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Key words: divinatory interpretation, literary identities, hermeneutic code, enigmas, Julio Cortázar, Las babas del diablo, Blow-Up, Michelangelo Antonioni.

Conflict of interest: the author declares no competing interests.

Funding: this research was partly funded by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Data availability statement: the author confirms that all data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article. All sources and data supporting the findings of this study were all publicly available at the time of submission.

Acknowledgements: I thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments in reviewing the final version of the paper in English. The initial version of this paper was the result of the European Research Project for Poetics and Hermeneutics (EPPH) of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The author would especially like to thank all the translators who helped internationalize the reception of this paper from Macedonian into English. The current translation was done in 2023 by Jasmina Ilievska-Marjanoviḱ (third and final translation, including bilingual review and extensive content editing). Previously, the paper was translated in 2022 by Ana Kechan, PhD, (translation of second draft), and in 2012 by Ilinka Crvenkovska (translation of first draft) and Matthew Jones (proofreading of first draft). Manuscript preparation according to PEASA formatting guidelines was done by Jasmina Ilievska-Marjanoviḱ.

Significance statement: the divinatory model for interpreting literary enigmas and its application to Julio Cortázar's short story "Blow-Up" (which is also connected to Michelangelo Antonioni's movie) have a universal symbolic, cultural, media, and educational function. By deconstructing the enigmas, this model and its specific application bring forth the theoretical and practical means for a new sensibility, liberating from frustrations of powerlessness when facing the mysterious. Not only literature but life itself has its own enigmatic places. Since enigmaticity in literature has a linguistic structure, it resembles the enigmas in human communication. Moreover, the enigmatic writing of Julio Cortázar successfully combines literary, photographic, cinematographic, musical, and aesthetic markers into a new trans-aesthetic code. Interpreting the mutual contact points of many semiotic systems requires detecting, explaining, and understanding semantically delicate trans-aesthetic identities. In this context, postmodern hermeneutics is an important factor in promoting the alternative, ambiguous, liminal, marginal, and even diabolical types of textual, human, and cultural identities.

Received: 17 July 2023.
Accepted: 24 January 2024.

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Licensee PAGEPress, Italy
Proceedings of the European Academy of Sciences & Arts 2024; 3:23
doi: 10.4081/peasa.2024.23

Topics: ORIGINAL RESEARCH
Category: HUMANITIES

A hermeneutics of literary identities[1]

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ABSTRACT

In hermeneutics, to understand and then to interpret a narrative text implies identifying its markers of ambiguity - its riddles and enigmas -which are interconnected like a cobweb. In this article, the researcher develops a literary hermeneutic model for interpreting any literary narrative text, based on the conceptual arsenal of literary hermeneutics and narratology. The model is called 'divinatory', since it is inspired by Friedrich Schleiermacher's idea for 'divinatory hermeneutics' and Roland Barthes' 'hermeneutic code', and it is applied on a very enigmatic short story by Julio Cortázar. The theoretical premise of the article also argues for the benefits of studying the complex systems of literary identities in literary texts and of re-establishing hermeneutics of literature as a 'hermeneutics of literary identities'. Due to its unique ambiguity, Cortázar's famous short story "Las babas del diablo" has numerous interpretations and too many title translations: after Michelangelo Antonioni's movie, it is known as "Blow-Up" in English, but also "The Devil's Drool", "The Devil's Cobweb", "The Cobweb/Kiss of St. Michael's Summer", and "The Thread of the Virgin" in other languages. Therefore, its unriddling divinatory interpretation provides an excellent initial interpretative model for any fictional narrative text. By analyzing the hermeneutically encoded aspects of its main narrative factors - the story and its discourse, narrator/s and focalization, narrative time and space, as well as intertextual connections - this interpretation finds that the short story's search for the identities of its subjects and events is, in fact, a search for the hermeneutic identity of meaning.

[1] Publication history note: This is the first publication of this essay in its English translation. This translated version has also been significantly updated and modified. Its first introductory theoretical parts are shortened to half their original length. All parts of the model-defining thesis and the structural composition in the main body of the text remain the same, but the application parts are extended, updated, and modified to match and elaborate on the English translation of the analyzed short story, which greatly differs from the previously analyzed Macedonian one. The reference list is updated accordingly. The previous version of the essay has been published only in Macedonian: firstly, in Kjulavkova (2005) Hermenevtika na književnite identiteti [A Hermeneutics of Literary Identities]. In Dijalog na interpretacii [Dialogue of Interpretations], K. Kjulavkova, J. Bessier, and Ph. Daros (eds.), Skopje, Ǵurǵa, pp. 61–115; later, for instance, in Kjulavkova (2006) Hermenevtika na identiteti [Hermeneutics of Identities]. Kumanovo, Makedonska rizinica, pp. 61–104.

Introduction

The object and method of interpretation and proposing a hermeneutics of literary identities

We will begin by surmising our theoretical presuppositions about literary hermeneutics. First of all, hermeneutics refuses to be indifferent—toward history, literature, language, art, culture, or religion. As a discourse of humanities, it is sensitive to the enigmas, puzzles, and mysteries in language, art, nature, and society. The human hermeneutic need to understand mysteries, resolve different kinds of enigmas, and decode what is hermetically encoded is a constant and imperishable principle. This principle becomes a syndrome, with its own symptoms. In that context, we can speak of a *hermeneutic (interpretative) syndrome*, which reflects the degree of order (system, law, rationality, logos) and disorder (anarchy, freedom, irrationality, eros) in the human condition. Both the degree of order and disorder in the enigmas and in interpretation explain the complexities of the 'hermeneutic code'.

Meaning has not only an aesthetic dimension but also an ethical one. Therefore, any hermeneutics is always built upon ethical principles, so hermeneutics and ethics are two sides of the same coin. We would even argue that ethics is the first hermeneutics in human history. It is indicative that, in the entire human history, only a few dozen philosophical concepts are interpreting the degrees and possibilities of order in the human condition: materialism, humanism, theosophy, idealism, utopianism, stoicism, dogmatism, puritanism, fundamentalism, radicalism, absolutism, despotism (tyranny), anarchism, rationalism, formalism, dialogism, individualism, asceticism, altruism, chauvinism, etc. These concepts indicate the dominant mindset of the epoch and its ethical background. The ethical aspect of the interpretative syndrome initiates the first (initial, primitive, primeval, primal, and/or prime) philosophy. "Ethics is, therefore, metaphysics", concluded Jacques Derrida in his essay "Violence and Metaphysics", when referring to the words of Emmanuel Levinas from his book *Totality and Infinity*: "Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy" (Derrida 1978, 98, 137 [1967, 146, 201]; Levinas 1969 [1961], 304).

Hermeneutic theory and interpretation are closely connected to literature because of their linguistic foundation: if there were no language, there would be no interpretation. The expressions seeking to be interpreted might be non-linguistic, but their interpretation has to be linguistic. Understanding is something else: it comes before or after interpretation, and it could be emotional, intuitive, mental, and not necessarily linguistic. Interpretation happens in language; it begins the moment when something ought to be described, put in words, and expressed through language. The most archaic form of interpretation may be remembrance. It strives to understand and articulate the understood, thereby becoming an introduction to interpretation. To put something into words means to see it through someone's consciousness. To find the right words for something means to interpret it. Language is a dawning consciousness and a type of memory; it memorizes the interpretation regardless of human intention. Interpretation is a resistance against oblivion. And if literature is a type of memory, then it is a form of interpretation, as well.

Literary hermeneutics asks two main questions. First, *what* do we interpret when interpreting a literary text? Second, *how* do we interpret literary texts? Both questions are not entirely congruent. So, in contemporary theory, there are numerous attempts to shift the interest from the object towards the method of interpretation. Some of those theoreticians that favor the method conspire to an open interpretative pluralism. According to them, there are as many interpretative strategies as there are readings of a single text! However, interpretative pluralism overlooks that there is no 'hierarchy of validity' in literary hermeneutics, and undermines the issue of 'validity' of interpretation altogether (Hirsch 1971). The complexity of the interpretation merely corresponds to the internal complexity of the text, and the pluralism of interpretive strategies merely corresponds to the pluralism of immanent poetic strategies applied in the text and suggested by its semantics. Behind interpretative fluidity, there are always some invariable literary elements. The different interpretations of different epochs usually have mutual meeting points, due to stable and recognizable literary features. Masterpieces do not stay valued over time because they fundamentally transform after every reading, but because they reconfirm their value by their ability to actualize the same contents again and again in different historical and cultural constellations. For example, an interpretation of *Antigone* by Sophocles (441 BC) cannot drastically revise the play's primary and constitutive tragic image of the world. Tragedy does not exist outside of its tragic dimension, even though the interpretative community radically changes through history, as well as its religious, ethical, aesthetic, and cultural criteria. Thereby, both questions—*what* and *how*—are inseparably interrelated and equally important in the interpretative act.

Still, hermeneutic methodology requires openness, plurality, simultaneity, and dialogism. Interpreting a literary text once does not mean finding its solution, delivering its final and definite explication, or cracking its cipher. One interpretation does not eliminate the possibility of another interpretation, as one interpretative method does not invalidate another. Hermeneutic praxis wholeheartedly accepts misunderstanding and even misinterpretation (any form of incorrect, erroneous, flawed, or faulty understanding). The so-called 'conflict of interpretations' stems from the differences in comprehending the "ontological foundations of understanding" (Ricœur 1969, 26), and is only stimulative for the justified occurrence of new interpretative methods. Therefore, the conflict of interpretations can be turned into a 'dialogue of interpretations' (Kjulavkova 2005, 5–24), a kind of interpretative eclecticism or, to be more precise, an 'interpretative syncretism' (Kjulavkova 2019, 24). Every new interpretative method is somehow related to all the previous ones and ought to be conscious of those relations (of genesis, opposition, intersection, combination, etc.). Syncretism proves that the coalition of methods is possible and sometimes inevitable in the process of interpretation.

