CHANNELING THE CINEMATIC IN MANUEL PUIG'S *BETRAYED BY RITA HAYWORTH*¹

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Abstract

The relationship between literature and cinema has grown more extensive in recent decades, not only due to the immense popularity of book-movie tie-ins and their intertextual relationship with other narrative genres like online games and literary adaptations on Netflix, but also because of developments in adaptation studies itself. However, there had been a concentration of studies on novel-to-film adaptations or the wholesale transpositions of literary works onto another medium. Still in the developing stage is the academic analysis of adaptations as a site for literary liquidity. Not only do novels, for instance, become source texts for films, there are occasions when novelists appropriate the cinematic into their characters, themes, narrative techniques, and plot structure. Beyond the adaptation discourse, how do contexts like the prevailing media culture, the realities of the author's literary environment, and the character of the literary and film industries affecting the text being investigated inform an interpretation of a particular novel and its eventual place in the literary world?

In view of the above, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does Manuel Puig's *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* appropriate cinematic devices in its themes, characters, plot structure, narrative devices, and narrative voice?
2. How does the novel represent Puig's worldview both as a film artist and a novelist?
3. How does the modern Latin American literary landscape inform the novel's composition?
4. How does cinema culture become a novelistic trope in *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*?
5. How does the novel constitute an occasion for literary liquidity through a new sense of Latin American reality and linguistic play?

Keywords

Manuel Puig, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, moviegoing culture, cinematic tropes, literary liquidity, new Argentine reality, linguistic play

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INTRODUCTION

In his book *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman (2000) appropriates the qualities of liquid particles in explaining his concept of modernity. Contrasting it with solids, he says liquids connote time, unlike the former that occupies space. Liquidity is almost synonymous with fluidity and both words describe modern life, which is constantly moving and to certain extent, easily vanishing into the space, thereby forming a new reality. Modern man's "liquid" life has been, in the process, difficult to pin down; it escapes as soon as it settles in a particular space. In his attempt to connect material reality with the sociology of modern living, Bauman, in his book's introduction, establishes the resemblance between the human condition as a social being and the behavior of liquids in the following passage:

Fluids travel easily. They 'flow,' 'spill,' 'run out,' 'splash,' 'pour over,' 'leak,' 'flood,' 'spray,' 'drip,' 'seep,' 'ooze'; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped—they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still. From the meeting with solids they emerge unscathed, while the solids they have met, if they stay solid, are changed—get moist or drenched. The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of 'lightness.' There are liquids which, cubic inch for cubic inch, are heavier than many solids, but we are inclined nonetheless to visualize them all as lighter, less 'weighty' than everything solid. We associate 'lightness' or 'weightlessness' with mobility and inconstancy: we know from practice that the lighter we travel the easier and faster we move.

These are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity. (2)

If contemporary sociology turns to metaphors like "liquidity" or "fluidity" to explain the behavior, tendencies and characteristics of the modern condition, then the study of the novel may also draw inspiration from concepts outside of its traditional domain to analyze what is happening as texts move around and within the vicinity of other texts of culture. Novels are born out of the writer's interaction in a social world. These can be sociological artifacts too. *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* was a product of fluidity of the realities that greeted its author, the fluidity of the narrative genres, and the fluidity of the themes and tropes that constitute its fictional cosmology.

It might be right to start this inquiry by noting where the novelist was born. Puig was born in 1932 in General Vallejos, in "a small town in an Argentine *pampas*" (King 283). The Quenchuan word *pampa* means "flat land" or "space." This very flatness of the land lends perhaps to its dreariness, thereby lending a most fitting

setting for a story of a community that is given to daily banal chatter and escapist entertainment. The pampas may be an uninspiring topography but it is also the force behind the creative evolution of Puig. Pedro Henriquez-Ureña (1963) describes the pampas this way:

The pampas had no trees, except on the banks of rivers; only grass, six or eight feet high. The horses and the cows brought by the conquerors bred freely in the plains and became wild; a hundred years ago there were many thousands of them. Men—the gauchos—became as wild as they, though they kept their European garments. Taming the pampa and the gaucho was the seemingly Utopian plan of the men of 1852; it was fulfilled in a surprisingly short time, even though it strewed many victims along its road, like *Martin Fierro*. Now the best emblem of the modern pampa is that admirable invention, the Argentine and Uruguayan *estancia*, the vast estate in which as many as two million trees may have been planted by man. (199)

The Utopian plan of 1852 being referred to in this passage was the ouster of Argentine dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. Similar to other post-dictatorial regimes, the new republic would fortify itself by means of forging unity among the people, strengthening governance, and promoting education and letters. This was the background that gave rise to the development of nineteenth and twentieth century Argentine literatures in which the central figure is the gaucho (Horst 71) or the Latin American equivalent of the American cowboy. The gaucho was the hero of the pampa and he became the moral force that animated the works of poetry and prose in those days.

