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EL GARABATO

AND THE MOTIVATION OF THE SIGN

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Vicente Leñero, early winner of the Premio Biblioteca Breve, is an exemplary specimen of the new wave of Latin American novelists, dedicated to producing narratives in which form and linguistic structure are as much a part of the total work as such elements as plot, theme, and conflict. Leñero's training as a civil engineer is clearly reflected in the precise and intricate architecture of his novels, from the structured ambiguity of Los Albañiles to the mind-boggling maze of interlocking levels of Estudio Q to the more subdued but no less tightly knit Redil de Ovejas. El Garabato, shortest of Lenero's major novels, follows certain structural patterns established in the earlier texts, but also contains a number of elements which add to the list of Leñero's accomplishments as an author and offer an additional perspective on all his works considered together as an intertext. As with any of Leñero's novels, El Garabato is constructed from an elaborate structural blueprint, and may be read and interpreted on a number of simultaneous levels. The present remarks will concentrate solely on certain semiological aspects of El Garabato; in particular, the manner in which the text, considered as a series of linguistic signs, creates a meaningful relationship between form and content which transcends the normal arbitrariness of symbolic representation.

Unlike many modern experimental novels, El Garabato contains no truly original or unique linguistic innovations; its impact upon the reader is derived rather from the subtle manipulation of traditional devices, tempered by the author's careful use of irony and parody. Superficially, the novel exhibits a format dating back to the earliest specimens of the genre, the time-honored novel-within-a-novel. El Garabato opens with a note to Leñero from his friend Pablo Mejía H., thanking the former for securing the publication of the latter's first novel, El Garabato, and containing additional trivial commentary from the

flattered and excited soon-to-be published author. The novel then begins, ostensibly the first-person account of the professional writer Fernando J. Moreno, Mexican novelist and critic of some repute, who is currently living in self-imposed isolation while contemplating writing the definitive Mexican novel. The reader learns that Moreno has long shunned interviews, in the style of Juan Rulfo, and has instead left the limelight to other younger and more vociferous writers, preferring to direct his own attentions to efforts he considers of more transcendental importance. His solipsistic state is broken by the appearance of one Fabián Mendizábal, aspiring young writer who, through some means of persuasion, manages to wheedle an interview from the hermetic Moreno. Moreno exacts as a condition of the interview that he be allowed to correct the proofs before publication but, after an excessive wait for further word from Mendizábal, is surprised and angered to see the interview appear in print without his prior knowledge. Mendizábal later returns, offering profuse apologies but no explanation for his transgression, and Moreno admits that the interview was in fact an accurate transcription of the conversation. Mendizábal, after some hesitation, confesses to having written a novel, and Moreno, against his own better judgement, agrees to read the manuscript. Mendizábal's novel is of course entitled El Garabato, and the remainder of Leñero's novel consists of alternations between segments of Mendizábal's novel and excerpts of Moreno's personal life, including his on-going commentary on the manuscript, which he reads by fits and starts. The hackneyed device of the novel-within-a-novel has been augmented by yet another embedded level, providing three levels of discourse. Only two, however, are significantly used, for apart from the initial letter, no further reference is made to Pablo Mejía or to Leñero. The reader is still left a bit puzzled about the three consecutive beginnings of El Garabato, all occurring within a few pages of each other, although this feeling is somewhat mitigated by later developments in the novel.

Mendizábal's text, judging by the fragments that Moreno reads to himself, appears to be a rather inexpertly penned mystery thriller. The protagonist, Rodolfo, is riding with his playboy friend Juan José Garmendia in the latter's sportscar when they observe an MG, driven by an American woman, forced off the road by a carful of sinister characters. After stopping to lend a hand, the two youths are unable to extract further information from the woman, who does allow Rodolfo to accompany her back to Mexico City in her car, as protection against a further attack. The

