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Latent Meanings in Ricardo Piglia's
Respiración artificial and Luis Gusman's
En el corazón de junio

El sentido de un texto depende tanto de lo que no dice como de lo que dice. Esta disyunción se hace de especial importancia en sociedades represivas, como ha observado Leo Strauss en su estudio de la "escritura entre líneas." En este ensayo se comentan los distintos mecanismos de la expresión clandestina, en dos novelas densas y difíciles del período del "Proceso" militar argentino. Respiración artificial y En el corazón de junio, a pesar de sus diferencias de estilo y construcción, funcionan a base de la expresión velada, del fragmento, de la ambigüedad. En ambas obras, la palabra da a conocer la verdad de una historia trágica y, como dice Gusman, pone algo "a salvo de la muerte."

In reference to its supposed interim position, the new Argentine military junta in 1976 called itself "Proceso de Reorganización Nacional," a name which people reduced with an exquisite sense of irony to that of the "Proceso," meaning not only the *process* but also the *trial*. This name recalled perforce the literary world of Kafka, in which even though the rules are never spelled out, everyone suffers their consequences. The literature marked by the "Proceso" has been basically of two types: the accusatory, published outside of Argentine during the years of the military dictatorship (or belatedly in the wake of the election of late 1983), and another type, more difficult to classify and to read, published in Argentina during the years of the "Proceso," but which escaped the attention of the censors because of a series of techniques it is our intention to elucidate here. The two most important figures in this second current are Ricardo Piglia and Luis Gusman, young novelists whose respective novels, *Respiración artificial* (1980) and *En el corazón de junio* (1983), won in turn the Boris Vian Prize, a prize for serious novels passed over by the official national prizes. Both texts are virtuoso avant-garde works, written in the fragmented and allusive mode typical of a certain tradition in twentieth-century fiction. The difficulty of the texts is a challenge worth meeting, however, because of the intensity of the two

novelists' meditation on Argentine history and society, and as part of a long tradition of what might be called the literature of silence. Earlier in their careers Piglia and Gusman were closely associated: Piglia wrote the introduction to Gusman's scandalous (and long-censored) novel *El frasquito*. In recent years, however, they have moved in different and exclusive spheres of influence. Gusman has been an editor of *Sitio*, a magazine noted for its quizzical if not impenetrable critiques of the works of Piglia,¹ Borges and a range of other writers. However, their recent differences need not obscure a community of endeavor. In the first issue of *Sitio*, dedicated to an examination of censorship, the lead article is a partial reprint of an essay that first appeared in English in 1941, "Persecution and the Art of Writing" by Leo Strauss.

Strauss's classic statement of the dynamics of writing and reading between the lines is a helpful introduction to Piglia's and Gusman's novels. Strauss writes:

Persecution ... gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. (25)

The specific techniques mentioned by Strauss as useful to this "peculiar type of literature" include "obscurity of the plan, contradictions, [and] omission of important links of the argument" (31). While this description may seem to embrace the whole of modern experimental writing, Strauss makes clear that he is referring specifically to those gaps, contradictions and obscurities which would hold a particular significance for an alert and dissident reader from the time and place in question. He writes:

Only such reading between the lines as starts from an exact consideration of the explicit statements of the author is legitimate. The context in which a statement occurs, and the literary character of the whole work as well as its plan, must be perfectly understood before an interpretation of the statement can reasonably claim to be adequate or even correct. (30)

The challenge, then, is to apprehend as exactly as possible both the explicit and the implicit messages, so as to understand the precise instants in which what we might call "code-switching" is taking place.