This modern pampa became a familiar sight for Puig as he grew up. However, he would also be witnessing the supposed infusion of Western popular culture and the shaping of local cinema either as a native response to Hollywood or the vernacular expression of a modernizing and mediatized 1930s. During his growing up years, Puig joined his mother every afternoon to the movies. At the age of ten, he also began to study the English language. His reading background would include the works of André Gide, William Faulkner, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. By 1946, Puig would be leaving for Buenos Aires to stay in an American boarding school and later to study philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires. With the images of the movies he saw as a child leaving an imprint in his consciousness, he applied for a scholarship to pursue a course in film directing at Cinecittà in Rome.

At the Experimental Film Center in Rome, Puig studied the works of Italian neorealists such as Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio de Sica, and Luchino Visconti. The Italian auteurs were then working against the narrative formulas of Hollywood and wanted to establish a cinema of protest. Puig grew disenchanted with Italian

neorealism, branding the movement eventually as reactionary, purist, and elitist. He considered the neorealists rigid and dogmatic and that

They were seeking, above all, and quite rightly, to get away from Hollywood formulas, to experiment with a more enquiring cinema. They wanted an intelligent, thought-provoking cinema of social protest. But this determination led them into a grave mistake: one of Hollywood's chief concerns had always been to construct a solid plot, but since, according to the neo-realists, all Hollywood was synonymous with reactionary cinema, the ability to tell a story also became a reactionary characteristic. Any attempt to give a dramatic structure was dismissed as cheap melodrama or pieces-a-ficelles. (Puig 284–285)

This disagreement with the neorealists was crucial in Puig's eventual decision to abandon a career in film screenwriting and to pursue the writing of novels instead. But although he abandoned his screenwriting projects, which he said “were little more than imitations of old Hollywood films” (Puig 286), the guiding spirit behind his decision to shift gears was the cinema. He found screenwriting pleasurable during the act of writing but the finished product, the film itself, robbed him of the pleasure. He said: “I was fascinated by the possibility of re-creating moments of being a child cocooned in his cinema seat, but awakening from that brought no pleasure. The dream itself, but not the waking” (Puig 286).

Puig's first novel, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, was written between 1962 and 1967 while working for an international airline company. It began as material for a screenplay. Suzanne Jill Levine documents the writer's several changes of careers in her biography of Puig. He “wanted to make music, then movies; then, as a failed screenwriter, he became a novelist” (xv). However, it is probable that Puig's decision to be a novelist did not come out of a mere reaction to the limits posed by screenwriting. He had always been a novelist-in-the-making, only he was tapping into cinematic influences to pursue a verbal art. He was working beyond words. He “liquified” the boundaries and parameters of modern novelistic art by welcoming migratory influences from the visual, verbal and spatio-temporal properties of another medium: film.

PERSONAL REALITIES AND THE MOVIEGOING THEME

While working on a film script, Puig struggled through what he perceived to be the limitations of his current medium in capturing the more fluid and loose rambling of a moviegoer in and out his/her dreamlike state. “I finally thought it might be more interesting to explore the anecdotal possibilities of my own reality, so I set

about writing a film script which inevitably turned into a novel" (Puig 286). Puig's "reality" points to no specific time in his life. It could reference his current state and most probably the years he spent as a young child watching movies with his mother and reading English. Yet, the novel also pivots around historical time. The liquidity of the narrative is found in its ability to pinpoint the microhistories of a small town in Argentina. Reality seems rooted in time and this has been evidenced by Puig's references to 1940s movie culture of General Vallejos where personal thoughts mingle with social events in an incoherent and synchronous manner. Drawing from Bauman: "Descriptions of fluids are all snapshots, and they need a date at the bottom of the picture" (2).

