THE IMAGINARY REAL IN THREE SHORT STORIES BY ARMONÍA SOMERS

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The fiction of Armonía Somers[1] remains relatively unknown outside the circle of Uruguayan letters. In part, this may be attributable to the dark nature of her work, particularly as it relates to desire and, on frequent occasions, to sexuality. Somers defended her own themes, including onanism, in an open letter to her critics in 1992, two years prior to her death. She said, in effect, that compassion for the human animal, including compassion for the self, was at the root of her thematic predilections:

> Yo creo que el ser humano de categoría abismal es un caníbal de sí mismo y los demás, pese a la maravilla del mundo adonde fuera puesto con las mejores intenciones de un Gran Dios o de la Gran Casualidad. [...] Solo el hombre sufre a causa del sexo a pesar de buscarlo como dicha. Yo creo que esa, la tan mal vista autocomplacencia, podría configurar para los mismos una operación tan normal como el fluir del pensamiento en otras instancias de la soledad. (Somers, "Carta" 1161-62)

Solitude is often a refuge for Somers' anguished characters. Encounters with others are intrusive at best. While her characters' solipsistic fantasies do open onto richer imaginary worlds, those worlds are often merely way stations on the path to a total void or even a catastrophic death. That which is sought in the fantasies, delusions, and hallucinations of Somers' characters is invariably some form of recognition by the Other, to use a Lacanian term[2] which takes into ac-

count the purely imaginary nature of those from whom recognition is sought, even within the context of the fiction.

This paper seeks to explore the possible application of key aspects of the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan to three short stories by Somers: *El derrumbamiento* (1948), her first fiction, *El hombre del túnel* (1963), and *El desvío* (1964). In each of these stories, the reader is confronted with a protagonist who is successful in gaining the longed for recognition by an imaginary Other, just prior to entering the void of the real. The figure of the imaginary in Lacanian theory first comes into focus with the subject's perception of its own specular image as a Gestalt. It is from this illusory, unified image that the essentially fragmented and indeterminate subject forms its unattainable ideal ego. This last, henceforth, will be an idealized and virtual mental construct, which is perceived, due to the subject's own conscious lack of determinacy, with reference to and projection onto the image of the Other.

In the first two stories studied, *El derrumbamiento* and *El hombre del túnel*, Somers' characters use the imaginary in seeking refuge from the narrow perceptions of the cultural mainstream, most closely associated with Lacan's symbolic order. It is in the symbolic order that language first comes into play. For it is in, through, and by language that the indeterminate subject falls victim to attempts to delineate her/his identity in accord with the dominant mores of her/his culture. Only in the third story considered, *El desvío*, does the subject intuit the essentially illusory nature of her imaginary identification and break with the symbolic ties that bind. Yet, the outcome of the third protagonist would appear to be, once again, what is described by the character as the "brutally definitive and timeless landing in the void" (103; my translation). For in Somers' work, as in Lacan's, the anxiety of the split, loss, lack, the hole, the aperture, or the void is real.

The "tortured" stories of Somers were, early on in her career, praised by the prominent Uruguayan literary critic, Ángel Rama. It was Rama who first published *El desvío*.[3] In *La generación crítica 1939-1969*, Rama referred to the Uruguayan generation of writers which was then emerging and concluded the book with an analysis of those qualities

of the imagination played out in the work of Cristina Peri Rossi and, prior to her, in the work of fellow Uruguayans, Felisberto Hernández and Armonía Somers.

> Efectivamente, podría decirse que estamos en presencia de una imaginación que comienza a tejer una nueva versión de la realidad. Aunque me inclino a pensar que se trata todavía de un ejercicio de libertad total en el cual la imaginación sobrevuela lo real, se enfrenta a él, trata de forzarlo como en una borrascosa escena erótica, trata de adaptarlo a sus exigencias despóticas. (245)

Both psychoanalysis and literature must work through the restrictions which language imposes on the imaginary order. Therefore, it may be seen as pertinent to both disciplines to define those limitations in order to develop techniques which, if unable to overcome the limits, at least extend their boundaries maximally.