Pierre Macherey also alerts us to the difficulties involved in "reading" the silence in a text, and to the importance of the task. Macherey writes:

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus, the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a *certain absence*, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence. (85)

He adds: "Silence reveals speech – unless it is speech that reveals the silence," and calls these "two methods of explanation by recourse to the latent or concealed (which) are not equivalent:"

... the second ... allows least value to the latent, since there appears an absence of speech through the absent speech ... The first image is the more profound, in so far as it enables us to recuperate the form of the second without becoming trapped in a mechanical problematic of transition: in being a necessary medium of expression, this ground of silence does not lose its significance. It is not the sole meaning, but that which endows meaning with a meaning ... The latent is an intermediate means: this does not amount to pushing it into the background; it simply means that the latent is not another meaning which ultimately and miraculously *dispels* the first (manifest) meaning. Thus, we can see that meaning is in the *relation between* the implicit and the explicit, not on one or the other side ... (86–87)

Both Macherey and Strauss, then, would caution us to read the lines *and* between the lines, back and forth between the explicit and the implicit. The metaphors – explicit and implicit, manifest and latent – allude continually to the outside and the inside of a text, and while recognizing the figurative nature of these names with regard to textual meaning we may grant the importance of the ideas they denote, since these serve to animate nothing less than human speech in history.

The dedication to Piglia's *Respiración artificial* reads: "A Elías y a Rubén, que me ayudaron a conocer la verdad de la historia."² In contemporary Spanish this phrase – "la verdad de la historia" – at the beginning of a novel would sound like a disclaimer by the author who recognizes that he has his story (*historia*) second- or third-hand thanks to the people named. Another reading, however, one more consistent with the whole of the novel, would take *historia* as history, thus asserting that there is truth in history, one which can (as implied by the choice of *conocer* over *saber*) be known partially rather than fully.³ Piglia's dedication also wavers between a claim of access to the truth of universal history or to a more specific (presumably Argentine) history, an ambiguity reflected in the novel, which is both a specific consideration of Argentina and an open-ended examination of the culture – history, philosophy and

literature – of the Western world.

In *Respiración artificial* access to truth is always partial and frustrating. The three main characters are all intellectuals who have little to show for their labors. Renzi, the narrator, is a frustrated young writer, a novelist who is dissatisfied with his first book and makes his second out of a compendium of fragmented thoughts, conversations, letters, documents; the novel (his artifact) is as a consequence quite opaque. Renzi's uncle, Maggi, is a historian who seeks to write a counter-history of the conflicts of nineteenth-century Argentina, centering not on Rosas or Sarmiento but on an imaginary figure caught in the middle, a double agent and eventual suicide, Enrique Ossorio, whom Maggi sees as emblematic of the failure of the country as a whole, whether as Utopian project (Alberdi, Sarmiento) or as nationalist ideal (Rosas). Maggi's friend Tardewski, a Polish exile evidently modelled on Witold Gombrowicz, is a philosopher whose ideas on Descartes and Hitler, Wittgenstein and Kafka are fascinating as he expounds them orally, but impossible for him to develop in print (the one time he publishes part of his theory, shortly after his arrival in Argentina, he feels the absurdity of his situation when he sees his last name misspelled at the top of the page but cannot read the article itself in its Spanish version). Renzi, Maggi and Tardewski share a gift for oral improvisation and an incapacity to develop their ideas fully in print; the book is made up of their tentative oral attempts to express the truth but never of truth fully revealed. In fact, all three men seem almost perverse in their intellectual bents, seeking out the heterodox, the secret or suppressed testimony which is excluded from the official accounts and which contradicts the received truth. Their intimations of another version of history, the *truth* of their histories or stories, stand in contrast to the example they set as three failed intellectuals: that is, the individual may fail to tell his truth but by his failure allow us to glimpse some piece of it, and the three separate examples, by allowing us glimpses of diverse parcels of partial truth, may illuminate the notion of historical truth, providing an essential image of Argentina as metaphysical idea and historical reality.