Puig's "reality" in time is specific so much so that titles of the chapters carry names of childhood acquaintances, year and place: "Mita's Parents' Place, La Plata, 1933," "At Berto's Vallejos, 1933," "Toto, 1933," and "Choli's Conversation with Mita, 1941," for example. Yet, Puig is also pointing to a generalized condition of the pampa in the 1960s and his personal circumstances. Prior to his shift to novel-writing, his forays into film and film writing lend to what he calls a "parallel reality," and engagements that are somehow "much closer to home" (283). Yet eventually he has found an even friendlier medium for his "parallel reality" in the novel which reads like a film scenario and a succession of screenplay drafts.

Puig's motivation to localize his poetics may be brought about by his own literary background. Carlos Fuentes, the acclaimed Mexican novelist, in his essay "Latin America and the Novel," writes that Argentinian writers do not have to their advantage a history of ruins similar to the Aztecs of Mexico. Rather, they draw their creative impulse from their history of colonial literary encounter: "Perhaps no other nation has so fervently had to invent itself a history beyond history, a verbal history responding to the culture's desperate, solitary cry: please, verbalize me" (7). The reality that Puig has recreated in *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* does not descend from an indigenous story but a story of a community's encounter with a foreign medium—the movies. The novel is a chronicle of how this little network of families responds to another set of artificial narratives, projected through the silver screens, and seemingly pointing to their banal existence. The verbal history that Fuentes points to in the above quote is an apt metaphor in understanding the realities of the characters in the novel.

The novel is centered on verballity of reality consisting of inconsequential chatters, overheard gossips, unmailed letters, entries in diaries, essays entered in a contest, and the like. These could only be visualized after these have been verbalized. Puig himself admits that the constraints of the visual in capturing the fluidity and looseness of banalities in everyday life worked to his advantage and pushed him to a career as a novelist. In his essay "Cinema and the Novel," he writes:

I finally thought it might be more interesting to explore the anecdotal possibilities of my own reality, so I set about writing a film script, which inevitably turned into a novel. Why inevitably? I did not consciously decide to switch from a film to a novel. I was roughing out a scene in the script in which the off-screen voice of an aunt of mine was introducing the action in the laundry room of a typical Argentine house . . . Everything she said was banal, but it seemed to me that the accumulation of these banalities lent a special meaning to what she was saying. (286–287)

The Latin American literary landscape was the larger stage in which Puig circulated in. Modern Latin American letters produced some of the most prominent names in the world of fiction-writing: Carlos Fuentes of Mexico, Alejo Carpentier of Cuba, Augusto Roa Bastos of Paraguay, Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Colombia, and Mario Vargas Llosa of Peru. From his own Argentina, Puig must have found inspiration in the works of fiction by Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar, and Luisa Valenzuela. Collectively, this group is called The Latin American Boom Generation consisting of “literary lions” whose stature as writers combine “avant-gardism and radical politics” (Greenberg) in equal measure.

Although his fellow Argentine fictionists worked around various traditions of fiction-writing, Puig becomes one with them in echoing the Argentine spirit conceived in the proto-novelistic form championed decades earlier by Jose Hernandez, author of *Martin Fierro*. The said work is a classic narrative poem about the gaucho who suffered as the country entered the modernization phase. Puig may have referenced the mediated reality of 1960s General Vallejo, but his themes somehow connect farther into the people’s historical memory when it was the gauchos and not the movie heroes who were looked up to as the symbolic figures of Argentina. Fuentes would explicate this need to “name” reality later on: “Through this process, the novel not only reflects reality, but in effect *creates* a new reality, one capable of admitting new desires, social behaviors, and moral demands that might go unheeded if not touched by the knowledge of the literary imagination”(5–6).