This essay is against the claims of anthropological powerlessness and hermeneutical impotence that no interpretation can unravel the 'true' meaning of a literary text. We hold the persuasion that it is possible to understand and interpret a literary text (and that understanding is possible in the world). The revelation of meaning nurtures the pleasure of reading, which is unique, has an identity of its own, and has no substitute. The pleasure of reading is related to 'the pleasure of the text' (Barthes 1973). It would be entirely illogical to believe that the pleasure of reading is devoid of the pleasure of finding meaning, understanding, and interpreting. We believe that meaning survives in conditions of permanent conflict and paradoxicality. It goes against itself and hides from the hunting view of the reader/interpreter. Meaning deconstructs and decenters itself, just like the writing and reading subject do. The subject is a constitutive precondition of meaning.

We propose here a literary hermeneutic model that is based on the subtle examination and deliberation of the complex sys-

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tems of literary identities, which range from the narrative identities constructed by literature through the plethora of identity-marked linguistic, semiotic, textual, and informational literary mechanisms to the identity of literary text and literary language in general (Valdés and Miller 1985). This hermeneutics of literary identities will help to reconcile the *how* and the *what* in literary interpretation and to integrate the degrees of order and disorder in literary hermeneutics! If literary hermeneutics establishes itself as a hermeneutics of literary identities, it could avoid interpretative chaos.

The vicious circle of identities and divinatory interpretation

Interpretation sheds light on the mysterious and ambiguous places in the text. It happens at the crossing points between the semantic knots and the slippery signifiers. The semantic knots are places in the text that instigate doubt and confusion, not just in the reader/interpreter but—in an embryonic form—in the author, during the process of writing, and even before that—during the process of perceiving the world, experiencing the world, or in some of the artistic forms of memory itself. If there were not any semantic knots in a text, there would be no story. If there were no story, there would be no literary world. If there were no literary world, there would be no literary values. If there were no delicts breaking the established rules of the game (the literary and cultural codes), there would be no literary-aesthetic situations. Because delicts are possible and each epoch creates its own kind, there is and will be literature! The traces that meaning leaves in the text lead us to the meaning of the text. We cannot follow the meaning if we do not follow its traces imprinted in the text. However, in this essay, our attention is focused on the primeval diabolic nature of meaning and the ambiguity of identity! Following this goal, we will keep returning to the traces that meaning leaves on the signifiers as a constitutive part of its identity. Following this goal, we will divinate on unriddling the riddle, aware that its solution is as ambiguous as the riddle itself, regardless how much it tries to clarify it and project it into a rationalized answer. Understanding is an introduction to interpretation, and has at least two phases: one pre-verbal, introductory, and primal phase, and one other, linguistically articulated phase that becomes an interpretation in process (Gadamer, 1991). Understanding is intuitive, whereas the act of interpretation is rational. If understanding is a natural human need and a primal existential longing, then interpretation is a cultural and ethical consequence, a civilizational benefit, and the result of a system of skills, methods, principles, and conventions. Every rational and articulated interpretation is based on a system of hermeneutics and methodological skills. Hermeneutics always offers the assistance of the organizational and structural principle that Roland Barthes named the 'hermeneutic code' (or hermeneutic 'voice of truth'), "according to which the narrative or part thereof can be structured as a path leading from a question or enigma to its (possible) answer or solution" (Prince 2003, 40). When Barthes defined his 'hermeneutic code', he was designating the term as a structural feature of any narrative text: all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution (2002 [1970], 17).

But we will be using it here as also pertaining to hermeneutics, as a more general term that encompasses the code of any human discourse or text that requires interpretation.

In literary hermeneutics, however, the literary text has more than one meaning. The pluralism of linguistic meaning reflects the ambiguity of literary identity. So, the act of interpretation begins with identifying the markers of linguistic ambiguity. This is not always an easy task in literature, as William Empson, the progenitor of 'close reading' literary criticism, has shown. He thoroughly studied literary ambiguity in poetry and categorized it into seven types, ranging from double meaning to outright contradictions, and defined it as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (1949, 1) and "when we recognize that there could be a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternative views might be taken without sheer misunderstanding" (1949, *x*). But it helps to remind ourselves that all markers of linguistic ambiguity—as well as all markers in general—are indicated at the level of signification. Hence, Jacques Lacan implicitly recommends to follow "the path of the signifier" (or "the signifier's train") in interpretation,[2] when he is interpreting Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Purloined Letter* as a parable of dislocation of the signs/signifiers (Lacan 1966, 30; Poe 2021). When he understood that the linguistic signs are disoriented and vacant outside the semiotic context, he started to follow their dislocation in order to interpret their meaning. The literary riddles are susceptible to dislocation and discrete migrations from one discourse to another. To be ambiguous means to be enigmatic. Enigmaticity is a basic principle of the literary text (Bessière 1993), even though the text cannot be an absolute enigma. Any literary text has to contain at least one entrance into (and/or exit from) its hermetic and labyrinthine screened-off space. Such is the phenomenology of any enigma. Each epoch has its own parameters of enigmaticity, its own tradition of making riddles. The enigmatic disposition of the literary text is not ahistorical but rather a socio-culturally determined category. The enigmatic place in a text seems to be an inserted 'text within a text' that is recognizable by its otherness, its increased level of difficulty, and its violentness. The Russian Formalists coined the term 'ostranenie' (Shklovsky, 1990 [1917]) and Roland Barthes the term 'atopic text' (Barthes 1970) to describe these odd places in literary texts. They always require another, a different, or a double reading/interpretation, a cross-examination. The more enigmatic the text is, the greater the need to understand it and the greater the pleasure in finding a possible solution. Thus, interpretation is an act of divination, revelation, and epiphany. It is godlike; it discretely projects the divine principle in a human project.

In French, *deviner* means to unriddle something by reading and creating.[3] In his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust

[2] Translator's note (TN): The English translation of the implied segment varies in interpretive nuances. According to the translation of Jeffrey Mehlman, Lacan writes "willingly or not, everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology, kit and caboodle, will follow the path of the signifier" (Lacan, 1972), while according to Bruce Fink et al., "everything pertaining to the psychological pregiven follows willy-nilly the signifier's train, like weapons and baggage" (Lacan, 2006, 21).

[3] It is very similar to divine in English. They both originate from the Late Latin devināre, and the Latin dīvīnāre, and both are related to the Latin deus (god), and divus, divinus (godlike). Litterally, the French verb deviner means the following: 1) to find out by guessing, to guess the right answer; 2) to find the right solution/answer to a puzzle/riddle/enigma by guessing or figuring it out; 3) to find a solution to a problem by inferences and hypotheses, to conjecture, approximate, guesstimate, suppose, surmise, presume, assume, imagine, etc.;

says "On devine en lisant, on crée" (1954, vol. 3, 656).[4] This verb is paronomastically close to the verb *diviner*, causing semantic analogies between unriddling and divination. In his academic speech "Sur la notion d'herméneutique…", Friedrich Schleiermacher claims that understanding (the mental act of reacting to a certain statement) is a form of devination (1987, 55–173). Therefore, he proposes his divinatory hermeneutics that is not limited to literary works, but encompasses all areas of speech and communication by which a subject expresses his/her thoughts or series of thoughts, and another subject perceives them, needing to understand them and to also be able to recognize the manner in which the listener should link ideas. Inspired by Schleiermacher's concept of any interpretation as divinatory, we would like to popularize his insight by conceptualizing our particular literary narrative analysis, as well as conceptualizing literary hermeneutics in general, as divinatory hermeneutic models. We will even use the method of question and answer in the analysis, since it is characteristic of looking for solution to riddles.

Let us now see one narrative riddle full of ambiguous dislocations of signs and meanings.

Unriddling a narrative riddle: "Las babas del diablo"

In order to establish a possible model of 'divinatory interpretation', we shall take a famous enigmatic work of fiction written by the Argentine-French writer Julio Cortázar (1914–1984), which is known worldwide as "Blow-Up", although its original title in Spanish was "Las babas del diablo" (literally, "The Devil's Drool").[5] The liminality and uncertainty of its literary identity factors is so symptomatic that they will undoubtedly help the understanding and defining of their structure. The literary identity nuances are so complex and delicate that they need to be carefully observed through a multilayered interpretation.

Any riddle includes the answer within itself. The riddle has the structure of a (rhetoric) figure of speech—allusive, ironic, metaphorical, metonymical, allegorical, parodic, anagrammatic... The answer is present and absent at the same time. The answer is not explicit; that is its privilege. Not everyone manages to find the answer hidden between the lines. In certain situations the inability to find the answer is even culturally discriminated and punished. As a riddle maker, the writer plays the role of the Sphynx. The reader is invited to find the answer. The difference is that literary riddles are open for more than one answer. The reader need not concern himself with the finality or infinity of divination but only follow the semiotic inscriptions in the text.