In Somers, the imaginary always collides with the real. Lacan was emphatic on the point that nothing can satisfy the incommensurate human drive, which impels the insatiated subject unto death. Marie Hélène Brousse, in explicating the Lacanian drive, is most cogent on this point:

> The symbolic order is organized through a basic reference to death. As Lacan states in "Position of the Unconscious" (Feldstein 259-282), the symbolic order is organized by representation, and representation implies the death of the thing.
>
> Death is always connected to the symbolic order. That is why the drive defined by this order is the death drive; for Lacan, libido is a name for the death drive. It's a paradox. Once you've produced libido as a representation of indestructible life, you can only define it as correlated with death precisely because it is pure representation.[4]

The very task of the psychoanalyst having been misconstrued by proponents of American ego psychology is what was at stake here for

Lacan, to whom the idea that the drive can be brought under wraps, as it were, in conformity with the demands of "the American way of life"[5] was pure illusion. The role of the analyst, according to Lacan, should come into play with the recognition established through the transference, a dialogue occurring in the here and now, not the past.[6] Yet, the aspect of the past, in the form of one's personal history, is always there in the background. The role of the analyst should not be that of a model of the demands of society but rather that of a neutral and sufficiently ambivalent response to the illusion of the demand, in order that the question of the demand be deflected from the imaginary Other, in the person of the analyst, back onto the subject. It is in this way that the subject may begin to bring to a conscious level, her/his own unconscious desires. It is the position of this paper that it is in the third story, *El desvío*, that the alienated desire of the Other is most fully eclipsed by the unconscious desire of the subject. We are referring here to the withdrawal of the projections of a character in the story. Yet this inquiry purports, ultimately, to consider the projections of the reader as well.[7]

We might next inquire as to the corresponding role of the critical theorist or the reader vis-à-vis Lacan's theory. Can reading put one in touch with her/his own desire by calling previously unconscious material into consciousness? Perhaps this is a viable thesis in that one's own defenses are lowered when free to project all that happens in the text onto a character who is, after all, only fictional. Is it merely a question of projecting our conflicts onto the text, or can we distance ourselves from it? Can a text be structured in such a way that we can remove ourselves from its demands and recognize our own?

If so, which narrative structures, techniques, and tropes might move us towards that end in a given text? Might fiction have the potential to free imagination from the limitations of the existing social structures by going beyond a representational staging to a mental playing out or working through of future possibilities? Could it be that some texts play a role in the here and now of the aesthetic experience of the reader, quite apart from the fiction's quality as representation?

To the extent that the nature of language itself, that which circumscribes the perceptual field of the writer, her/his characters, and the reader is indeterminate, it approaches or resembles the unconscious. This paper supports the position that there is an evolution in the construction of Somers' fiction drawing it into a continuum of texts from the period of the "marketing" *boom* in Latin America, including literature by writers such as Onetti, Lispector, and Cortázar,[8] who gained recognition precisely for reinforcing those techniques that evoke the unconscious processes of the active reader.

In that *El derrumbamiento* was the first story ever written in Somers' life, it is not surprising if it seems rather awkward stylistically, particularly in terms of the dialogue and imagery, relative to the other two stories studied here, which were written in the sixties. Nonetheless, it would appear to be a fitting point of departure, due to Somers' own decision to include it as the lead story in her personal anthology, *La rebelión de la flor*, as late as 1988.

In *El derrumbamiento*, Tristan, a black male, has subverted the law of ruthless whites, by murdering one of them, and is pursued by a savage mob, which has rallied for a lynching. He seeks redemption in an imaginary encounter with the Blessed Virgin, when her statue comes to life and speaks to him at a refuge for the homeless, where he is hunted down by the lynch mob.

In considering the three stories chronologically, it is interesting to observe that the fantastic element places a progressively heavier demand on suspension of disbelief for the reader in each story. As Tristan flees from the mob, for instance, he is worn down and feverish from exposure to a thunder storm, making it is easy for the reader to attribute the fantastic incarnation of the Virgin to a hallucination brought on by the fever. It is initially unclear in *El hombre del túnel*, the second story, as to whether or not the curious man who awaits the seven year old child as she emerges from her journey through a sewer pipe, is a benevolent stranger, a child molester, or merely a figment of the girl's imagination. By the time the reader determines that the last hypothesis is the case, since the man has grown no older when he

reappears "ten to twelve" years later, Somers has introduced the notion that the girl was the subject of psychiatric treatment, again bridging more narrowly the distance between reality and the fantastic for the reader. *El desvío,* however, sustains an absurd proposition from the outset, both in suspiciously uncanny remarks dispersed throughout the dialogue and through an acknowledgment by the protagonist that something is amiss in the temporal scheme of her seemingly endless, metaphoric train ride. It is in this last story that the reader can most readily infer that the protagonist has successfully fantasized a plausible separation from the projection of her demand, the domination of her male companion, when she is unceremoniously dumped at the detour or side track[9] by the ticket collector on the train.