However, Puig “does not fit comfortably with the other major figures of this movement” (Greenberg). A new reality requires a new kind of fiction. He may not have written along the realist traditions followed by novelists in other Latin American countries nor in the magical realism of a Borges and a Cortazar, yet Puig has created new ways of narrating by channelling the film medium and referencing Hollywood films and mixing these with references of local Argentinian films. Roy Armes (1987) writes that the very first film showing in Argentina took place during the colonial era, in 1896 in Buenos Aires. By the 1890s, the first shooting of a film took place in Argentina. The first film short was *The Argentine Flag* (*La bandera argentina*), which was directed by a Frenchman by the name of Eugene

Py. Another first—the first dramatic film produced—was through the courtesy of an Italian filmmaker, Mario Gallo. The film was *The Execution of Dorrego* (*El fusilamiento Dorrego*) and was shot in 1908. The first to import film equipment was a Belgian, Henri Lepage, and an Austrian, Max Glucksmann, was the first producer credited for transforming the efforts of the film pioneers into a full-fledged industry, prompting Armes to consider Argentine cinema important in terms of its connection with Western filmmaking. “The extent of European involvement in the beginnings of Latin American cinema finds its most extreme expression in Argentina”(165), Armes exclaims.

Decades of European collaboration in the cinema industry and exposure to Hollywood products led to the creation of a film-going culture that would almost dominate the childhood of Puig throughout the 1930s and until his sojourn to Europe as an aspiring film artist. Even as his interest shifted to writing a novel, his childhood memories of movie culture in General Vallejos would creep into his work. The movies have become the central metaphor of his creative urge:

I had always been submerged in the movies, but at age twenty-three, when the movies stopped being so good, the dream faded. What was left that was sacred? Memories of childhood films. I took refuge there . . . I was fascinated by the possibility of re-creating moments of being a child cocooned in his cinema seat, and how awakening from that brought no pleasure. (qtd. in Levine 40)

The moviegoing culture of his immediate family and his community of relations as a young man becomes the central theme-turned-trope in *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*. It is different from the gaucho theme of Hernandez and the reconstructed histories and magical fiction of Borges and Cortazar. It is the reality of the 1960s that coincided with the popularity of satellite television, the penetration of small towns by Hollywood movies, and the struggle of the local industry to co-exist with foreign mediated culture.

Jamie Norton (2009) claims that “the novel is threaded with the cinephilia of escapism and longing” (Norton). As the novel opens (“Mita’s Parents’ Place, La Plata, 1933”), Mita, the mother of young Toto who is the main protagonist in the story, becomes the subject of conversation in her parents’ household. She is now married to Berto, Toto’s father, and is settled in Vallejos. Mita’s ex-boyfriend, Carlos Palau, according to said conversation between her mother, sister, aunt, father, and grandfather, is now a movie star. However, Mita has nothing to be sorry about that since her current husband is not at all a bad choice in the estimation of her family: “That Mita was a movie-crazy and that she always gets her way and she married Berto who looks like a movie actor” (Puig 15). The conversation in Mita’s parents’ household in her hometown La Plata goes back and forth between the subject of

Mita being away with her own family in Vallejos and the movies currently shown in town; sometimes mixing descriptions of their relatives with the characterization of film characters. Discussions about their family relations are occasionally disrupted by some inane chatter about what meals to prepare and other household concerns.

Another significant detail pointing to the movie culture that is referenced in the novel is found in chapter 3 ("Toto, 1939"), where Mita and her young son, Toto (Jose Casals) are described to be frequenting the movie houses in Vallejos almost on a daily basis. In an interior monologue style, Toto—almost cultivating an introverted world beyond the cares of his household consisting of a working father, two house helpers, and a mother who would bring him along to the movies every afternoon—narrates his impression of the movies and these are interspersed with his actual childhood reality:

I'm going to think about the movie I like the best because Mommy told me to think about a movie so I wouldn't get bored at naptime. *Romeo and Juliet* is about love, it has a sad ending when they die, one of the movies I liked the best. Norma Shearer is an actress who's never naughty. Mommy slaps me but it doesn't hurt much but when Daddy slaps you he breaks you in two. (Puig 28)

The cinephilia serves to project a desire to live (or survive) the present moment, more specifically if the present moment is boring, tedious, difficult and unstable. This may be the projection of some desire or some repressed energy of most people of a small-town Argentine populace from the 1930s up to the 1940s, during which the country witnessed Peronist populism. Whether the cinephilia is personal, populist, political, or is the symptom of a larger cultural trauma, it is made both a theme and a trope to deploy the narrative. Movie-going is aspirational on the personal level and symbolic on the cultural level. Jorge Luis Borges writes:

They say that the doctrines of the transmigration of souls and of circular time or the Eternal Return were suggested by a sudden, disturbing impression of having already lived the present moment. In Buenos Aires there is not a single movie-goer, no matter how forgetful, who does not experience that impression (qtd. in Norton).

