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**POSTMODERNISM AND GENRE IN *EL FISCAL***  
**BY AUGUSTO ROA BASTOS**

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***Introduction***

Ralph Cohen, in his article “Do Postmodern Genres Exist?” poses an important question regarding the relationship of postmodernism to literary genre studies. Cohen states that “Postmodern critics have sought to do without genre theory” (13) because they feel that the boundaries implicit in the notion of genre are contradictory to the philosophical underpinnings of postmodern theory, which seeks to dismantle all limiting classifications and dichotomies. Nonetheless, Cohen proceeds to illustrate how the concept of genre is both relevant to an analysis of postmodern literature and does not necessarily imply a philosophical breach for postmodern critics. Cohen traces the origins of “combinatory genre theory” that, according to some critics, characterizes postmodern fiction, to eighteenth-century fiction, concluding that:

Do postmodern genres exist? This question can now be seen in the context I have set for it. If one wishes to trace the relation between modernism and postmodernism, if one wishes to understand the diverse ways of distinguishing postmodern fiction from postmodern surfiction and from the romance and spy sort as fictions equally contemporary but not postmodern, then genre study is the most adequate procedure to accomplish this aim. (25)

A postmodern novel that illustrates well the phenomenon of genre blending is *El fiscal* (1993) by the late Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos. Although the novel has received little critical attention, it is a complex work that presents a postmodern view of human existence and history, precisely through the interweaving of the characteristics of various literary genres. In the following

pages, I will illustrate how *El fiscal* ascribes to the generic heterogeneity or “combinatory genre theory” frequently associated with postmodern fiction<sup>1</sup> by blending characteristics associated with the detective, historical, existential and autobiographical genres and how this very heterogeneity fosters the interpretive multiplicity that characterizes great works of fiction.

### ***El fiscal as Detective Novel***

The first way in which *El fiscal* may be read is as a detective novel (or more precisely, a metaphysical detective novel). John Scaggs (citing Denis Porter) suggests that detective fiction begins with a question mark planted at the novel’s beginning that leads to reader to imitate a detective and attempt to solve the crime or mystery that occurs at the onset of the novel (Scaggs 34-35). According to Merivale and Sweeny, the metaphysical detective novel can be defined thus:

The characteristic themes of the metaphysical detective story [are]: (1) the defeated sleuth . . . (2) the world, city or text as labyrinth; (3) the purloined letter, embedded text, mise en abyme, textual constraint or text as object; (4) the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence (5); the missing person, . . . the double, . . . the lost stolen, or exchanged identity; (6) the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation. . . In metaphysical detective fiction . . . the mystery is a maze without an exit. (8-9)

Michel Sirvent adds that many texts use the detective novel structure although they do not strictly belong to the genre because “the mystery structure provides a crucial place for the reader to participate in the very intrigue he is expected to complete” (158-159).

*El fiscal* follows the detective fiction format by presenting two mysteries and their concomitant clues: the first is the disappearance and/or death of Leda Kautner, Félix Moral’s graduate student, and the second is the mystery surrounding what happens to Félix when he returns to Paraguay to attend the World Conference organized by the dictator. In the presentation of both mysteries, the novel narrates contradictory events and outcomes that are never fully elucidated for the reader.

With regard to the mystery surrounding Leda Kautner, the novel’s protagonist, Félix Moral, is both the detective and the criminal (a clear manifestation of the metaphysical detective novel’s concept of the double). Leda, who has a crush on Moral, supposedly arrives at his house one night and forces him to make love to her. Félix describes Leda as if she were a witch who has him under a spell, a devouring woman who rapes him:

Su sensualidad devoradora me excavaba como en una absorpción que me iba dejando vacío. Me sentía violado por un fantasma del que no podía o no quería desprenderme, que se aferraba a mí con una fuerza sobrehumana. Me sentí totalmente inmovilizado, prisionero de sus brazos, de su cuerpo que ondulaba sobre el mío tratando de penetrarme. . . . Ella trepó sobre mí, me cubrió con su cuerpo y acomodó su sexo sobre el mío. Empezó a ondular y hamacarse con la habilidad y la plasticidad de la ramera más experimentada en las magias y manipulaciones de la cópula. (122-123)

This encounter provokes “un furor homicida” in Moral who proceeds to strangle Leda Kautner. The episode concludes with Moral suffering “una fiebre altísima que no quería remitir” during a ten day period. When Moral recovers, he doesn’t know whether this episode was a dream or really occurred. He goes in search of evidence to prove whether the encounter with Leda was real or the product of his imagination. His dog brings him a strand of Leda’s hair from the garden, physical evidence of Leda’s presence in the house that night. However, when Félix travels from Nevers to Paris, he learns that Leda left for Germany on March 6th, seven days before the alleged encounter on March 13th.

The mystery of Leda Kautner is never clarified in the novel and resurges in the second part of the text, when Moral is on the plane about to arrive in Paraguay. He thinks to himself that the stewardess looks a lot like Leda. However, it is later revealed that she is only a young girl who vaguely resembles her. Nonetheless, when an emergency landing occurs, the stewardess who helps Félix exit the plane is identified as Leda Kautner. In each episode, the reader does not have sufficient clues to determine whether the encounters with Leda are real or imagined.

