changes in the organization. In La traición, the entire novel contains only three variations, interior monologue, dialogues, and personal memoirs, usually in the form of letters or compositions. The difficulty Puig encountered in attempting to write his first novel centered on the fact that he lacked an organized method for characterization. His decision to use monologues and letters resulted from his awareness that he could handle those more readily than the more complex third person narrative. The monologues sprang from remembrances of conversations of one of his aunts. The letters were carefully chosen because of his deficient background in

⁵⁵ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 72.

narrative fiction. He says:

Necitaba algo que no fuera el monólogo interior ni la tercera persona. Entonces se me ocurrió--además del diálogo--la escritura enajenada, es decir, personajes escribiendo, personajes que podían cometer errores escribiendo. . . . Me largué a hacer escribir a estos personajes cartas, diarios íntimos, composiciones escolares y de ese modo termine la novela escapándome de la tercera persona. 56

Manuel Puig realized that confrontation with the complexities that surround the creation of a novel could not be avoided forever. Thus, in his second novel, he attempts to incorporate what he had learned from La traición and some tentative experimentation within a wider narrative range to produce an expanded series of interpretations and investigations into the rural microcosm.

His rural setting has not changed; the novel still focuses on the imaginary inhabitants of Coronel Vallejos. This and the fact that Manuel Puig remains interested in the conscious and subconscious workings of the mind become the springboard from which the Argentine author launches his second novel. From the beginning, Puig embarks on a new course pioneering what is relatively new territory for him. The work contains a number of experimental models. The success of the novel depends to

56 Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 72.

a great extent on the reader's ability to manipulate the various parts of the fiction in order to maximize his investigation of the characters.

Basically, the novel contains two important elements within the structure. The first element, that of the subjective personal information, derives from the letters, the revelation of the conscious and subconscious configurations of the characters, as well as from the conversations. The second element is the objective impersonal information that originates in the introduction, the four day description and miscellaneous reports, listings, diaries, and other inserted data. The combination and interplay of emotion and objectified reporting bring the reader's attention to the psychological profile of the characters and the importance of the media in their lives. These two elements, emotional and factual material, and the parts of the novel that correspond to each element provide one approach to the novel.

The introduction, similar to that of Albert Camus' L'Etranger, opens the novel in an unusual fashion with a note giving background information on the obituary notice that follows. The magazine's title "nuestra vecindad" in the note radiates warmth, security, and a sense of belonging. But the atmosphere the note creates terminates abruptly with the words at the beginning of the article "FALLECIMIENTO LAMENTADO." This switch

from one mood to another without warning is a predominant characteristic of the novel that announces a revelation of information independent of the characters' knowledge. The obituary note concerns one of the characters, Juan Carlos, but its appearance is the work of an unnamed person. In his analysis of the translation Heartbreak Tango Ronald Christ has this to say about the epigraph that precedes the obituary notice:

What Puig lends to Tango--what he so stringently withheld from his earlier novel--is exactly what the epigraph indicates: 'his voice.' Not Puig's own voice, of course, but a narrative voice announcing what follows the introductory music and also fills us in on actions Puig cannot put into his characters' mouths. In other words, Puig has supplied an indispensable announcer to his novelistic soap opera. 57

Announcer is, perhaps, too strong a word to explain the juxtaposition of the note and the death article, since the novel is a written serial and not a cinematic soap opera that relies on a voice to provide the viewer with information external to the actors' minds and dialogues. However, Ronald Christ correctly perceives that both the announcer and the notice have the same functional roles--to reveal matters not directly within the observatory capacity of the characters. Puig mentions in his interview, "En Boquitas pintadas esa tercera persona

57 Ronald Christ, "Fact or Fiction," Revista '73 (Fall 1973), p. 49.

es sólo una especie de inventario de las acciones exteriores de los personajes." ⁵⁸ In actuality, the third person takes on two roles in the novel. On one hand it fuses the dialogue, stream of consciousness and the outward actions of Nené, Juan Carlos, Mabel, Raba and Pancho. On the other, it augments the story-line with supplementary material that helps the reader fill in the gaps in the chronology and the individual personalities. Each third person narrative reinforces an already established personality.

Helping to fill in some of the areas not mentioned elsewhere, the third person narrative describes what the principle characters are doing on four different days. The author begins with a review of their actions on a typical day. There follows a similar examination of another day to which the author has added, in a rhetorical style vaguely reminiscent of James Joyce, the substance of the character's major hopes and fears. By the time the next revelation of daily happenings occurs, two of the characters, Pancho and Juan Carlos, are dead, Juan Carlos, that day, and Pancho, eight years before. On the fourth day, the day of Nené's death, the cycle comes full circle. The inclusion of these days in the novel reduces the serial effect but at the same time

⁵⁸ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 72.

intensifies the reader's grasp of the individual characters' motives. That is to say, the novelist at times sacrifices a strong emotional tie to the work in exchange for a removed, objective look at the characters. This is most evident in the clockwork description of action that becomes extremely mechanical. The narration of Raba's actions on April 23, 1937, gives this information:

A las 11:30 la patrona le interrumpió nuevamente pidiéndole que tendiera la mesa para el almuerzo mientras se bañaba. A las 12:00 se sentaron a la mesa la patrona y sus dos hijos, un varón y una niña. A las 12:30 salieron los tres. . . . 59

The impersonal aspect is also apparent in the enumeration of activities each character performs, activities which read like a military schedule: lifeless, unambiguous, nondebatable and with more of a concern for efficiency than for aesthetics. Seen structurally, the progression from the first day to the fourth manifests a trip from life to death, from hope and anticipations to broken dreams and harsh reality.

In a similar manner, the miscellaneous reports contained in the novel offer details either not available to the characters or meant as a repudiation of their

59 Manuel Puig, Boquitas pintadas (Buenos Aires: Editorial Subamericana, 1974). p. 79-80. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear within the text.

remarks. The first miscellaneous segment in the novel concerns the contents of Juan Carlos' photo album. Somewhat unusual in its position, it comes after the letters Nené writes to Mrs. Etchepare which follow the Juan Carlos obituary notice; the album provides additional information about Juan Carlos' relationship with Mabel and Nené. Since the figure of Juan Carlos has not yet appeared, the photo album completes the picture set up by the laudatory remarks of his death notice and the image created as a result of Nené's letters.

Just as Juan Carlos enters the novel under the auspices of the third person narrator, Mabel gains entrance the same way. She is mentioned in Nené's letters, is present in Juan Carlos' photo album, and then her room is inventoried. In the process of revealing the contents of her room, several objects come under scrutiny--among which are the magazines that contain the answers to Mabel's sentimental questions. Though Mabel has yet to appear, the reader has already formed an idea of her personality.

The partial diary belonging to Juan Carlos clarifies the relationship between Juan Carlos and Mabel. A few aspects such as the seduction of Mabel are merely implied, making the reader form his own conclusions. Both Juan Carlos and Mabel gradually begin to take on their respective personalities as a result of the impetus in

these last three sections, which comprise one entire and separate division within the novel. They remain, in a sense, the antithesis to the first two divisions of the novel, concerned mainly with Nené's letters.

Other miscellaneous items add depth to the situations surrounding the five characters and aid the reader in providing psychological background. Their structural function borders on a simple change of pace which provides a transitional value between the more developed sections dealing with subjective thoughts and the third person narration. One of these miscellaneous items, however, should be mentioned in reference to the cyclical nature of the novel: the fragments of the letters which Donato has begun to burn. The novel actually begins with Nené's letters to Juan Carlos' mother asking for the letters Juan Carlos wrote to her. As the last words Juan Carlos wrote vanish in the fire, the reader returns to the point of origin, having gone from the death of Juan Carlos to the death of Nené. Obviously, the sections comprising the introduction, the sequence of events of four days, and the assorted compilation of reports and notes allow the reader to remove himself periodically from the intensified emotion of the characters and impersonally view the character's actions and emotions.

Nené's letters initiate the movement in sentiment. The letters themselves are quite in keeping with Puig's

use of personal memoirs to plumb the depths of personality. What is different are the stage directions that come after the letters. Given in the third person, these directions signal that growing change in Puig's fiction, the progression from simple to more advanced forms of storytelling. Unlike the written compositions in La traición, the letters are functionally vital units within the novel in the sense that they emanate from the main characters and share primary responsibility in whatever formation these characters ultimately assume in the mind of the reader. In La traición, Esther's diary and Herminia's notebook serve as supplementary reinforcement in the presentation of another character, Toto, and only incidentally do they focus on Esther and Herminia's sexual frustrations. As such, the compositions of Herminia and Esther do not possess the degree of integration into the whole that Nené's and Juan Carlos' letters do.

The letters covering the first two divisions in the novel are those of Nené directed to Juan Carlos' mother. Prompted by the news of Juan Carlos' death, she begins a correspondence that will reopen old wounds and force her into an agonizing confrontation with her feelings both past and present. The author has placed Nené's emotionalism at the beginning of the novel, because she is the spark that maintains the reader's interest. An intrinsic

component of the group completed by Juan Carlos and Mabel, she constantly presents different facets of her personality in melodramatic prose. Seemingly straightforward and sincere to the point of self-destruction, the content of her letters provides an invaluable accumulation of details for the study of her psychological profile.

In contrast to Nené's letters which introduce and then highlight her growing but consistent personality, the letters that Juan Carlos writes serve more to clarify misconceptions other characters and the reader may have about him. The different views each of the three women, Nené, Mabel and Celina, have of him coalesce and resurface as the true essence of Juan Carlos, partially as a result of the information contained in his personal correspondence. Indications of his basic philosophy toward himself, the opposite sex and his friends are gradually revealed in his written words. The reader works with the letters in much the same manner as if he were examining Juan Carlos himself. This is so because Juan Carlos is not aware that his letters contain the germ of a rather unflattering portrait. Finally, both Nené's and Juan Carlos' letters manifest an attempted flight from death. Nené attempts to outwit death by re-creating the past with her letters. Juan Carlos tries to deny his fear of impending death by repeatedly mentioning in

his letters the distinction between himself and the people who will die in the sanatorium.

Of the remaining letters in the novel, the most crucial are the three letters of Celina, two to Nené and one to Nené's husband. These letters are in direct contrast to the letters of Nené and Juan Carlos. If Nené and Juan Carlos want to eternalize the past, Celina concerns herself solely with destruction and hate. Thus, in the single framework of the letters, the cyclical structure becomes clear. Nené's work, filled with emotion and directing all her love to Juan Carlos, begins the cycle. In the middle stands Juan Carlos, indifferent to other people's feelings and concerned only with himself. Celina appears to finish the cycle. Full of emotion like Nené, she passionately hurls all her hatred at Nené. Both girls love Juan Carlos, while he loves only himself. The letters, then, are a major factor in determining the important features of Juan Carlos and Nené.

If the letters represent, for the most part, the conscious expression of feelings and desires of the characters, then the inexpressible or even unknown facets of the residents of Vallejos must be revealed in another way. Thus, the mental machinery of the characters is of paramount importance in order to understand the total configuration of the character. For Jorge Rodríguez Padrón ". . . lo más importante y decisivo de la novela

que comentamos nos parece que sea la personalidad de sus personajes, a los que ya hemos podido vislumbrar a través de sus expresiones, pero que tienen una mayor hondura y trascendencia." ⁶⁰ As a matter of fact, Puig comes close to excluding everything except the inquiry into the essence of his characters. His single-minded concentration in this respect convinces MacAdam that "Puig does not write, as do Mallea or Cortázar (in Los premios), about a search for Argentina or Argentine man: this circumstantial or historical reality does not interest him, except as it contributes to the formation of a personality, a consciousness." ⁶¹ Extremely important to the essence of the novel, the manipulation of the personality must be recognizable in the structure.

Just as the letters signal important aspects of one side of the character, the sections on the flow of thought and the dialogues attempt to fill the vacancies that remain inaccessible to the reader in letter format. In the flow of thought sections, the reader has access to a variety of stream-of-consciousness techniques, from simple non-verbal wanderings of the mind to confessions and prayers. Every one of the five central characters has at least one experience of this nature; Juan Carlos

⁶⁰ Jorge Rodríguez Padrón, "Manuel Puig y la capacidad expresiva de la lengua popular," Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, LXXXII, No. 245 (May 1970), p. 494.

⁶¹ MacAdam, p. 65.

experiences three such events. In addition, five minor characters, the patient in room fourteen, Juan Carlos' mother, Celina, Elsa and a young girl whom Juan Carlos seduces are seen momentarily in similar situations. These glimpses into the character's innermost mind are placed strategically in the novel, thereby avoiding a tedious encounter with the sections of the novel structured in the third person.

The conversations function much the same as the flow of consciousness sections except that they are by nature less frank and more structured. There are some interesting variations here. The first conversation is that of Juan Carlos with the colorful gypsy the day before the country fair. One unusual feature of the dialogue is the fact that only the words of the gypsy are transcribed. Juan Carlos' remarks come to the reader by way of the gypsy who either answers, rebukes or comments in such a manner that the essence of Juan Carlos' dialogue can be imagined if not completely reconstructed. For example, the gypsy's remark "Sí, ya sé que la baraja tiene pelo negro pero yo la vi pelada cuando recién cortaste el mazo" (p. 86) lets the reader know that Juan Carlos has questioned the validity that the jack is bald. The same type of situation occurs when Juan Carlos, growing tired and fidgety, asks for a palm reading. The reader reconstructs the scene from this remark, "No, la línea

de la vida es después, tenés que esperar el último corte. . . ." (p. 87) Juan Carlos' presence is always more than physical; he remains in the background, indirectly influencing the lives of the other characters.

Another conversation necessary in the study of structure is the one between Mabel and Pancho. This dialogue represents the second step in a progression that will culminate in The Buenos Aires Affair. Puig's experimental interest in dialogue surfaces at the beginning of La traición, at which point the dialogue of Mita's family appears much as it would in a realistic situation with no name designations other than those that show a directional emphasis. In the conversation between Mabel and Pancho in Boquitas pintadas, the omission of names prevails except when necessary and natural. Another addition to the dialogue form is the inclusion, in italics, of the characters' thought processes as they converse. Admittedly, the method accrues an aura of artificiality, but it does convey the underlying emotions and needs of Pancho and Mabel. What Manuel Puig loses in overall smoothness, he compensates for in the added touches to the personality. Puig repeats this format in the conversation with Celina and Elsa. The conversations plus the sections that deal with the subconscious and conscious mental flow of the characters and the letters comprise the subjective element of the novel. Both the

subjective and objective part, the part formed by the introduction, the description of four days and the collection of reports, have equal emphasis in the novel. Christ says ". . . for Puig, for this vision of his novel, so-called objective fact is not less moving than subjective fantasizing." ⁶² Combined, these two elements substantiate the characterization within the novel.

Alfred J. MacAdam suggests in his analysis of the novel that "What fascinates the reader here is human underdevelopment, life defined from without which totally lacks any interior reality or transcendence." ⁶³ While MacAdam sees the characters as underdeveloped, Christ in a more forceful statement believes that they are ". . . characters who such the thumb of popular culture to avoid chewing the gristle of reality." ⁶⁴ As colorful as this statement may be, it misleads the reader, for the very essence of the novel is that terribly disagreeable confrontation with reality which each character must experience. Christ realizes this, and he adds a little later

Here then, in Tango, is a newspaper-headline or soap-operatic drama; but again,

⁶² Christ, p. 52.