The subject of films and filmgoing is one but the use of these as narrative devices is another. This will be the subject of the succeeding subsections.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND FRAGMENTATION OF VOICE

As a Latin American Boom novelist carving new types of narrative devices, Puig foreshadows future styles in *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* that would later be strongly associated with postmodern fiction. One of such devices is the deployment of multiple perspectives. This is accomplished through whole chapters built on conversations which are presented not in a chronological flow and most often, skipping the replies of the other characters or omitting these so that the reader can only go over one side of the conversation. In chapters built on conversations, there are no descriptive paragraphs to signal transitions from one scene to another. The effect is being led to another reply which occurred in another scene. The closest comparison to this kind of narrative perspective is the transcription of a telephone conversation where the lines uttered by only one speaker are revealed to the readers while the other side is totally muted.

The result of this kind of narrative style is the fragmentation of voice. There is no specific character to focus on. There are only the speech and the dialogues to go by. Voices overlap and most often, a conversation is abruptly cut and jumps to another scene which may be happening simultaneously with a preceding conversation just unravelled. The opening scene ("Mita's Parents' Place, La Plata, 1933") is illustrative of the multiplicity of perspectives and fragmentation of narrative voice:

- A brown cross-stitch over beige linen, that's why your tablecloth turned out so well.
- This tablecloth alone gave me more trouble than the whole set of doilies, a full eight pairs . . . if they paid more for the needle-work, I could hire a sleep-in maid and spend more time on embroidery, once I get my customers, don't you think?
- Embroidery doesn't seem tiring, but after a few hours your back begins to ache.
- But Mita wants me to make a bedspread for the baby's crib, with bright colors since the bedrooms get so little light. Three rooms one after the other leading into a hallway with big windows, all covered with canvas curtains that you can pull open. If I had more time, I'd make myself a bedspread. You know what's really tiring? Typewriting on a high desk like the one I have in the office.
- If I lived in this house, I'd sit next to the window whenever I had a minute to work on Mita's bedspread—for the light.
- Is Mita's furniture nice?

- Mom feels terrible Mita can't take advantage of the house, now we've got all the modern conveniences, and she's right. (Puig 7)

The above-quoted conversation does not include identifying marks regarding the conversants and specific lines uttered by each conversant. Only by going through the whole chapter that the readers may be able to identify the speakers, namely: Mita's mother, Clara, her sister, and another (probably Violeta) who is presumed to be visiting that day in 1933. The first four lines are uttered by Mita's mother, followed by two lines from Clara, a daughter who is working in an office, then by a question from Mita's mother, and then Clara, addressing a third party who is probably Violeta. The chronology of these lines is not known and examples following these multiple and overlapping perspectives and fragmentation of narrative voice are scattered all throughout the novel even in chapters built around monologues, diaries, and essays.

The question of perspective and voice are directly drawn from cinema with its ability to use the camera lens to train attention to certain objects even if a sound is simultaneously looped into an image. For example, non-diegetic sound in cinema allows the viewers to hear the sound of a succeeding image before it unravels and while the frame is still focused on a previous or a transitioning image. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1985) in *Film Art: An Introduction* defines non-diegetic sound is that "which is represented as coming from a source outside the story space" (241). This may be a human voice, some background music, or a sound effect. In the passage quoted above, the line where Clara is informing a third party of her mother's opinion about Mita's marital life is not sure to have been uttered during the present conversation with the mother. It could have been uttered in a different occasion but it serves as an "intrusion" into the scene like a non-diegetic sound which is heard even if it has nothing to do with the current filmic space that is unravelling. A similar example can be cited in the same scene when Clara's grandfather's lines are introduced into the conversation without informing the reader whether he is present at the opening scene—or physically, inside the kitchen with the women.

The sudden changes and "jumps" in perspective and voice, represented by the overlapping lines of the characters which are coming from different time frames in the narrative, create the feel of the "present," which is exactly a quality of the film experience. In real life, several voices may be simultaneously heard. Or perhaps, when recollected in story form, scenes are jumbled in a person's memory. The mind has a way of arranging these rambling smaller narratives into a cohesive story. In cinema, there is only one tense—the present or the time of watching. This is why time in the cinema is called psychological time or the time-flux (Bluestone

408). Puig channels this in the narrative by showing simultaneous consciousness competing for the attention of the reader.