couple arrives at the apartment of Frida, the American woman, and the shy Rodolfo freely imagines sexual fantasies involving the gringa loca, fantasies which, in view of the latter's actions, appear to be on the verge of realization. Events intervene, however, and Rodolfo finds himself instead asked to carry a sealed envelope to an apartment across town. Stumbling into the unlocked apartment, Rodolfo finds a dying man, and there begins a series of adventures that include abductions, chases and other elements of the detective thriller, lifted in their entirety from current paperback novels and television series. At one point, Rodolfo opens the envelope and finds a piece of paper with a tangled scribble, the garabato of the title, with the inscription Orlando 69, and a small key. Much later, toward the end of the total novel, Frida, after having disappeared for a while, reestablishes communications with Rodolfo and informs him that the key fits a locker at the airport, and that to avoid further difficulties he is to deposit the envelope in the locker at a predetermined time. Arriving early at the airport, Rodolfo browses at the newsstand and discovers a British version of Virginia Woolf's novel Orlando, the strange tale of metamorphosis. Somewhat taken aback by this significant word, Rodolfo momentarily wonders whether there might be anything on page 69 of the novel to unravel the mysterious scribble, but dismisses the notion as absurd and proceeds to the lockers. The text of the novel leaves him as he is being abducted from the airport by a group of individuals who obviously wish to despoil him of the envelope and possibly, of his life.

The supposed text of Mendizábal's novel is not presented in an unbroken fashion, but intervenes in the text of the total novel in fragments, corresponding to the fashion in which Moreno is reading the manuscript. Following each excerpt from El Garabato, Moreno muses over the inept quality of the work and offers damning criticisms, from the skeletal character development and hackneyed plot lines to stylistic faults and errors of grammar. Moreno's commentaries range from penetrating judgements to pedantic nitpicking, with the majority of the remarks being located somewhere between the two poles. He is convinced that Mendizábal has in some fashion written a thinly disguised autobiography, or that in any case he has designed the protagonist Rodolfo after himself, embodying his own sexual inhibitions and working out the scenario of his internal torments. So certain of his judgement is Moreno that he attempts to communicate with Mendizábal, only to find out that the young man's name does not appear in the telephone directory. A call to the newspaper that printed

the interview reveals that the work appeared unsolicited in the editor's office and was printed with no knowledge of the author. Moreno's own life thus begins to acquire a tint of the mysterious trappings that adorn the protagonist of El Garabato, as he wonders as to the identity of the strange young writer.

Appearing in the counterpoint with the text of Mendizábal's manuscript is the drama of Moreno's life, involving his inability to reconcile his strong Catholic faith and moral principles with the life he is leading with Lucy, his mistress. Moreno is divorced and learns that his former wife is about to marry a businessman, which event Moreno receives with ambivalence. His ex-wife has the custody of the children and Moreno occasionally visits with his son who, however, is more drawn to his mother and resents the effects that his father's actions have had upon his own life. At the funeral of his brother, Moreno once again meets his son and manages to invite him out for lunch, during which an extremely frustrating and depressing conversation ensues. Employing the pretext of difficult studies, Moreno's son declines further invitations to visit with his father and fades from the scene. Torn by feelings of guilt and self doubt, Moreno resolves to leave Lucy, a course of action he has pondered many times in the past but never before put into action. He receives advice from several individuals, including his psychoanalyst, all of whom try to convince him to abandon his strangling Catholic morals and live a more natural life. Moreno tries hard to convince himself that his present life leaves nothing to be desired, but finally ends up, in a moment of exceptional torment, by leaving Lucy, although several attempts at reconciliation will appear later. Moreno's musings about the nature of his dilemma are juxtaposed with extensive quotes from Erich Fromm and others who have spoken on the problems of love and sin, but despite his immersion in works of philosophy, psychology and theology, Moreno remains as confused and indecisive as before, and his life is reducing itself to a shambles around him. His work is paralyzed, his projects for writing the definitive novel lie fallow while he wallows in self pity and tries to decide upon a plan that will liberate him from the entanglements of his emotional life. It is in the midst of this turbulent situation that Mendizábal's manuscript comes into his hands, and the reading of El Garabato is inextricably bound up with the working out of Moreno's own destiny.

Moreno's first impression upon reading the manuscript is that the work is utterly worthless, and he is determined to not see the writer again, but to leave the rejected

manuscript with his secretary, who will then dismiss the man's attempts at further communication. As his reading progresses, however, Moreno begins to feel sympathetically drawn to Mendizábal's neophytic attempts at creating a narrative. Moreno, in a moment of lucid self-awareness, realizes that his own plans for creating a monumental novel have been momentarily waylaid, and he begins to see himself as the guiding force behind the creation of a new writer, in the person of Mendizábal. He feels that he might be able to furnish the young writer with the technical and emotional tools necessary to rise to prominence as a novelist, and to thereby extend his own dominion over the literary world. It is not coincidental that Fernando Moreno and Fabián Mendizábal share the same initials, the latter name being in effect a somewhat grotesque transformation of the former. The parallel is rendered even more noteworthy by Moreno's own psychological difficulties, which mirror those which he supposes plague Mendizábal, revealed by the latter's inability to create believable characters in his manuscript.