⁶³ MacAdam, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Christ, p. 49.

as always in Puig, you are guided to see even this unheroic drama in collision with day-to-day reality, the collision of bourgeois romantic dream with poignantly objective fact.⁶⁵

With or without romantic dreams, the characters continually confront the obstacles that reality imposes on their daily lives. Not one of the characters escapes the inevitable clash with the situations they picture as less than ideal. Like all "folletines," in fact, the essence of the novel consists of the interrelated tangle of conflicts between the characters. It is this element that helps fuse the characters together. Several of these collisions surface in the analysis of the main characters.

Of all the characters, Nené possesses the greatest amount of potential growth. Hers is a journey from death to love and back to death. MacAdam perceptively notes

Everything in Boquitas pintadas, from the title which comes from a foxtrot sung by Carlos Gardel in the picture El tango en Broadway, to the body of the work, the passions of Juan Carlos, Nené and Mabel, leads to death, the total anonymity of being forgotten.⁶⁶

The novel revolves around her love for Juan Carlos and the gulf that grows between them. Part of that gulf results from the hostile situation between Nené and Juan

⁶⁵ Christ, p. 50.

⁶⁶ MacAdam, p. 64.

Carlos' sister Celina. According to Nené, the hostilities began when Nené, instead of Celina, was chosen as a finalist in the springtime festival. Nené concludes

La rabia mía es una: Celina quiso hacerle gancho al hermano con Mabel, y usted sabe que Juan Carlos la afiló un poco pero después dejaron. Antes de noviar conmigo. Pero parece que lo mismo Celina quedó con la esperanza de emparejarse con la familia de Mabel. (p. 25)

The enmity between the two goes deeper than a fight over a contest or even Celina's desire to be part of the Sainz family, and Nené is well aware of that fact. Indirectly addressing herself to Celina in one of her letters to Juan Carlos' mother, she stipulates

Muy bien, no hacía mucho que hablábamos con Juan Carlos cuando tuvo aquel catarro que no se le curaba. Ahora esto que lo sepa Celina: cuanto más lo entretenía yo a la noche charlando en la tranquerita . . . más tardaba él en irse a lo de la viuda Di Carlo. A mí me lo decían todos, que Juan Carlos entraba por el alambrado del guardabarrera derecho a lo de la viuda mosca muerta. Era ella quien le chupaba la sangre y no yo. (p. 32)

Nené's self-defense has no effect on Celina. For one thing, while Nené believes she has a correspondence established with the mother, Celina has in reality intercepted the letters and signs her mother's name to the letters she sends Nené. Whatever Nené writes of Celina, Celina obviously knows. And this helps Celina concentrate on maintaining her loathing of Nené. Her prayer for her brother's repose turns into a venomous attack on Nené.

Yo pido que pronto esa mujer tenga su merecido, porque si no voy a poder seguir viviendo, del odio que le tengo, y también estoy segura de que fue por ella que él robó en la Intendencia ¡se lo habrá pedido ella! para escaparse con él, por eso habrán fingido pelearse y que nunca se me cruce en mi camino porque no respondo de mis actos ¡que el cielo no lo permita! ¡no quiero saber dónde está, si vive o está muerta! Pero que no se me cruce en mi camino porque la voy a despedazar. (p. 216)

Shortly after her prayer, the first letter from Nené arrives, and Celina immediately starts making plans for revenge, while at the same time maintaining a surveillance on Nené by assuming her mother's name and corresponding with Nené. Even in her letters, Celina cannot help doing her best to irritate Nené. In response to Nené's concern about the cremation of Juan Carlos, Celina writes

Postdata: me olvidaba agradecerle que me recordaras el deseo de Juan Carlos de ser cremado. Debemos olvidar todo egoísmo y hacer su voluntad, aunque no esté de acuerdo con nuestras creencias ¿no es así? (p. 218)

The reader can almost hear Celina laughing sadistically as she writes those words. First, she lets Nené know she had forgotten Juan Carlos' request for cremation and thanks Nené for reminding her. After telling Nené that Juan Carlos will be cremated, she and her mother do the opposite; they give Juan Carlos a Christian burial. Her revenge is also quite simple. She attempts to use the information Nené herself provides in the letters about

her love for Juan Carlos and her feeling for her husband Donato to destroy Nené's marriage. In a way, Celina's plan backfires for even though it causes a temporary separation, it nonetheless forces the situation to the surface, so that both can confront Nené's secret desire and act accordingly. Once Donato knows everything, the road to reconciliation hinges on whether he and Nené are willing to forget the past. Celina unwittingly has helped Nené arrive at that milepost. Celina's hatred plays a major role in illuminating the problems in Nené and Juan Carlos' relationship.

Nené's relationship to Juan Carlos is a two-sided one. For Nené, hers is a romantic love. She dreams of marriage and considers only the positive aspects of Juan Carlos' character. Juan Carlos, on the other hand, desires only physical contact. Their relationship is reduced to a constant tug-of-war on the porch every evening when Nené's parents retire. Juan Carlos continually tries to seduce her, while she tries to maintain the status quo, waiting, perhaps for a firmer offer from Juan Carlos. The situation reveals the essential conflict between the two lovers.

One of Juan Carlos' interior monologues illustrates how complex the matter becomes:

. . . sacá esa mano, Juan Carlos' el doctor Aschero, mi hermana, el chisme, 'mejor la noche de bodas, así nos portamos bien unos

meses más y vos ya te curás, pero me da miedo que nos vean en este portón, y después me vas a seguir queriendo? esperemos un rato más que se duerman, Juan Carlos, pero acordate que es porque vos me lo pediste' . . . no, si no me lo pedís vos yo no te toco ni las manos, pedímelo vos, Nené, demostrame que me querés para siempre, que no te importa de nada, 'no querido, si yo te lo pido vas a decir que yo soy una cualquiera, eso nunca, y pueden aparecerse papá y mamá, y yo tengo miedo. . . . (p. 123)

The scene reflects the position of a girl trying to resist the advances of her boyfriend and weakening position. Eventually the stalemate that develops terminates in frustration and sadness on one side and frustration and anger on the other. This encounter focuses the reader's attention on two items in regard to Nené. First, she worries somewhat about Juan Carlos' sickness. Her love does not belong in the fanatical category which would blind her to all problems. Second, whatever her feelings toward his malady, she can be seduced by Juan Carlos. Yet, in spite of her love for him, Nené decides to end her relationship with him.

After Juan Carlos dies, Nené looks back in an attempt to penetrate the cause for their parting. Ready for an easy solution, Nené convinces herself that Celina is at the bottom of their separation. She says "Pero ahora no sé que me pasa, pienso si Celina no hubiese hablado mal de mí, a lo mejor a estas horas Juan Carlos estaba vivo, y casado con alguna chica, o conmigo." (p. 20) However,

her explanation lacks a solid foundation, because Juan Carlos rarely paid any attention to his mother and sister and never did what they wanted him to do. For inexplicable reasons, Nené mythifies the past, ignoring important information that led to a cessation of their affair.

Juan Carlos returns not completely cured from Cosquín in September of 1937. Sometime between September and December of that year, he has a confrontation with Nené's father. The confrontation widens an already growing gulf between Nené and Juan Carlos. Shortly thereafter, on the twenty-seventh of January, 1938, the reader encounters Nené's feelings drastically changed.

¿Cuál era en ese momento su mayor deseo?
En ese momento su mayor deseo era que
Juan Carlos recuperase el empleo de la
Intendencia. ¿Cuál era en ese momento su
temor más grande? En ese momento su
temor más grande era que alguien se
encargase de enterar al joven martillero
público llegado poco antes a Vallejos--
con quien tanto había bailado en la
Kermese navideña--de su pasada relación
con el Dr. Aschero. (p. 129)

In a span of six months, Juan Carlos' position has been relegated to that of a friend. Furthermore, Nené has almost forgotten their close relationship, as she worries more about the damage of her escapades with Dr. Aschero can cause than she does about her association with Juan Carlos, who has a reputation for winning and seducing women. The reader can see a partial explanation for Nené's radical changes in two of her letters.

In the second letter dated May 24, 1947, Nené explains her feelings toward Juan Carlos after his departure to Cosquín.

Yo sabía que él estaba enfermo, que había ido de nuevo a las sierras de Córdoba para cuidarse, pero no sé por qué . . . no me daba lástima, o debe ser que yo no pensaba que él se estaba por morir. (p. 11)

The matter-of-fact indifference with which she describes her insensitivity contrasts with the contents of the letters she sends to him during his stay at the home. Restructured from one of Juan Carlos' letters to her, one letter implies that she spends time crying to herself over Juan Carlos. Whether the letter is a monumental lie or an outward manifestation of Nené's romantic imagination, the situation indicates that her internal feelings are ambiguous. Juan Carlos' position in her life temporarily seems to lose ground, and she becomes involved with Donato Massa.

In another letter, Nené explains "Le juro señora que cuando me casé con Massa ya no me acordaba más de Juan Carlos, lo seguía apreciando como amigo y nada más."

(p. 20) The reader suspects that this has a ring of falsehood, because immediately afterward Nené produces a 1936 clipping which she has kept and cherished linking her to Juan Carlos. Nené may want to convince herself and Mrs. Etchepare that she had forgotten him, but she fails.

In a conversation with Mabel in 1941, a little over two years after her marriage to Donato, Nené reveals "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." (p. 195) Mabel instantly realizes what Nené means and expresses what the reader has already guessed "---¿Qué, Nené? ¿de casarte con un enfermo?" Nené vehemently denies Mabel's insinuation, but the evidence suggests otherwise. The passage would seem to indicate that Nené regrets not having persisted in her attraction for Juan Carlos, but that interpretation poses a problem in Nené's life. If she loved him then and still does, why did she marry Donato? If she does not and did not, why did she keep the clipping and more important, why does she so wistfully regret her decision to forsake her relationship with Juan Carlos? The situation that develops after the death of Juan Carlos supports the claim that Nené had never completely forgotten him, but instead had moved him to a minor position in her subconscious. The five years from 1941 to 1946, in which her life remains closed to the reader, are the years that Juan Carlos' image lies dormant in Nené's mind. His death notice brings that image to the surface, as Nené once again becomes involved with Juan Carlos. At this point Nené refuses to let him go, even if it means destroying her marriage.

Nené's marriage to Donato is, after all, an empty shell devoid of real emotion. Many times in her letters she admits that Donato has never inspired any love in her, ". . . nunca lo quise." (p. 232) Her reaction to Donato expresses itself verbally in a desire to manipulate him. She tells Mabel ". . . y piensa siempre en lo que a mí me gusta para comprarme así no trabajo mucho en casa. . . ." (p. 138) These negative feelings soon turn to disgust as Nené finds it increasingly difficult to merge her subconscious memories of a better man--Juan Carlos--with Donato. Donato cannot really compete, since for him competition is in reality the idealized version that Nené has of Juan Carlos. Without the image of Juan Carlos that Nené has buried, Donato would still be in a disadvantageous position, for Nené has directed her attention outside her domestic environment. In an effort to escape her insipid existence, she fantasizes possible escapades with younger men. In one of her letters she indiscreetly writes

¿Usted cree que puedo encontrar un muchacho
que me dé otra vida?

Me gustaría un muchacho como había
antes, ahora son todos con cara de pavo.
Pero no tanto, de eso estaba convencida,
y el otro día vi a unos muchachos tan
lindos. . . . (p. 29)

That these remarks occur in a letter to Juan Carlos' mother in which she claims to love only Juan Carlos appears somewhat strange. The reader can only assume that

Nené's memory of Juan Carlos as well as her fantasy about young men are a result of a growing sexual frustration. Nené has never had a chance to experience variations within sexual encounters. Nor does she particularly enjoy her sexual experiences with her husband. She gullibly accepts her husband's explanation that the size of the penis has no relation to the individual enjoyment of the sex act. She says of the sexual encounter, "Porque hablando la verdad, una vez que se apaga la luz no se ve si el marido es lindo o no, son todos iguales." (p. 197)

Nené suffers in her relationships with men, because she looks at love between men and women from a romantic point of view; that is, her concept of love is spiritual rather than physical. In her relationship with Juan Carlos, she manages to escape seduction because she places a higher value on their true feelings for one another than on his erotic demands. For Nené, love constitutes a permanent desire to be with the person to whom you are attracted, a concept based on the mutual giving of each person. As such, love takes on an overpowering aura that transcends even death. She devises this scene a la Chateaubriand in one of her letters:

Ese es el único alivio y oscurezco bien la pieza. Entonces puedo hacer de cuenta que estoy con Usted y que vamos a la tumba del pobrecito Juan Carlos y juntas lloramos hasta que nos desahogamos. (p. 19)

For Nené love specifies one meaning for all lovers and can only be given once. She tells Mabel of the fictitious Pierre's involvement with two women "--Pero de verdad puede querer a una sola." (p. 190), as if she cannot accept the possibility of Pierre or for that matter anyone loving more than one person. Like Marie of the radio novela, she is trapped. Married to a man she dislikes, she re-encounters the man she has always loved. Not able to forget Juan Carlos completely, she assumes that love always works the same way. What seems so simple to Mabel is beyond Nené:

--Y él vuelve con ella por la conveniencia.

--No, él la quiere a su modo, pero de veras, Nené.

--¿Cómo a su modo? (p. 191)

Almost indignant and unaware that other possibilities exist, Nené refuses to let Mabel change her mind on the interpretation of love. Whereas for Mabel love is a means to an end, Nené constructs castles in the air and defines love as the ultimate sensation. She enthusiastically states "--Mabel, no me digas que hay algo más hermoso que estar enamorada." (p. 192), to which Mabel realistically responds "--Chst."

Thus the reader begins to suspect why Nené and Juan could not continue as they were before he went to Cosquín. Juan Carlos, prior to his departure, fulfilled Nené's expectations of the ideal romantic lover. His

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Nené suffers in her relationships with men, because she looks at love between men and women from a romantic point of view; that is, her concept of love is spiritual rather than physical. In her relationship with Juan Carlos, she manages to escape seduction because she places a higher value on their true feelings for one another than on his erotic demands. For Nené, love constitutes a permanent desire to be with the person to whom you are attracted, a concept based on the mutual giving of each person. As such, love takes on an overpowering aura that transcends even death. She devises this scene a la Chateaubriand in one of her letters:

Ese es el único alivio y oscurezco bien la pieza. Entonces puedo hacer de cuenta que estoy con Usted y que vamos a la tumba del pobrecito Juan Carlos y juntas lloramos hasta que nos desahogamos. (p. 19)

For Nené love specifies one meaning for all lovers and can only be given once. She tells Mabel of the fictitious Pierre's involvement with two women "--Pero de verdad puede querer a una sola." (p. 190), as if she cannot accept the possibility of Pierre or for that matter anyone loving more than one person. Like Marie of the radio novela, she is trapped. Married to a man she dislikes, she re-encounters the man she has always loved. Not able to forget completely, she assumes that love always . . . What seems so simple to Mabel . . .

--Y él vive . . . experiencia.
 --No, él . . . de
 veras, . . .
 --¿Cómo a . . .

Almost indignant at . . . her possibilities exist, Nené refuses to . . . change her mind on the interpretation of love. Whereas for Mabel love is a means to an end, Nené constructs castles in the air and defines love as the ultimate sensation. She enthusiastically states "--Mabel, no me digas que hay algo más hermoso que estar enamorada." (p. 192), to which Mabel realistically responds "--Chst."

Thus the reader begins to suspect why Nené and Juan could not continue as they were before he went to Cosquín. Juan Carlos, prior to his departure, fulfilled Nené's expectations of the ideal romantic lover. His

fight with tuberculosis also fit in with the standard romantic tale. But his return as a sick man falls outside the ideal and borders on the commonplace. He should have died at Cosquín to make Nené appreciate him more. In fact, Nené has no problems re-creating his love after he dies even though she has a husband and children.