The second mystery revolves around the exiled Moral’s return to Paraguay. The novel appears to narrate two different and contradictory denouements without any definitive explanation at the novel’s end. Moral’s letter to Jimena offers one version, while Jimena’s letter to Moral’s mother offers another. In Moral’s letter, he indicates that he successfully administered the poison to Stroessner through the special ring he wore for this purpose while shaking the dictator’s hand, suggesting the likely possibility of success of his mission:

Seguí a los que iban saliendo. En el palco de los diplomáticos vi a Clovis que me guiñó un ojo de festiva aprobación. Almorzaré con él y le alcanzaré mi envío. Dentro de 72 horas Clovis ya te lo habrá entregado en Nevers y yo sabré aquí si el anillo del noble conde de Villamediana ha cumplido honradamente la misión magnicida que le he encomendado. Ahora solo me queda esperar los resultados. . . Seguiré, si puedo, escribiéndote hasta la partida de Clovis. (341)

In contrast, Jimena’s letter indicates that Félix disappeared on the third day of the Conference, relating his subsequent imprisonment and death. The contradiction between the two letters is further compounded by the mystery

of how Félix's identity was discovered in the second version, especially when Moral had previously indicated that "Las dos veces que estuvimos con Jimena en Paraguay, los sabuesos más renombrados del régimen no me reconocieron" (166). Félix has had plastic surgery and it is thus unlikely that he would have been recognized. The reader is left to attempt to reconcile these two contrasting versions. The first possible explanation is that the poison failed and Félix was subsequently captured by the authorities. However, this interpretation is somewhat invalidated by the fact that Moral previously tried the poisoning ring out on his dog, resulting in the dramatic death of the dalmation Yaguareté at the end of the first part of the novel. Moreover, the idea that the poison simply failed seems inordinately simplistic for one of Roa Bastos's novels.

Roa Bastos has scattered a series of other clues throughout that novel that suggest another possible explanation for Moral's version of events. There is no detective other than the reader to resolve this second mystery. The reader must reconstruct all the clues, many of which, in a postmodern fashion, appear early in the novel, before it is possible to perceive their importance.

The first clue is the notable contradiction of dates within Félix's letter and also between Félix's and Jimena's letters. The conference is supposed to begin on September 1st, 1987 and Félix is slated to travel to Paraguay at the end of August. However, when Félix asks Dalila Mieres to identify the stewardess on his flight, she responds "La tripulación de ayer, FAE 747-27 de septiembre de 1987 estaba integrada por Leda Kautner bajo el nombre de Paula Becker" (328). This comment suggests that Félix did not travel to Paraguay at the end of August, but rather at the end of September. Nonetheless, on page 334 Félix states: "Viernes 1 de septiembre: La reunión inaugural se desarrolló como la escena de una pieza de Ionesco. Decididamente, este congreso de rinocerontes y dinosaurios está hecho a la medida del creador del absurdo teatral" (334). This comment contradicts the previous one, suggesting that Félix was already in Paraguay on September 1st. To complicate matters further, in another instance Félix ambiguously dates his diary "jueves 28" without specifying if it is August or September (311). Thus, Félix's trip to Paraguay appears to take place during two different and irreconcilable dates. Finally, Félix indicates that on September 1st: "pude estrechar la mano desnuda, todavía tendida, del tiranosuario con el mas férvido apretón de manos que en mi vida había dado" (340). Félix sets the reader up to expect his success, but also underscores the absurd and incredible character of the event, as if it were a scene from an Ionesco play. Indeed, much of what occurs in the novel has an incomprehensible, theatrical and almost fantastic quality.

In contrast with Félix's version, Jimena narrates that Félix traveled "a fines de agosto de 1987" and that he "asistió a las dos primeras reuniones del congreso, inaugurado el 1 de septiembre de 1987. Desapareció dos días después (el 3 de septiembre) sin dejar huellas" (342). Moreover, Jimena indicates that she arrived in Asunción on September 27th, the same date in which Félix's

flight supposedly arrived according to Dalila Mieres in the written version of events left by Félix, although the reader knows that the two characters could not possibly have traveled on the same date, and that Jimena was unable to travel with Félix due to an accident that she had right before the scheduled trip.

These “clues” present an apparently unsolvable mystery for the reader who is left to interpret them. Could Félix’s flight to Asunción on September 27th be a textual printing error? Did Félix travel at the end of August or September? Were Félix and Jimena on the same or different flights? These are some of the many questions with which the reader of *El fiscal* is faced.

Perhaps another “clue” to this contradiction in dates is found in the narrator’s account of how Francisco Solano López, president of Paraguay from 1862-1870, following the suggestion made to him by Father Fidel Maíz, added the date of February 29th to the calendar to create a false leap year in 1870. The inclusion of this manipulation of dates may serve as a wink to the reader illustrating that the play of dates is intentional and meaningful within the novel.

Similarly, Félix makes the following bizarre comment when he is on the plane to Paraguay nearing Asunción: “Busco en vano el centelleo del río patrio. Lo que resulta raro en esta época del año cuando las interminables lluvias de agosto hacen salir de madre al río padre y las inundaciones arrasan las poblaciones ribereñas. No veo el mar de aguas revueltas y barrosas” (192). Since August is the month of least rain in Paraguay, Félix’s expectation of flooding and interminable rain suggests that he thinks he is traveling in January or February, the summer months when the most rain falls in Asunción. This is an important clue because it suggests yet another possible interpretation: the imaginary or fictitious character of Félix’s version. It projects Félix’s trip into a future time, the moment in which Stroessner was truly overthrown, which occurred on February 3, 1989, a month with great expectation of rain and flooding in the country.