The three heroes' accounts of the secret truth are shadowed by other visions of what secrets the truth may hold. The most shadowy character in the novel is the twentieth-century censor, Arocena, who intercepts letters written to Ossorio in the middle of the last century, and tries to find hidden, and subversive, truth in them. (Ossorio is conscious that Arocena is reading his mail, and proposes a dark Utopian novel made up of censored epistles from the future.) An example of Arocena's method: Ossorio receives an unintelligible letter referring to such contemporary American writers as Donald Barthelme and Grace Paley, and to a chance

encounter in New York; after several hours' work, Arocena reduces the letter to a still cryptic message from "Raquel" in New York, who announces: "No hay novedades. Espero el contacto" (124). After further work with code-breaking techniques, the letter is reduced to a single phrase: "Raquel llega a Ezeiza el 10, vuelo 22.03" (125), which, by the further reduction of "Raquel" to "Aquel" apparently refers to the return of Perón in 1973.⁴ However, Arocena's labors, no matter how ingenious, cannot but be judged those of a paranoid when one reflects on the fact that he is reading letters addressed to a man who died in Chile in 1852. Similarly, Maggi insists on the importance of Ossorio as an emblematic historical figure at least partly because of Ossorio's delirious visions of the future (our present), calling Ossorio's *eccentric* life a testimony to what he terms "el reverso de la historia" (35). That is, the truth as it is sometimes "glimpsed" is what is absent, what is suppressed or concealed, or what is not expressed in an historical or fictional document. This dark, eccentric view of historical truth coexists in the novel with the example of the three main characters, each of whom would give his "*verdad de la historia.*" Here, Piglia draws away from his proclaimed masters in Argentine literature, Borges and Arlt, and moves closer to Bianco who wrote in *Las ratas*: "Acaso la verdad sea tan rica, tan ambigua, y presida de tan lejos nuestras modestas indagaciones humanas, que todas las interpretaciones puedan canjearse y que, en honor a la verdad, lo mejor que podemos hacer es desistir del inocuo propósito de alcanzarla" (77). Piglia and his characters do not desist from the attempt to determine the truth, but their attempts to reach it do bear witness, in Bianco's phrase, to the notion that truth presides over our world from a remote, perhaps ultimately unattainable, place.

Arocena's paranoid reading of the letters to Ossorio calls attention within the novel to the need for a subtler reading between the lines, to the undoubted fact that Piglia has written between the lines. Piglia's novel, by its elusive, self-contradictory tone and its fragmented approach to truth suggests in a very powerful way the presence of persecution or of an inquisitorial state of mind in the country in which it was written, and shows how an ingenious writer can dance circles around the inquisitors.

In his first letter to Renzi, Maggi writes: "Hay que hacer la historia de las derrotas" (18). Piglia and his characters view their task as that of bearing a painful testimony which contradicts the glorious conventional version of Argentine history, a version which cannot but sound more dubious than ever after the events of the last few years. In the same letter Maggi refers to Joyce as a man preoccupied with a single problem: how to narrate real events (20). With Joyce, Piglia would insist that the best way to tell the truth about real events is not necessarily the most

direct way. In so doing he parts company with other writers of his generation like Jorge Asís and Osvaldo Soriano, for whom the testimonial or the picaresque narration of events of the recent past has the virtue of providing a seemingly raw, direct vision of past and present realities, though as such their versions must suffer the drawback of being *unmediated* visions of history. Piglia proposes a *mediated* version of historical truth. His interest in nineteenth-century Argentine history is shared by such diverse Argentine novelists of recent years as Enrique Molina in *Una sombra donde sueña Camila O'Gorman* (1973), Marta Mercader in *Juanamanuela mucha mujer* (1980), and César Aira in *Ema, la cautiva* (1981). Although two of the novelists mentioned experiment with what Borges calls deliberate anachronism (450), Mercader by inserting contemporary feminist ideas into her recounting of the story of Juana Manuela Gorriti, and Aira by having the pampas Indians discuss Marxist ideas of surplus value, neither achieves the richness of Piglia's account of the failure of Utopian and nationalist ideas in Argentina, in the present as well as in the past century, or the power of his evocation of painful past and present realities. His *lectura* or *escritura saltada* of Argentine history is a history of defeat and frustration, but also, because of its very lucidity, of some hope.