The answer is given *discreetly* in the riddle itself, the text itself. To overcome that discreteness of the answer, conquer the space 'between the lines', and decipher the figure that secretly lies hidden in the riddle—that is the 'ultimate goal' of interpretation. However, the very game of unriddling is not to be underestimated by any means. The unriddling process is perhaps the most important part of the riddle. In the act of interpreting, the interpreter is obsessed with the concealed part of the text. To call into question the interpreter's yearning for the 'true' answer to the riddle means to unjustly portray him/her as an anemic and impotent observer who is merely pushing Sisyphus' boulder just for the sake of reaching the top, as a result of serving the punishment, and not for enjoyment. Interpreting is not similar to serving a life sentence in prison of a person with a death sentence. The hermeneutic ideal is to put every stone (building block) in its place and to get a resulting building that is much more than just the sum of those stones. The hermeneutic project is ambitious. The riddle has the structure of a work of art. If interpretation and the reader are legitimate participants in the aesthetic acts of communication and reception, the interpreter is a thinking subject who builds a superstructure on top of nature and takes part in the creation of the work of art. The interpreter is not Sisyphus but rather resembles Oedipus, for he/she influences and changes history. However, the true answers often do lead to unpredictable karmic tragisms. Hermeneutics is the foyer to the tragisms of humanity and history.

A draft of an interpretative model: the questions

Roland Barthes (2002 [1970]) writes about the so-called *hermeneutemes* as basic structural units (morphemes) of any sentence/text encoded by the 'hermeneutic code', which is one of his five narrative organizational structures, his five 'narrative codes' (hermeneutic, prohairetic, cultural, connotative, and symbolic code). He categorizes several *hermeneutemes*: (1) *thematization*, or subject of the enigma; (2) *proposal*, or metalinguistic signaling of the existence of an enigma; (3) *formulation* of the enigma; (4) *promise of an answer* or *request for an answer* to the enigma; (5) *snare* to finding the truth, or pretense of truth (alluring traps, deliberate evasions of truth); (6) *equivocation,* or space in-between truth and snare/lie (mixtures of truth and snare, double-understanding); (7) *jamming*, or acknowledgment of the insolubility of the enigma (foreseen obstacles to revealing the enigma); (8) *suspended answer*, or delayed, temporarily discontinued after having been begun; (9) *partial answer*, stating only one feature that would lead to the complete identification of truth; and (10) *disclosure, decipherment*, or final discovery and irreversible uttering of the solution to the riddle (Barthes 2002 [1970], 209–10).

Analogously, we propose that there are several unavoidable questions that should be asked in the divinatory process of interpreting a literary text:

(1) Which place in the text is most enigmatic and has the power of allusively hinting toward unriddling the riddle;
(2) What other places are exceptionally hermetic, enthropic, atopic, deviant, delicate, or polysemic in their meaning, so it becomes necessary to divine their identity;
(3) Where does the semantic delict happen in the narrative text (where in the text does the order change from one direction into another indicative direction or into the reverse direction, where do unexpected turns or odd conversions happen on any structural narrative level: in the discourse and the story, in nar-

4) to find out the truth by presentiment, to sense, to have an inkling; 5) to find out and reveal the future by divination, to predict, foresee, foretell; 6) to find out the hidden truth by solving and revealing, to make out, distinguish, discern, demask, decipher, decode, etc. (Dictionnaire, 2023) (TN).

4 "We are divinating when reading, we are creating" (TN).

5 Julio Cortázar's "Las babas del diablo" was published for the first time in 1959 in a short story collection called "Las Armas Secretas" [The Secret Weapons]. The English translation by Paul Blackburn was published in the short story collection titled "End of the Game and Other Stories" (1963), but it is not available to find out under what title. Later, after Michelangelo Antonioni's movie "Blow-Up" won the 1966 Gran Prix at Cannes and became famous, the same English translation of this story became known and published under the title "Blow-Up", and even the short story collection got renamed "Blow-Up and Other Stories" (1967). We used the English translation "Blow-Up" by Blackburn (1971), which is available online (TN).

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ration and focalization, in the characters, in the time and space, in the point of view from which the world is presented, or in the historical perspective of looking at the world); and

(4) Which places in the narrative text may stand out as potential keys for interpreting or decoding the enigma, as well as are there any other texts by the same author or by other authors that may serve as potential keys and support or turn the interpretation toward the direction of the potential answer.

These above four questions comprise the basis of our divinatory model of interpretation and the following chapters will be answering them in relation to Julio Cortázar's short story.

The hermeneutic code of the title: hermetism and homonymy

The unriddling interpretation of the short story "Las babas del diablo" by Julio Cortázar (1971) will begin with the first question: *which place in the text is most enigmatic*? Or to rephrase, which segment of the text generates constant and considered mystery with its lexical ambiguity: the title, the names, the space, the time, the narrator, the events, or the characters? If the interpreters uncover the source of homonymy or polysemy, there is hope that they will get to know the structure, the function, and the meaning of that lexical ambiguity.

In this short story, the title carries a high degree of ambiguity, flagrant homonymy, and loud noise. This homonymy is an important characteristic of the short story's hermetism. The original title, "Las babas del diablo" (literally: "The Devil's Drool"), is a metaphoric cipher that encodes the main thematic thread of the story. The title is like a puzzle. It reflects the enigmatic nature of the story. Both the title and the story are a kind of a riddle. Untangling the semantic knot of the title is the foundation of interpreting the short story as a whole. The title may be interpreted in many ways and points towards different possibilities. It is one of the most delicate narrative segments as it is a linguistic utterance that is so difficult to translate (almost untranslatable) that it leaves room and justification for numerous unequivalent translations. The linguistic translation is the first step to literary interpretation.

The Devil's Drool

Upon first reading, the meaning of the original Spanish title "Las babas del diablo" seems like it is not an idiom and does not require any recoding of idiomatic cultural or traditional contents. The literal translation would be "The Devil's Drool" (drivel, snot, slime). Translated as such, the title is within an acceptable semantic correlation to the story and its contents. If the drool is the metonymical projection of insatiable hunger, desire, and lust, then the title is indeed suitable to the contents of the story. The contents present the state of 'drooling' after something forbidden, unavailable, or inaccessible.

If the man in a grey hat from the short story desires the boy, he can be connected to the image of the devil who is drooling over the object of his desire—the boy. As readers, we don't meet him in the short story actually drooling, since we don't meet him before but only after the event of him presumably losing the desired boy, so he is quite angry at the moments we face him through the eyes and voice of the narrator. He has a bloodless complexion, with "the black holes he had in place of eyes, surprised and angered both, he looked, wanting to nail me onto the air" (Cortázar 1971, 114–15). He is represented by the narrator as somehow mechanical, lifeless, hollow, and grotesque. His only memorable features were his bloodless complexion, his strangely involuntary mouth movements, his especially black eyes, his even blacker (maybe canine) nostrils, and his fetishy (expensive and glossy) shoes that are uncomfortable for walking:

> What I remember best is the grimace that twisted his mouth askew, it covered his face with wrinkles, changed somewhat both in location and shape because his lips trembled and the grimace went from one side of his mouth to the other as though it were on wheels, independent and involuntary. But the rest stayed fixed, a flour-powdered clown or bloodless man, dull dry skin, eyes deepset, the nostrils black and prominently visible, blacker than the eyebrows or hair or the black necktie. Walking cautiously as though the pavement hurt his feet; I saw patent-leather shoes with such thin soles that he must have felt every roughness in the pavement. (110).

However, his supposed subordinate and partner in crime—the blonde woman—aside from the similar attributes of predatory hollowness, also has decidedly slimy attributes:

> She was thin and willowy, two unfair words to describe what she was, and was wearing an almost-black fur coat, almost long, almost handsome. All the morning's wind [...] had blown through her blond hair which pared away her white, bleak face—two unfair words—and put the world at her feet and horribly alone in front of her dark eyes, her eyes fell on things like two eagles, two leaps into nothingness, two puffs of green slime. I'm not describing anything, it's more a matter of trying to understand it. And I said two puffs of green slime. (105).

The only other time the notion of drooling appears in the short story is when the narrator explains that he can't save the boy again with his photograph in his dreadful recurrent hallucinations about the incident, describing the set-up as a "framework of drool and perfume" and his photograph as a "meek intervention": "couldn't yell for him to run, or even open the road to him again with a new photo, a small and almost meek intervention which would ruin the framework of drool and perfume" (114). In this sense, we could say that the short story portrays a very probable devil's vicious circle of lust with several subjugated protagonists and with no way out, a circle that demands either its own fulfillment or a radical, tragic, and metaphorical leap (by the assistance of a higher power, 'Deus ex machina', Chance/Coincidence, or some similar narrative device, like the photograph in this short story).

After some research, we find that the expression "devil's drool" might have an idiomatic background, after all. Some researchers of Cortázar's work point out that this Argentine expression has the idiomatic use to express a close shave (Chatman, 1985, 139), a close call, an extremely narrow escape from a dangerous situation, very similar to "by the skin of one's teeth" (Zamora, 1981). This is so indicative of the storyline in the short story that the title could easily be translated by one of these expressions. However, the only difference from these expressions in English seems to be that it does not merely refer to the figurative image of death, but of the devil. This seems to be an important semantic nuance since the expression in Spanish vividly illustrates that a person was so close to the devil that his senses could pick up on his drooling. So, Cortázar clearly integrates the meaning of this expression in his short story, portraying the devil's incarnations as hollow within and dripping with insatiable desire from their teeth, nose, and eyes. As we will see further on in our analysis, Cortázar's take on the expression also seems to entail that the person who managed to save his own life was so close to the other side that he will never be the same again and is not quite alive or saved either. To some extent, the literal translation of the title as "The Devil's Drool" also contains all of these important messages,

even more accentuating the lingering sensation of the drool, so it may be an even more effective solution.