An interview with Roa Bastos conducted by Luis Antonio Girón in 2003 sheds some unexpected light on this reference to the “interminable August rains” in *El fiscal*. In the interview, Roa Bastos speaks of a novel he was then writing titled *Un país detrás de la lluvia*. Roa made the following comment regarding that work in progress:

Se trata de uma novela que me ronda, com um título brumoso: ‘Um País Atrás da Chuva’. Quando era menino, em Iturpe, que é o povoado do interior onde cresci, admirava a paisagem nos dias de chuva, e esse véu tênue da chuva que se interpunha entre minha varanda e o campo o tornava incerto, distante, intangível. Assim vejo meu país: atrás de uma cortina. . . . Na história há uma menina. Os olhos de uma menina cheia de sonhos que vão construindo algo que, no entanto, não existe no presente. (<http://erouxacourthes.wordpress.com/2006/10/08/roa-visto-por-giron-epoca-sao-paulo-2003/n.p.>) I am talking about a novel that has been going around in my head, with a misty title: “A Country Behind the Rain”. When I was young, in Iturbe, which is a town in the interior where I grew up, I admired the landscape on rainy days and that thin veil of rain that interposed

itself between my veranda and the countryside, making it uncertain, distant, and intangible. I see my country in the same way: behind a curtain . . . In the story there is a little girl. The eyes of a girl full of dreams who is constructing something that nonetheless, does not exist in the present. (my translation)

What makes Roa Bastos's words even more interesting is that there already exists a connection between *El país detrás de la lluvia* and *El fiscal*. In 1991, Roa Bastos published a fragment of *El país detrás de la lluvia* in the journal *Hispanamérica*. This fragment consists of a few sections of the novel *El fiscal* that will later appear, somewhat reelaborated, in the published version of the novel in 1993. The important point here is that the unpublished novel provides an important key for interpreting *El fiscal* in the figure of the dreaming girl who builds something non-existent. Perhaps Félix Moral, in his version of his trip to Paraguay, is also constructing something non-existent; dreaming or imagining (through writing) a version of events that will signify a better Paraguay. Moreover, the fact that Roa states that he sees Paraguay behind a curtain, a constant veil of rain that makes it distant and intangible, further suggests the imaginary nature of the trip, a constant motif in Roa Bastos's fiction.<sup>2</sup>

If we now return to the novel's beginning, we can comprehend the significance of various passages that support this interpretation. For example, when Félix first plans his trip to the Paraguayan conference, he states:

El primer hilo París-Asunción había comenzado a tensarse . . . ¿Se puede escribir una historia real o imaginaria sobre hechos que aún no han sucedido o que están empezando a suceder? Acaso es lo único que puede hacerse. Toda historia real o imaginaria no es sino una anticipación del presente. (167)

In this paragraph, Félix alludes to the idea of anticipating events, of imagining events in writing that have not yet occurred or are first beginning to happen. Similarly, on page 198, Félix states that "*El ejecutor de una empresa atroz—sentenciaba Salustio—debe imaginar que ya la ha cumplido*" (198). Moreover, he writes the following to Jimena: "*la recapitulación que te estoy escribiendo de cosas que ya han sucedido y de otras que están por suceder no es un relato de fingido y despreocupado desprecio*" (231). Finally, when he is writing on the airplane he says that "*detesto indagar y menos aun explicar las causas últimas de lo que me acontece. En la ficción como en la vida, los más ínfimos hechos son inexplicables. Lo misterioso, lo extraño, constituyen su naturaleza y su razón de ser*" (234). All of these quotations point to the fictitious character, the mere writing about rather than living the events narrated in Félix's version.

Moreover, it seems more than a coincidence that the dates cited in the novel (Friday, September 1 and a Thursday the 28th also possibly in September) do not correspond to the real 1987 calendar but that of 1989 (the year of Stroessner's actual fall). If we take extratextual elements into account, Roa anticipates the end of the dictator Alfredo Stroessner with the version imagined by not lived by



Félix Moral. In his own version of events, Félix is a hero who justifies his life with the assassination of the tyrant: "Podía ser este el instante único y excepcional en el que vengo pensando hace bastante tiempo . . . ese momento definitivo en el que . . . uno se convierte en lo que debe ser y hace lo que debe hacer" (167).

The emphasis that the novel places on the act of writing and the meta-fictional dimension which is always present in Roa Bastos's work also support the idea that Félix's version of events is purely imagined in writing. After Félix's plane trip, his friend Clovis comments to him: "Te vi escribir todo el tiempo durante el viaje. —Sí, cuando nada se puede hacer se escribe" (245). Later, Clovis gives Félix a special pen that reminds us of the "portapluma recuerdo" in *Yo el Supremo*. Clovis's pen is described as "Una gruesa lapicera negra, a pilas, pero increíblemente liviana . . . Está hecha con la raíz de *amorphophallus* . . . El mango de la pluma está estriado de venas que parecen dilatarse y contraerse bajo la presión de la mano . . . Enciende la luz y me entrega la pluma. Haz buen uso de ella" (245-46). With this pen Félix can re-write Paraguayan history according to his own desires, converting himself into the savior of the nation who justifies his life by assassinating the dictator. For Félix, the important point is not necessarily accomplishing this task, but rather thinking and writing about it (as is the case with any intellectual) that makes it real and authentic: "El riesgo de morir en un atentado contra el ser que se odia profundamente es la confrontación menos excitante que puede arrostrar un hombre menos valiente y temerario. Lo único necesario, lo único que redime es la sola idea de *hacerlo*. Una creencia absoluta en esta idea" (58). For ultimately, rather than a political revolutionary, Félix Moral (like Roa Bastos himself), is a writer.

In contrast, in the second version of events, Jimena describes Félix's capture and torture by the authorities and his eventual assassination by Pedro Abad Oro. In this second version, Félix is presented as a useless martyr, because two years after his failed assassination attempt, a military coup by Andrés Rodríguez unseats Stroessner. As Jimena states: "Los sentimientos de odio o de venganza no han mejorado nunca 'la alucinación en marcha de la historia.' Félix fue una víctima de esta alucinación" (352).