A word about the title: artificial respiration is never mentioned in the novel, so Piglia's meaning must be read between the lines. The phrase itself, *respiración artificial*, suggests itself as a near acrostic of *República Argentina*. Artificial respiration is a technique for rescuing those who cannot breathe on their own: life is breathed into them by another. Piglia would seem to see his task as novelist as one of breathing life into the dead and dying of Argentina: to give voice to the disappeared, to breathe life into the past. The metaphor is desperate but apt.

Piglia, then, uses an open structure – initially that of an exchange of letters, and later of an endless dialogue – to allude to a series of topics which are not, which cannot be, treated more directly. The range of allusion is wide, but the narrative structure itself is quite compact. The reader, identifying with Renzi, is constantly waiting for Maggi to make himself manifest, and the suspense produced by the perpetual postponement of this event lends tension and coherence to the book. If Maggi is, as is suggested tacitly, yet another victim of the political violence, then his nephew's attempt to give him voice in the narrative is that much more urgent.

The difference between Piglia's novel and Gusman's is instructive in the various ways of presenting latent meaning. In Piglia we note a well-defined (or closed) narrative structure which opens outwardly by means of allusion, whether literary, philosophical, historical or political. In

contrast, Gusman's fiction purports to be open in its structure, but is rather more limited in its reference, since both the author and his critics refer to a sharply defined personal mythology in his work.⁵ Within this looser framework, he provides clearer ideas about reading between the lines.

Gusman's earlier novel *El frasquito* (with a preface by Piglia) concerns the murder of a twin, buried secretly in Gardel's tomb in the Chacarita Cemetery in Buenos Aires. Banned as immoral, it also tells of the gift a failed tango singer makes to his beloved of a test tube of his semen. Gusman tells of the history of the banning of the book in his preface to the reissue of the book in 1984, in which he tells of his encounter with one of the guardians of the nation's morals and says of himself: "me he convertido, y no por la fatalidad, en el personaje de Stevenson, en ese Dr. Jekyll, y no por haber ingerido el contenido de *El frasquito* sino por haberlo escrito" (11). He also comments: "Hoy, que descreo de una literatura maldita que encuentra su razón de ser en la intencionalidad, pienso que la historia de este libro tiene que ver con el lugar en que sus propias palabras lo han situado" (14). This first novel was followed by *Brillos* (1975), *Cuerpo velado* (1978) and the novel that concerns us here, *En el corazón de junio* (1983). In addition to his literary activities with his writing and the magazine *Sitio*, Gusman is a psychoanalyst associated with the Lacanian journal *Conjetural* and the Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires.

En el corazón de junio is a difficult text to summarize, since a summary would imply that it has a determinate story and meaning, which is not I think the case. The novel is composed of fragments set off with titles, fourteen in number if we include in this list the repetition of one of the briefest fragments. These fragments have a variety of narrators and characters, though the characters in the dreams, daydreams, trances and stories in some sequences appear directly as characters in other of the segments. The first two segments are the most extensive: "El hombre de los gansos," some ninety pages in length, is told by a Sr. Flores, who is alive thanks to a heart they transplanted to him from a civil servant named Cigorraga. It is followed by a segment with the English title "Darkness," some forty pages in length, narrated by a Sr. Soler, who is looking for a Spanish lady and is being pursued by his enemy, called simply "el Rubio." The rest of the novel (some 150 pages) consists of briefer segments which correspond to two groupings: five fragments with the common title "En evidencia," the first and last of which are virtually identical, and seven fragments which tell of incidents of "Bloomsday," that famous June 16th recounted by Joyce in *Ulysses*, also the day in 1955 when Stanislaus Joyce died in Trieste, while in Buenos Aires the

Air Force was bombarding the Plaza de Mayo in the prelude to the "Revolución Libertadora" of September of the same year. (Because of the bombs, Gusman spells the Joycean term "Bloombdsday"). These "Bloombdsday" segments are narrated by Juan Rodolfo Wilcock, an Argentine writer who left Argentina because of his opposition to Perón and died in Italy in 1978 while he was finishing an Italian translation of *Finnegans Wake*: he died of a heart attack, and was found several days later with a book about the human heart open on his lap. Gusman's novel ends with Wilcock awaiting "el rayo que atraviesa el pecho, el que fulmina. El rayo solitario y terrenal, el quedo santo" (295-96): it ends, as it begins, with references to the heart.