Nené's love has been a motivating force in her life, but that love must ultimately end. On her deathbed, Nené finally is able to value her husband and children more than her past love. The transition, occurring as it does, confirms that impossible love and sexual frustration characterized all her life. It is those two aspects that provide a basis for Nené's development.

Juan Carlos motivates all the movement in the novel. Of prime importance are his sexual relationships with different women and his personal philosophy. The novelist begins the portrayal with an obituary notice:

. . . por las excelencias de su espíritu y carácter, destacóse como ponderable valor, poseedor de un cúmulo de atributos o dones --su simpatía--, lo cual distingue o diferencia a los seres poseedores de ese inestimable caudal. . . . (p. 9)

The reader then reconstructs the character from events prior to his death. The remarks in the introduction present an artificial point of reference which the reader rejects on the basis of material he later encounters.

Juan Carlos exemplifies a character who hides no

tremendous variations within his personality. His primary goals are seducing women and surviving. Work and responsibility are anathema to him. A diseased Don Juan, he spends all of his time planning or enjoying conquests. While he appears to have difficulty with some of his romances, Juan Carlos nevertheless feels secure and would never change any of his life style. His refusal to accept any change manifests itself in his attitude:

Juan Carlos le iba a decir algo más y se calló: que si tenía que renunciar a vivir como los sanos prefería morirse, pero que aunque no le quitasen las mujeres y los cigarillos lo mismo prefería morirse si era a cambio de trabajar como un animal todo el día por cuatro centavos. . . .
(p. 64)

Feeling as he does about work and pleasure, his epicurean philosophy serves him quite well. The only advice he will listen to or give is that of a continued search for enjoyment, cost what it may. In this spirit, he counsels Pancho to speed up his efforts to seduce Raba with these wise words: "A las 17:40 cerraron la discusión sobre Rabadilla aconsejando Juan Carlos a Pancho qui si no se apresuraba a dar el zarpazo se le adelantaría cualquier otro." (p. 62) His hedonistic attitude of pleasing only himself is reflected in his character flaws.

Juan Carlos shows no substantive love for his family. His mother and sister are little more than slaves, nagging and inefficient from his point of view. After

being served a juicy steak just the way he likes it, Juan Carlos breaks out in a cold sweat and has to return to his room and lie down. The sequence of events that follow closely resembles what might be compared to a scene from Nero's life.

Pocos minutos después le llevaron la comida en una bandeja a la cama. Juan Carlos halló que el bife estaba frío. Lo llevaron de nuevo a la plancha. Celina lo dejó pocos segundos tocar el hierro de un lado y del otro para que no se cociera demasiado. Juan Carlos lo encontró demasiado cocido. Su madre y Celina estaban de pie en la habitación mirándolo, esperando alguna orden. (p. 59)

Being served constantly only increases his propensity to do as he pleases and further develops his spoiled child syndrome.

Another fault which characterizes Juan Carlos is prevarication. This fault knows no bounds, for Juan Carlos lies to everyone. Even his family receives its share of falsehoods. When Juan Carlos' mother interrogates him as to his whereabouts on a late evening, Juan Carlos unwilling to let his mother know that he spent the night with widow Elsa, allows Nené to take the blame for his outing. Of more serious proportions, however, are the lies he fabricates about his health and the visits to the doctor.

Entonces su madre tratando de no dar importancia al tema le preguntó que había dicho el médico esa tarde. Juan Carlos respondió que por una emergencia el médico

había debido abandonar el consultorio toda la tarde. (pp. 63-64)

Indifferent to his mother's concern for him, Juan Carlos endangers himself with his avoidance of the doctor. He falsifies, for convenience's sake, to avert what might turn out to be a lengthy discussion with his mother.

With the same ease that he shows in lying to his mother, Juan Carlos manipulates his episodes with women. While at the sanatorium, he writes to Nené, "En cuanto a las enfermeras, son todas a prueba de bala, la más joven fue a la escuela con Sarmiento." (p. 102) Not only is the statement false but the implication that he has no possibility for sexual activity in Cosquín is, of course, untrue. He depends so much on prevarication to get out of the tight spots that it soon becomes a habitual tool. In fact, the facility with which he handles untruths permits him to play ironically with deception. In one of his letters to Nené, he masterfully contrives to distort the truth almost beyond recognition.

Estuve pensando tanto en vos, y en otras cosas, pensar que recién ahora que estoy lejos me doy cuenta de una cosa. Te lo quiero decir pero es como si se me atrancara la mano ¿qué me pasa, rubia? ¿me dará vergüenza decir mentiras?
(p. 108)

In admitting that he would be ashamed to tell a lie, he prevaricates. At the same time he paves the way for the lie he is about to tell since with his statement, anything he says afterwards would sound like the truth.

Complementing his inveterate lying is his total disregard for instructions even when they might prove to be the one thing that could save his life. He ignores his mother's warnings to shave early and get plenty of rest. Fond of sexual activity and cigarettes, Juan Carlos stays out late so that he can enjoy as many women as possible and smoke continuously. When his doctors prescribe specific recommendations for him, Juan Carlos feels obliged to take an opposite course. He becomes accustomed to bathing in a river near the sanatorium even though the doctors forbid it. He explains to Nené that his breaking the rule almost causes his expulsion from the treatment center. Still, he learns nothing from the incident and soon swims again. Although he maintains in his letters that he obeys instructions, "¿Sabes una cosa? el médico dijo que voy mejor, yo ahora le hago caso en todo." (p. 117), his performance, nine days later, reveals otherwise: "Pese a estar próxima la hora del té decide ir a bañarse al río. . . ." (p. 118) Juan Carlos can no more obey orders than he can stop lying.

One other flaw in his character concerns his crude manner of expression. His writing reveals a paucity of academic training as well as a lack of any consideration for the addressee. He writes to Nené:

Ricura ¿qué estás haciendo a esta hora hoy
sábado? me gustaría saber ¿estás durmiendo
la siesta? ¿bien tapadita? quien fuera

almoada para estar más cerca. Bolsa de agua caliente no me gustaría ser porque por ahí me resultás pata sucia y sueño. Sí, mejor no andar buscando cosas raras. (p. 100)

Certainly not possessing the most classic style or content, Juan Carlos insults Nené and immediately after compounds the insult when he implies that he has heeded a gypsy's warning and does not trust her. The word pata occurs several times in his letters referring to humans. More than merely an indication of his lack of education, the word also suggests that Juan Carlos has a contemptuous attitude toward most people. Upon receiving word of Pancho's death from Elsa, he writes back "Fuimos muy amigos aunque en un tiempo no era más que un negro roto." (p. 169) The novelist underscores Juan Carlos' coldness toward his former companion with the third person amplification that follows the letter, "Piensa en la posibilidad de que el amigo muerto note que la noticia del asesinato en vez de entristecerlo lo ha alegrado." (p. 170) Juan Carlos' character contains blatant imperfections which make him the opposite of what the eulogy in the funeral notice depicts.

Of course the obituary makes no mention of his good looks, but they, combined with his sexual prowess, always appealed to the women. Nené is attracted to Juan Carlos because of his handsomeness. Frequently, she uses terms like lindo and buen mozo to describe him. Nené's

infatuation is for the most part based on his appearance and not on his character. This explains why Juan Carlos has such a tremendous hold on her. Nené takes her impression of the comely Juan Carlos, idealizes it and nourishes her passion with that image of perfection. Mabel, like Nené, is drawn to Juan Carlos, initially, by his attractiveness. In comparing Juan Carlos with Cecil, the rancher, she says ". . . un joven estanciero de origen inglés, menos apuesto que 'él'. . . ." (p. 42) Seduced by Juan Carlos, she is also aware of his sexual prowess. Her response to him then results from her appreciation for both his appearance and his ability to satisfy her erotic urges. Unlike Nené, however, she does not feel as strongly about Juan Carlos. Elsa's reaction to Juan combines the attraction for his youthful beauty and her need to escape loneliness.

The conversation between Juan Carlos and the gypsy provides the one essential clue to Juan Carlos' dealings with the opposite sex. While examining his future, she foresees his first theoretical love and comments "--por primera vez veo que te vas a enamorar, porque baraja de amor no te salió ninguna, puerco asqueroso, tanta mujer y no querés a ninguna. . . ." (p. 89) What superficially seems a teasing joke between the fortune teller and her customer takes on a more serious note in

the interior monologue of the woman after Juan Carlos has departed.

. . . no se quiso quedar conmigo porque ese no quiere a nadie, ni a mí, ni a las otras, parece sana la bocha pero está echada a perder, está toda podrida por dentro. . . . (p. 92)

The analysis the gypsy makes portrays the relationships Juan Carlos has with Elsa, the unnamed young girl and Matilda.

Elsa represents what Nené later regretfully wishes she had found the courage to be--a woman who gambles all she has for Juan Carlos and does everything in her power to be by his side. Mentioned only infrequently in the novel, Elsa provides Juan Carlos with a refuge both in Vallejos and at Cosquín. While demonstrating an uncommon devotion to Juan Carlos she is nonetheless concerned for the safety of others. It is Elsa, tuned to the needs of Juan Carlos and the possible risk to others, who alerts the physician to his tuberculosis. The doctor reveals how he discovers, through Elsa, Juan Carlos' condition.

. . . que en su presencia había escupido sangre y que yo debía alejar a Juan Carlos del contacto con los seres queridos, cosa que ellos no se animaban a expresar. (p. 98)

Because Elsa has an unbiased view of the situation, Juan Carlos finds in her someone who loves him in spite of what he is. She says of him after his death,

Siento vergüenza de pedir otra cosa,
para ese pobre muchacho, que viví en
pecado con él, y ahora no está más.
Y yo lo perdono, Dios mío, era una
cabeza hueca, yo no quiero tenerle rencor,
ya se murió, ya no le puede hacer mal a
nadie. . . . (p. 215)

It is Elsa who lovingly takes care of him only to hear him rave about Nené and Mabel. His desire to stay with her at Cosquín is not a matter of love; he merely wants to leave the treatment center accommodations which are repulsive to him. Juan Carlos uses Elsa just as he tries to use everyone else.

More fleeting than his involvement with Elsa are his fleeting involvements with a young girl of Vallejos and a nurse at the sanatorium. Both girls mean nothing to him. Juan Carlos becomes involved without really caring about the two women. It is this syndrome of constantly searching for sexual contact that typifies his relationship with women.

Of all his relationships with women, the one that offers the greatest potential for reaching a compromise between the sexual and spiritual is the one he has with Mabel. Contrary to his normal habit of seducing and forgetting, Juan Carlos attempts to establish a more permanent relationship with Mabel. He enters in his diary the day of Mabel's seduction and expresses the happiness he feels:

. . . . SOY EL SER MÁS FELIZ DE LA TIERRA Y
PROMETO ANTE DIOS COMPORTARME COMO UN HOMBRE

DE VERDAD, JURO NO CONTARLO A NADIE Y
CASARME CON ELLA. (p. 49)

Obviously, the sexual encounter with Mabel makes a serious impression on Juan Carlos. His desire to marry her at that point would seem authentic. He would have no other reason to promise marriage to Mabel. The fact that the diary is for Juan Carlos alone suggests sincerity. His relationship with Mabel becomes extremely complex due to the fragmentary, non-chronological presentation of time and the presence of Nené, with whom Juan Carlos also has an ambiguous relationship. The time structure covers the most critical period in each of their lives.

From the time that Juan Carlos seduces Mabel in September of 1935, to April of 1936, he and Mabel date frequently. Sometime in April of 1936, the situation changes with the appearance of Cecil, the rich Englishman who becomes interested in Mabel. By this time, Mabel has begun to doubt her love for Juan Carlos. In September of that year Juan Carlos escorts Nené to the Spring dance and shortly thereafter begins dating Nené, while at the same time continuing a faded but still active relationship with Mabel. In June of 1937, Juan Carlos goes to Cosquín and maintains a correspondence with Nené and a non-reciprocated one with Mabel. Upon his return, in September, 1937, he finds Mabel has shut him out of her

life, and Nené is following her father's orders not to see him. Toward the end of the year, Nené meets Donato, and within a year she marries him. Mabel also has met her future husband by June of 1939 and marries him in 1941. The crucial time for Juan Carlos, then, is between June of 1937 and September of 1937, since both women abandon him in September.

This restructuring of time reveals that Mabel still occupies Juan Carlos' mind up to September of 1937. In April, 1937, Juan Carlos tells his friend Pancho that "Mabel le había prometido convencer al inglés para que lo tomara como administrador de las dos estancias." (p. 76) This remark sets up the conflict between his expressed need of employment and his desire for Mabel. Even if the Englishman ignored or was unaware of Juan Carlos' relationship with Mabel and gave the theoretical position, the position exists only in Juan Carlos' mind, and he has no qualifications for the job supposing it ever existed, Juan Carlos still has to deal with the problem of his feelings for Mabel. The actual state of Juan Carlos' response to Mabel belongs to an area of speculation rather than finite specifications. The reader finds himself tempted to believe unequivocally that Juan Carlos' accumulation of sensations toward Mabel definitely falls within the range of love. The last interior monologue of Juan Carlos certainly seems to bear this

out, since Mabel's name appears repeatedly. Toward the end of the monologue, the associations concerning Mabel completely dominate Juan Carlos' thoughts.

. . . Mabel, Mabel, Mabel! Yo tengo ganas de verte, mañana, cuando sea de día, te voy a decir que me volví . . . porque ya estoy curado! y que no me importa que estés en la bancarrota, ¿y no hay mal que por bien no venga? ¡que suerte que me volví. . . (p. 123)

The pathetic desperation in his attitude is unmistakable, and the reader soon discovers the reason for Juan Carlos' insecurity: Mabel has abandoned him completely. Whatever he feels toward Mabel must be understood in light of his maneuvers with Nené.

As was the case with Mabel, Juan Carlos first becomes attracted to Nené because he wants to make love to her. Nené, however, demonstrates a capacity to resist, at least more so than others, his arduous advances. Juan Carlos knows that time will have to be spent on Nené and concentrates all his efforts on reducing the time necessary to seduce her.

. . . ese invierno haría mucho frío en el portón ¿se cumpliría su plan secreto antes de empezar los fríos? ¿todas las noches de invierno en ese portón? (p. 64)

These words, in a section dated April, 1937, undermines what Nené has already established in her letters as a budding romance between the two in that it shows the true nature of Juan Carlos' intentions. In dating Nené, Juan Carlos has another motive besides sexual

satisfaction. From the chronological sequence, the reader can see that Juan Carlos is dating Nené while still maintaining an interest in Mabel. The same day he worries about Nené's porch, he tells Pancho of Nené,

. . . qui ni bien consiguiera lo que ambicionaba, se acabaría Nené, y pidió a Pancho que jurara no contarlo a nadie.... Juan Carlos dijo que Nené era igual a todas, si la trataban bien se envalentonaba, si la trataban mal marchaba derecha. Lo importante era que Mabel sintiera celos y no se olvidara del favor que debía hacerle.
(p. 76)

Juan Carlos, at this time, not only does not love Nené, he also has definite plans to abandon her after he has made her a sexual and psychological tool. Timing is all important, because Juan Carlos hopes to rekindle Mabel's previous attraction for him, and because he has not yet been sent to the sanatorium. Nené clearly remains in the background, while Mabel fluctuates between her actual role of disappearing into the background and the role of prime importance given to her by Juan Carlos, who refuses to believe that she is slipping away from him.

The trip to Cosquín changes the progression and allows Nené to move to the foreground. Now it is Juan Carlos who needs moral support and a demonstration that someone actually cares. Away from his home territory, Juan Carlos soon discovers which one feels enough for him to take the time to write. He expects that he will receive letters from at least two girls since he writes to two.