Although Jimena's version of events is somewhat less mysterious than Félix's, it nonetheless poses some unanswered questions for the reader. The version omits the details surrounding Félix's disappearance. The biggest mystery here is how the authorities realized Félix's identity and came to arrest him. Once again, following the form of metaphysical detective fiction, the novel includes a series of clues that implicitly hint at the answer, without ever explicitly resolving the mystery.

In Félix's version of events (if we choose to accept them as real), Félix describes several encounters with his old friend, Fulvia Marcia. When the orchestra gives a recital in honor of the Conference participants, Fulvia is there playing the harp: "Supongo que ella no me ve. A través del cordaje de su instrumento siento sin embargo sus miradas fijas en mí" (300). Later, Félix



describes the manner in which he approaches Fulvia on the first day of the Conference: “Fulvia, el ídolo de nuestra juventud, la novia romántica de los excluidos, no me reconoció pese al pequeño frote que le hice con la una del índice en la palma de la mano. Era nuestro santo y seña en los encuentros furtivos en medio de numerosa concurrencia (337). It is possible that this second reference to Fulvia may be the key to understanding how Félix was identified. Perhaps Fulvia indeed recognized Félix’s signal and betrayed him to the authorities. The name Fulvia Marcia may be symbolic of her power and connection with the government, since the name belongs to the wife of the Roman emperor Titus. Moreover, Moral describes her as an ambitious woman: “Fulvia tenía otras miras mas allá de nuestro destino de jovencitos pobres que iban para farmacéuticos, contables o abogadillos”(301) and is currently the wife of the Minister of the Interior. Finally, the name “Fulvia” comes from the Latin “Fulva”, meaning yellow, which is also Felix’s nickname for Leda Kautner (an important symbol I will return to in the final section on the autobiographical novel). Yellow is a color associated with death, and therefore may also refer to the role that Fulvia has in the capture and death of Felix Moral.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, this hypothesis is never confirmed for the reader in the text. By offering subtle clues that lead to contradictory interpretations, Roa Bastos questions the possibility of knowing the truth and inserts *El fiscal* within the genre of the metaphysical detective novel.

### **El fiscal as *Historical Novel*<sup>4</sup>**

The capture, torture and death of Félix Moral at the hands of the Stroessner dictatorship catapult *El fiscal* into the historical (and dictator) novel genre. There is much scholarship written on the genre of historical novel and many differing definitions of what constitutes historical fiction. Definitions vary from ample parameters (any novel that includes historical events) to fairly restrictive ones, such as that of Georg Lukács (who states that historical fiction must refer to past events prior to the life of the author and focus on minor characters who encapsulate major social trends) [Lukács 21-61] or María Cristina Pons, who insists upon the non-decorative use of history and adherence to a linear time-space chronotope to delimit historical fiction (Pons 21-107). The debate over defining the historical novel merits its own separate study and cannot be engaged with here. Consequently, for purposes of discussing how its genre conventions affect *El fiscal*, I will use Noé Jitrik’s somewhat broad view of historical fiction:

La novela histórica se propone representar conflictos sociales . . . pero también . . . podrían entrar manifestaciones costumbristas, de crítica social o política y aun de psicología social . . . en tal abanico una constante insoslayable sería la referencia a hechos históricos . . . En suma . . . lo que pecularizaría la noción de novela histórica es la referencia a un momento considerado como histórico . . . y . . . cierto apoyo

documental realizado por quien se propone tal representación. (20-21)

Despite the fact that the main action of *El fiscal* revolves around an assassination plot to eliminate Alfredo Stroessner, the truly historical character of the novel resides in its portrayal of the presidency of President Francisco Solano López. While elements of the Stroessner dictatorship are criticized and brought to the fore, the novel gives equal if not more weight to reflections on the López government and his involvement of Paraguay in the Triple Alliance War. The love triangle between López, his Irish concubine Madame Lynch, and the native Paraguayan woman Pancha Garmendia also forms an essential element in Roa's portrayal of this historical era. Moreover, as I show below, Félix Moral is depicted as López's double throughout the novel, thus uniting Paraguay's past and present history through the figure of Moral.

Among the many elements that establish Moral as López's double is his heroic but futile attempt to give meaning to his life by killing Stroessner. This event parallels López's equally heroic but futile attempt to triumph over Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay in the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870). Félix's poison-dispensing ring with which he hopes to assassinate Stroessner is in the form of a serpent that bites its own tail, also known as the Ouroboros, a symbol of recreation or eternal return. Finally, Félix is assassinated on March 1, 1987, during the annual pilgrimage to Cerro Corá to commemorate the anniversary of López's death. Thus, Félix serves as a contemporary reincarnation of López.

In a postmodern fashion, Roa Bastos's novel does not pass a positive or negative judgment on López. Both viewpoints are simultaneously allowed to sound and intersect within the novel. For example, when Moral is first writing the screenplay about López, *he enters into the project* with an unfavorable view of the president: "El guión inicial fue escrito por mí. Traté de relatar en él, con el mayor rigor y fidelidad posibles, la historia de estos personajes, ponerlos a la altura del papel histórico que desempeñaron en el martirologio de un pueblo" (30). Nonetheless, later on Moral changes his mind and states that "Todos mis prejuicios y viejos anatemas contra López y Lynch, contra el patrioterismo cimarrón de escarapela y machete, se borraron como bajo un soplo demasiado fuerte. Arrojé la pluma contra la pared y me lancé con los últimos soldados a defender a ese Titán ya muerto suprema encarnación de la raza" (34). In the second part of the novel, these observations dialogue with those of Sir Richard Burton who wrote a history of that era titled *Letters from the Battle-fields of Paraguay*. Despite Burton's historical character, all of his comments about López and Lynch are invented, adding to the postmodern questioning of historical truth proposed by the novel.