INTERIOR MONOLOGUES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Seven of the eighteen chapters of *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* are built around interior monologues and the movies and their incompatibility with their actual lives remain at the center of these narratives. The chapter headings of the monologue are named after the characters whose perspectives are being featured, namely: "Toto, 1939," "Toto, 1942," "Tete, Winter, 1942," "Delia, Summer, 1942," "Mita, Winter, 1943," "Hector, Summer, 1944," "Paquita, Winter, 1945," and "Cobito, Spring, 1946." In keeping with the multiple perspectives and fragmentation of voices that are deployed in the chapters built around dialogues, the chapters built on monologues showcase the effect of the movies on the lives of the Argentines in the 1940s. Puig's monologues are an influence from one of his favorite writers, William Faulkner, whom he considers to be one of the best in maximizing the use of language and making it "sprawling all over the place" (qtd. in Wheaton).

It is obvious that Puig deploys the monologue in order to train the attention on people. The main protagonist is Toto, a proto-homosexual who comes of age in 1940s Vallejos. His background is provided in the first two chapters through the dialogues of his grandparents and the interaction of his parents with their house helpers. Toto's two monologues are rambling, disorganized, and frequently stray into his family life, his playmates, his schoolwork, and his daily watching of movies with his mother. Rejected by his father for being effeminate but secretly harbouring a passion for the movies with his mother, Toto has created a pseudo-world. In effect, the narrative he creates is interspersed with personal details and references to the movies he has seen and some images projected by the Hollywood stars that have left an impression on him. The movies guide his thoughts and daydreaming. In one of the monologues, Toto narrates how he would clip all articles and photos pertaining to Ingrid Bergman in the film *Intermezzo*, which will soon have its run in their town. However, a fever prevents him from attending the screening and this unfortunate incident has been mentioned with dismay in one of his monologues.

The monologues are mainly banalities consisting of observations of his family life and these are compared with what is happening in the movies. The mingling of the personal with the film-going culture is meant to show how the movies create a dreamlike-state: "My characters have all been affected by those cinematic dreams. In those days, movies were very important to people. They were their Mount Olympus. The stars were deities" (qtd. in Wheaton).

The films of the 1940s were the sources for Puig's novel and so were the banalities that visited daily conversations in his childhood:

I learned certain rules of storytelling from the films of that time. Mainly how to distribute the intrigues. But what interests me more about those films is examining the effect they had on people (qtd. in Wheaton).

The banalities are the movies' close relations. They must go together in articulating the theme of film as daydream metaphor in the novel. Like a regular ritual, movie-watching is much anticipated and missing a current run is a major source of regret. Mita misses *Hold Back the Dawn* during its regular run when she gave birth to Toto. As his most personal novel therefore, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* becomes Puig's attempt to document the 1940s pseudo-culture in General Villegas and how the films become both the source of madness and the key to critically assessing reality. He writes:

I began writing narrative at age twenty-nine. During the previous years I tried not to see reality, which impoverished me in the same way as when one doesn't dream. In our dreams we confront and question reality. I felt the need to tell stories to understand myself . . . My characters have a hard time accepting reality; at some moment they manage to escape, but the dialogue between dream and reality keeps them alive. The solution: accept both dimensions. Without madness, nothing changes. For any change, social, political, etc., you have to be in that apparently useless territory. Total acceptance of reality is tantamount to paralysis (qtd. in Levine 145).