Gusman's novel is constructed around a series of word-plays. The title of one of the segments, "El hombre de los gansos," or Goose-Man, refers to the author's surname. Similarly, the chapter "El camino del zoo" plays with grotesque effect on the variety of expressions in Spanish which use animals to comment on human behavior: "lágrimas de cocodrilo," "mosquitas muertas," "pez gordo" and so on (237). The incidents of June 16, 1955, around the Plaza de Mayo are described in this way:

Recuerdo que en las vías los chanchos estaban alborotados y se paseaban de un lado a otro de la estación ... El tío no tardó en volver. Durante el viaje de regreso contó cómo los corderos corrían por la plaza y se quebraban las patas contra los bancos de mármol. Mientras tanto desde el cielo se oían los gritos de los gorilas que atacaban ... En la estación no todos eran chanchos y gorilas, ya que también había un carnero pelirrojo. (235)

A similar series of puns on the verb *latir* culminates in the phrase: "Así es en estos latifundios en que un dedo en cruz es la señal del quedo santo" (171). The false etymology deriving *latifundio* from *latir* calls attention to a word which is not mentioned because it points to the impulse that animates the text,⁶ a word important to psychoanalysis as well as to literature: latent (*latente*).

The heart of the text is a series of enigmas which seemingly are never resolved: the evil Cigorruga committed which led him to donate his heart, what happened to the Spanish lady, what evil acts are to be committed by the woman who approaches a church in the visions from the trance, the secret which Wilcock hopes to find in *Ulysses* and in Stanislaus Joyce's manuscripts about Tolstoy, and the relation that exists between the various series of characters and of stories. The text proposes two means of elucidating these enigmas: the interpretation of the visions and dreams and the reading of texts. Flores in the first segment, for example, when he is unable to find out anything more about

Cigorruga, proposes to elucidate the mystery of the donated heart by reading books whose titles begin with the word *heart*: Flaubert's *Un coeur simple*, Dostoyevsky's *Feeble Heart*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The reading he makes of these texts suggests *en abyme* a way of reading Gusman's novel. I shall discuss here his reading of the Flaubert story.

Flores's reading of Flaubert focuses on two leitmotifs: that of Félicité's heart and that of her relations with birds. When he paraphrases Flaubert he rewrites the text so as to call attention to these leitmotifs. For example, Flaubert writes that Félicité, when she sees young Virginie taking her first communion, "avec l'imagination que donnent les vraies tendresses, il lui sembla qu'elle était elle-même cette enfant" (4:109). Flores rewrites this passage as follows: "Virginia recibió la hostia. En ese instante Felicidad creyó que en su pecho latía ese corazón infantil" (58). The story's dénouement, in which all of Félicité's love is invested in a stuffed parrot, suggests that she had always felt a special affinity for birds; therefore, a series of events barely mentioned in the original text acquire great importance in Flores's (and Gusman's) version. Flores writes: "Necesito analizar los hechos escapando de las imágenes que el autor propone para ir justificando la santidad de esa vida simple. Si hasta hubo un crimen quizás, el hecho de que la víctima haya sido un ave no le resta importancia" (54). The crime in Flaubert's story is little more than a fantasy of Félicité's, who searches in that way to explain the death of the parrot; in Gusman's novel it will acquire a transcendental importance. Later, when Félicité has placed the stuffed parrot in her room, Flores thinks that no doubt she spoke with it: "Hablar con Lulú (the parrot) era como hablar con el espíritu santo ... Entonces, como yo sospechaba, ella hablaba con el loro" (62). In the search for a hidden order in the story, suspicion creates its own truth, a truth which resides above all in the "hechos escapando de las imágenes." It is a truth that the author *proposes*, but that only a reader like Flores *exposes*: a hidden truth. Of course, it is not clear whether the author intended (consciously or not) to express these ideas, nor whether the suspected order is *in* Flaubert's text in any real sense, or whether Flores has imposed it on that text because of his obsession with the donated heart. As Macherey has suggested, there are two types of silence in a text: one which is an absence of meaning, another which implies the presence of a latent meaning (86-87). What the text does not say: what it hides (and says through its silence), what it cannot express and leaves as a mystery (which not even silence can express). I shall call these two kinds of silence in Gusman's book what is *erased* and what is *illegible* (or more succinctly in Spanish, *lo borrado* and *lo borroso*). The *erased* portions of the text can be filled in by the alert reader; the *illegible* portions will