The novel presents countless other examples of the dialogue on historical reality, among which figures the discussion of the two Cándido Lópezes (the Argentine painter who depicts the triumph of the Triple Alliance Powers and the Paraguayan one who shows the depths of despair of the defeated). Of course, there is only one historical Cándido López, but Roa shows how his perspective

varied in his paintings depending upon which side's viewpoint of the same events he was depicting. This postmodern contemplation of history culminates with the discussion of Francisco Solano López as a Christlike figure who was allegedly crucified by the Brazilians. López's identification with Matthias Grünewald's painting of Christ accentuates his positive dimension and is a bridge from the novel's historical dimension to its existential one. The implicit connections and parallels between Moral and López form another subtle layer of the text left to the reader to perceive and whose construction adds to both aesthetic quality and enjoyment of the novel.<sup>5</sup>

### **El fiscal as *Existential Novel***

The third type of genre markers relate to *El fiscal* as an existential/philosophical novel. The first index of its relationship to this genre is the protagonist's name. The last name Moral, meaning moral, is hardly a coincidence and points to *El fiscal*'s philosophical dimension. The existential novel, understood in a broad sense, has been defined as a novel that presents a philosophical reflection on the meaning of life. According to Helene Henderson and Jay Pederson, existentialism emphasizes the importance of man's action and commitment in the world and includes the belief in a strong bond between literature and political action (147-50). *El fiscal*'s Félix Moral is clearly a character with an existentialist bent who seeks to control his own destiny and achieve political action that will better his country. As I have shown elsewhere, to this end Roa Bastos employs the ideas of Rainer María Rilke in the novel to illustrate the concept of a "death of one's own" that drives Moral's actions throughout the novel. Clovis explains that Rilke was upset when his ex-girlfriend Paula Becker died in childbirth because he considered that a "generic" death for women in that era, and not a death that was in consonance with the way the famous painter lived her life. The notion of a death of one's own coincides with Félix's idea of an instant that defines and justifies one's life (330-331) which in his case is the assassination of Stroessner.

Another important philosophical and existential episode is the discussion of the lost manuscripts of Friedrich Nietzsche in the novel (262-265). Although this section might at first appear as a pointless digression to the reader, it is in fact an integral part of the novel that engages with both the historical image of López and the interpretation of the actions of Félix Moral. The lost manuscript that is saved in Paraguay is that of *Ecce Homo*, an autobiographical account by Nietzsche in which he expounds on his philosophy of the Superman. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche compares himself to Christ while rejecting Christian values. He declares that man can only become a Superman if he follows his egotistical impulses which will bring him success in life; if he suppresses remorse and nostalgia (Tanner viii-Xii).

The ideas expressed in *Ecco Homo* provide a lens from which to view the attitudes of both Moral and López in *El fiscal*. In particular, Nietzsche's self-portrayal as an anti-Christ overlaps with the idea promoted by Fidel Maiz of López as a Christ figure and the painting of Christ by Matthias Grünewald. These conflicting visions plant the question: Was López a selfish Superman who uselessly sacrificed the Paraguayan people or a Christ/hero who sacrificed himself in the fight to save Paraguay from the imperialistic threat of its neighbors? The philosophical elements of Rilke and Nietzsche, among others, are important for understanding the genre markers of *El fiscal* as an existentialist novel in which Félix Moral determines and vindicates his own destiny through his political engagement and attempts to create a better world. Just as in the case of the detective novel and historical novel, the genre markers are frequently implicit (connections between Rilke/Moral and López/Nietzsche, and consequently create an aesthetic quality for the reader in detecting and establishing the necessary-) comparisons.

### ***El fiscal as Autobiographical Novel***

The last genre with which *El fiscal* can be associated is that of the autobiographical novel. According to Phillipe Lejeune in *On Autobiography*, the autobiographical novel refers to "all fictional texts in which the reader has reason to suspect, from the resemblances that he thinks he sees, that there is an identity of author and protagonist, whereas the author has chosen to deny this identity, or at least not to affirm it. So defined, the autobiographical novel includes personal narratives (identity of the narrator and protagonist) as well as "impersonal" narratives (the protagonist designated in the third person); it is defined at the level of its contents." (13).

Roa Bastos's employment of autobiography is suggested in the novel through a number of parallels between the life of the protagonist Félix Moral and that of Roa Bastos himself. A few of the autobiographical elements that are easily recognizable in the novel are the following: the narrator speaks of Moral and Jimena as "dos Géminis, a escasos días de diferencia entre sí" (26), a reference to Roa Bastos's birthday (June 13) and that of his third partner, Iris Giménez (whose last name seems to give rise to Moral's partner's first name, Jimena, so close to Giménez that it seems more than a coincidence);<sup>6</sup> Jimena is the daughter of Spanish exiles who came to France as a result of the Spanish civil war, a detail that replicates Iris Giménez's family history; Moral is exiled from Paraguay because of a screenplay he was involved in writing and becomes a professor at a French university in Nevers, while Roa Bastos was also a screenplay writer living in exile who taught at the University of Toulouse in France; Jimena is a scholar of indigenous cultures, just as Iris Giménez studied indigenous languages and náhuatl culture. At one point in the novel, Moral speaks of how

he wrote an unfinished essay that “Se titulaba *Contravida*” (80), a reference to Roa’s then unfinished novel of the same title (published after *El fiscal* in 1994). Moral also speaks of the publication of his “Carta abierta al pueblo paraguayo” (172), a letter that Roa Bastos actually authored. All of these details suffice to suggest that Moral is to a certain degree an autobiographical character. Indeed, Moral makes explicit reference to biography and autobiography in the first few pages of the novel, when he speaks of the pages he is writing for Jimena, thus setting up the genre convention for the reader: “No son un diario íntimo ni la exaltada crónica de una resurrección. Menos aún, ese género espurio de una autobiografía. Detesto las autobiografías en los que el yo se regodea en su vacua autosuficiencia... Todo lo que cuentan está desmentido por lo que no cuentan” (25-26). Despite Moral’s denigration of autobiography, the novel engages with autobiographical genre markers on a number of levels that suggest alternate interpretative values for the text.