Por último toma los borradores del visitante y como había prometido corrige la ortografía de las tres cartas: la primera--de siete carillas--dirigida a una señorita, la segunda--de tres carillas--dirigida a la familia, y la tercera--también de tres carillas--dirigida a otra señorita. (p. 102-103)

One of the girls has to be Nené, since she has already stated that she was corresponding with him. The other young lady would be either Mabel or Elsa, and the possibilities of either are equal. But no matter who receives the letters, it is clear that Mabel never writes to Juan Carlos, for there are no traces of such a letter.

The reader is thus aware of the reason why Nené begins to loom more favorably in Juan Carlos' mind during his stay in Cosquín; she continually writes to him while he is there. His growing appreciation for Nené can be seen in the progression of Juan Carlos' feeling for her. His letter of August 10 states, ". . . yo no sé si antes sentía lo mismo, a lo mejor sentía lo mismo y yo no me daba cuenta, porque ahora siento que te quiero tanto." (p. 108) This is quite a change from the character who only wanted to exploit her. He not only expresses an appreciation for Nené, but also proposes, unorthodox as its means of expression may be, to her: "Al volver a Vallejos empesaremos una nueva vida, y unidos para siempre ¿me aceptás? Anda haciendo planes." (p. 112) That he had considered marriage to Nené becomes evident in the

discussion between Elsa and Nené in Cosquín. Elsa recalls, "Mientras que de Ud. hablaba siempre bien, que fue con la única que pensó en casarse, eso se lo digo sin celos de mi parte, Nené. . . ." (p. 228) The fact remains, though, that after his return to Vallejos and after Nené had written all those letters and received a tentative offer of marriage, Juan Carlos nonetheless has Mabel on his mind.

Both women figure prominently in the protagonist's thoughts. It is typical of Juan Carlos that he should offer marriage to one while wanting the other one. A defective model of the Don Juan archetype, with whom he shares the name, he searches for women until tuberculosis kills him. Yet for all his sexual activity, he is basically a hollow figure incapable of bringing significant meaning to his life. Whether tuberculosis or his single-minded view of women do the most to prevent him from enjoying normal heterosexual relationships is an open question. One thing is clear; sexual problems are an important part of his life.

The novelist presents the character Mabel in a much more limited scope. If Nené at times represents the confused romantic, Mabel radiates a confidence attained by her willingness to accept the world on its own terms. Seduced by Juan Carlos at approximately nineteen years of age, Mabel adjusts to the incident without difficulty.

Not entirely comfortable with Juan Carlos' tubercular condition, she begins to reconsider her relationship with him and find flaws in his character.

Trabaja como perito mercantil pero ha tenido discusiones con sus superiores por frecuentes ausentismos. Ha pasado una época de resfriós continuos y a menudo se siente cansado. Yo se lo creo pero la versión circulante es que le gusta demasiado divertirse, que es muy mujeriego, que por lo menos una vez a la semana se embriaga con sus amigos. (p. 41)

At the same time that she begins to doubt that she really loves him, she manipulates both her frequent quarrels with her parents over the diseased Juan and the arrival of an Englishman to provide her with excuses to dissolve the understanding she has with her boyfriend. Mabel feels indifferent to him by the time he departs for Cosquín. Her life from then on reflects the same type of decision-making. She becomes sexually involved with Pancho, because she wants to know whether Juan Carlos or Pancho is more virile. Her reputation suffers when the news of her affair becomes common knowledge, but Mabel rides out the storm unscarred. Indiscretion forces her to accept marriage, a minor setback in her life. She tells Nené her husband is "un petiso mal hecho." (p. 185) The addition of a husband to Mabel's life does not change her attitude toward men. The narrator provides this clue to her style of life six years after her marriage.

Como ya lo temía, no estaba abierto el negocio de artículos para hombre, situado en la esquina, donde trabajaba el joven vendedor con quien tanto simpatizaba.
(p. 209)

Without too much trouble, the reader can supply the rest and imagine Mabel's relationship with the salesman.

Mabel reduces everything to an animalistic pleasure principle. Her explanation for the popularity of Juan Carlos is an evaluation of his ability to provide sexual enjoyment. That she views everything from its sexual aspect is a manifestation of her strong sexual drives, which, in a way, give her an advantageous position from which to confront the possible frustrations awaiting her in her marriage. That she will be sexually frustrated in her marriage to a man she considers deformed and does not love is probable; she has too many experiences with which to compare him.

Mabel pensó que con el tiempo tal vez aprendería a quererlo. ¿pero y si las caricias de su novio no lograban hacerle olvidar las caricias de otros hombres?
(p. 198-199)

Nonetheless, if she can encounter extramarital sexual experiences, they may help her endure her marriage. Mabel is very much like Juan Carlos in that her sexual urges occupy an important position in her thoughts. She is not handicapped by convention and eagerly enters into sexual encounters. Hers is a life of biological needs and practical adjustment to reality.

In all these characters, the meaning of life is blurred in the confines of the world they inhabit. That these confines should not be externally described is characteristic of Puig's prose. The limitations the characters manifest are, strictly speaking, self-imposed and an expression of their own desires. Their reactions to external stimuli do not suggest a rigid mold that forces them to act as they do. For instance, Nené's choice to abandon Juan Carlos originates in an internal evaluation which just as easily, as she mentions later, could have led her to make the opposite decision. Marta Morello-Frosch states that ". . . it is fitting to insist that Puig's characters are not necessarily suffocated by an asphyxiating and miserable environment they cannot transcend." ⁶⁷ They are capable of transcending their world but never do.

Upon examining possible interpretations for the motives of the character's actions, it is clear that the main action is not a result of isolated individual personalities but rather of the tangle of various interpersonal relationships that join all the characters into the soap opera that Boquitas is. What transpires in the novel is the sum of all the outward and inward feelings of the group plus the actions that link them together.

⁶⁷ Morello-Frosch, p. 53.

Thus, Juan Carlos' visits to Elsa are hidden in the lie that he has been with Nené, which causes Celina to hate Nené, which affects Nené when she writes to Mrs. Etchepare, which indirectly causes her to separate from Donato. This combination of cause-effect action is based upon the facts that Nené is romantic, Juan Carlos is a liar, and Celina, a venomous witch. It is obvious that we are concerned with actions in direct proportion to the passions that inspire them. The passions are limited in magnitude and limitless in frequency of occurrence. MacAdam correctly surmizes that "Like a renaissance epic (Orlando furioso particularly) it [Boquitas pintadas] is made up of myriad episodes in which the same passions are repeated ad infinitum." ⁶⁸ Juan Carlos varies only minimally in his feelings for the different women he meets, but the distinct number of times he establishes those feelings are presumed to be of an ever-increasing amount. The same could be said for Mabel and Nené. The men they fall in love with will always reveal a more or less constant degree of sexual frustration in the women, while the actual numbers of men inevitably increase. Thus, the passions are continuously repeated and the character who endures those passions changes very little, if at all. The audience uses

⁶⁸ MacAdam, p. 61.

the characters as guideposts from one revelation of feelings to the other. MacAdam adds,

Unlike the novel or drama, which exist either through the relationship of the action, plot and history or through action and plot, the folletín derives its cohesion from the play of passions in time. It has no precise, organic structure and depends on the presence of certain figures--those who experience the passions--to give the (false) impression of realism. ⁶⁹

The margin of verisimilitude necessary to produce that realism depends on the collective memory of the audience, which in turn is affected by the modulations in character development. Obviously, the greater the changes in a particular character, the more difficult it is to remember him. The idea solution for the serial requires the minimizing of character development and the increment of emotive situations.

It is not suprising, then, that Manuel Puig would look to the popular culture media for parallels, for they contain the richest supplies of ordinary emotional materials. In an era when catastrophic movies are the box office sellers of the movie empire, one can see the desperate need people feel not only for emotional catharsis but also for a vicarious reality distinct yet related to their own. Morello-Frosch points out about one of the media:

⁶⁹ MacAdam, p. 61.

Cinema enters life, films are modified by personal experiences, and life, dreams and even the film itself are "filmized," so to speak. Life and films are spheres neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically subordinated. Even if the motion picture displays types of conduct--types of feminine and masculine beauty--to the characters, it is always a matter of life as it may be, not as it is. ⁷⁰

One of the major suppositions of Manuel Puig is that life and the images of popular culture coexist as related but separate realities. Care must be taken to notice that the media in his novels exist as equal forces with reality, sometimes merging with elements common to both, and at other times functioning independently and separately from reality.

With this in mind, the reader has to consider that the characters in Manuel Puig's prose fear, learn, and are influenced sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes equally by life and the media. Toto has almost a one-to-one relationship with the movies, while Juan Carlos derives his values more from life's propaganda. Morello-Frosch explains about the character's use of media:

To the contrary of what normally happens with dreamers who escape from the mundane and seem to float in a counterpart world of fantasy, Puig's characters return to the real world armed with some concepts which, in spite of being false, they apply to their every-day experiences. ⁷¹

⁷⁰ Morello-Frosch, p. 53.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Each character exhibits individual adaptations or rejections of the media.

Juan Carlos unifies the action in the novel: he also has a unique relationship to the reality of the media. As Morello-Frosch says, "Juan Carlos, el personaje principal cuya nota necrológica inicia la novela es un héroe de matinée: buen mozo, tarambana, sensual tuberculoso."⁷² In fact, his use of physical appearance and erotic appeal to try to seduce every female he meets fits the role of a superlover like Valentino. Juan Carlos may look like a movie star but his fascination with any type of popular media is almost nonexistent. There are several references that indicate his appreciation for the dancing parties but only as a practical medium motivated by his desire to be with the girls he plans to seduce. Actually, Juan Carlos does not have much time for another reality; he is too busy seducing girls in the one he inhabits. His only participation with a reality separate from the one he lives in concerns the minor fixation he has on the gaucho myth. But this is a personal affinity that has no relation to the external world of popular media. His macho fixation is a product of acculturation, not specifically of the popular

⁷² Marta Morello-Frosch, "La sexualidad opresiva en las obras de Manuel Puig," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, V (January and September, 1974): 152.

culture but of the entire socio-psychological cultural pattern.

Unlike Juan Carlos, Nené shows a marked tendency to receive influence from the popular culture and the mystique that surrounds it. Her metamorphosis of the relationship she shares with Juan Carlos into a romantic adventure has already been mentioned. Her ideas on romance are formed, at least partially, from her exposure to movies, radio and the local glamour scene. Nené's winning the Miss Springtime contest of 1936 lays the groundwork for her views on love. The newspaper clipping of the event relays this stereotypical version of Nené's contribution to the festival.

Cerró esta cabalgata musical un vals vienés de fin de siglo ejecutado con ímpetu notable por la Srta. Nélida Fernández y el Sr. Juan Carlos Etchepare, quienes convincentemente demostraron 'la fuerza del amor que supera todos los obstáculos'. . . .
(p. 21)

Nené's love cannot quite overcome all obstacles, but she would like to think it does, because that is what love is, according to the accepted version of popular culture, represented here by Sra. Baños. Nené listens to the radio programs and is quickly influenced by them. After listening to a pair of sentimental songs about love, Nené transports herself mentally to those dreamy yesterdays:

Frrente al espejo en que se sigue mirando,
después de aplicar el lápiz labial y el
cisme con polvo, se lleva el cabello ti-
rante hacia arriba tratando de reconstruir
un peinado en boga algunos años atrás.
(p. 15)

Nené uses the movies in much the same way. Since her life is not as exciting as it could be, she becomes accustomed to manipulating her husband into taking her to the movies, and they, in turn, magnify love into a very exciting game. She constantly compares her tedious life to the lives she sees on film. It is a comparison that provides recreation and a temporary escape from her ordinary life. Somewhat alienated and upset by strong forces operating within her life, Nené uses media as a diversion. She writes to Mabel "... a él le gustan mucho los dramas fuertes. A mí no tanto, para eso basta con la vida ¿verdad?" (p. 142) Nené's unhappiness and frustration result from the incompatibility of two realities--the one projected by the radio programs and feminine magazines and the other projected by the one she inhabits. She knows that glamorous cabarets exist, but that existence is not a part of her life. And it is this exclusiveness which so drastically affects her role with both Juan Carlos and Donato and eventually produces her psycho-erotic frustration.

Mabel functions as the Toto of Boquitas pintadas in that she has very close contact with the media in all its forms: films, radio programs, and feminine magazines.

Like Toto, she has multiple uses for the media. Sometimes she arranges her life according to the information she derives from them. At other times she combines external reality and media reality to produce a third reality with extensions into both. There are also times when the media's only function is recreation.

Mabel first avails herself of the informative value of the popular magazines during that period in her life when she begins to doubt the validity of her relationship with Juan Carlos. Bothered by nagging questions, she writes two letters to the columnist of Mundo Feminino to get a second opinion from an impartial observer. Since Mabel has already coldly and rationally analyzed Juan Carlos' negative probabilities, the article merely supports her prior convictions. Still, it pleases Mabel that the representative of her favorite magazine does agree with her.

Mabel also has in her possession a short article taken from the same magazine that makes references to the impossible love of Romeo and Juliet.

'Coqueto conjunto para cocktail realizado en seda moirée, con casquete Julieta, según la nueva moda inspirada por la super-producción Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer "Romeo y Julieta", del inmortal W. Shakespeare. Foto M-G-M.' y 'La nueva sensación del cine, Deanna Durbin, propone a las jovencitas este luminoso conjunto para ciclismo'. . . . (p. 46)

She considers the relationship between her and Juan

Carlos sufficiently similar in substance to the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet to warrant keeping the article. The near parallel situations indicate the overlapping, at least in Mabel's mind, of the two realities. She perceives the fate of Romeo and Juliet as predestined and lives her own life with the same attitude. She tells Nené,

--Mirá, Nené, yo creo que todo está escrito, soy fatalista, te podés romper la cabeza pensando y planeando cosas y después todo te sale al revés. (p. 195)

This fatalism gets partial support from romantic films which have a tendency to blame cruel fate for all the sufferings of the star-crossed lovers.

Mabel's enjoyment of a particular media sometimes occurs simultaneously with thoughts that pertain to personal situations.

A esa página seguían colecciones de pieles y atavíos de gala. Mabel se detuvo en un vestido largo hasta los pies, negro, con amplia falda bordeada de zorro plateado. Recordó que Cecil quería organizar en el futuro recepciones de etiqueta en su estancia. (p. 71)

The author utilizes this simultaneity to impress upon the reader certain facets of Mabel's personality. First, it illustrates the cold, impersonal feeling Mabel has for Cecil. Second, it reveals her priorities of perfume, jewels, and clothes--all materialistic items meant to please only her.

Mabel resembles Toto in her ability to re-create

film plots with elements of her own personal life not found in the original story. In a way, this helps her understand her position better.

Mabel pensó en la intimidad de la rica exdactilógrafa con el chofer, en la posibilidad de que el chofer estuviera muy resfriado y decidieran amarse con pasión pero sin besos, el esfuerzo sobrehumano de no besarse, pueden acariciarse pero no besarse, abrazados toda la noche sin poder quitarse la idea de la cabeza, las ganas de besarse, la promesa de no besarse para impedir el contagio . . . es cuando el metal cromado no contiene más la sangre impetuosa que las bocas se acercan y todas las noches se regalan el beso prohibido. (p. 69)

Mabel's fantasy creates a romantic situation that provides a solution to the problem of physically desiring Juan Carlos but fearing the contagion of tuberculosis. The fantasy resolves what reality cannot. Her separation from Juan Carlos is inevitable, but she can still have him in an oneiric reality with the impetus provided by the cinema.