In *El derrumbamiento,* there is a clear line dividing the realistic segment of the protagonist's flight from his later fictional encounter with the Virgin. In the two later stories, the points of transition between reality and fantasy are not perceived as readily. Smoother transitions may serve to erase the jump between conscious and unconscious images in the reader's mind. The paradox in this could be that once we, the readers, have agreed to play in the fantastic field, as it were, it is reality not fantasy which is perceived as the interruption and draws our attention, precisely owing to the distance which we have permitted ourselves from its temporal and spatial dimensions. Wolfgang Iser describes these two modes with regard to reader response:

> Because the literary text invokes conventional signs to establish itself as a "staged discourse", that places the textual world under the sign of the 'as-if', readers know that they must bracket off their natural attitudes toward what they are reading. But this does not and cannot mean forgetting or transcending those natural attitudes, which cannot be abandoned. Instead, they figure as a virtualized background, which as a latent instance of comparison, or at least as a testing ground, is essential if the textual world is to be digested. (240)

That which usually would not be acceptable within the parameters set by the dominant discourse may be expressed through fiction, which could, presumably, via reader response, serve as an imaginary ground where possibilities are mentally tested in the here and now of the reading process. A question we might pose then in considering the work of Somers, or that of any writer of fantastic fiction, is whether the unrealities supported by the text are capable of evoking thoughts which subvert the mainstream social mores. The subversive element becomes evident in the three stories studied at the moment when an image emerges in discourse which would normally be blocked off by consciousness in deference to acceptable social standards. Tristan's dialogue with the Virgin and its sexual overtones in *El derrumbamiento* would be seen as blasphemous in the dominant Catholic culture. The man in the tunnel from the story so named is the embodiment of those desires which society most fears and, consequently, refuses to recognize as human by nature. This is evident in the words of the protagonist in her final encounter with the man, whose image has developed as a result of the projection of her own desire. She is just on the verge of being enveloped by his protective embrace when she is struck dead by a passing automobile. Her description of the apparition of her unfulfilled longing, in spite of, or perhaps due to, her sense of society's condemnation of her prohibited desires, reads as follows:

> Fue entonces cuando pude ver fugazmente cómo el violador de criaturas, el ladrón, el asesino, el que codicia lo que no le fue dado, y el todo lo demás que puede ser quien ha nacido, abría los brazos hacia mí. Pero en una proteceión que no se alcanza si las ruedas de un vehículo llegaron primero. Lo vi tanto y tan poco que no puedo describirlo. Era como un paisaje tras los vidrios del tren expreso, con detalles que nunca se conocerán, pero que igualmente aterciopelan la piel o la erizan de punta a punta. (134)

In the final story considered, the detour or "desvío" of the title itself coincides with the woman's final rejection of society's impossible notion

of marriage or the edict that "two shall join as one," a metaphor which, in Lacanian thought, is subsumed under the imaginary relation of self to Other. In this Somers' story, the female protagonist, quite literally jumps off the train of social conformity.

A characteristic common to the work of both Somers and Lacan lies in their attempts to articulate that words are inadequate to express what matters most. Nonetheless, the mental images which the gaps and silences between words may elicit are key to bringing previously unconscious material into play. This expressing that there is something that eludes expression is referred to in Van Haute's introduction to his reading of Lacan's essay (*Écrits* 292-325) on the subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire:

> Lacan felt that Freud's clarity and didactic talent had ultimately led to distortions and oversimplifications, so that his own notoriously "impossible" style was meant to serve as a metaphor for the difficulty of listening to the unconscious. Clearly his difficult writing involves not only the intellectual effort of readers but also their unconscious processes. (Van Haute, xvii)