Moreno, alternately drawn to and repelled by Mendizábal's text, never finishes reading the manuscript, although he is reluctant to admit this to the author when the two finally meet. Moreno suggests that he has read the entire work, and comments on its technical and literary lack of lustre. Mendizábal, in turn, reacts with surprising violence, accusing Moreno of a total lack of comprehension. He exclaims¹ (182) that Moreno has failed to grasp "todo, la novela, el sentido de la novela. Y lo sabe muy bien, mejor que yo." At this point the interview is terminated. Moreno tries to convince himself that he acted prudently in rejecting the manuscript, but he cannot avoid being tormented by doubts concerning his failure to read the entire text. Mendizábal's fervent assertion that the novel has something more than a simple detective story troubles Moreno, as though he had inadvertently allowed a potentially valuable treasure to slip from his grasp through sheer laziness.

Faced with the inability to reestablish communication with Mendizábal, his continuing frustration at trying to write, and his self-destructive relations with Lucy, Moreno finally takes a decisive step, and boards a plane for Los Angeles "para disfrutar de una libertad absoluta lejos del análisis y de la comunión." (187) Like Rodolfo, who is last seen in the pages of Mendizábal's unfinished manuscript, being whisked away in the car of his abductors, the text of Leñero's novel ends with Moreno in the plane, filled with similar reflections: "El jet despegó de la pista y yo

sentí, al ascender en vuelo, que el aparato me raptaba para siempre inventando, anticipándome una muerte ante la cual yo podía escribir con su sentido absoluto (puesto que es muy probable que Cristo no sea Dios) la palabra fin." (187) And with the word fin the novel comes to a close, that is to say, the novel of Pablo Mejía H. and of Vicente Leñero, for the novel of Fabián Mendizábal, whose partially unread manuscript has been returned to its mysterious owner, has never been finished. No further attempt is made to draw a distinction between Leñero and Mejía; the two merge as authors of the novel El Garabato, and the novel, Leñero's novel, ends with the words of the supposed author Mejía.

The structure of El Garabato is a bit unusual to the reader accustomed to similar literary ventures in a more traditional vein. The greatest departure from the norm is naturally the failure to terminate the innermost novel, that of Mendizábal, and the indeterminacy with which the entire novel ends. The reader wonders about the relevance to the overall text, dealing ostensibly with the emotional difficulties of a professional writer, of the insertion of long segments of text from an apparently unrelated detective novel. Surely, shorter inserts would have served the author's purpose just as well, without distracting attention along divergent paths, only to leave the reader stranded at the end with an embedded novel that fails to reach a conclusion. It is easy enough to conclude that El Garabato is merely a game, an attempt to create a sort of anti-novel, in the tradition of the French nouveau roman or its more recent Latin American counterparts. In El Garabato, the initial inklings of a coherent plot are often contradicted by later proceedings, as the novel, after much rambling and philosophical digression, goes absolutely nowhere. Is Leñero one of the authors derisively described by Moreno (22) as "aquellos narradores de nuestros días que en aras de la forma erigen un altar laberíntico en que ellos mismos se ofrecen como víctimas sucumben?" Anyone who has not read Los Albañiles and particularly Estudio Q would be easily drawn to such a response. A failure to initiate a deeper inquiry into the relation between the textual structures of El Garabato and the interpretation of the text as a coherent whole is, however, an injustice to the rigorous precision with which Leñero has fabricated this short but intense narrative. There are a variety of interpretations which may be placed on El Garabato, and one of the most interesting and significant from the point of view of the Latin American narrative in general is the problem of the motivation of the linguistic sign.