The Devil's Splotches

The title could also be translated as "The Devil's Splotches". Splotches suggest semantic traces—dark places and dark stains—that make the story hermetic and obscure. Such a translation alludes to the "dark splotches on the railing" (Cortázar 1971, 111), which are caught in the photographer's shot and bear witness to something other/different than what was previously expected (the tragic and violent exit from the devil's vicious circle of lust). This translation suggests an interpretative option that is directed at the blonde woman—a victim that suffers in the act of revenge, when the furious man in a grey hat throws himself on her by the fence and plays out his game, commits the crime. If the boy by any chance knew or found out that the woman died because of him, he would become the victim of a dark memory and a guilty conscience. The boy, too, would have stains/splotches on his conscience; and he would have to learn to live with them, to die with them.

The translation "The Devil's Splotches" also alludes to some of the other semantic indications in the text: the birds (pigeons and sparrows), the clouds, the cobwebs, the blurriness of vision, and the cobweb floaters before one's eyes. Let us point out several quotes with these motifs that are symptomatically repeated (like a recurring dream) by the narrator: "(now a pigeon's flying by and it seems to me a sparrow)" (101); "(now a large cloud is going by, almost black)" (103); "(now a small fluffy cloud appears, almost alone in the sky)" (108); "a place where the railing was tarnished emerged from the frame" (114); "…to see something like a large bird outside the focus" (115); "What remains to be said is always a cloud, two clouds…" (115).

There is a prevailing atmosphere of a clouded, webbed, foggy, and stained vision and mind: with the birds flying in front of the lens of the camera and entering the descriptions in the story (in parentheses), the clouds that keep passing by like cobweb floaters before one's eyes (also in parentheses), the mentioned slimy gossamer filaments (spider cobwebs) that float in the October morning air of St. Martins's belated summer (109), the fog that overcomes the consciousness of the narrator (113), the sudden "splotches of rain cracking down, for a long spell you can see it raining over the picture" (115), the splotches (of blood) on the fence, and the uncontrollable urge to tell the story as an attempt to "always get rid of that tickle in the stomach that bothers you" when something weird happens (101), to spill out the stains/splotches on one's conscience.

This entire symptomatic system of dark places comprises a relatively consistent circle of signs and meanings that support this offered variant of interpretation/translation of the title of the story. They offer an acceptable interpretative key to decode the short story and solve its riddle. Obviously, the devil has his fingers all over this story and leaves traces of his fingertips, just like - on the other hand—the narrator sticks his nose into other people's business, where it does not belong, thus placing himself within reach of the devil's fingers ("I had poked my nose in to upset an established order", 113).

The Devil's Clouds

The splotches and the clouds in the story are a mutual metaphorical projection. Therefore, we could also translate the title as "The Clouds of the Devil" or "Devil's Cloudlets". The clouds keep popping out everywhere in the parenthetical discourse of the narrator in this short story, and he describes himself as someone who can "see only the clouds", who has become "dead", who is "less compromised than the others", and can think, write, and remember "without being distracted" (100). Also, at the very beginning of the short story, the narrator says a very strange sentence: "you the blond woman was the clouds that race before my your his our yours their faces" (100). Aside from the incorrect grammar (since the narrator is experimenting to find better ways to retell his story, and language is failing him in respect to all the grammatical persons, tenses, and possessive adjectives, or pronouns that he would like to encompass), it is very symptomatic that precisely the devilish blonde woman is being identified with the clouds.

Out of the entire short story, what remains at the end are indeed only the clouds that keep appearing and disappearing, passing from one end of the photograph to the other, the images from memories (in the imagination and in reality), passing before one's eyes, as if they were cloudlets in front of which a pigeon flies by, or cloudlets which turn into a great gray cloud, obscuring reality, obscuring identity, obscuring the past, obscuring the characters, the actions, and the mind. These cloudlets of the devil are a semantic inversion of the devil's splotches and the foggy cobweb floaters in the eyes and in the mind of the narrator and the reader. They can be used to link the transition from a verbal to a non-verbal state of mind, the transition from consciousness to a state of silence/void that refuses to face the truth, that crosses the threshold of consciousness and goes beyond it, where a person loses his mind, faints, or crosses the thin line separating life and death. And in fact, as the narrator says, the story starts backwards, from the end: "I who am dead (and I'm alive, I'm not trying to fool anybody, you'll see when you get to the moment, because I have to begin some way and I've begun with this period, the last one back, the one at the beginning, which in the end is the best of the periods when you want to tell something)" (100–101).

Devil-Spit or the Devil's Cobwebs of Virginity

Another variant of the interpretation of the title would be "Devil-Spit", an expression for St. Martin's gossamer spiderwebs, which are also called "angel-spittle", according to one auto-reflexive sentence given in Cortázar's short story. Describing the boy's escape, the narrator says:

> …all at once (it seemed almost incredible) he turned and broke into a run, the poor kind, thinking that he was walking off and in fact in full flights, running past the side of the car, disappearing like a gossamer filament of angel-spit in the morning air.
>
> But, filaments of angel-spittle are also called devil-spit… (109)

In this context of the short story, we might say that the choice of the synonym "angel-spit" (that also means baby drool) for the gossamer filaments implicitly alludes to the boy's virginity, while the synonym "devil-spit" explicitly alludes to the devil—the man in a grey hat, or whoever/whatever is hiding behind him, weaving spiderwebs to catch the prey and pulling the strings—and to his devil's bargain, based around his supposed proposal to the boy to sell his own virginity for money, out of curiosity, out of weakness, or confusion.

The devil reaches for the boy's virginity and desires to take it, perhaps even succeeding, although not only in the literal or vulgar sense of the word. The story is a parable of taking the boy's virginity but also a projection of taking away the virginity of the

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word, the narrator, photography, life, and the meaning of life. Nothing is as it was. Everything is transformed, initiated into a different form of reality, vision, story, and narration. Yes, even the very act of narration is no longer absolutely pure, innocent, but rather violated, impure, sinful. Sin and virginity offer a mutual explanation. Syntax has been violated in these paradigmatic places in the text, as well, and it is no longer 'virginal'. The author consciously points it out in the narrator's introduction at the very beginning of the story, at the very moment when we cross the threshold from the world of reality into the imaginary world of the literary, which stll has a certain mysterious umbilical cord connecting it to reality. Reality seems to be precisely the very thing the narrator, the implied author, and the author so often and so emphatically try to distance themself from, as if looking for a form of overcompensation, due to the fact that the distance between literature and reality is more operative than essential.

Syntax has lost its virginity, and not in any other way but through the ways of the devil. In that sense, interpretation is not virginal, but at its very beginning, upon initiation, is marked by consciousness as being devilishly sticky, cobwebby, clouded, partly clear, partly cloudy, and never completely clear. Nothing is innocent: neither the look, the event, the camera, its lens, nor the photograph… This is a story of the loss of virginity, of the sacrileged identity of virginity, of false virginity, of the devil's cobwebs in the mind, in the view, in the image, and in the story. So, why not the title "Devil-Spit", or even "The Devil's Cobwebs of Virginity"!

The Devil's Cobweb: the (in)conclusive solution

Upon rereading, we discover yet another possible interpretation of the homonymy in the title, which is related to the previous interpretation of the mentioned "gossamer filaments", and is in a semantic correlation to the mythemes behind the meaning of the short story. In this variant the translation of the title would be "The Cobwebs of the Devil" or "The Devil's Cobweb" (the singular is a synecdoche of the plural). There are very similar expressions that include both angel and devil connotations, which are used in many parts of the world to designate this very particular kind of spider cobwebs. These cobwebs are spun by newly hatched baby spiders to transport them through the air. They are simultaneously both wet and slimy, and especially abound during periods of prolonged good weather: it is autumn, maybe even the beginning of winter, but days are still sunny, pleasantly warm and beautiful. On the one hand, these are called angel-spit or 'threads of the Virgin' [fils de la Vierge], on account of the Holy Mother's miraculous weaving skills; and on the other, witches/grandma's hair or devil's spit/drool. As if everywhere around the world folklore could fathom the subtleness of the small step that could reverse the two extremes, bridging the chasm between them. This very time of the year is either called by the Christian holidays in October/November (St. Michael's summer or St. Martin's summer) or by the poor, innocent, vulnerable, but also liminal people who would benefit from more warm weather (Gypsy summer, Indian summer, grandma's summer, maiden summer); yet, it is always full of references to these spiderwebs, like gossamer being called after the geese eaten for St. Martin's Day or after the going away of summer (Leo S 2022).