The question of how autobiography affects interpretation in *El fiscal* should be mediated through some of the author’s own statements that may provide an important key to the novel’s comprehension. In a little known interview with the Juan Ramón Iborra conducted in 1998, Roa Bastos states that his third partner, Iris Giménez, twice attempted to kill him. When Iborra asks if something happened with Iris, he replied:

--Sí. Algo muy terrible. Dos intentos de eliminación, por ejemplo.

--De eliminación. ¿Quiere decir de suicidio?

--Esto es una cosa muy grave que no se puede contar en un reportaje, ¿no? porque sería acusarla. Pero fue una cosa terrible . . .

--Lo que me está diciendo es que ella le quiso eliminar a usted?

--Sí, sí. Por estrangulamiento una vez, en sueños. Y otra vez, delante de los hijos y de un sobrino que había venido a buscarme. (169)

Whether or not there is corroboration of these alleged incidents, it is clear that Roa Bastos has stated that his partner attempted to strangle him in his sleep. It is my belief that this traumatic event (whether real or imagined by Roa Bastos) inspires the pivotal episode of Leda Kautner’s appearance in Moral’s house in *El fiscal*.

Other than Roa Bastos’s statements in this interview, there is little biographical information available about his relationship with Iris Giménez. The Paraguayan journalist Antonio Pecci includes a brief section on the relationship in his 2007 book. He there states “Ya en 1984 conocería en Toulouse a su *última compañera, la franco-española Iris Giménez*, quien había sido alumna de Roa en los cursos de guaraní en la universidad del mismo nombre, donde ella misma era profesora de la cultura Náhuatl en la citada casa universitaria. Aproximadamente desde 1979 se unirían en pareja y tendrían tres hijos . . . La relación con Iris Giménez terminaría a mediados de los 90, entre otras razones, por la decisión tomada por Roa de radicarse en el país” (23).

Regarding the novel's connection to personal relationships, Roa Bastos himself once stated:

La narración, la intriga, esto que pudiera ser una intriga policial de magnicidio, está relatada por un antihéroe, sabe perfectamente bien que es incapaz de hacer lo que se propone . . . Justamente el relato de este antihéroe hace agua por todas partes, se deja adivinar como el producto de una fantasía esquizofrénica . . . Es sí una intriga en cierto modo policial que encubre un drama verdadero, un drama clásico digámoslo así de las contradicciones que existen en las relaciones sobre todo de pareja. (cited in Pecci, 84-85)

If we now re-read the Leda Kautner episode in the light of the author's alleged (auto)biography, Leda Kautner can be interpreted as a double of Jimena (Jimena's dark side or Shadow, in Jungian terms). Leda is Moral's student (as was Iris the student of Roa). We are told that "Leda habla correctamente siete idiomas y conoce varios dialectos transilvanos y eslavos" (103), a fact that is paralleled by Iris Giménez's multilingual capabilities (she speaks Spanish, French, Náhuatl and Guaraní, which she studied with Roa). Thus, Leda Kautner may simply be another dimension of Jimena's personality. According to Jung:

The shadow cast by the conscious mind of the individual contains the hidden, repressed, and unfavorable (or nefarious) aspects of the personality. But his darkness is not just the simple converse of the conscious ego. Just as the ego contains unfavorable and destructive attitudes, so the shadow has good qualities—normal instincts and creative impulses. Ego and shadow indeed, although separate, are inextricably linked together in much the same way that thought and feeling are related to each other. (Jung 110).

Jimena, a generally positive character, is the character's ego, while Leda Kautner is the character's shadow. Moral's description of Leda as a devouring female who attacks him, potentially confirms this interpretation. However, what appears to seal the connection is Moral's description of his strangulation of Leda during this episode.

Experimenté de pronto una idea ciega. Sentí estallar en mí un odio apasionado, un rencor sin nombre, un furor homicida. Llevé mis dos manos al cuello de la muchacha. Iba a estrangularla. Solo con su muerte iba a poder sacar su cuerpo que se había adherido al mío. . . Oprimí mis dedos crispados sobre su cuello con salvaje violencia. Perdió el aliento. Los ojos comenzaron a girar casi ya fuera de las órbitas. Su cuerpo fue ablandando y cesaron sus roncos gemidos. Me miré las manos. A la turbia luz de la luna vi que las tenía manchadas de sangre. (124)

The autobiographical genre markers suggest a possible psychoanalytical interpretation of the novelistic events. This psychoanalytical interpretation rests



on the important connections that exist between autobiographical fiction and trauma. Leigh Gilmore's book on autobiography analyzes what the author terms limit-case texts that present the intersection of autobiography and trauma. She states that these texts are informed by what Ian Hacking has called "memoropolitics," a term that refers to "a politics of the secret, of the forgotten events that can be turned, if only by strange flashbacks, into something monumental. Memoropolitics concerns pathological forgetting" (Hacking cited in Gilmore 25). Gilmore suggests that the experience of trauma reformulates the normal questions we ask ourselves when confronted with autobiographical material. In other words, instead of asking ourselves where autobiography ends and fiction begins, this question is now reconfigured as "a struggle between what is real and what is imagined in the representation of self and trauma" (22). Gilmore adds: "the subject of trauma refers to both a person struggling to make sense of an overwhelming experience in a particular context and the unspeakability of trauma itself, its resistance to representation. Trauma emerges in narrative as much through what cannot be said as it does through what can" (44).