Not only does Mabel fantasize about Juan Carlos in an established plot, she also utilizes the screen stars for her own imaginative episodes, although her attempt is not on the same level as that of Toto. Her fabrications reveals her sexual frustration and the high expectations she has of the men she dreams of seducing her.

¿Cuál era en ese momento su mayor deseo? En ese momento su mayor deseo era ver entrar sigilosamente por la puerta de su cuarto a Robert Taylor, o en su defecto a Tyrone Power, con un ramo de rosas rojas en la mano y en los ojos un designio voluptuoso. (p. 132)

That her expectations are at odds with reality does not bother Mabel as much as it does Nené. Without worrying herself excessively, she not only decides to enter into a situation totally uncharacteristic of films, but she chooses a man from a lower level of society who bears little resemblance to her movie idols. For Mabel, the satisfaction of her sexual urges has priority over the realization of any myths from media.

Her preferences indicate the difference between Toto's and Mabel's experiences with popular culture. Whereas Toto's psycho-sexual condition results from his inability to differentiate clearly and choose between the two value systems, because of his lack of maturity, Mabel immediately abandons media influence when it conflicts with her normal instinctive drives. Unquestionably, popular culture derived from media such as films, radio and magazines, influences her personality in the same manner as social conventions, to a certain extent, do. The external reality composed of social pressures and conventions and the fantasy reality she derives from the movies, feminine magazines and radio programs overlap, so that there are elements common to both and elements that are distinct entities for the two sets. For instance, one element that belongs to both is the belief that love normally precedes sexual activity. But the choice of whom to love consists of two separate

elements; society's position, more flexible in that only general terms like moral character, financial responsibility, and favorable disposition are specified, and the media position suggesting qualities like physical perfection and a romantic nature. However, there is another reality in Mabel exclusive and independent of these two realities and that is the demanding id of her personality. Mabel's primary psychological frustration concerns the irreconcilable differences between her realistic nature and her physical desires. When media influence pushes her into a relationship with Juan Carlos, her sexual drive takes over, and she is seduced. Later her practical nature inhibits the merging of the film-like Juan Carlos and the desire for the sexual gratification she receives from him. When she marries Gustavo for practical reasons, she finds herself sexually frustrated. As the reader can see, the cinema influence in Mabel is subservient to the sexual and practical nature operating within her.

The remaining two characters Pancho and Raba reflect, on a smaller scale, the confrontation between popular culture and sexual immediacies. The hopes and dreams of the two are motivated by their observations of popular culture. In Pancho, the reader sees a character who desires that his sexual object have the qualities of a movie actress. Pancho says of Nené ". . . Nené no era una india bruta: hablaba como una artista de la radio

y al final de las palabras debidas no olvidaba las eses."

(p. 74) His grandiose ideas cause him to abandon Raba after he has seduced her, thinking that he will encounter further opportunities for marriage to a girl in a higher social class than Raba. His adventure with Mabel reinforces his preference, while at the same time it indicates that his future is potentially as frustrated as the other characters', since it is unlikely that he could find a permanent relationship with someone in Mabel's social class.

Even the unfortunate Raba sustains conflicts between those illusory dreams she weaves while under the influence of the films and radio shows and the uncompromising facts of reality. Like Mabel and Nené, she shows a marked preference for the popular songs and movies of the day.

Las tareas a realizar cuando el patrón
estaba en casa eran las más pesadas,
porque no podía acompañarse cantando,
mientras que a la mañana entonaba diversas
melodías, en general tangos, milongas y
tangos-canción escuchadas en las
películas de su actriz-cantante favorita.
(p. 80)

Like Mabel, Raba adjusts the plots so that they reflect her situation. Her version of the rags to riches story thus incorporates her awareness of the dangers in attempting to rise out of one's social class and a subconscious desire to marry someone rich.

Raba pensó en la película argentina que había visto el viernes anterior, con su actriz-cantante favorita, la historia de una sirvienta de pensión que se enamora de un pensionista estudiante de abogacía. . . . Raba decidió que si alguien de otra clase social, superior, un día le proponía matrimonio ella no iba a ser tonta y rechazarlo, pero tampoco sería ella quien lo provocase. (p. 80-81)

Cautiously open to all possibilities, Raba knows better than to hope for the impossible. The media lets her know that there is a reality different from the impoverished one she lives in, but it does not tempt her for the moment to fantasize excessively. The temptation occurs later in a situation much more probable because of the simple events that have already happened. Having given birth to Pancho's son, Raba is bewildered and upset by Pancho's refusal to accept either her or his son. While listening to a tango about a gaucho and his woman, she fabricates a new relationship with Pancho.

' . . . y el gaucho extrañado le dijo no llores mi pingo que la patroncita ya no volverá . . . ' es un tango triste porque cuando se muera la china el gaucho se queda solo con el caballo y no se puede acostumbrar ' . . . tal vez por buena y por pura Dios del mundo la llevó . . . y no dice que le haya quedado un hijo, al Pancho le quedaría el Panchito si yo me muero. . . . (p. 160-161)

Raba in her fantasy sacrifices herself in order to bring about the union of Pancho and her son. As her interior monologue progresses, the images in Raba's story change, forcing new plots to appear until the monologue is one

stream of slightly different stories all containing fragments of truth and imagination with no clear distinction between the two.

. . . él se aprovecha que soy ciega y trae a otra más blanca, la sirvienta del Intendente Municipal, y me dice que es una vieja. . . ¡el hijo nuestro se va a quedar cieguito! y yo agarro la lavandina y me la tiro encima y me quemó toda, por mala que no lo cuide a mi nene, sin padre y cieguito, un día se cayó de la cuna que no sabe donde poner las patitas chuecas y se partió la frente, se le abrió en dos la cabecita y se me murió, ¡el castigo va a ser ese! (p. 165-166)

It is apparent that Raba is more deeply influenced by media than Mabel.

While the media plays a major role in the development of the characters, its structure within the novel is not as obvious as in La traición. However, the author's growing mastery of narrative fiction is readily apparent in his second novel. The three major elements: innovative new devices within a completely new form, character development with an emphasis on the sexual repression of each character, and the interphasing of media influence in the characters form the core of the novel. Of the three, popular culture functions as a bridge between the characters of La traición and Boquitas pintadas. As in La traición, Manuel Puig uses psychological investigation in Boquitas pintadas, but he goes much further in the expansion of character consciousness. There is a greater

reliance on melodrama to arouse emotion in the reader as well as a new confidence on the part of the author toward experimentation with narrative points of view, especially third person narration. Taken as a whole, these aspects produce a novel of singular literary effort that signals Manuel Puig as a most promising writer.

CHAPTER IV

The Buenos Aires Affair

The change from Boquitas pintadas to The Buenos Aires Affair involves additional modifications in form, the utilization of a new literary subgenre and an intensification of the Freudian approach into the investigation of personality. Puig's tendency to explore the many facets of rural life has evolved into the investigation of bourgeois life in Buenos Aires.

Several technical devices illuminate the distinction between the first two novels. The most obvious difference is the divestiture of letters and diaries. There are journal pieces in the novel, but they are limited to newspaper headlines, the partial articles that follow them, and two official reports: one deals with a police interview, while the other describes the autopsy performed on Leo's body. Thus, the personal memos are eliminated or minimized.

The same depersonalization characterizes the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Whereas in Boquitas, the author perfects and expands his use of the primary technique employed in La traición, in The Buenos Aires Affair he curtails its appearance in the novel.

Puig admits "Hay menos diálogo, menos uso del stream-of-consciousness que presupone un lenguaje más coloquial." ⁷³ The knowledge that such a technique could provide has been shifted to the biographical sketches of Leo and Gladys, thus making it unnecessary to prove their consciousness. The restricted use of the stream-of-consciousness in this novel causes the presentation of Leo and Gladys to appear at times uneven and excessively controlled.

The utilization in Chapter IV of selected images and footnoted material, reminiscent of Merimee's style, allows the author to explore two separate but related facets of Gladys' character--the overwhelming emptiness and dissatisfaction with her life and the constant preoccupation with sexual fulfillment. Whereas before, in the biographical section that precedes this part, the pertinent facts are unceremoniously laid down for the reader, here the character herself exposes the pathetic situation of her psyche, magnifying essential aspects of her continuing frustration through subjective revelations. The reader formulates from this flow of images Gladys' thoughts concerning suicide, violence, murder and sex. Necessary to the extent that it provides an inroad into the psychic exploration of Gladys, this descriptive addition

⁷³ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 70.

also performs another important function within the author's esthetics. Since it follows the highly structured biography of Gladys' formative life, the stream-of-consciousness revelation revitalizes the reader's attention and focuses this renewed attention on Gladys' psychological problems. Puig intentionally creates this break for he maintains: "Pero de todos modos, a partir de Boquitas pintadas tengo muy en cuenta los límites de la atención del lector, nunca le exijo demasiado." ⁷⁴

While the reader manipulates the flow of thought, he must also contend with the footnotes. The footnotes are puzzling in that they narrate what seems at first an unimportant, unrelated masturbatory act. But the act physically parallels what is occurring in Gladys' life and thoughts. Her constant but unsuccessful attempts to find happiness and to create and detain the erotic images she desires are mirrored by the act itself. The footnotes demonstrate that Gladys fails at even the most elemental tasks she undertakes. Together, the images and the act convey the total desperation that Gladys feels.

Another structural manipulation occurs in Chapter XIII. The author narrates the sensations of Gladys, Leo and María Esther Vila following the kidnapping of Gladys by Leo and the subsequent meeting of the three characters

⁷⁴ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 77.

in Leo's room. The action has been fragmented and each moment is thus expanded through the particular sensations of the characters. It is a cinematic slow-up in the sense that Joseph Warren Beach describes.

In the ralenti the movement, which at the ordinary rate is perceived as one rapid curve, as undifferentiated outline, is slowed up to such an extent that we are able to distinguish its successive moments. . . . In the analogous procedure in fiction, there is a tendency to exhaust the content of the moment presented, there is an infinite expansion of the moment. ⁷⁵

The material which the author inserts relates only abstractly to the affective domain of the character in the sense that the material has to be analyzed before it can fit the character's established psyche.

Sensaciones experimentadas por Gladys, ante la presencia de Leo María Esther -- Un paisaje: cielo nocturno luminoso, de tono similar al aguamarina, es decir azul y transparente, la piedra preciosa que no obstante su densidad de color permite ver el interior del engarce y en último termino [sic] la piel pálida del dedo, del escote o del lóbulo de la oreja. ⁷⁶

One could formulate symbolic interpretations for the description and assign them to Gladys. But whether one

⁷⁵ Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique (New York: The Century Company, 1932), pp. 408-409.

⁷⁶ Manuel Puig, The Buenos Aires Affair, (México: Joaquín Martíz, 1973), pp. 199. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear within the text.

accepts the transparency of Gladys' soul as a reflection of the sky's transparency or not, the process is one of abstracting the emotion and re-applying it to explore Gladys' consciousness.

Similarly, two definitions of Leo's sensations require the same abstraction. One sensation is described in terms of a famous painting by Michaelangelo. There are some vital clues to Leo's personality in this description. Another sensation retells the plot of a Wagnerian opera. That Leo identifies with the hero, Sigfrido, is obvious. But the merging of the two concerns a process that has its roots in Leo's psychophysical nature and, as such, lies outside the perimeter of mere sensations. Thus when the author writes sensations and the reader discovers the highly abstract passages, a narrative disjunction occurs which forces the reader to separate storyline and character background. In so doing, the reader ignores one to pursue the other. Like the experimentation in Chapter IV, the section that deals with these sensations provides valuable commentary on the character's personality.

The newspaper headlines and parts of their accompanying articles appear in Chapter V and X. The most striking element of the headlines and the articles is their common base--violence. A reflection of the times as well as a parallel with Leo's unstable state, the articles underline the growing discontent with society's rules and

values, a situation which Anais Nin analyzes:

. . . the death of emotion has lead inevitably to excess violence which is the major theme of our literature today and a symptom of schizophrenia, violence in order to feel alive because the divided self feels its own death and seeks sensation to affirm its existence. ⁷⁷

The group of young rapists and the urban guerrillas exemplify the desperate need to demonstrate their existence. In a novel fraught with violence and sexual frustration, the newspaper articles are at once a reminder of what possibilities exist in society itself and an understatement of the potential with Leo and Gladys.

Perhaps the most surprising structural elements within the novel are the autopsy performed on Leo and the extended minor description that follows, relaying anatomical information not contained in the legal autopsy. Manuel Puig's interest in the progressive decay of the human body emerges earlier in Boquitas in which the decomposition of Juan Carlos and Pancho is given in great detail. Of paramount importance here are the changes that rapidly occur after death. In a sense, the transformation from life to death involves the movement from one reality to another. The changes, both physical and psychological, in life are a continuation that does not terminate with death. In spite of all the supposed permanency of the conventional

⁷⁷ Anais Nin, The Novel of the Future (New York: Collier Books, 1972), p. 173.

reality that people in general, and Puig's characters specifically, believe in, the inevitable deterioration of the body, is, perhaps, the only ultimate reality. Regardless of who they are or what world their bodies and minds temporarily inhabit, the characters in Puig's novels eventually enter an ultimate reality from which there exists no escape through the use of any media--death.

The most modified element in the novel is the use of the media. Unlike the first two novels in which the power of popular culture directly influences the formation of the individual personalities of the characters and was one of the thematic components, in The Buenos Aires Affair, the media are not directly interwoven with the characters and, as such, are more properly an extension of the form. The cinema stands separate from the characterization as an epigram of each chapter. Each epigram consists of one frame of a motion picture, usually of the heroine and a brief section of the dialogue corresponding to the film. The essence of the dialogue can be super-imposed on the chapters to reflect similarities between the character's life or personality and the film in Chapters I, III, VI, VII, IX, and XV; in the remaining chapters, the epigrams have a more complex relationship to the material in the text.

The first chapter has as its epigram a portion of the film La dama de las camelias, starring Greta Garbo.

The splice reveals the situation between an older woman and the young man who is in love with her and wishes to take care of her. The scene depicts the self-pity the woman feels and her attempts to interest the suitor in pretty girls his own age: "Debería volver al salón y bailar con alguna de esas jóvenes bonitas." (p. 9) Her motive for rejecting his love apparently stems from her incredulity that she could ever attract a man in her condition "¿Pero por qué habría usted de reparar en una mujer como yo? Estoy siempre nerviosa o enferma . . . triste . . . o demasiado alegre." (p. 9) Greta Garbo's temperament in the epigram previews the most characteristic feature of Gladys' personality--her nervousness. Her mother Clara indicates,

¿Pero es que había una recuperación posible para Gladys? Hacía apenas un mes la había creído curada, y ahora la veía otra vez en el fondo de esa pecera oscura en que se sumergía, una nueva y aguda crisis de postración nerviosa. (p. 12)

Gladys' fits of depression and illness parallel Garbo's role of sometimes sick and often sad.

Un lugar tranquilo frente al mar, varios meses de serenidad y descanso habían transformado a Gladys, pero pocas semanas de vuelta en el hervidero de los medios artísticos de Buenos Aires habían bastado para llevarla otra vez a cero. (p. 12)

The brief presentation of Garbo anticipates the appearance of Gladys in a similar role.

The epigram of Chapter III, a segment of a Joan

Crawford movie entitled El suplicio de una madre, contains the confrontation between a mother and her daughter. It indicates that the daughter snobbishly objects to the mother's working as a waitress to support the family. The mother expresses her disappointment in the daughter's reaction.