It is no wonder that most translations of this short story, aside from the English "Blow-Up", use their native expressions related to these spiderwebs or to this period of the year to interpret and translate the title: for instance, Alain Dorémieux translated it in French "Les Fils de la Vierge" (Cortázar 1963), Radoje Tatić translated it in Serbian "The Spiderweb of St. Michael's Summer" ["Paučina miholjskog ljeta"] (Kortasar 1969), but also used the variant "The Kiss of St. Michael's Summer" ["Poljubac miholjskog ljeta"]. The original title in Spanish is also an expression that refers to the same cobwebs, and when translating it literally as "The Devil's Drool", the translators incorporate the same context; for example, the Macedonian translation [Ligite na ǵavolot"] by Katerina Mandariḱ (Kortasar, 2005), or the Serbian translation ["Đavolje bale"] by Aleksandra Mančić (Kortasar, 1998). At this time of the year, the sky is filled with sticky, slimy, unattainable, and invisible cobwebs, flying through the air, especially in the morning. In the context of the short story, we could correlate them to all the previous aspects of the title we already wrote about: the spiderweb eye floaters, the invisible splotches, the small greyish-white cloudlets, and the tiny virginity membranes. These spiderwebs of prolonged summer are incarnations of the mysterious and the enigmatic. They are strange, in-between realities, which signify the absent. They signify the void that is the 'real glue' of this short story.

Regardless of which title variant we choose, none will be wrong, even though none of them *a priori* contains all the possible semantic implications and translations. Translation is not integral, just like interpretation. But we have to decide on a single solution, one variant. And we will use that title in this essay from then on. Interpretation, just like translation, is restrictive. We chose this last title "The Devil's Cobweb"[6] because it is derived by analogy from the Latin phrase of a vicious devil's circle (circulus vitiosus), it spectrally points toward the hermetic nature of meaning and the labyrinth of interpretation, and it is the least further away from all the other interpretations/translations of the title. Upon nuanced deliberation, "The Devil's Cobweb" may also signify the devil's drool, splotches, clouds, spiderwebs of virginity (devil-spit), even spiderweb eye floaters and birds; however, not as if belonging to the devil, but as if integrating a symbolic attribute that adds a certain emotional degree to the description of ominous, ill-fated, or cursed cobwebs.

The identity of the narrator: protean multiplication and ambiguousness

Then God said, "Let there be a storyteller, and let there be a story". And that is what happened. God created many storytellers and set the stories to flow out from them to bring light to the human kind. And God saw that it was good. God called the creators "storytellers", and their creations stories." And evening passed and morning came, marking a day of the creation.
(a pastiche of Genesis 1:3–25)

And there was a storyteller, and there was a story! The story cannot tell itself, and in order for it to be a story, it needs to be told. There is always someone who tells it. The identity of the narrator/storyteller is an important part of the interpretation. There is always someone (a subject) who creates or discovers the story, who puts it together, based on something seen, heard, and experienced. There is also someone who learns of the story, hears it from someone else, takes it from someone else, and reshapes it,

[6] The Macedonian translation by Liljana Nikolova Petroviḱ has this title «Ǵavolska pajažina» [Devil's Cobweb] (2008), possibly influenced by this essay. It is published in an anthology that is edited and prefaced by Kjulavkova (TN).

based on previously adopted and heard myths, legends, tales, jokes, and anecdotes, in order to pass it on to someone else. Herein lies the genesis of storytelling: its historical, psychological, anthropological, traditional, and ontological genesis… The story needs to be passed on to others, to be re-told to someone, for it would not be a story unless it is re-told. Whether its re-telling is oral or written, that is a different matter, perhaps even secondary to the ontology of the story. What is important is for the story to be re-told from one (person) to another, in order for it to interpret and memorize by retelling, since re-telling is the only way for a story to exist, to BECOME a story, and to REMAIN a story. To BE A STORY. And there was a story!

There would be no story if there weren't a storyteller/narrator. There would be no short stories, novels, nor tales. The story and the narrator are the main constitutive elements of the short story and the novel. The constitutive parts of plays are an absent narrator and characters who act, thereby restituting the story into an immediate dramatic act. In plays, the story is absent because the narrator is absent. In the short story, the novella, and the novel both the narrator and the story are present. The presence of the narrator and the story are materialized in different ways but never entirely canceled. All who had tried to destroy the story and the narrator have fallen into the trap of delusion, as historical practice has regularly confirmed and demystified.

Re-telling is an act of interpretation and, therefore, an intersubjective act. A story is not a solipsistic act. The short story is a form of interpretation of a certain (someone's) 'reality', time, and ethics. By re-telling, the narrator interprets the narrated events. For example, in "The Devil's Cobweb", the narrator ironically refers to the event that takes place on the banks of the Seine as 'a comedy' (Cortázar 1971, 110). The narrator mediates between the subjective and the collective consciousness, behind both of which there is always some hidden agenda: someone's interest, a certain ethical value system, and/or some *intention* (Eco 1992). The narrator tells the story either to an imaginary or a real reader. The narrator is an interpreter of the story but so is the reader. Narrating and interpreting are kindred intersubjective acts. The interpretation of a literary text is an interpretation of the interpretation that is already present in the story: a true meta-interpretation.

The identity of the narrator also brings into question the identity of the characters, and makes the position of the reader more 'difficult'. In "The Devil's Cobweb", the identity of the narrator is built by his conscious multiplication, which is also in line with the "off-centering" of the interrelated narrative instance of narrative voice, time of narration, and narrative perspective/focalization (Genette 1980, 249), the multiplication of the points of view and the lens (emotionally and mentally), and the interchangable positions of the main character and the narrator. Thus, a certain uncertainty is introduced, a skepticism, a sense of distrust, and an avoidance of plausability. The narrator here is inclusive, never excluding but always incorporating other identities, like *genre mixte*. The mixing of the identities of the narrator (and by analogy, also of the characters, and the position of the implied author and author), the constant change of the grammatical person in the narrator's voice, the changes in the type of narration (indirect and direct speech, the former predominant in narrrative fiction, the latter in plays) and the type of focalization in the narrated world, the uncertainty of the identity of the observer, of the camera lens, and of the focalizer—all of these characteristics are a form of, and even an essence of, the unrecognizability of the identity of meaning (the semantic identity) in the short story.

This is one of the main indications given to the reader and interpreter by the author and the text, so they ought to be followed and respected in the process of interpretation. There are many grammatical errors, allusions, and a certain sense of enjoyment in instigating and fueling the mind of the reader. Thereby, the multiple and ambiguous identity of the narrator is not coincidental. On the contrary, it is a deliberated projection of reality, the kind of reality that has been forgotten or that we refuse to remember. The insistence on deluding the reader about the identity of the characters and the narrator is realized in the form of overcompensation: the more the narrator obscures his identity, it means that his need to obscure it is bigger, and as a result, there is a greater syllogistic probability for him to be you, you to be me, me to be him… Then, we resort to hiding reality behind imaginary worlds and simulating made-up situations, thus relativizing the boundaries between them.

At the level of narrative voices, we could differentiate several types of narrators in "The Devil's Cobweb", which may shed more light on the identity of this narrator:

The metafictional heterodiegetic narrator

There is a *heterodiegetic narrator* who appears at the entry point and the exit point of the short story's narrative framework, but is only sporadically heard in the course of narration, always slyly hiding behind some of the characters. This heterodiegetic narrator, who positions himself as a 'professional' narrator with the dedicated primary role of being a narrator, separated from the position of the characters (or with a tendency of being separated as much as possible), is, in fact, a bridge between the characters and the author, between fiction and history. Yet, this relationship exists more like a provocation and a possibility rather than being explicitly marked. Its provocative nature becomes an integral part of the devil's game of intangible and unattainable meaning, whose circle is a maelstrom, a black hole sucking everything in its center or abyss. This relationship also signalizes the difference between the author, the narrator, and the main character. Thus, all autobiographical and personal implications are hinted at as possible, and even probable, but still not present in the artistic world of the short story.

The presence of this heterodiegetic narrator can be recognized by how it is indicated—by the use of the first person singular and plural (particularly in the entry frame of the story), which suggests, on the one hand, a certain distancing from the world of the short story, and on the other, a step closer towards the position of the author:

> But I have the dumb luck to know that if I go this Remington will sit turned to stone on top of the table with the air of being twice as quiet that mobile things have when they are not moving. So, I have to write. One of us all has to write, if this is going to get told. (Cortázar 1971, 100)
>
> All of a sudden I wonder why I have to tell this, but if one begins to wonder why he does all he does do, ... (101)
>
> We're going to tell it slowly, ... (102)

This metafictional heterodiegetic first-person narrator constantly interrupts throughout the narration in very short digressions—narratorial discourse pauses in the narrative speed (Genette 1980, 94)—which are marked by parenthesis: "the sun came out at least twice as hard (I mean warmer, but really it's the same thing)..." (Cortázar 1971, 102) or "Right now (what a word, *now,* what a dumb lie) I was able to sit quietly..." (103).