According to Saussure, the modern founder of the science

of signs,² each sign consists of a signifier, or externally manifest element and a signified, or underlying element united by a function of signification or meaning.³ Ogden and Richards, in their famous semiotic triangle,³ see the relationship between sign, referent, and interpreter to consist of a set of non-equal functions. Fundamental to the question of signs, in particular linguistic signs, is the notion of arbitrariness versus motivation. In the world of signs, some signs, known as icons, have a motivated signifier; for example, international traffic signs, or signs indicating a direction by pointing a hand. In such cases the signifier formally suggests the signified and one may speak of a motivated sign. Other signs, however, exhibit an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified: the colors of traffic signals, which bear no obvious relation with the notions of stopping and starting, but rather represent the result of an accepted convention.⁴ When dealing with language, which is nothing but a system of signs, the notion of arbitrariness also enjoys a prominent position. Disputes over the motivation or lack thereof of the linguistic sign go back at least as far as Aristotle, who asserted that there is an intrinsic connection between the form of words and their meanings. This view was rejected by Plato in his Cratylus, and it is now generally accepted that in most instances words mean what they do simply because convention has so dictated. The numerous bizarre semantic shifts that may be found among the world's languages amply attest to the non-absolute nature of convention, while a comparison of the words for the same concept in unrelated languages demonstrates that the human mind is willing to accept virtually any reasonable combination of sounds to represent a given meaning.

Despite the general arbitrariness of the sign, there are clear cases where a source of motivation exists, both at the level of the signifier and at that of the signified. Such motivation was recognized by Saussure himself and further described by other investigators.⁵ At the level of the signifier, there are obvious cases such as onomatopoeic forms, imitations of sounds or concepts whose actual phonetic shape in large measure dictates the meaning. One may also add phonetic symbolism or synaesthesia, whercin a particular combination of sounds, for reasons as yet poorly understood, evokes certain connotations independently of the language in use. At the level of the signified, one may consider the case of compound morphemes, whose meaning may be extracted by combining the meanings of the individual

constituent morphemes. Such examples open the possibility for considering the motivation of linguistic signs on hierarchically arranged levels; not only may one examine the signifying function between single words and their referents, but one may also regard entire combinations of words of arbitrarily great length as germane to the issue of signs and signification.

The above remarks are of crucial significance to the study of El Garabato, since a literary text is composed of linguistic signs, of varying degrees of complexity. For example, entire fragments of dialogue, description etc. may be considered wholistically as signs, each group referring, via a particular signifying function, to a referent at a higher level of meaning. The investigator of a literary text is faced with the empirically unresolvable question of the fineness of structure that he may legitimately isolate as being of significance to a literary interpretation. This is the problem addressed by Roland Barthes in S/Z, in his attempt to divide a classical text into small units to be analyzed individually:⁶ "Everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure." Disagreement may arise as to the significance of a particular structure vis-à-vis the entire work considered as an ensemble of literary signification; such technical and methodological difficulties notwithstanding, it behooves every literary analyst to regard a text as the simultaneous structuring of a number of levels of signification, each with its individual semiotic configurations. Thus when touching upon the question of sign motivation, it is seen that while the individual word is in most cases arbitrarily formed, it is quite possible that larger segments of text, larger narrative units including the entire text itself, may in fact be quite well-motivated, both at the level of the signifier and at the level of the signified. Few would deny that literary texts considered as wholistic signs are motivated at the level of the signified; such a dictum is the definition of coherence, of meaningfulness. It is possible, however, to consider the motivation of a literary text also from the standpoint of the signifier, that is, from the actual concrete patterns appearing on the textual surface. The structure of signifiers characterizing a particular text, which is to say the actual textual elements themselves, may bear more than a totally arbitrary relation to the referent of the text, again at a number of interrelated levels. In trivial cases involving individual words, the above remarks about motivation apply to create onomatopoeic forms or significant proper names. On

higher levels of significance, taking as objects of study linguistic signs whose signifiers consist of segments larger than the word, the question of motivation takes on a different aspect, for one now has to deal with more subtle and far-ranging cases of sign formation. In essence, a claim for sign motivation at a higher level is tantamount to the claim that the actual form in which the text is deployed, as well as the sum total of its constituent words, is crucial to an overall interpretation of the text. This dictum is normally accepted without question in poetry, where spacing, typographical arrangement, punctuation, syntactic juxtaposition and other topological characteristics are routinely analyzed as bearing upon the interpretation of the works. Within the study of the narrative, however, less attention has been devoted to this concept, perhaps revealing an underlying philosophy, at times explicitly mentioned by students of the structural analysis of narrative, that the analysis of a narrative is precisely the study of those elements that remain invariant under translation and other modifications. Such a view precludes the study of language-specific topological qualities that would not survive translation or even simple paraphrase. Nevertheless, given the impossibility of drawing a clear delimiting line between poetry and prose, and given the reawakening of interest in a general science of "poetics," which considers each work of literature in its entirety as a series of signs without attempting an a priori categorization, it seems fruitful to leave open the question of the motivation of textual signifiers in works of narrative as well as in "poetry." Remaining within this spirit of open exploration, let us examine a few characteristics of El Garabato, with an eye toward discovering possible motivations for the structuring of the text.