remain in the realm of enigma, in the heart of darkness.

The erasures in Gusman's novel refer to the historical and political context in which it was written. In the course of the text there are obsessive references to violent crimes. A phrase which is repeated several times in the trance scenes is: "esta tierra está llena de delitos de sangre" (161, 216). Some of the dead sleep a drugged sleep at the bottom of the sea, where they have been thrown out of the sky. In the trance scenes there is a terrifying black coach which creeps silently along the streets of the city. In Soler's tale there is a holy man, brother José, to whom many people "van a preguntar por los cuerpos familiares. Parece que el hombre repite siempre lo mismo: 'Veo agua, mucha agua. El agua lo cubre todo'. Sin embargo, los visitantes insisten: '¿Dónde están los cuerpos? ¿Dónde están los cuerpos?'" (124). But if the hidden meaning of these sentences may seem obvious it is because I have brought them together here: in the text they appear dispersed through a long series of apparently disjointed stories. The reader has to find a common thread (just as we were instructed to do already in Flores's reading *en abyme* of the stories that have to do with the heart, and just as Wilcock will do with *Ulysses*). The common thread in this case – the bloody crimes, and the insistent questions asked about the victims and perpetrators of them – refers to extratextual circumstances, the Ford Falcons of the forces of repression, the bodies thrown into the River Plate from airplanes and helicopters, the *habeas corpus* actions.

Tamara Kamenzain writes in her book *El texto silencioso*:

Quando se escribe *por fuerza mayor* (en los límites casi vergonzantes que supone la realización de un deseo) la autocensura se transforma en esa circunstancia donde lo hermético coincide con lo permitido. Circunstancia en la que el deseo de 'decir lo que se quiere' tiene que pasar por los filtros tortuosos que impone lo real y encontrar allí formas nuevas de burlarlo. Así surgen textos que se sitúan enfrente del habla, allí donde el silencio escrito genera algo que para la conversacion – para la censura imperante – no se entiende. (39)⁷

Thus far the hermetic elements in Gusman's text have been of the legible variety. Because it is a difficult text it no doubt got past the censors (greatly weakened in any case by mid-1983) but will also have attracted few readers. The "silencio escrito" in Gusman's text is much more hermetic than that of Piglia's novel, which despite its fragmentary nature has the continuity of a sometimes interrupted and digressive dialogue. The erasures in Gusman's book are legible, as in a palimpsest, though considerable patience may be needed.

The blurry areas in Gusman's text, however, are of a different order

of illegibility. If the erasures in *En el corazón de junio* exist above all at the level of the word, the blurriness in it is rather at the level of the chapter and of the articulation between the segments. What are the links between the various segments? Does Flores discover something at the end? What happens to Soler? How are the trance scenes linked to the rest of the text? What is Wilcock looking for? All of these (and many other) unknowns in a text make it nearly impossible to read as narrative, since the reader is deprived of the possibility of finding an order or meaning in it. But I suspect that such is precisely Gusman's intention: to propose a text without a determinate meaning, that does not find "su razón de ser en la intencionalidad." A text in which the erasures indicate that the meaning is not in the written words, in which the blurs suggest the impossibility of knowing the truth. Flores suspects that Cigorraga – a civil servant, as I have already said – has committed some evil act, and that the donated heart hides this evil act in his own chest. It may well be that this evil is related to the woman in the trance scenes, with the murders committed by the panting man, with all the evils that fill this place with bloody deeds. Guilt which is never fully understood, which may be more than the guilt of some individuals, may perhaps be best expressed in a blurry text like this one, a text in which, as we are reminded a couple of times in the course of the story, "Todo está velado" (278, 295). *En el corazón de junio* is a text that exasperates by its difficulty, but Gusman's reader cannot but feel in it what one character calls "su desesperación por escribir, por poner algo a salvo de la muerte" (294).