The banalities are splayed all over and they are numerous: about bedsheets, furniture, house helpers' quarters, dolls, toilets in movie houses, et cetera. The limitation of cinema to capture all of these details in particularly-focused frames led to Puig shifting to the novel. Works of fiction need not observe economy of words and details are important in creating an atmosphere. Puig writes:

It was one day in March 1962 that this accident of 30 pages of banalities happened. I think it was my dear desire for narrative space, which led me to change my medium of expression. Once I had managed to face reality, after so deeply as possible in order to try to understand it. The traditional 90 minutes offered by films was simply not enough. The cinema requires synthesis, whereas my themes needed the opposite: they called for analysis, the accumulation of details. (287)

The banalities are not only key to the theme of the illusion of movie-related glamour and dream-like state of the characters in the novel, they are instrumental in understanding the deeper crisis of family relationships. For instance, in the fifth chapter, "Toto, 1942," the young protagonist inadvertently mentions in his

monologues his latent fear of his father and his despair over his incapacity to please him. In the following lines, the scenario in the movie plot is mixed up with the dysfunction that gnaws at the young heart of a sexually confused boy:

Dad's not going to like it, oo how scary that he had come "Now I'm going to the movies with you all the time," since he had forgotten all about his store bills watching the movie, and we were walking out of the moviehouse and Dad said he like Rita Hayworth better than any other actress, and I'm starting to like her better than any other too . . . (Puig 63)

The monologues train light on the characters and the extent of their illusions and denial of their harsh reality. Yet there are other prose forms that have been deployed as both structuring device and textual genre of the other chapters. These are the diary entry, the essay supposedly entered in a competition, a commonplace book, an anonymous note, and an unsent letter, and these forms are strategies of "verbalizing" a unique Latin American reality, borrowing from Fuentes's "verbalize me" statement, which is meant to describe contemporary Argentine fiction's tendency to create a new novelistic language register.

CONCLUSION: A NEW REALITY AND LINGUISTIC PLAY

Ruben Dario's modernism has had a towering influence to modern poetry in Latin America, but its impulses have also affected the Latin American fiction's interest in problematizing the concept of mimesis or breaking away from hardcore realism and in its wake turning to the infusion of magical realist elements in the works. Finding a champion in Borges, this theory of fiction "rejected the dreary simulations of realism and was based on metaphoric and metonymic magic" (Rodriguez Monegal 688). Borges and Cortazar upheld the theory and infused this in their works while their successors in the 1960s like Vargas Llosa and Puig opted for a slightly different style. Puig specifically used the dream state as the trope to represent reality. The movies are a metaphor for the dream and the reflection of reality in Argentina from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Dreams are the only reality known to Puig's characters and they behave in a way that they refract their worldviews by accommodating images and narratives from the movies they have watched. The social world that Puig inhabited was full of details of dreams and banalities. They are refracted through the films and so they require organized reflection. He writes:

My novels, on the other hand, always aim for a direct reconstruction of reality; this led to their—for me, essential—analytic nature. Synthesis is best expressed in allegory of dreams. What better example of synthesis is there than our dreams every night? Cinema needs this spirit of synthesis, and so it is ideally suited to allegories and dreams. (288)

If there is any iota of politics in the novel, this is most likely subtly referenced; the novel opting to deal more extensively on the behavior of an inner town and its popular imagination. But this personal politics must draw from autobiographical sources first and foremost:

Ninety percent of the novel is real. Sometimes for the sake of economy two characters from films (that Toto relives or reworks into fantasies in his monologues) became one; but it was about me, and the people close to me. The characters were the family that didn't have time for me as a child, as well as the people who had shared something with me in that era, relatives, neighbors, people who had time to listen to me. I wanted them to give me their secrets, their intimacy. Letting them talk or write a letter, they would reveal things to me. (144)

The dreams themselves convey social commentary and these require a unique language. The story of a proto-homosexual harboring secret thoughts and living a closeted existence in a repressive Argentine state (represented by his homophobic father, Berto) and finding little joys and hope in the company of a movie-crazed mother expresses much about what their society suppresses, lacks, and desires. This kind of fiction requires a new linguistic theory different from the language hospitable to the allegorical, ironic, and parodying tendency of Marquez's and Cortazar's magical realism and Borges' historiographic metafiction. Puig's generation of modern writers was specially attuned to capturing the regional dialects and registers of language of Argentina's insulated towns and that in itself becomes a sort of a political commitment.

That Puig's literary generation was attuned to inventing a new register has been evident at the onset. There "was a concentration of language not just as the writer's instrument but as itself his real subject" (Rodriguez Monegal 689). Puig would exemplify this not only on the dialogues and monologues but also on the five different types of writings that would complement these: a diary entry, an essay, a commonplace book, an anonymous note, and a letter. Each genre requires a specific language and a specific "textual surface" (Rodriguez Monegal 689). "The use of prose as a distorting mirror of its own verbal reality" (Rodriguez Monegal 689) is evident in the linguistic play. It points to itself; "a total awareness of a novel as a literary text" (Rodriguez Monegal 689). For Puig, the macro-novel becomes host to micro-narratives that are sometimes devoid of logic and still maintains the dream-like motif and atmosphere.