It would be difficult to speak of a single theme or motif in a novel as technically complex as El Garabato; if, however, one were pressed for a single judgement, it would not be totally objectionable to assert that the novel deals with frustration, with the inevitability of the human condition. Fernando Moreno spends the pages of the novel trying to work out his personal inhibitions and neuroses: his religious preoccupations, his guilt feelings about living with a mistress, his love and perhaps remorse toward his children and his former wife, his inability to sustain a new creative endeavor in the light of his image as a famous writer, his lack of desire to be interviewed or to serve as a figurehead for Mexican letters, and of course,

the ambivalent and vexing position into which he has been placed by Mendizábal's unsolicited manuscript. At each stage of that portion of Leñero's novel that directly concerns Moreno, he is given various bits of advice. On occasion, he acts on his own, reading the available sources of assistance. At no point, however, does Moreno manage to fully face any one of his problems, not even at the end of the novel, when he flies off to escape them; each remains ultimately unresolved. Moreno has divorced his wife, but retains ambivalent feelings toward her as witnessed by his emotions upon learning of her impending marriage. He feels glad to be rid of the responsibility of a family and yet tries to cultivate the companionship of his son, against the latter's wishes. Moreno is clearly aware of the impending dilemma regarding his wife with his mistress, and yet rather than discussing the situation outright he prefers a more cowardly escape, announcing that he is leaving her and then, after considerable vacillation, actually doing so. The same holds true of his views toward Catholicism. Moreno is quite explicitly aware of the paradoxical nature of the religion that attracts him. The advice of friends and of a psychoanalyst are superfluous in that they merely reinforce an awareness he already possesses. Nonetheless, even as he flies out of Mexico, Moreno cannot help reflecting on religious questions, indicating that the topic has not yet left his mind. Finally, Moreno's behavior in the face of Mendizábal's manuscript reveals his inability to come to grips with his own literary difficulties. Moreno reads the text in bits and snatches; his opinion varies from a desire to consign the work to the garbage to a dream of creating a protégé who will sweep the literary world by storm. The ultimate flaw in Moreno's nature is revealed by the fact that, after experiencing so much indecision, he eventually utilizes the final cop-out by not finishing Mendizábal's text. He realizes that he has lost a unique opportunity when reflecting upon Mendizábal's reactions to his commentaries, he tries and fails to locate the ambitious young writer. It is too late: Moreno's indecisiveness has crippled his ability to extricate himself from his self-created dilemma.

The actual textual structure of Leñero's novel offers a striking parallel to the events concerning the lives of Moreno, Mendizábal and Rodolfo, the protagonist of Mendizábal's novel. The narration of Moreno's life is constantly interrupted by the fragments which the latter is reading from Mendizábal's text. After each fragment, Moreno mentally intervenes offering observations

concerning the merits and demerits of the text. These observations correspond to the advice which comes externally to Moreno each time he finds himself faced by a crucial configuration of problems. Each reading of El Garabato terminates at an indecisive point, with the protagonist left suspended in a fashion which, while perhaps suggesting an eventual resolution at the end of a long series of adventures, leaves the reader wondering as to the immediately succeeding events. Precisely the same formal structure characterizes Moreno's own life. Indeed, the narration of Leñero's novel contains an entire series of crises that Moreno encounters, and at each stage, just as it appears that he is about to reach a definitive decision, he hesitates, and the chain of events collapses around him. The most telling parallel between Moreno's activities and the formal structure of the novel lies in the unfinished ending. Moreno, after reading nearly the entire text of Mendizabal's manuscript, a bit at a time, finally declines to read the final portion, robbing himself of the opportunity to achieve the satisfaction that every reader receives at the conclusion of a novel. The text of El Garabato, for the readers of Leñero's novel, thus remains incomplete, just as Moreno has perceived it, and it is apparent that Leñero has not intended Mendizabal's text to be any more than a tool in the development of the narrative. In the end, Moreno also escapes the pages of Leñero's novel without having reached a satisfactory solution to his own problems; his leaving thus parallels the stopping a reading of Mendizabal's novel in mid-chapter. Both Rodolfo and Moreno are last seen embarking on a journey whose consequences can only be guessed at. Rodolfo's destiny is left unspecified through the foibles of Moreno; Moreno's destiny is left unspecified through the foibles of Pablo Mejía, which is to say, of Vicente Leñero. Moreno, as reader, is denied the final knowledge of the conclusion of the text through his own actions; Rodolfo (perhaps a surrogate for Mendizabal) passes up the opportunity of reading the possible key pages of Virginia Woolf's novel through his own reluctance, and the reader of Leñero's novel is denied access to the conclusion of Moreno's life story through the offices of the author himself, projecting his view onto the reader.