In this limited sense, one might even find some affinity to the surrealists in the work of both Somers and Lacan. Or, perhaps more aptly, as was previously suggested, Somers would appear to be in agreement with several of her contemporaries from the period of the Latin American *boom*, in their conviction as artists, that an exposition lacking in ambiguity leaves little room for the active participation of the reader. The omniscient third person narration of *El derrumbamiento* evolves to that of a first person narrator-protagonist in both *El hombre del túnel* and *El desvío*. In addition to participating in the confessional intimacy achieved by the two female narrators, the experience of the reader becomes uncanny when she/he realizes that both characters' tales are related retrospectively from the void. The dialogue of the first story also cedes to a greater exposition of thought in the other two, distancing the reader from the constraints of the social status quo, to the extent that

thought is freer or less open to censorship than the spoken word.

Although we get the point in *El derrumbamiento* that the Virgin never wanted to be represented by that statue with the caramel smile when she expresses herself as a real live flesh and blood, desiring woman in seducing Tristan, his own verbalizations are never freed from the honey-coated self effacement of an Uncle Tom stereotype. If the story was intended as a parody of the pseudo-sexuality of mystic literature,[10] it fails, due to the fact that there is not sufficient likeness to the original form to adequately balance the distortions of it. The dialogue could more aptly be described as burlesque at times, for instance, when Tristan comes close to melting the virgin's "golden bud" and she insists that stroking it will quite adequately allay her desire. She doesn't need him to penetrate it: "Has derretido a una virgen. Lo que quieres ahora no tiene importancia. Alcanza con que el hombre sepa derretir a una virgen. Es la verdadera gloria de un hombre. Después, la penetre o no ya no importa." (26)

It is this uniquely female brand of humor, which emerges in this story from 1948, that is Somers' blueprint for inciting feminine desire at its' subversive best. Her humor finds less compromised forms of expression in the later stories.

The thoughts of the protagonist in the second story evince less conscious control of language than that which restricted Tristan's verbal conformity to the social order. The dialogue is scarce in *El hombre del túnel* and is used to confirm the protagonist's conviction that the people surrounding her are taking recourse in the ascriptive power of words, in order to sully that which she experiences as the purity of her own desire. This first occurs when the character, still a young child, returns home and tries to tell people about her encounter with the magical man in the park: "sin que nadie se diera cuenta de lo que se estaba haciendo, me enseñaron que había en este mundo una cosa llamada violación [...] la imagen de mi hombre permaneció inconexa, tierna y desentendida [...]. Hasta que un día decidí no hablar más." (129)

The man she is describing was dressed in old-fashioned clothing. Without hearing a word, he had conveyed to her a feeling of approval

and acceptance previously unknown in her seven years. When she succeeds in sighting him again "ten to twelve" years have passed, placing her between seventeen and nineteen years of age. She rings up the neighbor across the street and begs him to delay the man, whom she has spotted from her window. The male neighbor's response is an innuendo to the effect that maybe she would like some sexual companionship. Her initial resolve that it is best not to attempt to communicate with others, is reinforced when she slams down the telephone receiver: "Le corté el chorro sin fin de la estupidez con que amenazaba inundar el mundo" (131).

The imagery following this event is some of the most obscure which emerges from the mind of this troubled character.[11] Its oneiric qualities invite projection from the reader, who must struggle to complete possible meanings. Relative to the rather heavy-handed metaphors of the first story, we find a more extensive use of the displacement of images, in addition to their condensation, in the second narrative. It is now quite clear to the reader that she/he has entered a context in which her/his own free associations are called into play in order to decipher latent meanings in the manifest images of the text. To cite a couple of examples, the woman describes a subsequent encounter with another woman in the hallway. On the day of her death, as she races down to the street level to meet her man, she considers the elevator but opts for the banister of the staircase. The odor emerging from the woman who crosses her path is described as that of a damp mop. She says of the woman, who significantly snorts, as would a horse:

> La estaba imaginando en una pata, yéndose a la oscuridad de la rinconera a colgarse sola por una manilla de hilo sucio que ella misma se habría atado en la ranura del cuello, cuando persistió en tomarse toda la anchura del pasaje. Luchábamos por el espacio vital, sin palabras, a puro instinto de conservar lo más caro, ella su vocación de estropajo, yo la boca del túnel donde iba a hallar de nuevo algo que me pertenecía, cuando no tuve más remedio que empujar. (132)