The stylization of the situations in the novel necessitates the stylization of the language and the turn to the novel—rather than to film—becomes an important aesthetic statement:

What I like to do in my novels is to show the complexity of everyday life; the subtexture of social tensions and the pressures behind each little act of yours. That's very difficult to put into film. I feel much more comfortable with films dealing with allegorical, larger-than-life characters and stylized situations (qtd. in Wheaton).

It is therefore the language of the novel—mediated by the cinema—that is evoked almost as a thematic strain in *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*. There is the breaking down of distinction between verbal and visual art, what McFarlane calls “the novel's linearity and the film's spatiality” (27). The novel is said to be linear because the page leads the reader's eyes toward a particular direction. Corollary to that, the film is said to be spatial because each film image occupies a space on every frame. That kind of distinction is now a thing of the past. Both novel and film are linear and spatial. They have even achieved a synthesis in the language newly-invented in Puig's deeply personal debut novel. Linearity and spatiality are now fused—even cancelled out—given the multiple ruptures imposed on the chronology of situations, the multiplicity of characters and voices, the lack of distinction between the thematic and the marginally banal, and the autonomy given to the independent complementary narrative genres-cum-chapters built on the forms of the essay, letter, diary entry, anonymous note, and commonplace book.

“Esther's Diary, 1947” (chapter 12) is an entry tackling the behavior of the girls in Toto's class. “Annual Literary Essay Competition Free Subject: ‘The Movie I liked Best’ by Jose L. Casals, Sophomore Section B” (chapter 13) follows “Esther's Diary.” It is where Toto narrates the story of Johann Strauss in the film “The First Waltz.” This is followed by “Anonymous Note Sent to the Dean of Students of George Washington High School, 1947” (chapter 14) bearing a nomination to Toto Casals as best student of the year. Meanwhile, “Herminia's Commonplace Book, 1948” (chapter 15) are random thoughts on Mary T. Lincoln, the favorite music of the book's owner, a discussion about an engagement, about plays, films, books, arguments on God, and the like. Finally, this series of experiments on various prose forms as the chapters' thematic and organizing principle culminates in “Berto's Letter, 1933” (chapter 16), written for his brother when Toto was eight months old. Here, he talks about Mita, his wife, and an incoherent series of ruminations about life. The letter, however, remains unsent.

This play on prose forms is a play on language and a fresh take on a reality that Puig and his sixties generation have had a fascination for. It is a play of many of his town's “liquid” realities. The different personas on the novel, alter-egos of Puig,

give breath to a reality that is best lived in the dream state, not in the waking state; for the waking state is too painful to bear. It is the consciousness of the here-and-now couched in fluid language that is not logical to an outsider but makes sense to the sufferer. As the novel playfully referenced Rita Hayworth's characters in the movies (betraying the opposite sex after she ensnares them with her charm and making them desire her), betrayal takes place as the people pin their hopes on pipe dreams. It is a betrayal that is mesmerizing and charming to the sufferer. Just like in the movies, its head and tail and its rhyme and reason can only be known to the dreamer and the betrayed. It is not supposed to make sense. Rather, it has been intended to parlay critique on one's limits. *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* is after all Puig's commentary on the dual effect of dreams represented by the American movies of 1940s: "They were dreams, totally stylized—the perfect stuff of films because dreams allow you the possibility of a synthetic approach" (qtd. in Wheaton).

For that much-desired synthesis, Puig needs the form of the novel as his host. Language is now the bearer of reality, and whether the novel is a betrayal of another kind is up to the assumed reader and decoder to decide.

Note

1. This paper is partly based on an unpublished chapter in the dissertation titled *Postmodern Filming of Literature: Sources, Contexts and Adaptations* (University of Santo Tomas, 2003). It is the revised version of a paper read at the Fourth International Colloquium on Literary and Cultural Studies titled "Literary Liquidities 2: Post/Colonial Places/Spaces" held on March 1 and 2, 2019 at Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia.

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