In addition to the most general and obvious parallels described above, one may wish to tie the formal structure of El Garabato to the internal content in less direct fashions. Another route of approach would be through a slightly different use of the theme of frustration. Moreno constantly finds himself frustrated and thwarted in his

attempts to resolve the conflicts that plague him. Just as he seems to have reached a decision, his own vacillation forces him to abandon his resolution and everything returns to its former state of chaos. In a very similar fashion, the reader of Leñero's novel experiences a parallel frustration, in that the text of Mendizábal's novel is started and stopped so many times, and finally just as "something exciting" is about to happen, the text is definitively broken off, never to be resumed. It is almost as though Leñero were mocking the non-serious reader of his work, telling him "you thought you were getting a nice mystery novel, with everything neatly tied up at the end, and you've had a rude awakening," an even more explicit use of the gambit of inconclusive endings that he has employed in Los Albañiles and Estudio Q. The reader must be more careful; things aren't always as simple as they seem, neither for fictional characters like Moreno and Rodolfo, nor for the readers of Leñero's novels. Once more, it is possible to trace a parallel between the content of the text and the techniques by which it is structured to form the narrative.

One may also approach the relation between textual structure and literary significance on the most general plane, transcending the particular problems of the fictional characters. By presenting his narrative structures as a series of false starts and inconclusive episodes, Leñero is offering a commentary on the human condition itself. Everyone is to one degree or another plagued by doubts and insecurities like those that harrangue Moreno, Mendizábal and Rodolfo. Each individual finds himself at times at an impasse which may not be bridged but which calls for an immediate retreat. So many lives end as inconclusively as the text of El Garabato, through mysterious disappearances or, more commonly, through the interruption by death of an unfinished set of designs: "Not with a bang but a whimper" as T. S. Eliot put it. In El Garabato, as in his other novels, Leñero is trying as one might to escape the tentacles of destiny and strike out as an individual, he remains as trapped as a character in the pages of a novel. Moreno once remarks (39): "Cuando el autor de una novela no consigue diferenciar su propio yo del yo de su protagonista, la obra de ese autor se convierte en simple cauce para el desahogo." Moreno accuses Mendizábal of violating precisely this stratagem, and yet Moreno himself is just as trapped by an inability to escape the glaring lamps of introspection and self-judgement. Whereas Mendizábal has chosen the pages of a novel to engage in self-seeking, Moreno's tormented solipcism has manifested

itself in the diametrically opposed manner: a total paralysis of his creative abilities, the inability to write further. Moreno considers making Mendizábal his surrogate, expressing himself through the works of another; this points out again one of Leñero's major themes, that individual differences become blurred and often disappear in the face of the essential similarity of all individuals, both fictional and real. One could pursue at great length the role of parallelism in El Garabato, a study that would carry the present investigation far afield. Rodolfo and Moreno share many more characteristics than the few just mentioned, and the text acts in many instances to draw the characters closer together. Corresponding to Moreno's dilemma regarding Catholicism, for example, is Rodolfo's attempt to seek asylum in a church, where he is first aided for a short while by the priest, but finally turned out to face his own problems. Mendizábal's virtual anonymity correlates with Moreno's pressing desire to avoid publicity; the two keep intruders away, utilizing different techniques as befits the individual. The list could be extended much further, to indicate all the more functional role of the embedded narrative in El Garabato.