From time to time, however, the presence of the metafictional heterodiegetic narrator is also indicated by the use of the impersonal third-person singular. But in this short story, this impersonal use shows no interest in the auctorial commentary position that

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would subordinate the different voices and lenses under the dominant point of view of the author. This type of narration seems to be used only to stimulate the illusion of a setting suitable for postulating meta-literary premises, auto-referential theoretical and general standpoints, and metafictional findings and revelations, including 'the effect of the final revelation' of all diegetic truths (Barthes 1970) at the very end of the short story. Such theoretical hypotheses and premises come and go unannounced throughout the short story, with or without special markers, thus achieving the effect of overflowing from the point of view of the character into the point of view of the narrator, from a homodiegetic to a heterodiegetic level. It happens, for example, when the narrator gives theoretical instructions for photography and literature:

> One of the many ways of contesting level-zero, and one of the best, is to take photographs, an activity in which one should start becoming an adept very early in life, teach it to children since it requires discipline, aesthetic education, a good eye and steady fingers. (Cortázar 1971, 102–103)
>
> Michel is guilty of making literature, of indulging in fabricated unrealities. Nothing pleases him more than to imagine exceptions to the rule… (108–109)

From the very beginning of the short story, this impersonal heterodiegetic narrator introduces these meaningful elements of theoretical, essayistic, and metatextual skepticism:

> It'll never be known how this has to be told, in the first person or in the second, using the third person plural or continually inventing modes that will serve for nothing. If one might say: I will see the moon rose, or: we hurt me at the back of my eyes, and especially: you the blond woman was the clouds that race before my your his our yours their faces. What the hell. (101)

The dissociated homodiegetic narrator

The *homodiegetic narrator* incorporates the identities of two very delicately distinguished voices of the translator (writer) and the amateur photographer within the main character, the French-Chilean Roberto Michel. The introduction of the writer's narrative voice (through his typewriter) and the writer's point of view (through his camera, his lens) as two discernable entities evoke the autobiographical trait of the dissociative (split) narrator identity. There is a secret 'French' connection between Roberto Michel and Julio Cortázar. But the autobiographical implications in "The Devil's Cobweb" are so carefully dosed that they remain in the realm of assumptions. In comparison, in Cortázar's short story "Apocalypse at Solentiname" (2012 [1976]), the same autobiographical implications are rather more obvious and consciously indicated by its memoir poetics.

We could also argue that there are even three homodiegetic narrators in "The Devil's Cobweb", one of whom is a translator, another a photographer, and the third one is just a camera lens in the role of a narrator. All of them use the position of a character-narrator (a subject who is both a witness, and a participant/protagonist in the events that take place), but in a given moment, they all become objects of observation themselves. It is not just that the narrating identities are mixed but the narrating and focalizing positions are also mixed. The homodiegetic and the heterodiegetic position are constantly alternating and hybridizing without any logical order.

In Gerard Genette's terms (1980 [1972]), the dissociation of the 'homodiegetic narrator' in this short story serves as the basis to separate the subject who is watching ('the narrative perspective'/'focalization') and the subject who is narrating ('the narrative voice'). In Franz K. Stanzel's terminology, the two modes of 'reflector' and 'narrator', although positioned in one character-narrator, are being dissociated (1986). This process is carried out on a metalinguistic level when the story becomes dependent on the code of both discourses, literature and photography (one might say film, as well). Both literature and photography are juxtaposed with reality since they have the ability to change reality (its representation/image/face/look), depending on who is watching it, who is composing it, who is evaluating it, and who is interpreting it in the form of a story. When Michel, the photographer, compares his memories of the event with the photograph (a "frozen memory"), he understands that they are both different from the inaccessible "gone reality": "the first day he spent some time looking at it and remembering, that gloomy operation of comparing the memory with the gone reality; frozen memory like any photo, where nothing is missing, not even, and especially, nothingness, the true solidifier of the scene" (111).

So, the final impressions from reading this short story pertain not only to its non-finite semantic and semiotic identity (the non-finite identity of the meaning of the short story, including the meaning of its structural elements, like the narrator, point of view, story, character, time-space, etc.), but they pertain also to the image of reality itself. The very reality loses its 'realistic' quality, and with one foot in, it enters the space of the unreal and the fantastic. Reality—in its strict meaning, as historical and biographic—is restrictive concerning the unreal. But the fictional reality, on the other hand, is porous and lets elements of the fantastic, the unreal, the alogical, and the fictitious/fictional seep through. For Michel, looking seems to invite the untruthful fictional reality:

> I think that I know how to look, if it's something I know, and also that every looking oozes with mendacity, because it's that which expels us furthest outside ourselves, without the least guarantee, whereas to smell, or (but Michel rambles on to himself easily enough, there's no need to let harangue on this way). In any case, if the likely inaccuracy can be seen beforehand, it becomes possible again to look; perhaps it suffices to choose between looking and the reality looked at, to strip things of all their unnecessary clothing. (104)

The homodiegetic narrator does not introduce himself in either an uneventful or unambiguous way. On the contrary, his introduction contains the subtlest play of identity transformations. But, what identities, dear Lord! The position of the main character changes constantly, from an observed object to an observing subject, and vice versa. Both characters within the main character are two narrating and even focalizing positions, which converge toward a single but dissociative character, whose dissociation moves along the lines of the dissociating discourses and experiences of language/literature and photography. The narrator, therefore, has multiple personifications.

The borderline narrator and mobile focalization: relativization of the identity of the narrator and the reflector

Sometimes the narrator appears in the I-form: the homodiegetic "I" of the main character Roberto Michel being both the 'narrating I' and the 'experiencing I', which are both, however, dissociated into the "I" of Michel the writer-translator and the "I" of Michel the photographer; then, it is also the "I" of some heterodiegetic narrator as the implied author in the short story; and ultimately, it is the heterodiegetic and autobiographical "I" of Cortázar (the actual real author) with elements of pseudo-simula-

tion and mimicry. According to Genette's terminology (1980 [1972]), this narrative voice is autodiegetic (of the hero narrator), the focalization is mainly internal, the time of narration is mainly an anachronological analepsis (recounting an earlier event), and there are many shifts in the narrative levels (from extra-diegetic, to intra-diegetic, to meta-diegetic, and also to metalepsis—breaching the impervious boundaries between the narrative levels to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction). In Stanzel's terminology (1986), 'the first-person narrative situation' ('Ich Erzählsituation') is used here, but it varies its perspective from mainly internal to somewhat external, its person from (dissociative) identity to non-identity, and its mode in both narrator and reflector.

At times, the above autodiegetic narrator appears in the first person plural, which is quite understandable due to the dissociative identity and the narrative level jumps of the previous first person singular: for instance, "And now that we're finally going to tell it, let's put things a little bit in order, we'd be walking down the staircase in this house as far as Sunday, November 7, just a month back"; or when he says "(because we were photographers, I am a photographer)" when he describes himself going out to take photographs (101). He mentions the name Roberto Michael only much later when he starts talking about himself in the third person again.

Occasionally, the autodiegitic narrator will also use the second person narration, directly involving the reader (the narratee) as a character or participant in the story: "you'll see when we get to the moment" (101). Once in a while, the autodiegetic narrator shifts throughout all the spectrum of available grammatical persons in one paragraph: he starts with the first person singular, then shifts to first person plural, only to shift to the impersonal third person for a break, and then jumps to second person singular or plural (like he is talking to the readers, but also to himself in 2nd person). The narrator uses "we" and "you" instead of the impersonal "everyone" or "people" here, in a way strategically familiarizing the unusual events and always feeling close to the readers, inviting them in:

> All of a sudden I wonder why I have to tell this […], or why when someone has told us a good joke immediately there starts up something like a tickling in the stomach and we are not at peace until we've gone into the office across the hall and told the joke over again; then it feels good immediately, one is fine, happy, and can get back to work. […], nobody is ashamed of breathing or of putting on his shoes; they're things that you do, and when something weird happens, when you find a spider in your shoe or if you take a breath and feel like a broken window, then you have to tell what's happening, tell it to the guys at the office or to the doctor. Oh, doctor, every time I take a breath . . . Always tell it, always get rid of that tickle in the stomach that bothers you. (101)

Yet, at other times, as we explained in the heterodiegetic narrator section above, the narrator appears in the heterodiegetic third person singular: either from the position of an auctorial narrator, somewhat closer to the 'authorial narrative situation' ('Auktoriale Erzählsituation'), only to ruminate meditatively on philosophic issues; or much more frequently, from the position of a neutral and objective narrator-camera, which is the internal, non-identity, reflector dominated 'figural narrative situation' ('Personale Erzählsituation'), according to the typology of Franz K. Stanzel (1986, 1–8). After seeing all the narrative positions, this last position is very symptomatic of dissociative identity, especially because it is very frequent and because it usually shifts to first-person narration in the middle of the paragraph or sentence. It seems like the previous autodiegetic first-person narrator shifts to talking about himself in the neutral third-person, as if he is someone else, distancing from himself:

> Roberto Michel, French-Chilean, translator and in his spare time an amateur photographer, left number 11, rue Monsieur-le-Prince Sunday, November 7 of the current year […]. He had spent three weeks working on the French version of a treatise […]. But the sun was out also, riding the wind and friend of the cats, so there was nothing that would keep me from taking photos of the Conservatoire and Sainte-Chapelle. It was hardly ten o'clock, and I figured that by eleven the light would be good, the best you can get in the fall … (102)
>
> I recited bits from Apollinaire which always get into my head whenever I pass in front of the hotel de Lauzun (and at that I ought to be remembering the other poet, but Michel is an obstinate beggar), … (102)
>
> Michel had to endure rather particular curses, to hear himself called meddler and imbecile, taking great pains meanwhile to smile and to abate with simple movements of his head such a hard sell. As I was beginning to get tired, I heard the car door slam. The man in the grey hat was there, looking at us. (109–10)

It seems as if the narrator in this short story illustrates Genette's revisited *borderline, mixed, or ambiguous narrator*, who is between homo- and heterodiegesis, exploring the degrees of absence: "Absence also has degrees, and nothing resembles a weak absence more than a dim presence. Or more simply: at what *distance* does one begin to be absent?" (1988 [1983], 105). What is emphasized in an ironic way in "The Devil's Cobweb" is the tendency to introduce distinctions between the narrative positions, and then insisting that those distinctions are canceled. At a higher level, in identifying all the subjects of narration, a category may be introduced according to which everyone and no one is the narrator. It was and was not ("Aixo era y no era")[7]. Latin American magic, illusion, and freedom! Magic Realism! The identity of the narrator is brought in a direct correlation to the manner of narration, the object of narration, the event, the memories of the event, and the subject to whom all of that had happened. One seemingly simple story is devilishly complicated, illegible, and unrecognizable.