The protagonist, having sent this beast-of-burden and her bag of vegetables flying with a shove, describes each of the contenders in this struggle as trying to preserve what is dearest to her, the neighbor her vocation as a mop and herself, she tells the reader, the mouth of the tunnel or that place where she could again find that which belonged to her. There is an overlay of images, whereby the protagonist imagines an intruder on her life space as voluntarily hanging herself from the dirty strap of her broom handle; which she, the neighbor woman herself, has voluntarily strapped around her own neck. This peculiar juxtaposition of images invites the reader to make the latent connections which one projects on the manifest content of a dream. Moreover, one possible interpretation for any reader who has struggled between her right to fulfillment of personal desire and her vocation as a broom might focus on the bitter humor and irony in the projection of a woman's tightening the collar to the leash around her own neck.

The mechanisms of both condensation and displacement are also evident in the imagery used to describe the character's later decision to opt for the banister of the staircase in lieu of the elevator door. She considers that the elevator is the normal path and that it's up and down vertical movement has its own efficiency but "mientras la puerta del ascensor se abría de por sí como un sexo acostumbrado", she opts instead for "el pasamanos grasiento de la escalera [que] se me volvió a insinuar con la sugestión de un fauno tras los árboles" (133). It is in this onanistic bliss that she goes down to meet the "man" of her desire.

> Y yo hacia atrás de la memoria, cabalgando en los pasamanos tal como alguien debió inventarlos para los incipientes orgasmos, que después se apoderan de las entrañas en sazón, hasta terminar achicándose en los climaterios como trapo quemado. [...]
>
> Aquel sí colgado del vacío. Sin más significación que la de su arrasamiento, se quedó unos instantes girando en el aire de la caja de la escalera con otros síes más pequeños que le habían salido de todo el cuerpo y me acompañaron

> hasta la puerta. Crucé luego la calle con el mismo vértigo que había cabalgado el madero [...] (133).

Forty years, or almost two generations after this passage was written, a valid projected reading from a present-day feminist could easily include praise for the power of auto-eroticism versus the efficient and accustomed vertical movement of the male. Nonetheless, in all three stories, death forecloses on the complete fulfillment of desire, whether or not it is embodied in the projected, imaginary Other. The title of the first story, *El derrumbamiento,* refers to the shelter crashing down and killing both the black man and his pursuers. Before fleeing herself, the Virgin, ironically, tells Tristan that she can mitigate the suffering or the form his death will take, but cannot prevent it; since, after all, only the Father has that power.

As for the protagonist whose curious man beckons her to emerge from her inner tunnel and cross over to the other side, the Nirvana towards which her desire impels her ultimately consists of the extinction of all desire or death as the story concludes: "Entré así otra vez en el túnel. Un agujero negro bárbaramente excavado en la roca infinita. Ya sus innumerables salidas, siempre una piedra puesta de través cerca de la boca. Pero ya sin el hombre. O la consagración del absoluto y desesperado vacío." (134)

Although the elimination of desire in *El hombre del túnel* would appear to be equated with death, a Lacanian analysis sheds light on the fact that even in life, what blocks our connection with the unconscious is the alienating, imaginary object in that it sits in, deceptively, as the alternate agent of human desire. While there is a value to alterity, the subject is always at risk of disappearing in the Other's desire. In part, what is relinquished in Lacanian analysis is the subject's impossible hope of having its' own demands on the Other satisfied. Demand in a successful analysis is exposed as that which masquerades as desire. By way of analogy, fiction, which pretends to provide an adequate object for desire, may replicate the misrecognition implicit in the myth of the subject's adaptability. In this sense, some fictional presentations may block the access of the text to the free play of unconscious mecha-

nisms by closing on rather than subsequently distancing and working through the projected identity of the reading subject with the fictional character.

The third story considered, *El desvío*, takes place in a woman's mind and can be viewed as an attempt to represent the essence of the non-existence of the Other. The story itself subverts the notion of the Other. Humor is now clearly key to Somers in creating self-awareness in the reader.