The technical means by which the various conflicts are presented in El Garabato add another dimension to the meaning which may be extracted from the pages of the novel. As striking as the substantive parallels between Moreno, Mendizábal and Rodolfo is the fact that the parallels exist at all. Leñero has, by means of a descending series of novels within novels, protagonists describing protagonists, hinted powerfully at the reductibility of human individuality to points of destiny; perhaps, in the most pessimistic and far-reaching interpretation (which is not necessarily Leñero's own view), to one single archetypal human pattern. In this fashion, the text of El Garabato may be seen as embodying a motivation for the linguistic sign at the level of the signifier. The author has created a network of textual structures which reiterate at every level the interpretations derivable from a total reading. It may also be claimed that Leñero has utilized motivated signifiers in the study of textual forms from a stylistic interlude to a central integrating factor of the entire work.

And what of the role of the reader of El Garabato? Which reader? And which novel? One might well wonder, for the telescoping format of El Garabato posits many readers; perhaps, following the lead of Estudio Q, infinitely many readers. In El Garabato, that is to say, Leñero's novel, Moreno acts as the voice of interpretation. He is the figure of literary creation, and through the potential

surrogate of Mendizábal, he is experiencing a moment of creation. Small matter that he himself did not actually write the text which he is criticizing, for his critical judgements regarding the structuring of the narrative more than make up for this incidental lack. Leñero, through the voice of Moreno, offers, more explicitly than he has done previously, an insight into the process of authorial creation. In Los Albañiles, the reader is merely left with a set of alternatives which do not fit into a harmonious whole in any obvious fashion. In Estudio Q, the reader is made to feel the infinitely many levels common to any signifying system, in which the author, as the reader himself, is lost as a mere point among the whirling galaxies of the universe. El Garabato offers an intermediate position, locating the author in a stance that is comprehensible to the reader, and presenting the external novel (Leñero's novel) as a series of hints at its own construction. It is irrelevant whether or not there are any autobiographical elements in El Garabato; the important factor is that the act of creation is dissected for the outside observer. Unlike, for example, Cortázar in Rayuela, Leñero is not inviting the reader's participation in the formation of the novel, for the text, such as it is, is a fait accompli. He is, however, demonstrating the many stages in the process of evolution of a literary text, and is pointing out the role or roles of the author, the reader and the critic in the genesis and development of a text. Leñero's preoccupation with the theme of destiny, traceable in all his works, includes the reader as well as the author, for in the final analysis, Leñero draws no boundaries separating individuals into distinct categories. El Garabato makes use of an extension of the paradigm or underlying system of potential choices, onto the textual surface. Paradigm implies choice, the excision of simultaneity, and El Garabato is characterized by the inability to sustain a choice. The paradigmatic choices of the text are allowed to "leak" out, as it were, not to dazzle the reader with the potentialities of creation, but in order to force the issue of choice. Destiny, the lack of a true self-determination, is the absence of choice, or equivalently, the irrelevance of any choice, and it is destiny that forces the opening of the paradigmatic doors and the multiple structure of the text.

El Garabato is a novel without an ending because it is a novel without a beginning. Leñero continues to explore the development of the narrative in the form of a reflexive structure which contains its own development, and which involves the reader in every step of that development. The

reader is the writer of El Garabato, not because he is asked to reassemble the scrambled pieces of a puzzle, nor because he is required to choose his version from among competing alternatives, but because he is drawn into a union with the author, with the multiple and infinitely extending group of readers/writers that, for Leñero, is the only resolution of the human paradox.

NOTES

¹ References are to Vicente Leñero, El Garabato (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1967).

² See Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de Linguistique Générale, 3rd ed. (Paris: Payot, 1967).

³ C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1923), p. 88.

⁴ As further testimony to the power of convention, several researchers have reported that, in terms of visual perception, a green light would actually be more noticeable as a signal for danger.

⁵ Cf. Ch. Bally, "Sur la motivation des signes linguistiques," Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris, 41 (1940), 75-88. See also L. Hjelmslev, Prolegomena to a Theory of Language, trans. L. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961) and Roland Barthes, "Eléments de sémiologie," Communications, 4 (1964), 91-135.

⁶ Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 12.

⁷ The question of paradigmatic overlapping is dealt with more extensively in John Lipski, "Paradigmatic overlapping in Tres Tristes Tigres," Dispositio, 1 (1976), 33-45.