According to John Wilson, psychology distinguishes between the Trauma Archetype (universal forms of traumatic experiences across culture, time and history) and The Trauma Complex (the unique individual trauma experience) [157]. The Trauma Complex "cogwheels dynamically with other archetypes as determined by basic psychological needs . . . (the Shadow, Betrayal, Trickster Archetypes)" [161]. The Trauma Archetype is a universal form of reaction to stressful experiences that provoke fear (such as fear of annihilation), generates the formation of the Trauma Complex and is symbolized through symptoms, dreams, and fantasies. These symbols of the trauma experience are located within the Trauma Complex. In Wilson's words, "The Trauma Complex can activate other psychic complexes . . . basic needs for safety, protection . . . revenge, aggression, retaliation" (168). Trauma provokes what is known as the Abyss Experience which is associated with the realistic perception of life-threatening events. Wilson adds that "Common to the abyss experience is the confronting of what is life-threatening, evil, depraved, excruciating, vile, sinister, and the 'darkness of being' (184). The Abyss experience leads to the Inversion Experience, when "reality is supplanted with unreality" and the "surreal" becomes real." (184). Finally, in psychoanalysis, the Inversion Experience involves "perceiving opposites or inverts in personal experience" (Keppe cited in Wilson 187). Frequently, the Abyss and Inversion experiences lead to the Transcendent Experience in which the subject resolves conflicts and is able to ascend to a higher level of being (Wilson 189).

I have detailed the psychological theory of the Trauma Complex at length here in an attempt to show how the narration of Moral's encounter with Leda Kautner enacts all the key elements of The Trauma Complex. Roa Bastos's alleged attempted murder at the hands of his partner is fictionalized through Leda Kautner's sexual attack and Moral's subsequent strangulation of the



devouring woman. Leda's attack is comparable to the Abyss Experience—a life-threatening, dark experience that is symbolized through a dreamlike encounter. This experience, which Moral himself classifies as phantasmagoric, is also an Inversion Experience in which reality is supplanted by unreality: “Todo era demasiado ambiguo, fantasmal. Tal vez la fantasmagoría estaba en mí. Tal vez esa figura femenina, desnuda, estremeciéndose en espasmos por las ansias del deseo no era más que la proyección de una fantasía corporizada por el alucinador poder de la fiebre” (119). Moreover, just as the Inversion Experience involves inverted personal experience or perception (e.g., happiness perceived as sadness), Moral inverts the direction of the murder attempt in his narration and attributes the homicidal behavior to himself. In this way he also enacts the desire for retaliation which Wilson suggests is one of the other psychic complexes activated by the Trauma Complex.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it is this episode that leads to Moral's equivalent of a Transcendent Experience. The episode is followed by Moral's visit to Dr. Morel for a high fever lasting ten days. As soon as the fever subsides, Moral realizes his meeting with Clovis in which he is given the opportunity to vindicate his life by assassinating Stroessner and liberating Paraguay, this constituting his Transcendent Experience. In real life, this is paralleled by Roa Bastos's return to Paraguay where he hoped to realize the tasks of helping Paraguay's youth and politically reconstructing the country after dictatorship. Moreover, just as the Trauma Complex “cogwheels” with other archetypes, Moral's Trauma Complex leads him to experience the presence of the Shadow Archetype, in which Jimena's shadow (Leda) attacks and attempts to destroy him.

As we saw in the previous discussion of Leda Kautner in the section on the detective genre markers, the episodes surrounding Leda are shrouded in mystery, with Leda's alleged departure from France a week prior to the supposed occurrence of her encounter with Moral. Consequently, this episode acquires a symbolic dimension whose content may be elucidated through these autobiographical connections. This symbolic dimension represents the intersection of trauma and autobiography.

Some previously mentioned details that corroborate this interpretation are Moral's nickname for Leda (Fulva), associating her with the color yellow and its symbolic value of death.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, if we return to the contradiction in dates that was examined in the detective fiction section, we see that the mysterious coincidence in dates between the flight on which Leda was a stewardess and Jimena's flight to Paraguay, both strangely occurring on September 27, 1987, may in fact be another allusion to the identity between these two characters in the novel.

Finally, if we now re-evaluate the novel's philosophical dimension in terms of its autobiographical elements, the focus on Rilke's concept of a death of one's own gains new meaning. Moral/Roa Bastos postulates a different death from his partner's murder attempt: a redemptive death in which Moral dies as a hero instead of a victim and in which he vindicates his entire country.

In summary, *El fiscal*'s autobiographical dimension provides yet another way to read and interpret Roa Bastos's novel and bears an intimate connection to the relationship between narrative and memory. According to Mark Freeman: "Memory . . . is about drawing out meanings and explicating a significance that could only emerge as a function of what came after" (128). Something that happened is now being interpreted in light of subsequent events and this will undoubtedly affect the manner in which the original event is narrated. *El fiscal* can be interpreted as a fictionalized evaluation of Roa Bastos's autobiographical trauma.