Unlike the other two stories, *El desvío* announces its' fictionality by opening with the female protagonist telling us that this narration is not addressed to us but rather to the others lying around, abandoned on the grass at the place of the detour. She tells us, despite the fact that they appear neither to hear nor desire anything, that she cannot comprehend why none of them gets up and screams as she did on landing there. Somers has returned to a heavy reliance on dialogue to carry the plot in *El desvío*. Although the use of dialogue in *El derrumbamiento* added to the theatricality or artificiality of the fiction, Somers has succeeded in *El desvío* by ironically juxtaposing elements of a elichéd, if humorous, and realistic dialogue against the unreal backdrop of the eternal train ride. The effect on the reader is to recognize her/himself in this aspect of reality as it is foregrounded by the dialogue. In this way, the story parodies the illusions underlying romantic relationships. Both distancing from and identification with the characters is possible, due to the simultaneity of the absurd and representational context of the background plot and its juxtaposition with a dialogue which is all too "real".

El desvío deals with the inevitability of time, as it carries us along, interfering with our ever fully knowing our desire. The female protagonist allows herself to be seduced by her traveling companion, whom she has just met on the platform while awaiting the train. On one level, even as she capitulates, she expresses an awareness that she has been duped when her companion looks at his watch and tells her that seven days have passed. She eventually agrees, despite the fact that she knows she has just boarded the express train. She also wonders at how she lets

him kiss her so easily but explains the progression of the relationship as having assumed the rhythm of the train ride:

> [E]l tren habia empezado a andar con su famoso chuku-chuku que hace las delicias de todo el mundo [...].
> —De modo que te gusta a ti también ese ruidito ¿no es cierto?
> —Qué si me gusta — dije yo al borde del éxtasis — sería capaz de cualquier locura cuando empieza a escucharse. [...] era que algún mecanismo frenador se me había descontrolado repentinamente. (104)

She relates that, her own braking mechanism having gone haywire, it was easy to find herself entering into his way of understanding time. Until one day, at a moment difficult to specify, she begins to understand that this mysterious train ride is taking her nowhere.

Meanwhile, through a process of condensation and displacement of imagery, the faceless ticket taker, appearing at intervals like a fly on the wall, or suspended from the ceiling, becomes a blank on whom the reader may project the role of guardian of the accepted social order. This occurs when the protagonist's companion, whom she has begun to refer to over time as "my man", explains that he felt compelled to put a ring on her finger as she slept, in order to keep up an appearance of propriety in the face, or rather facelessness, of the ticket taker.

The rhythm into which our heroine has been lulled is interrupted one day by her man's overreacting to his distaste for the way she folds his pants:

> —¿Lo has visto? — me dijo en tono de reproche tratando de estirar la prenda — estaba bien doblado por mi madre y tú has hecho este lío. [...]
> —Observa —me explicó— un desgraciado pantalón se maneja así, tomándolo por los bajos y haciendo coincidir las costuras. Luego ya podrá doblarse en dos, o en cuantas partes se quiera.
> Cielos, qué descubrimiento. (106-107)

This final sarcasm is her private reflection on the "brilliance" of her man's demonstration of how his laundry should be folded in order that she might approximate the perfection of his mother. Slowly but surely, it dawns on the woman that even her preferences, opinions, and judgments are dictated as her man attempts to disappear her desire in his own:

> —Es que voy a decírtelo de una vez por todas —declaró él cierta noche al regreso de una comentada exhibición de cine— a mí sólo me entusiasman las documentales, esas en que las gentes y las cosas de verdad envían un mensaje directo. Y las novelas de aventuras, porque en tal caso soy yo quien lo vive todo. Soy desde el primer momento el protagonista y basta ya de segundos planos. (107)

It is worth noting that the male's comment implicitly rejects movie plots which call for oblique techniques and representational works requiring anything other than a facile emotional identification.