In both novels multiple layers of meaning are a product of a desperate attempt to speak of the unspeakable. Piglia and Gusman are intensely aware of the inadequacy of language (and the ambiguity of silence), and have chosen tortuous compression, ambiguity and fragmentation to express a truth which cannot be spoken directly. Interestingly, both turn to methods for the artificial prolongation of human life – heart transplants and artificial respiration – as metaphors for the act of writing.

Piglia and Gusman, like other writers in repressive situations in human history, achieve rich, suggestive texts through attention to the multiplicity of meaning in language, and through narrative techniques which disrupt the simple telling of a story. Though such other important modern narratives as *Ulysses* and *Rayuela* also use fragmentation and ambiguity, these features in Piglia's and Gusman's novels demand a specifically political reading, since there are clear indications in them that the repressed elements have to do with the Argentina of the "Proceso." The features Strauss associated with coded writing – "obscurity of the plan, contradictions, omission of important links of the argument" (31) – are

all present, while the need for a reading which would decode the latent messages is shown *en abyme* by the frequent use of characters who are engaged in reading between the lines. Latent meaning is – as Gusman's puns suggest – at the very heart of these texts; it is their life. Reading and writing defy death and silence: the letter gives life.

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NOTES

- 1 Jorge Jinkis, review of Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, in *Sitio 2*. A more serious examination of this novel, from a very different angle from mine here, is Roberto Echavarren's "La literariedad: *Respiración artificial* de Ricardo Piglia." See also the interview with Piglia in *Encuesta a la literatura argentina contemporánea*, in which he calls literature "un arte de lo implícito" (136).
- 2 Piglia has recently informed me that the Elías and Rubén addressed in the dedication are two of the thousands of *desaparecidos*.
- 3 On *historia* see Wardropper's interesting article on Cervantes, "Don Quixote: Story or History?"
- 4 I am indebted to Marta Morello-Frosch for the information that "Aquel" was a guarded way of referring to Perón in the period prior to his return from exile.
- 5 See the back cover of *En el corazón de junio*: "El autor remota ciertos 'mitos personales' – espiritismo, iconografías sagradas y profanas, ceras, vísceras, damas autómatas – con el modo de relato de su primer libro: *El frasquito*." In an interview Gusman acknowledges: "Uno siempre escribe el mismo libro" (*Encuesta*, 65).
- 6 Critics of Gusman's work have often remarked on his preference for allusive and latent meanings to manifest ones. Juan Carlos De Brasi writes: "Cuando se toman los textos de Luis Gusman – *El frasquito*, *Brillos*, y *Del muerto* – una avalancha de sugerencias y desarrollos parciales se precipita sobre el lector" (5). Less sympathetically, Nora Catelli calls *En el corazón de junio* "este reguero de asociaciones libres que unen, zurcen e hilan ensoñaciones de costurerita (muy próximas a las insertadas en *Pubis angelical* de Manuel Puig) y sordos aldabonazos en la puerta grande de la literatura" (46). On *En el corazón de junio* see also the article by Antonio Oviedo cited below.
- 7 In an article on the poetry of the seventies, Andrés Avellaneda affirms that the political chaos of the period resulted in an increased density of expression, regardless of whether the subject of the poem was political or not. He writes: "La nueva tensión de la palabra poética parece entonces derivar de un doble origen: por una parte, la búsqueda de otro lenguaje a partir de las formas gastadas por el populismo sesentista; por otra parte, la imposición de la realidad represiva, responsable aquí de la doblez del significado y del lenguaje segundo, de la reflexión, el cuidado y el retorcimiento" (4).

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