Who leaves their apartment on November 7th, on a Sunday morning, in Paris, on Monsieur Le Prince street? Who watches the boy roaming the quai on Saint-Louis island in Paris? Who is 'the blond woman' who would give anything, including her own life, to convince the boy to agree to something? Who is the man with the black mouth and arms raised in a homicidal gesture? Who is the boy? What are the devil's cobwebs, clouds, drool, pigeons, and sparrows that fly in the air? What is the central event of the story: is it the photographer-translator's watching of the woman and the boy; is it the photography; is it the correlation between art and reality; or the demiurgic power of the eye/lens of the camera to trap tiny details of relevance in the memory of the photograph, which may bring to light another event later on, and form a different story within the film of the narrator's memory?

The narrating distinctions in "The Devil's Cobweb" are discreet and variable. The identity of the narrator is subtly nuanced. The multiple and even conflicting nature of the narrator's identity is strictly controlled. The discrete identity of the narrator and of the characters in the short story suggests a discreteness of its

[7] "The usual exordium of the Majorca storytellers", according to Paul Ricœur in "The Rule of the Metaphor" (2003 [1975], 265) (TN).

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meaning. Everything in the story is displaced from its usual position: the narrator, the subjects and objects of observation, the point of view (the lens of the character and the lens of the camera), the storyline, time (the time of narration versus the narrated time, the semantics of the *now*), space, and meaning. All and nothing. Nobody and everybody. Cursed literary and photographic illusion! The deeper the abyss of writing, the deeper the abyss of interpreting! The hermetic nature of literary identities and their hermeneutics are proportionate.

In the beginning, after the introductory autoreferential notes on the necessity for retelling the story to others, in a magical repeating narrative (re-retelling) chain, the narrator says:

> And *now that we're finally going to tell it, let's put things a little bit in order*, we'd be walking down the staircase in this house as far as Sunday, November 7, just a month back. One goes down five floors and stands then in the Sunday in the sun one would not have suspected of Paris in November, with a large appetite to walk around, to see things, to take photos (*because we were photographers, I'm a photographer). I know that the most difficult thing is going to be finding a way to tell it*, and I'm not afraid of repeating myself. It's going to be difficult because *nobody really knows who it is telling it, if I am I or what actually occurred or what I'm seeing (clouds and once in a while a pigeon) or if, simply, I'm telling a truth which is only my truth*, and then is the truth only for my stomach, for this impulse to go running out and to finish up in some manner with, this, whatever it is. (Cortázar 1971, 101; italics by K.K.)

What is important to emphasize here is that, while pondering on the meaning of being a subject ("if I am I or ..."), the narrator points to the confusion of several narrative instances, one of which is particularly unusual. The subject of narration can be: (1) the narrator ("I", but which "I" and what is "I" is another question); (2) the events that had occurred (actually or not) or had somehow been perceived (either the events surrounding the boy, who is the object of seduction, being thrown in the jaws of the 'man in a grey hat'; or 'the blond woman' who dies in his grip; or the clouds/cobwebs that blur the vision and the mind; or the photographer-writer encumbered by the traumatic memories and willing to tell the story?). In the second part of the story, the mobile narrator identifies himself even with the lens of the camera, as a particular type of observer, with a particular point of view for observing the world and for constituting the meaning of the story (which is a delict, an unexpected turn in the story):

> All at once, the order was inverted, they were alive, moving, they were deciding and had decided, they were going to their future; and I on this side, prisoner of another time, in a room on the fifth floor, to not know who they were, that woman, that man, and that boy, to be only the lens of my camera, something fixed, rigid, incapable of intervention. (114)

The perception in the short story is mobile: several narrators, several observers, a constant mixing of the positions of the subject and object of observation, the external focalization becomes internal and vice versa. In the complex and elusive laboratory of identity change, there is not one but more centers of observation. Decentering is so emphasized that it turns into a tendentious entropy and a relativization of identity so as to achieve the effect that everything is possible when nothing is explicitly shown. The mobility of the observer affects the uncertainty about the real event, and makes 'truth' difficult to access. The hermeneutics of literary identities has a deep desire to reveal the truth, even when facing the fact that this may simply be impossible, due to any number of reasons. The search for truth is the challenge in interpreting hermetic literature, so in interpreting the cobwebs of Cortázar's story, as well.

There is something poetic in this short story, since it is grounded in allusion and not in hard and indisputable 'evidence'. The recorded photograph has the power to register and memorize the nuances of identity. But it is only used for its power to create the 'reality effect' (Barthes 1989, 141–148). The photography is merely a pretext for repeating the narration, for multiplying the story, for producing a new story about the same events, a story that is now changed because of the dominance of the camera lens and the logic of the photograph (and not the awareness of the photographer and the translator). This is how we get a story within a story. The image of the world (and of reality/truth) in the story is hermetic, and thereby aestheticized. Such an image is not a simple cutout of reality. Thus, the very substructure to interprete this short story and its numerous identities is made literary (literarized). The very fact that the photographer is also a translator is symptomatic. All of this is confirmed when an incomplete—yet hermeneutically very indicative—excerpt is quoted in the short story from a text by Jose Norberto Allende, which alludes that "the second key resides in the intrinsic nature of difficulties which societies…" (112–113). Another's speech is interrupting the speech of the narrator/implied author/real author as its heteroglossic interpretation that directs the interpretation of the short story and its literary identities. Translation is a type of interpretation. Photography is also interpretation. There is a hermeneutics of photography as well. The hermeneutics of literature and of photography are tightly linked (Barthes 1981), so that equivalence is well used in this short story.

The problem of literary identities is reiteratively articulated in this short story, posing questions about the identity of: the narrator/observer, the story, and the subject/object of observation. Recognizing the identities becomes a key aspect of hermeneutics, especially because the process is mystified by the overflowing of narrative horizons and the ontological inseparability of the voice and point of view. And since hermeneutics deals with the hermetic (dark, atopic, difficult/arduous, figurative, enigmatic, knotty, or labyrinthine) places in the text, the main objectives we need to detect in this interpretation are the (hermetic) identities in the short story: the identities behind the narrator/observer, behind the acts of narration and focalization, and in that context, also behind the characters.

The complex identity of the story: generative and trope-like rediscovery

And there was a delict, and there was a story! Let us see now what "The Devil's Cobweb" is all about. What is its storyline? We should be able to reconstruct the story from the discourse into which it is built. It could be presented in the discourse—as a systasis of pragmas (composition of events/arrangement of incidents), a plot (mythos), a syuzhet (discourse), a narrative—with the help of various constructive techniques, which have been typologized by the Russian Formalists, the narratologists, and many theoreticians: inversely, in a discontinued way, elliptically, by committing some kind of a violent act (a delict, a scandal, a turning point) on its chronological flow, simultaneously, annularly (chiastically), etc. The reconstruction of the story brings back the chronological logic of events and registers the main delict in the story. But when the identities of the narrator, the observer, and the character are drastically shaken, the story is reconstructed with much difficulty. Depending on how many stories a short story can

generate, its interpretation will be just as complex. Any attempt to reconstruct the order of the story gives a different meaning to it, a different composition, and a different identity. The storyline is the pillar of the meaning of the narrative text (short story, novella, or novel). Any change in the storyline is a change in the meaning of the short story due to the shift in the interpretative perspective. The number of stories in the text equals the number of interpretations and the number of worlds.

It is naïve to underestimate the chronological course of the story. The ability to read and reconstruct the story is proportionate to the ability to interpret a fictional text. One can easily interpret fictional texts that allow the reconstruction of only one story. Here, the interpretation is a comment and a reply to only one vision of the world. However, the text that generates more stories and, on top of that, presents all stories as equally un-plausible, is an ambiguous text *par excellence*. The interpretation of such a text has no final versions, only plausible interpretations, which feed the delusion that the interpretation is endless. There is simply no argumentation plausible enough to confirm the priority or superimposition of one meaning/story, but rather, there is enough argumentation to keep in play all the implied meaning systems and stories. The interpretations of such a text are risky, and the text attracts new readings and interpretations. This is the reason why some literary works are a frequent object of interpretation, unlike others. Such is the case with, for example, *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf, *The Trial* and *The Judgement* by Franz Kafka, *In A Grove* by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, *The Purloined Letter* by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, *On Heroes and Tombs* by Ernesto Sabato ...

In "The Devil's Cobweb" by Julio Cortázar, we can differentiate several stories, which are all in mutual (semantic) contact and form an artistic world in the form of a story-within-a-story, a story-beyond-a-story, a world-beyond-a-world, and mise-en-abyme… The very fact that the narrated events are observed through different lenses—the eyes of the translator/writer, the eyes of the photographer, and the lens of the camera itself—gives the possibility for different interpretations of the story. The identity of the story is not mechanical but, rather, enigmatically multiplied. In this short story, there is an introductory story that follows a certain logical order of events. But, there are other less-stereotypical stories—some begotten by the imagination of the photographer-narrator, some by the magnified photograph, and some by the 'film' that develops in the mind of the narrator, but all as a form of a literarized memory—which, altogether, comprise the hermeticity of the narrative of "The Devil's Cobweb". It is this hermeticity of this short story that is the object of study in this essay. And it is the hermeticity of the text, and not the text itself, that is the object of study of literary hermeneutics.