### Conclusions

The heterogeneity of genres incorporated into *El fiscal* subscribes to the "combinatory genre theory" that some critics suggest as characteristic of postmodern fiction. Linda Hutcheon speaks of this characteristic heterogeneity of postmodern fiction in a *Poetics of Postmodernism* (3-53). In a similar vein, Ian Gregson notes:

Postmodernist authors have been led to adopt generic modes which can be exploited for their familiarity but at the same time deconstructed and extended in unfamiliar and often much more sophisticated directions, sometimes introducing philosophical preoccupations which are alien to the genre. (62)

Undoubtedly, *El fiscal*'s postmodern character has led to its employment of genre blending as a key hermeneutic tool that assists in uncovering its various interpretive levels. In *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Hans Robert Jauss discusses the relationship between aesthetics and literary hermeneutics and suggests that the three constituent elements of the reader's aesthetic experience (poesis, aesthesis, and catharsis) intertwine with various levels and types of identification with the novelistic hero. According to Jauss, the reader's identification with the hero can be admiring (of the perfect hero), sympathetic (of the imperfect hero), cathartic (producing of either a tragic emotion for the suffering hero or a comic one for the beset hero), or ironic (the production of a feeling of alienation or indifference for the anti-hero). As the discussion of the various types of genres that are combined in *El fiscal* illustrates, the reader's vision of the hero, Félix Moral, will differ according to the genre within which the hero is interpreted. For example, the Félix Moral of *El fiscal* as historical novel may be perceived ironically due to his identification with Solano López as a useless martyr, whereas he may be perceived cathartically when *El fiscal* is read as an existential novel. In this last reading, Moral aptly fits the mold of the imperfect hero as a suffering individual who produces a tragic emotion in the heart and mind of the reader. Similarly, *El fiscal* as an autobiographical

novel may suggest a sympathetic identification with the imperfect protagonist/author, while *El fiscal* as detective novel leads the reader to what Jauss terms “associative identification.” This implies a lack of identification with the hero *per se* and instead identification with the other participants of a game (159), the game here defined as the reconstruction of clues and solving of the two novelistic mysteries. This variability of identification and interpretation of the hero in *El fiscal* fits with the postmodern tendency to avoid pigeonholing the protagonist and to present a complex and variable characterization of human nature.

## NOTES

1 Note that genre blending is not exclusively a characteristic of postmodern fiction and has sometimes appeared in 19<sup>th</sup> century texts, such as Sarmiento’s *Facundo* or 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist texts. However, the mixing of genres is frequently associated with postmodernism and represents the postmodern effort to confuse and erase boundaries and fixed categories. It is in this sense that I examine genre blending as a postmodern phenomenon in *El fiscal*.

2 The imaginary, symbolic trip occurs in *Hijo de hombre*, where Casiano propels the derailed train wagon through the countryside, a voyage associated with the forces of revolution. In *Yo el Supremo*, the dictator’s last ride on his horse is largely a symbolic trip that leads to his split personality and reflections on his life. Similarly, in *Contravida*, the protagonist makes a symbolic train trip back to his origins and in the movie *El portón de sueños*, Roa Bastos narrates his life and work using the train trip as a vehicle to access his past memories.

3 This version of events, recounted by Félix, may simply be invented and indicative of the fictitious character of his narration, since it makes little sense that he would try to reveal his real identity to anyone, even an old friend, when he re-enters Paraguay and thus jeopardize his mission and his life. Similarly, it seems unlikely that Moral would attend and take photographs at the funeral of the revolutionary Pedro Alvarenga, since this might also compromise his identity and goal to kill Stroessner. This may lead the reader to doubt the veracity of these narrative events.

4 Note that this section on the historical novel does not offer a comprehensive discussion of the topic because this aspect of *El fiscal* that has already been discussed by the current critical bibliography on the novel. Owing to the impossibility of analyzing every aspect of genre in this study, I have chosen to omit topics covered by other scholars, in particular, the relationship between Francisco Solano López and Alfredo Stroessner. For a discussion of this aspect of the historical novel, see: Carla Fernandes, “Francisco Solano López: El héroe máximo de la nación paraguaya” *Cahiers du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésélien/Caravelle* 72 (1999): 57-71; Leila Gómez, “Viaje a los campos de batalla: Augusto Roa Bastos y la guerra de la Triple Alianza,” *MLN* 125.2 (2010) 305-325;; Blas Matamoro, “El mito, alegoría de la historia: El Paraguay de Roa

Bastos,” *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 709-710 (2009): 53-62; Ricardo Rohena, “Notas sobre la verdad y el poder en *El fiscal* de Augusto Roa Bastos,” *Exégesis: Revista de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Humaco*, 9.26 (1996): 70-72.

5 It is also important to note that a dialogue/philosophical content are established between Nietzsche’s ideas and Moral’s character. Moral frequently expresses a sense of guilt and regret when he reflects on his relationship (real or imagined) with Leda Kautner and its implications for his relationship with Jimena. This illustrates that Moral does not subscribe to Nietzsche’s version of a Superman.

6 Indeed, Roa Bastos dedicates the novel to “Morena Tarsis, tú me animaste a reescribir esta historia, la viviste tú misma y eres escrita por ella,” further suggesting that the character Jimena Tarsis refers to his real-life partner, Iris Giménez.

7 Note that this Inversion Experience might also be interpreted as a form of psychological projection. According to Marie-Louise von Franz, who worked with Jung, Jung defined projection as the “transfer of subjective psychic elements onto an outer object. One sees in this object something that is not there” (3). Thus, Moral is unconsciously enacting the same actions that Roa attributes to Iris Giménez in his interview with Iborra. This transference of actions may be thought as a form of psychological projection caused by the element of trauma experienced by the author. Indeed, the author suggests the idea of projection at the onset of the episode in the following comment: “Tal vez esa figura femenina, desnuda, estremeciéndose en espasmos por las ansias del deseo no era más que la proyección de una fantasía corporizada por el alucinador poder de la fiebre” (119).

8 According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, yellow “heralds decrepitude, old age, and the approach of death and ultimately yellow becomes a substitute for black” (1138).

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