Hice lo posible. (Mira en torno, desesperada.) Pero es inútil. No te imaginas lo que significa ser madre. Ella es parte de mí misma. Tal vez no haya salido todo lo buena que yo quería. Pero no por eso deja de ser hija mía. (p. 25)

The tension present in the film also exists between Clara and Gladys, for different reasons. In the case of Clara and her daughter, the source of conflict comes from Clara's selfish professional pride. Clara cannot understand why Gladys would choose sculpture instead of poetry as her profession. Furthermore, she believes all sculptors are potential hunchbacks and would like to see her daughter involved in a more graceful career. Gladys, on the other hand, longs for encouragement and some sign of love from her undemonstrative mother but never receives it. As a result she feels rejected and alienated from her mother.

The movie De corazón a corazón with Greer Garson in the starring role is the epigram for Chapter VI. The essence of this movie concerns the life of an orphan boy and the administrator of an orphanage who grows so attached to him she attempts to prevent his adoption by a foster set of parents. The section contains particular

significance in that it comes just before the biographical sketch of Leo. The chapter illustrates that Leo, like Sam, has no parents during the formative years of his life. Also, like Garson, Olga, the person who raises Leo, is not the appropriate person to manage his upbringing. The splice also indicates a characteristic common to all of Manuel Puig's male protagonists from Toto to Juan Carlos to Leo--their lack of a strong father image.

A scene from the movie Mujeres with Norma Shearer serves as epigram for the seventh chapter. Evidently the role is that of a divorced woman who still loves her former husband. Her mother questions her about the possibility of finding another man, but Norma Shearer strongly objects to any such proposal ". . . un hombre bueno. Ya hemos tratado el tema. Yo encontré al único hombre que quise. Y lo perdí." (p. 113) With the aid of the book she is reading, the daughter perceives the sometimes tragic visitations love can bring.

'Si el amor te hace una seña, síguelo, aunque sus senderos sean escarpados. Y cuando sus alas te envuelvan, entrégate a él. Aunque su voz quebrante tus sueños como el Viento Nórdico devasta el jardín.' (p. 113)

Within the novel, the essence of love does not consist in the security it may bring, but rather in the range of emotions it allows people to experience.

'Mas por miedo has de buscar en el Amor
sólo paz y placer entonces mejor será que
pases de largo por su umbral, rumbo al
mundo sin inviernos ni primaveras ni
veranos, donde reirás, pero no a carca-
jadas, y llorarás, pero no todas tus
lágrimas.' (p. 113)

The chapter that follows this epigram intensifies the significance of love. Gladys, like Norma Shearer, is sure that she has met the right man, "lo único que importaba después de haberlo visto era tratar de pasar el resto de mi vida cerca de él para mirarlo." (p. 123) She welcomes the opportunity for love, cost what it may in personal sacrifices: "Dios me preguntaba si yo estaba dispuesta a cualquier sacrificio por amor a mi futuro compañero. Respondí que por supuesto sí, más aún, sería mi placer doblegarme a la voluntad de Leo." (p. 131) But Gladys in exchange for her love and loyalty expects a modicum of protection and a sense of well-being. She admires and sees a need for strength in men, "Fuerza que necesita para proteger a la mujer amada." (p. 131) All of her expectations, like those of the heroine of Mujeres, are crushed when she and Leo break off their relationship. Gladys' chances for finding a new love to replace her feelings for Leo are remote. Norma Shearer's role parallels very closely not only the beginning but also the end of Gladys' encounter with Leo.

The epigram of Chapter IX consists of an extension of Chapter VII in that the situation again concerns the

destruction of a love affair. The differences are that the couple is engaged when the separation occurs and that this separation results from the death of the fiancée. The woman playing the part is Susan Hayward and the title, indicative of both women's future situation, is Manana Lloraré. In the chapter, the reader discovers several links to the epigram. Leo and Gladys, like the heroine and her fiancée, no longer have a personal relationship, for Leo openly admits to María Esther that he hates Gladys and plans to abandon her. He even confesses a desire for her death. Hayward's role as an alcoholic mirrors Gladys' addiction to barbituates.

Ella está siempre en sus cosas. Pero perdida. Está en lo de ella pero perdida. Con sus pastillas para dormirse y para despertarse. Hasta que un día se las toma todas juntas porque eso es lo que va a pasar. (p. 157)

Leo's death will later recall this film. Thus, the film splice foreshadows Leo's death and Gladys' emotional crisis.

There are several aspects of Chapter XV to compare and contrast with the epigram. The most obvious similarity between Greta Garbo and Gladys is that neither is aware of the death of their former lovers. In the two women the need for the lover constitutes an important phase in their life. Both Garbo and Gladys have chosen a career involving the fine arts. The main difference between the two concerns the pathetic condition of

Gladys' life. While Garbo has just experienced a tremendously successful evening at the ballet, Gladys has had her position as the finalist taken away from her by the very man who selected her. Her career as a sculptor must be considered as a failure, while Garbo, in contrast, stands at the threshold of a bright and prolonged career. The epigram emphasizes the total emptiness of Gladys' life.

From the epigrams in Chapters I, III, VI, VII, IX and XV, one can plainly perceive the similarities and differences between the characters in the novel and the film. Not quite as obvious is the expanding feature of the film clips in regard to the characterization of Leo and Gladys. The epigrams are not merely simple reinforcement and background for Puig's characters, they are multiple extensions of the problems Leo and Gladys had, have or might have in the future. The different film splices prevent the reader from assuming that only two texts exist. The epigrams continually present the characters from multiple angles. In Chapter X, for instance, the character portrayed by Lana Turner in Las Follies de Ziegfeld resembles the roles of Susan Hayward in Manana Lloraré and Norma Shearer in Mujeres in that the basic problem concerns a man-woman relationship. But this epigram also links Gladys to a future life of possible unhappiness with its prefiguration of

tragedy in Turner's role. The unfortunate accident with the champagne glass foreshadows an unlucky career that parallels Gladys' failure to succeed in sculpture. The epigram demonstrates Puig's use of the cinema to create a reality separate but related to the one the characters in his novel inhabit. The psychological problems visible in the screen characters mirror frequent conflicts existing universally in men and women, and, in particular, in Leo and Gladys.

While the author's use of popular culture in this novel establishes a separation of reality not emphasized in his first two novels, the personality of these two characters is much less influenced by media and much more a result of childhood familiar traumas. Their sexual and social frustrations are a product of infantile inbalancing in their psychic states related to the cinema only in the sense that the cinema often portrays figures similar to Leo and Gladys. The core of the novel deals with the psychological and social aberrations of the two primary characters and possible interpretations as to how they became the way they did. To this end, the author uses a subgenre appropriate for the investigation of the themes of sex and violence as his point of departure.

Manuel Puig's third novel is loosely patterned on police fiction. The author says of its structure:

A partir de Boquitas he tratado de relatar en los términos que mejor se avinieran al contenido. El contenido --creo-- debe siempre preceder a la forma. En Rita Hayworth no partí de una estructura previa; el libro fue tomando forma a medida que avanzaba. En esta tercera novela hay una historia de violencia contenida, y se me ocurrió que los términos de una novela policial me iban a facilitar la narración. ⁷⁸

In more realistic terms, the novel has, at least initially, the form of a detective yarn. Cheuse comments on Puig's transition from the serial to this subgenre.

Movies and day-time serials no longer hold the popular mind in thrall, and Puig, always sensitive to the vagaries of popular taste, gives them over for the detective novel, a more appropriate vehicle for an inquest into the decline of a culture. ⁷⁹

Whether or not Puig is sensitive to the vagaries of the popular taste can be debated; but the form used, as the author admits, provides the most propitious way to present the contents of the novel. In popular literature today the crime mystery exists as a prototype for sex and violence, and for the author who wishes to explore these two themes, the form comes pre-defined with murders, the sexual acrobatics of the investigator and the debased environment in which the scenes usually take place.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 70.

⁷⁹ Alan Cheuse, "Puig's Last Picture Show," Review 75 (Winter, 1975), p. 79.

Puig modifies the set form to fit his particular artistic needs.

Puig's format begins much the same as any other mystery with the disappearance and possible murder of Gladys Hebe D'Onofrio. As in so many mysteries the possibility of death overshadows the kidnapping. This presentiment enters the scene through the poem that continually surfaces in the thoughts of Clara, Gladys' mother: ". . . tan medroso y triste,/tan oscuro y yerto/todo se encontraba . . . /que pensé un momento: /Dios mío: que solos/se quedan los muertos. . . ." (p. 13)

In the second chapter the kidnapping assumes its final form with the kidnapper and the victim cinematically frozen in his apartment. He is waiting for María Esther, and Gladys is bound, gagged and lying on the bed. The state of undress of the kidnapper, who is wearing only a towel around his waist, hints at a situation much more complex than a mere kidnapping. That situation involves the personality of the two characters and their relationship to one another, an aspect which Puig will explore under the cover of this crime drama. Puig says,

Me interesaba mucho en esta novela la zona en que los contenidos de la inconciencia aparecen enmascarándose en la conciencia.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Quoted in Sosnowski, p. 70.

The form, then, masks a revolving base from which the author can examine the externalization of the subconscious feelings of Leo and Gladys. This basis for the novel incorporates a wide range of devices to highlight the interior aspects of the characters. It is not a simple detective novel. The presentation of the biographical sketch of the kidnapper clashes with the traditional detective story. Furthermore, the typical detective mystery novel works with abundant action and built-up suspense throughout, both limited elements in Puig's novel. Actually, this novel more closely resembles an expanded feature in a police magazine that attempts to cover the pathological evidence in a bizarre murder case. The one aspect that prevents a strict parallel is the insertion of a stream-of-consciousness device, which rarely appears in the crime magazines, for exploring the kidnapper and victim. This novel, then, presents an attempt to examine Leo and Gladys in relation to the potential crime common to both.

Gladys' problems illustrate external manifestations of the failures in her chosen career and personal life. Many of Gladys' conflicts originate in her youth. Her mother is a frustrated poetess. Envious of all poets, she spends endless amounts of time preparing and giving recitals. Because of her consummate interest in poetry, Clara finds little time for her daughter, relegating her

care to her family and a neighbor. The neighbor proves to be a superior mother substitute, and Gladys quickly forms an attachment to her which in turn causes tension between mother and daughter.

Gladys Hebe tenía entonces cuatro años y cuando su madre la retaba porque no comía, se ponía a llorar pensando sin decirlo que durante la excursión al delta había comido sentada en las faldas de la vecina. . . . Gladys Hebe llamaba a la vecina en sueños solamente, porque de lo contrario su madre le lanzaba miradas acres. (p. 30)

Consequently, Gladys associates the neighbor's lap with food and love, a combination missing in the relationship with her own mother, whereas she associates only tension and conflict with her own mother. The relationship becomes less and less that of a mother-daughter one. Gladys needs a mother who understands and cares, qualities lacking in the egoistic Clara. While the mother continually reinforces her position of tyrannical superiority, the father, although friendly to Gladys, abides by the decisions and evaluations of his wife, thus leaving Gladys alone and helpless in a world of adult responsibilities and fears.

Gladys, through lack of confidence and the ambivalent feelings of her own worth inspired by her mother's mishandling of her youth, comes to feel more and more that no one wants her. Her prolonged adolescence results from her inability to direct her feelings away from home; she is in reality still striving to obtain the love and

attention of her mother before she can venture out into new conquests. Abandoned early to someone else's care and receiving only harsh criticism from her mother helps Gladys establish the basis for the negative feelings she has about herself.

Her entrance into the world of art is due partly to the attention and praise she experiences in her first efforts: "Los progresos de Gladys en la escuela de bellas artes, fueron, por el contrario, rápidos e indiscutibles. Especialmente sus modelados en arcilla llamaron la atención." (p. 37) But Gladys' true feelings toward sculpture waver between a passing interest and a need to feel the comforting social contacts the glamour of art bestows on the successful artisans.

Her dependency on art eventually becomes an escape from the unhappiness she encounters in her life. In the imaginary interview with a reporter from Harper's Bazaar, she reveals of her beach collection "La obra era esa, reunir objetos despreciados para compartir con ellos un momento de la vida, o la vida misma." (p. 119) Objects that were once useful have been reduced to worthless, decaying refuse. Gladys collects and identifies with the rejected articles of humanity.

In time her sense of inferiority leads her to adopt a similar position with Leo. She becomes the social outsider which he exhibits before the art world as a

new find. Gladys comes to believe that she, like the bathing cap and slipper she picks up on the beach, has no value in and of herself. Her life is as empty as the objects she collects, and Gladys easily identifies with their alienated state. But whereas before her attraction to sculpture was based on a need for attention, her arrangement of the objects the sea rejects mirrors the very feelings she has of herself. Her art not only does not bring peace to her, but it constantly reminds her of her own uselessness in the world. Yet she clings to that art, falsely believing that it is an integral part of her existence, providing her with the only moments of happiness in her life. "Gladys se vería obligada a tomar un trabajo cualquiera; la única actividad que le agradaba era su trabajo plástico. . . ." (p. 230)

Gladys' dedication to the field operates solely on a superficial level. In spite of her protests that art constitutes the only meaningful aspect in her life, she demonstrates a willingness to abandon her sculpture not once but twice, once for no apparent reason during her stay in the United States and a second time when she believes her relationship with Leo will turn into something permanent. In Gladys' life, art belongs to a realm of nonessential functions that can be adopted or ignored depending on the strength or weakness of her other needs, but her attitudes toward art do indicate the serious

consequences of her desire for attention and love.

These same feelings of rejection influence her ideas concerning heterosexual relationships. Gladys initiates her acquaintance with the opposite sex in her art class as she observes for the first time the nude male form of a model. The author, in a third person narrative, indicates Gladys' initial embarrassment and her naive misconceptions about the physical proportions of men. Prior to this experience, her knowledge has been derived mainly from Greek statues, and her first confrontation with the male physique understandably produces a mild shock. The reader will later recall another reference by Gladys to the comparison between the male form and classic sculpture: ". . . un caño torcido y surcado por venas, con punta de dardo o de flecha india envenenada dos grotescas esferas colgantes vergüenza de la creación, error de la naturaleza, los escultores griegos obligados a reducir las carnes del diablo a infantiles dimensiones graciosas, discretas. . . ." (p. 64) Although her introductory contact falls within normal, established lines, the second reference suggests that Gladys' internalization possesses elements beyond mere surprise and wonder. To a degree, the apparent hostility can be attributed to her desire for symmetry in the art form, but an emotional response exists that remains outside esthetics and which must be attributed to the subjective

feelings of the girl toward men revealed in the word vergüenza.

Gladys shows no unusual variations when she accepts her first date. Frightened by her date's insistent desire to take advantage of her, she manages to keep him at a distance, permitting only superficial kisses. Most important in this first confrontation is the fact that Gladys stays in control of the situation while conveying the impression that she has no objection to some degree of physical contact with males. That is to say, Gladys accepts the sexual aspect of life quite well at that time. Her demanding desire to be loved has yet to emerge.

By the time Gladys makes the trip to Washington, she has become a mature young woman with specific ideas about the man she would like to meet. With those ideas she fabricates three different configurations which correspond to her varying tastes. The first ideal, a rich young man resembling Montgomery Clift in facial features, combines a hypersensitivity with a mild form of neurasthenia. The second choice has a penchant for keeping busy with all sorts of activities, is married, and looks like John Kennedy. Third on her list is the university sports enthusiast with a golden tan and the composite face of all those young men that are pictured in the magazines advertising the latest grooming products. Unfortunately, Gladys has set her goals much too high

and has very little chance of ever meeting anyone even remotely resembling any one of her three ideals. As a result of her desperate need to be loved, she settles for much less, as her affairs in New York illustrate.