The dialogue in *El desvío* is a parody of the typical romantic appropriation of one person's desire at the expense of the other's demand. This is most evident in occasional remarks, whose humor heightens our awareness of the alienated form of our desire: "Me gustan mucho tus dientes—me dijo—son del tipo que andaba buscando, esos que brillan cuando chocan con la luz y parecen romperla" (104-105). Comments such as this last suggest the joke behind man's attempt to possess the object of his desire, as if the female's physical body were an empty vessel or object, devoid of subjectivity. *El desvío* succeeds in a way in which the earlier stories could not, due to the female protagonist's victory at throwing off the mask of conformity while avoiding the temptation to masquerade as object of the other's desire at the expense of asserting her own.[12] The story's narration and the dialogue of its metatext suggest that the more subversive of human subjects can gain an awareness of the futility of completely realizing human desire by taking recourse in the partial satisfactions or the immediacy which self irony and humor afford both life and its representation in art.

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NOTES

[1]The fictional work of Armonía Somers (1914-1994) includes five novels and twenty-five short stories. All citations from the three stories studied in this paper can be found in her last publication, the 1988 anthology *La rebelión de la flor.*

[2] Lacan writes: "But we must also add that man's desire is the *désir de l'Autre* (the desire of the Other) in which the *de* provides what grammarians call the 'subjective determination', namely that it is *qua* Other that he desires (which is what provides the true compass of human passion)." See "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious" (*Écrits* 312).

[3] *El desvío,* which was first published in the Sunday supplement of Montevideo's *El día* in September of 1964, also appeared in Ángel Rama's *Aquí cien años de raros* (Montevideo: Arca, 1966).

[4] See Marie-Hélène Brousse's chapter "The Drive (II)" (Feldstein 114).

[5] See reference to American ego psychologists, Kris, Hartmann, and Loewenstein (Van Haute 88).

[6] For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Mary-Lee Sullivan, "The Theatrics of Transference in Federico García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* and Paloma Pedrero's *La llamada de Lauren*," *Hispanic Journal* 16.1 (Spring 1995): 169-171. Of particular relevance is Lacan's Chapter 19 "From Intervention to the Transference" (*Four Fundamental* 244-260).

[7] Regarding the gaps and blank spaces which elicit the reader's desire and the use of projection both within and outside of the text, see Mary-Lee Sullivan, "Projection as a Narrative Technique in Juan Carlos Onetti's *Goodbyes*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 31 (1994): 443.

[8] For an invaluable clarification of many aspects of the polemic around the elusive concept of the *boom*, see "El *boom* en perspectiva" (Rama, *La novela en América Latina: Panoramas 1920-1980,* 235-293). See María Rosa Olivera-Williams' article for a comparison of

fictional technique in Juan Carlos Onetti and Somers. Related to this topic, the stucturing of ambiguity, is Elena Martínez' "La ambiguedad y el papel del lector en *El desvío*" in the collection of critical essays edited by Cosse (105-118). For comparison with Clarice Lispector, see Jean Franco's chapter on "The Magic of Alterity" and, in particular, her remarks on the destabilizing of the subject in Lispector's *A Bela e a Fera* (Franco 204-205).

[9] The manner in which the protagonist of *El desvío* begins her narration from a prostrate position on the grass is reminiscent of the enigmatic opening of Julio Cortázar's *Las babas del diablo*, from his 1959 anthology, *Las armas secretas*. In their respective stories, Somers and Cortázar share a language that is laden with ambiguity, despite its' matter-of-fact tone, due to its' insertion in a temporal spatial scheme which defies the conventional "reality" of the reader. This creates uncertainty in the reader as to the narrator's reliability in serving as a mediator between what is fantastic and what in "reality" occurred.

[10] Possible sharing of occasional vocabulary common to mystic literature is briefly alluded to in essays by Lilia Dapaz Strout, "*La rebelión de la flor*: la metamorfosis de un icono en *El derrumbamiento*" (Cosse 53-86) and Ana María Rodríguez-Villamil, "Bajo el signo de la madre: *El despojo* y *El derrumbamiento*" (Cosse 119-147).

[11] It would be difficult to ignore the similarities between this story and Ernesto Sábato's *El túnel*, published in 1948, in their narrow focus on the association's of a pathological mind. In both fictions, the protagonists bring about their destruction as a result of solitude and an inability to bridge the communication abyss between the projections of their own minds and external reality.

[12] For a discussion of the feminist history of this definition of "masquerade" as well as for her position regarding points of convergence and discrepancy with Lacan's theory, see "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix" (45-100).

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