Her first sexual experience depicts the need Gladys has for someone to protect her.

Una vez allí le tomó la mano y se la besó con ternura. Gladys sintió que algo se descongelaba dentro de su pecho, y de ese pedazo de hielo que le pareció llevar bajo las costillas manaban lágrimas abundantes: entraron, el caballero la sentó en sus rodillas y la cobijó en sus brazos largos de raza sajona. (pp. 49-50)

Gladys' participation consists of a passive acquiescence, more like a child's than an equal partner's. Her seducer even has to undress her and put her in bed. The image of her sitting on the man's knee reminds the reader of an analogous incident when the neighbor sat Gladys on her knee and fed her. The common base consists of the almost parental love both the neighbor and the man give to Gladys.

After her cursory experience with the man from Chicago, Gladys becomes increasingly concerned about her attitude toward life and love.

. . . la muchacha tenía otro aspecto desde que su objetivo en la vida--a partir de lo ocurrido con Frank--era repetir aquel momento de goce, en brazos, por supuesto de alguien que le ofreciera un futuro. (p. 52)

Gradually, she makes the discovery that sexual activity often is more gratifying when it accompanies feelings of love and hope for the future. Her sexual fulfillment

with Danny results from just such feelings.

Con Danny consiguió Gladys en un único encuentro su más satisfactoria relación hasta esa fecha, pues unió atmósfera amorosa, y perspectivas de un futuro feliz, a un acto físico pleno. (p. 53)

The goal Gladys has in mind--the union of sex and love--is not one easily accomplished. Her feelings of rejection serve as an obstacle in her efforts to find a suitable man. Subconsciously starved for love, she accepts any sexual advance without being able to differentiate whether or not she or the man really care for one another. Thus, she becomes involved with a number of men who bring her no closer to her goal. The listing of lovers, particularly the first sexual experience with the unnamed gentleman and the affair with Frank, with whom Gladys becomes involved indicates her obvious nymphomania. Gladys' incentive--a future filled with happiness--remains strong, and she changes from man to man searching for the right combination.

Upon meeting Druscovitch, Gladys imagines that her dream of love has finally come true. Leo appears to possess those qualities that signal for her the epitomy of the male image; he is forceful, aggressive, and successful in his career. The total effect that Leo exercises on Gladys surfaces in a fantasized interview. Gladys reconstructs his first visit and recalls the strong passions he evoked.

Yo no exterioricé la más leve emoción, y no me costó ningún trabajo contenerme, porque São Paulo carecía de toda importancia después de ver entrar por mi puerta a un ser semejante. Lo único que importaba después de haberlo visto era tratar de pasar el resto de mi vida cerca de él para mirarlo. (p. 123)

Unable to forsake her dream, she forcibly converts Leo in her own mind into her ideal and convinces herself that the situation is an answer to her prayers.

. . . pensé que el cielo existía. Que Dios me quería y por eso me había premiado después de tanto sufrimiento, con un amor de veras. (p. 131)

Forcing Leo to become a falsely constructed ideal, she then can enjoy sexual relations with him.

Having entered this make-believe world, she adamantly refuses to acknowledge any past experience of failure in her erotic life: "Considero que mi propia historia de amor es insuperable." (p. 117) Shutting out the obvious, Gladys metamorphosizes the entire relationship into an affair of love and need. Morello Frosch comments on Gladys' paradisiacal escape.

Este rapto acaba con una violación sexual final, no muy distinta de sus otros encuentros y es en este momento que la protagonista imagina que todo es un estupendo affair: "The Buenos Aires Affair," descrito en lenguaje hiperbólico en una entrevista imaginaria. ⁸¹

⁸¹ Morello Frosch, "La sexualidad opresiva en las obras de Manuel Puig," p. 155.

In Gladys' mind, Leo's savage possession of her turns into an intimate moment of pleasure for her. Regardless of how Gladys distorts the actual incident, it impresses the reader as a rape scene of sadistic proportions.

Leo's eventual betrayal hurts Gladys much more than other men in her life simply because Leo contains the greatest number of qualities that Gladys finds appealing in men. She becomes more involved from an emotional standpoint with Leo and admits that Leo satisfies her need to be loved. Leo is not only very active in high society, but he also gives Gladys a taste of success in the world of sculpture. When Leo severs their relationship and destroys her chance to go to Sao Paulo, Gladys, who regards Leo as her only chance for happiness, has no choice but to consider suicide.

Gladys' life is the embodiment of middle-class tragedy. Her existence seems doomed from the first to pain and nothingness in spite of her attempts to encounter happiness. For her, life can only be ridiculously unjust, because her sufferings are thrust upon her without reason.

. . . mientras a pocos centímetros de allí había una mujer embargada por un inmenso placer, ella misma se encontraba soportando, entre otras cosas, una fuerte jaqueca, el disgusto por el alejamiento de Leo, la descalificación del jurado, y la amenaza de las innumerables jaquecas que la aguardaban en Playa Blanca; si era posible tal disparidad de

suertes, no hallaba ella razón alguna por la cual debía tocarle la menos favorable. . . . (p. 237)

Like the protagonist of existential novels, she senses that her life is void of any true meaning, and that she has no recourse to happiness. Her only alternative consists of merely surviving, an alternative which she would rather abandon. The decision to take her life springs from a desire to avoid accepting this intolerable choice and is a manifestation of her rebellion against a world not of her choosing.

Si esos poderes desconocidos cometían una cruenta injusticia, dichos poderes eran reprochables; cualquier complicidad con esos poderes la volvía reprobable a ella también; en el caso de seguir viviendo, no podría evitar futuras complicidades con los poderes aludidos; el solo hecho de seguir viviendo la volvía complice de ellos. . . . (p. 237)

The presentation of Gladys in the novel up to the point at which she makes her decision to take her life parallels that of the other frustrated characters in the novel. However, the last chapter deviates from the pattern of establishing characters who are socially or sexually maladjusted. The couple in that chapter radiates comfort, happiness and sexual fulfillment. At the abyss of despair, Gladys meets the woman who has everything she wants and will never have. Completely depressed, Gladys can only perceive with bitterness the final irony that just a wall away live two perfectly happy people.

In the final analysis, the fact remains that Gladys does not of herself fail. Given an opportunity, there is nothing in her personality structure or her background that would prevent her from enjoying an ordinary, middle class life. The rejection she feels as a result of her mother's upbringing and the unfortunate experiences she has with men do not inflict permanent damage on her ability to relate to people. The psychic wounds that Leo leaves are no doubt deep but not fatal. Her reaction to the loss of his imagined love can be considered normal and does not entail a rigid choice from which there is no escape. Gladys assumes when she makes her suicidal decision that the worst is upon her; she believes it at the time, but her decision is postponed by the conversation with the friendly neighbor. That Gladys will awake with the same compulsion to kill herself, admittedly, is more likely than her chance of finding a new hope for love. It is not probable that she will find any consolation from within her own life, but it is possible. The author's last references to Gladys certainly do not indicate any observable trauma, and her sleep, ironically seems even peaceful

Su sueño era sin duda sereno, puesto que la respiración le aplanaba y le henchía el pecho acompasadamente. . . . La visitante respondía que sería mucha molestia, pero no se puso de pie, quedó sentada en la cama. . . . La visitante aceptó con sólo una inclinación de cabeza, la leve sonrisa perduraba en sus labios.
(p. 248)

All of this would seem to indicate that Gladys' problems are externally applied and can be surmounted and that although the impact of her relationship with Leo is quite serious, it is not necessarily permanent or devastating. The actual state of Gladys' condition, however, exists on a far more disastrous level. As the failures increase, Gladys' center of personality, the ego structure, diminishes to a point at which existence has no advantage over nonexistence. Inevitably, Gladys will surface as a person receding from life and becoming more like an inanimate object similar to the objects from the sea with which she empathized. Her evaluation of her position reveals the attraction which a withdrawal from life has for her.

. . . no iría a ninguna parte ni esa noche ni nunca, se quedaría allí hasta que alguien viniese a buscarla y la llevase donde fuese; si le era posible nunca más en su vida tomaría una resolución; si le era posible nunca más molestaría a nadie con pedidos, si no tomaba ninguna resolución, ello significaba que de su conducta estarían excluidas medidas irreparables como el suicidio . . . permanecería quieta en su cama; si se quedaba quieta en su cama, allí moriría porque nadie le llevaría nada de comer. (p. 236)

The final meeting of Gladys and Leo--the kidnapping and humiliation of Gladys--condenses at once Gladys' incredible misfortune and Leo's approaching madness.

Leo's problems, on the other hand, are severely pathological in that they originate in a mental

malfunction over which he has no control and which influences his encounters with other people. Leo Druscovitch is a psychiatrist's dream. He is unable to establish normal heterosexual relationships because of his Oedipus complex, and he shows progressive symptoms of acute paranoia and suffers under the pressure of a terrible guilt burden. Leo's difficulty with women starts even before his conception when his mother, against the advice of various doctors, submits to the demands of Leo's father and provides him with a child. Weak and unstable, the mother dies three months after Leo is born. For unstated reasons, the father moves to Mendoza, leaving his children in the care of a servant. Consequently, the oldest, Amalia, has to manage the household and Leo becomes the charge of Olga, the second oldest. Olga, then, represents the mother image. The boy becomes attracted to the mother image, upon whom he fixes his erotic impulses, and Olga helps the charade along unwittingly by playing games with him.

. . . y cuando la más condesciente Olga quería alegrar al hermanito le daba para jugar prendas que su padre había dejado en el ropero: el pequeño se disfrazaba y arrastraba la ropa por toda la casa. Olga se ponía ropa de su mamá muerta y le pedían a la doméstica que los casara. (p. 91)

It is Olga who entertains and looks after him, and Leo quickly forms a strong attachment to her based on the sexual excitement she arouses in him.

Before Leo has a chance to transfer the sexual stimulation from his substitute mother, Olga, to a female object outside his home, Leo's father makes a brief visit to Buenos Aires. Leo is perfectly happy with the games he and Olga play, but the girl, worried about her father's displeasure, refuses to play.

Leo la llamó a jugar. Olga respondió que jugarían a leer cuentos. Sin saber por que Leo enrojeció y dijo que quería jugar a la hormiguita. Olga respondió negativamente, porque su papá se enojaría. (pp. 93-94)

The boy, upset at this indirect interference of his father in his sexual gratification and unable to protest the matter, soils the bed. Still not convinced that his unconscious titillation at the hands of Olga has terminated, he persists in his attempts to persuade Olga to return to their former game until Olga finally slaps him, and Amalia admonishes him for his conduct.

. . . . 'la tenés merecida, con el pobre papá enfermo grave y vos te seguís portando mal. Ay, Leo, vos sos muy chiquito, pero todos tenemos que rezar para que papá se salve.' (p. 94)

More important to Leo than his father's illness, at this time, is his interrupted dream of sexual intercourse with his mother image; a dream Leo will never complete as he goes through infantile sexuality to puberty and finally to manhood. Freud says of this non-resolved state:

One says rightly that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of the neurosis. It is the culminating point of infantile sexuality, which through its after-effects decisively influences the sexuality of the adult. The task before each new human being is to master the Oedipus complex; one who cannot do this falls into neurosis.⁸²

Leo's neurosis results from his inability to master the Oedipus complex. He goes through life trying mentally to force his sister to continue their prior relationship. The women with whom he later has sexual experiences momentarily become surrogates for his sister. The encounters with women who deny him their bodies remind him of Olga's refusal to play his game. When he forces himself on them, he mentally completes his infantile desire to possess Olga. If a woman accepts Leo, she no longer contains the association he has with Olga, and he loses his sexual interest.

Susana empezó a murmurar insultos entre sollozos contenidos para no alarmar a la abuela. Leo se le arrojó encima y empezó a besarla con furia. Más lo insultaba Susana y más deseo sentía. . . .
(p. 97)

When the girl offers herself willingly, Leo becomes temporarily impotent. Leo subconsciously associates the violence in his sexual experiences with rejection by Olga even after puberty, because he cannot disassociate

⁸² Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud. Trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), p. 617.

his sister from her role as a former sex object. Paradoxically, his conscious repression of these hidden desires is partly responsible for his uncontrollable loathing of her touch as an adult.

Se acercó a Leo y lo acarició, 'tuvimos que hacerte de madre, y las madres a veces nos equivocamos.' Leo sintió la caricia como el roce de un bichoso viscoso: su hermana había obrado bien, él lo comprendía, pero ello no impedía que su caricia le resultase repulsiva.
(p. 104)

Leo must necessarily reject all women who accept him and feel sexually attracted to those who resist him, since subconsciously he has become trapped in his pre-puberty contest with Olga to play the worm game.

Some of Leo's guilt complexes stem from his infancy. His father's illness and death coincide in time with the rejection he receives from Olga. Like Toto, he is told he should not be concerned with his own diversion out of respect for his father. Amalia's suggestion that he pray for his father's health can only produce guilt in the boy, for the father dies shortly thereafter. If Leo did not pray, he would feel guilty. If he did, he must assume his prayers were ineffectual and in all probability blame himself. Even if he does not feel guilty because of his father's death, he possibly carries the burden of imagining that his mother's death was a result of giving birth to him. In the session with the psychiatrist he remarks, possibly referring to his mother,

. . . . tengo ganas de llorar tengo
 ganas de llorar porque ella se murió, y
 no tenía la culpa de nada me da
 mucha lástima ahora que está muerta
 me da lástima, si yo hubiese sabido que
 se iba a morir le habría dicho que la
 quería, cualquier cosa, para que se mu-
 riera en paz se murió por culpa
 mía. (p. 144)

His most intense guilt feelings, however, develop from an incident that occurs when he is a young man. In a violent scene of sodomy, he brutally injures a pervert and reads in the papers the next morning that the pervert was found near detach, but never discovers whether the injured party dies. This incident preys on his consciousness from that moment on and is incorporated in all his thoughts. He continually fears that his action will eventually be discovered by the police. In his session with the psychiatrist, the episode appears distorted and fuzzy, the work of his conscious mind trying to rationalize the incident into something more palpable, shifting the blame away from himself and emphasizing its unpremeditated aspect.

Le hice mal a alguien, y después me arrepentí una vez lastima a un muchacho, sin querer no, con un ladrillo de forma accidental, jugando, yo tire ese ladrillo al aire, no pense que estaba tan cerca y el estaba ahí, y yo lo lastime en la nuca. . . . (pp. 139-140)

His guilt soon begins to manifest itself in his conscious behavior. In a weak moment he explains to María Esther what actually transpired on that evening.

Algo que hice, pero que hice sin querer.
 Tenes razón, si lo hice fue queriendo.
 O no sé, no, no es verdad, ¡no lo hice
 queriendo! Me arrepiento de lo que
 hice. (pp. 161-162)

Tormented by these memories, he again rationalizes the episode by claiming that it was an accident. Consciously, he starts to accept the psychological interpretation of María Esther that he must have wanted to do it, when his subconscious suddenly recoils at the thought, and he vehemently denies willful intent. The remembrance is so humiliating that he alters the details and pretends that his transgression was perpetrated against a girl.

In another discussion with María Esther, he further softens the shameful occurrence by adding more justifiable details. The victim, before identified as a female, now becomes his ex-wife who follows Leo after he quarrels with his mistress and tries to reconcile the differences between her and her former husband. Failing that, she entices Leo into a dark vacant lot for further persuasion. She tries to elicit a confession of love from Leo while he is trying to seduce her but is unsuccessful. They disagree and Leo has to gag her to prevent her screaming. Later, Leo realizes she has suffocated because of his gag. From the alterations in this version, it is apparent that Leo is still attempting to appease his conscience. Unable to do so and aware of the seriousness of his crime, he loses touch with remorse and slowly replaces

it with fear that he will be apprehended for his conduct.

As badly confused as he is, it is not long before the fear gets totally out of control. One month before he kidnaps Gladys, he visualizes in a dream segment his role as an accused criminal.

El acusado tiembla de rabia al verlo avanzar, lo insulta, lo llama traidor. Éste repite ante el acusado sus cargos, viola el secreto profesional y sin pruebas materiales, solamente en base a deducciones psiquiátricas, inculpa a quien en ese momento tiene las manos amarradas con grilletes. Los pesquisas escuchan atentos, el médico enarca una ceja, por último fija una mirada de índole mesmérica en el acusado. El crimen se dilucida. La condena es prisión perpetua, por homicidio premeditado. (p. 179)

Leo fabricates this scene because his fear makes him imagine that the crime is so obvious that the analyst will have no difficulty in penetrating his cover and unraveling the puzzle. As his paranoia progresses, the crime will reappear more frequently in his thoughts and give rise to his suspicions that his secret is increasingly vulnerable. At this stage of Leo's predicament, presumably after being tormented with the thought for many years, the guilt complex still exists, so that Leo's dream furnishes him with some masochistic relief. He is able to express his subconscious fears that the murder was planned and receives the appropriate sentence--life imprisonment. Further along in his dream, his fear of being caught augments, and the instinct for self-

preservation asserts itself.

El paciente teme que el médico traicione el secreto profesional y lo denuncie a la policía. . . . El paciente esta inmóvil en su divan, el médico agrega que durante las sesiones de análisis ha logrado dar con la clave de la personalidad del paciente, y ello le ha llevado a descubrir un crimen perfecto, cometido en un baldío, muchos años antes. El médico va hacia el teléfono, da la espalda al paciente, toma el receptor. Junto al paciente hay un cenicero de piedra coloreada, cuarzo, más liviano que un ladrillo. (pp. 182-183)

No longer seeking a justified punishment, Leo wishes to erase all evidence of his guilt by subconsciously killing the doctor. The conflict between his desire for expiation and paranoid fear leads to fluctuation between wanting to tell someone and disguising the elements when he does refer to it. This accounts for his changing the sex of the victim, rearranging the story, and his creation of a new version.

In spite of his precaution, he reveals the essence of his crime to María Esther, who reconstructs the incident using the jumbled information which Leo provides. Fearing that Leo will repeat the episode with Gladys, María Esther informs the police of her suspicions without realizing that Leo has modified the incident so it cannot be traced to him. The police's failure to establish Leo's prior involvement in a crime and their report to Leo only serves to strengthen his belief that the police

through the aid of María Esther are closing in on him.

Paranoia increasing without bound, Leo imagines that all his incongruous actions are making him suspect and paving the way for his arrest. After his discussion with the police, Leo's actions and thoughts betray the nervous apprehension slowly overtaking him.

Para evitar ocurrencias grotescas a quien lo viera mojó el pantalón también desde la entrepierna hasta la cintura. La limpieza del rodado todavía no había sido efectuada, decidió no esperar y volver a pie a la heladería. Pocos pasos antes de llegar pensó que toda su actitud había sido sospechosa, el cajero podía haber llamado a la policía en el interín, y cualquier interrogatorio ulterior podría serle adverso. (p. 191)

By this time, Leo is approaching insanity.

Completely overwhelmed by his fear and suspecting that every move he makes brings him closer to the police, Leo frantically attempts to analyze the situation but only sinks deeper into the paranoid state, since fear is directing his thinking. His feverish mind pictures Maria Esther calling the police, who in turn question his psychiatrist, resulting in the solution to the crime. His thoughts become a mass of chaotic confusion. Leo conceives of a plan logical only to a madman; the plan that terminates with the kidnapping of Gladys.

Si María Esther Vila llegaba al lugar en que el crimen estaba por cometerse --era él quien iba a matar a una mujer-- y lo desbarataba--aparentemente--con su presencia imprevista, ella no dudaría

más de la intención que él tenía de matar a una mujer; impidiendo de ese modo el asesinato de una mujer a manos de él, María Esther Vila terminaría de convenirse de que el crimen del baldío había sido de la misma índole. (p. 193)

Ironically, Leo's relationship to Gladys is tangential in that Gladys ceases to exist almost immediately for Leo as a real person and becomes correlated only with subconscious feelings of hatred and guilt of which Gladys has no knowledge. Like all of Leo's women, Gladys initially is nothing more than a substitute for the Oedipal image of his sister that Leo has never displaced. He therefore becomes excited because she resists him and savagely rapes her. Their second sexual encounter, however, hints of a possible change in Leo.

. . . la segunda vez que nos acostamos juntos creí que todos los problemas se habían terminado . . . y por primera vez logré algo que nunca había podido hacer: después de que todo había salido bien . . . me quedé dormido abrazándola, yo que si no estoy solo en mi cama no puedo quedarme dormido. . . . (p. 142)

The change dissolves quickly as Leo begins to make associations with his past. He incorrectly mistakes Gladys' care for him as a deceitful gesture on her part to assure herself of the trip to Sao Paulo. The deceit must remind him of a similar situation with Olga where he also felt used and tricked. Recalling Olga can only reinforce the mother image that obstructs his relationship with any woman. So Gladys becomes the victim of

the powerful subconscious forces within Leo, and, like the other women who customarily share one or two sexual experiences with him, joins the ranks of women he despises.

Leo's underlying wish to kill Gladys first arises as a result of his embarrassment over the Sao Paulo exhibit. He impetuously offers her the prize before he rapes her and then repents of his hasty judgment. She is a constant reminder that he made a mistake and irritates him with her presence. He blames her for his impotence, just as he does with all women. His conflict with her achieves priority because of his guilt feelings about his handling of the matter. She appears in his dream as a victim of a pathological murderous criminal, a convenient way for him to eliminate her. In the kidnapping, she is no more than a useful tool to divert María Esther's attention from the crime in the vacant lot. Finally, when Leo madly dashes back to Buenos Aires to take Gladys to the director's reunion, Gladys knows nothing of his plan. As far as she is concerned, Leo has definitely abandoned her. There is a deliberate separation between the Gladys to whom Leo responds externally and the Gladys with whom Leo mentally fights. Gladys can only observe the inexplicable and brief external confrontation. But Leo's reactions are but a small part of a larger total configuration of his disoriented personality. To

understand his external actions necessitates the exploration of his inner being. As Nin has discussed, "Action does not represent the whole character. Nor do fragmentation of analysis and introspection necessarily threaten the unity of man."⁸³ In this case, Leo's unity consists of his separate neuroses. Frustrated in normal heterosexual relationships by a towering Oedipus complex and pushed into insanity as a result of an excessive libidinal drive, Leo becomes a standard representative of a Freudian case study. The psychological analysis of these characters shows that both Gladys and Leo's problems originate in their relationship to the parents and, in particular, to the mother. It is the subconscious and conscious frustration of love with respect to their childhood traumas that provides the basis for the novel.

Seen from the prospective of the total novel, the multiple variations in the form, the subgenre classification, and the characterization are the elements that must draw the reader into the exploration of the world that the novel projects. All of the variations in the form reinforce the continuum of sexual violence, potential crime, and the psychological aberrations resulting from interpersonal relationships. The sections that

⁸³ Nin, p. 194.

deal with Gladys' stream-of-consciousness and the accompanying masturbatory sequence and the abstracted enumeration of thought processes in Chapter XIII are innovations in Puig's work that add further dimensions to his characters.

In much the same manner, the use of media appears as an extension of the form having distinct contact with Puig's stated purpose--the investigation of the subconscious base that foments conscious behavior patterns. The cinema can be interpreted in light of an underlying force in the novel and reapplied to the interaction of Gladys and Leo, but the direct associative link between characters and media that is so impressively appealing in the first two novels has changed focus in The Buenos Aires Affair.

In La traición and Boquitas, the characters' prevailing attitudes and patterns of behavior are directly influenced by the media stereotypes that they admire. Their personalities are shaped to a great extent by their application or rejection of media values. In The Buenos Aires Affair, however, the cinema reality presents simultaneously a continuation in many directions of the psychological problems inherent in Leo and Gladys as well as a screen where both worlds, fictional and cinematic, merge to create a powerful image of a reality characterized by frustration. Both media and fiction

illustrate the steady progression toward unhappiness and irrationality indicative of future changes in the cultural canon.

The utilization of the police drama to frame the two elements of crime and psychological study is a fortunate choice in that it continually suggests and remolds the importance of character motives. The initiating detective plot catapults the reader into an inquiry of the crime, the people and the motives, all of which help the reader maintain his concentration on a personal solution to the crime. The police mystery clearly sets up Leo as the pivotal base upon which the novel turns.

The characterization of Leo and Gladys departs from the usual police account in that both the victim and the criminal are integrated into a psychological profile. The novel presents Leo's multiple neuroses and Gladys' failure to establish permanently satisfying relationships with men in a way which permits further examination and interpretation.

While the psychological presentation of characters and the choice of the type of novel used are strong unifying points, the novel also utilizes many dazzling innovations. The novel demonstrates Puig's ability to assimilate new techniques and devices in narrative prose, but it also reveals his distancing from the media as an

integral part of characterization, one of the most successful elements in his fiction. Alan Cheuse, in his review, may have correctly named the novel "Puig's Last Picture Show." One might hope that Manuel Puig will not totally abandon the influence of popular culture in his future novels, for it does reflect the essence of the influence of cultural value.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Manuel Puig's style has changed from his first novel to The Buenos Aires Affair. La traición reveals the hesitation which an aspiring but inexperienced writer necessarily demonstrates in a first presentation. Faced with the dilemma of problematic third person narration, Puig settled for dialogues as a means of communicating his ideas. La traición incorporates a series of interior monologues in which the dominating force revolves around the consciousness of a provincial boy. The content thus defined allows the author to concentrate on arrangements of speech and thought that would most clearly reflect the boy's fixation on films. These arrangements characterize the fluidity of Manuel Puig's style in La traición. All of the information given belongs to the category of subjective personal reaction which imperceptibly forces the reader to engage in emotional speculations about the characteristics of Toto. Reinforcing the characterization with autobiographical data, Puig weaves the consciousness of the boy into a complex image for the reader. Besides strong dependence on memory recall, the author adroitly mixes cinema reality

and language with colloquialisms to provide an emotional consciousness which the reader can explore from various angles. While the stream-of-consciousness technique, the epistolary method, and the free dialogue are elements of Puig's style that support his content in La traición, these aspects are also limitations in his early work since he chose them because of his inability to manipulate third person narration. His success in Boquitas can be attributed to his evaluation and modification of these elements.

In Boquitas the author expands his view of subjective consciousness and initiates that characteristic of conflicting subjective and objective parallels that is so much an integral part of his work after La traición, necessarily so, for the area of his concern stems no longer from the personality of one boy and the town's reaction to him. Rather, his field of vision now encompasses the interpersonal relationships of a number of people whose internal personality traits play a vital role in the formation of behavior. As in La traición, the language of the characters in Boquitas reflects their addiction to popular culture. Since the author's purpose is to present the clash of hopes and dreams based on cinema values with the actual misery of reality, the inclusion of subjective fantasies and modified third person narrations become the focus of the novel. Moving

away from first person accounts can be considered an upward step in an author whose goal is to combine psychological study and the cinema values into a meaningful statement concerning the twentieth century.

The author's third novel utilizes his two main recurring stylistic devices--the alternate presentation of lingering emotional passages with other passages clearly intended to be devoid of all emotionalism and the consistent use of cinematic atmosphere. Both are intended as instruments to intensify the subjects most interesting to Puig: psychology and films. In The Buenos Aires Affair, the structure as well as the language point to that end. While the reader has no problem seeing the use the author has made of his readings of Freud, the effects of the cinema are not as apparent. Still, investigation of his novel reveals that Puig is determined to relate the aberrant relationships visible on the screen to problems hidden in the subconscious that are manifestations of an early frustration.

In the progression of Manuel Puig's prose, the single aspect that remains unchanged is his interest in the conscious and unconscious forces operating within the individual. This fascination with Freudian psychology constitutes one of the points of divergence between Puig and other Hispanic-American novelists. The latter have, for the most part, discarded the Freudian concepts

for manipulations of the more Jungian archetypal structures within man, and their subject matter reflects this choice. As the critic Walcutt indicates,

. . . the subject matter of recent fiction has become blurred and unreal: subjective views of a protean world, explorations into private voids, depersonalization of fictive characters into archetypes. Much of it suggests the contemporary writer's inability to identify himself with concrete issues in a world which he apparently can't even see, much less understand. ⁸⁴

Puig, on the other hand, shies away from the complexity of such subject matter and concentrates his efforts on the influence the media have on the individual's personal problems.

The media have a tremendous impact on the lives of the characters in La traición and BoQUITAS. Some of the characters like Berto and Juan Carlos perceive a reality completely exclusive of the media world. Their is a world of cold contact with their immediate surroundings. Other characters, like Toto, Mita and Raba, exhibit behavioral patterns whose value system derives from their close ties to the media. Their reality is a mixture of an external reality and the reality they observe in the popular culture. Toto and Raba have greater difficulty in separating the two realities. Leo is the sole example of a character whose conscious and unconscious perception of the external reality, falsified by his neuroses,

⁸⁴ Walcutt, p. 351.

reflects a reality more fantastic than either the external reality itself or the projection of media reality.

Ordinary people, like these characters, manifest similar levels of assimilation of movie values, themselves a prostitution and distortion of similar societal values. The progression from those individuals who have no difficulty in disassociating media elements from their everyday lives to those who cannot separate what is happening on the screen and their own roles in life becomes in the final analysis a process of minimizing or maximizing the values emanating from popular culture. When the function of media approaches a maximum point, the subjective reality of the character tends to reflect very little differentiation in value systems. As the function decreases, the subjective reality of the character tends to reflect the widening separation in value systems until the media has little or no effect on the character.

The conflicting areas occur when the media, by nature vehicles dependent upon sensational or intensified relationships, lose their center of balance, that is, when only one particular aspect of society is being reinforced. In a well-balanced situation, there appears enough variation in characters and stories as a reflection of a sound cultural canon that both positive and negative values have the same amount of weight. Thus, the

differentiation of the two value systems is of no consequence since the selection of all positive values becomes as possible as the selection of negative values. However, when the cultural canon begins to crumble, everything moves in a state of flux, and positive values disintegrate before new positive values can emerge. In such cases, the differentiation can be quite significant since the selection will be more likely to contain negative or non-existing values, that is, new created elements which have not been designated as positive or negative.

This is precisely what is occurring in today's society. The major interests of the cinema, the largest representative of popular culture, have become lost in a mire of sex, crime, and violent passions. More than any other element, this obviously proclaims the edge of chaos upon which we find ourselves. Unfortunately, more and more people find it increasingly difficult to be satisfied with an everyday life of sensibility associated with constructive values, because they are constantly exposed to the excitingly destructive world of the media.

The importance of Manuel Puig, then, derives from his use of the media to show how the growing sexual and criminal faults of man are a product of the dissolution of his value system. If the media frequently depict scenes of criminal violence and sexual perversion, it should not come as a great surprise since these elements

more and more are the rule of the day. Puig's novels, through an analysis of sexual frustrations and the media's role in causing, reinforcing and reflecting them, contain a wide range of possibilities for the reader to explore and related to a world of endlessly shifting values.

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