Let us now reconstruct all the stories we can find in this short story.

The first story: the code of narration

Roberto Michel, a photographer and translator, on a Sunday morning, on November 7th, in Paris, leaves his apartment and heads for the Seine, along the quai d'Anjou and the quai de Bourbon on the Isle Saint-Louis, with the intention to wander around and take some photographs in the shimmering autumnal sun. He reaches the end of the isle and sits on the parapet by the small square. He observes, waits, and enjoys himself. Then he notices an adult, petite, and slim blonde woman and an adolescent boy standing on the quai. The woman is trying to convince the boy of something important. He supposes she is offering him his first sexual experience and imagines the entire situation according to stereotypical convictions. He positions the camera to capture them in an embrace, while he notices the look of confusion and curiosity on the face of the boy. The blonde woman tells him 'a silent story', trying hard to convince him of something that is terribly important (to her!). (Stories convince, change one's mind, stories are powerful!). At that moment, the photographer notices a car parked by, in which an adult man, with a grey hat on his head, is "reading a paper, or asleep […] and would, like me, feel that malicious sensation of waiting for everything to happen" (Cortázar 1971, 107). In an instant, the photographer decides to capture the couple, the camera clicks and he takes the photo. But they all notice him. The woman argues saying he has no right to be taking a photograph of them. She wants the film. The boy escapes as quickly as he can, "disappearing like a gossamer filament of angel-spit in the morning air", but these filaments "are also called devil-spit" (109). The man, fainting indifference thus far, exits the car, with the hat on his head and the paper in his hands, pale, with a bloodless face, and heads towards them. Michel escapes without giving them the film and returns home.

The story within the first story: the inaudible story

Here we can find another sub-story: the inaudible story the blonde woman tells the boy confidentially, quietly, whispering in his ear. This story is not heard in the text and thus remains in the realm of assumptions. Everyone can complete it according to their finding, based on the principle of predictability. Stereotypes are once-established delusions, which generate a huge number of new individual and collective delusions in the history of humankind! This story deals with the stereotype of seduction. Seduction is described as "a cruel game, the desire to desire without satisfaction, to excite herself for someone else…" (108). This voiceless story has a rhetorical purpose to convince the boy to do something that terrifies him, judging by the descriptions of his reactions and the expression on his face. She is supposed to motivate the boy to accept the game known as 'initiation into adolescence'. Perhaps this is so. But perhaps the game around 'the hurt innocence' is crueler than it would appear.

The dramaturgy of the world is filled with such seemingly-stereotypical stories, based around inherited or borrowed delusions that turn the world into a torture chamber, a space of trauma. Everyone hopes that they will not be the victim of a stereotype, that stereotypes are for others, and then, everyone becomes a victim of uncritically accepted stereotypes. Formally, this pantomime-story is only known to the two characters, the woman and the boy. All others can only assume what it is, based on their knowledge of the stereotype. In literature, however, it is the redundant places, such as stereotypes, that cause a loud hermeneutic noise. Silence is an enigma. Silence is a hermetic place that must be interpreted. Later on, precisely this absent story will provide a new key for interpreting the story.

The second story: the code of the photograph

A part of the first story is repeated here: on a Sunday morning (November 7th), Michel (him, me, we) goes out to walk along the quai of Seine and to take some photographs. He notices a boy and a blonde woman in an intimate conversation. He frames up his shot with them (together with everything else that, at that moment,

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flies before them or surrounds them), and takes the photo. When she notices this, the woman asks Michel for the film. The boy runs away as fast as he can. A man in a grey hat comes out of a black car, parked by close to the quai. Michel does not give them the film. He runs home.

So far, the storyline is the same. Several days later, Michel, in his atelier on the fifth floor, develops the film and looks at the photograph he took at the Seine quai. Then he enlarges it several times, like a poster, and after not being able to look away from it for days, the events start replaying in his head in several different interpretations, like movies on a screen. Here begins the second part of the storyline that includes a new story. This story is reconstructed with the help of the magnification of the photograph and it is a new vision of the same event. Now Michel observes the events from the position of the camera lens at the moment the photograph was taken. He looks at the photograph for a long time. He looks at it in a different way, through the prism of photography, and thus he creates a new story. He now realizes that—most probably—the blonde woman's presence is only "vicarious" (113), she was seducing the boy for someone else, not her. That someone else is the man in the grey hat, the man who fainted indifference by reading a newspaper in the car nearby, so that is why he angrily got involved after the boy ran away.

This other 'reality' is also reflected in the eyes of the boy, but Michel only notices this in the enlarged photograph. The silhouette of the hidden man, "the real boss" of the situation (113), is present in the eyes of the boy: the direction toward which he is looking back. Now he realizes that the woman is only supposed to trick the boy into voluntarily accepting to be a victim, she was sent "in the vanguard to bring the prisoners manacled with flowers" (114). The narrator Michel had already described her seduction before as: "The woman was getting on with the job of handcuffing the boy smoothly, stripping from him what was left of his freedom a hair at a time, in an incredibly slow and delicious torture" (108).

We then realize (as readers) that, even in the first story, the narrator Michel—who is generally narrating analeptically, but allows for some foreboding prolepsis from time to time, since he knows what will happen later on—had made many meaningful remarks toward this interpretation, already alluring the readers toward the same hints and conjectures. Like when the man in a grey hat shows his face for the first time, angry at Michel for taking the photograph and "carrying the paper he had been pretending to read": "It was only at that point that I realized he was playing a part in the comedy." (110). Or when the narrator says of the blonde woman that "she was dominating him toward some end impossible to understand if you do not imagine it as a cruel game, the desire to desire without satisfaction, to excite herself for someone else, someone who in no way could be that kid" (108).

Moreover, in the context of the new discovery, something Michel saw previously becomes much more important than he (and we, as readers) could have realized at the time. When he was running away that day, Michel had turned around after a certain distance, and had seen the man and the woman once again, seemingly arguing by the stone fence of the quai: "They were not moving, but the man had dropped his newspaper; it seemed to me that the woman, her back to the parapet, ran her hands over the stone with the classical and absurd gesture of someone pursued looking for a way out" (110). These lines were given in the first story of the narrator but only as a lead that could make sense after the second story is revealed. As readers, we had not enough information to place our finger on it at the time of first reading.

Similarly, Michel now remembers "the dark splotches on the railing" (111) that he did not pay attention to when he was there, but are now enlarged in the blown-up photograph on the wall (i.e. being there prior to the events that followed). He thought that he had saved the boy, but now he interprets that the woman remained in danger. He cannot help her and is overtaken by a feeling of guilt. He thinks that he saw her trying to escape and save herself, but absurdly and in vain. It seems as though he is going through some intense emotions, something that resembles a fit, a stroke, a passing out, or even dying. At that very moment of (maybe) passing away into the other world Michel recalls "the dark splotches" again: "a place where the railing was tarnished emerged from the frame" (114). He seems to interpret them as blood stains from repeated strikes that the woman has received by the man in the grey hat after any failed mission. (And the readers may be encouraged to interpret them connected to all other allusions, as the devil's stains, the stains over meaning, the clouds before the camera lens, the slime in the eyes...) Michel thinks that the evidence of this 'reality' is imprinted on the photograph:

> And what I had imagined earlier was much less horrible than the reality, that woman, who was not there by herself, she was not caressing or propositioning or encouraging for her own pleasure, to lead the anger away with his tousled hair and play the tease with his terror and his eager grace. The real boss was waiting there, smiling petulantly… (113)

A story based on words and literature is closer to lies/fiction, while a story based on a photograph is closer (though, not equal) to truth. So, the 'truth' that is presented in the second reconstruction of the event is gruesome. Instead of the story of seduction of an innocent boy by an adult woman, professional at what she does, one gets the story of mediation in enticing a boy for a pedophile, who was in the background of the (real) scene on Seine's quai. And the story does not end here, even though the narrator leads us to believe that this is what the semantic delict (the noise, the hermeticity) comprises of. This, however, is just the pretext to perform another shift in the narrative situation. The man in the grey hat does not get to the object of his desire (the boy), so his unfulfilled desire instigates an even more gruesome reaction: the mediator who does not get the deal done must be punished. The mediator is the real victim. From a bird of prey, the blonde woman turns into a carcass, from a hunter into prey.

Therefore, the man in a grey hat, who started out as a character in the background of the story, zooms up and comes to the forefront of the story. He is blown-up so big that he covers everything up. Only he remains—on the photo, in the narrator's memory. The narrator himself (Michel) seems to be in danger of becoming the second victim or casualty. From a hero who saves the boy, he becomes a weakling destined to fail and even die. From being on the opinion that "taking that photo had been a good act", since "Michel is something of a puritan at times, he believes that one should not seduce someone from a position of strength", the narrator Michel (proleptically) anticipates in the very next paragraph that he may be a victim of a fatal act: "Well, it wasn't because of the good act that I looked at it between paragraphs while I was working. At that moment I didn't know the reason, the reason I had tacked the enlargement onto the wall; maybe all fatal acts happen that way, and that is the condition of their fulfillment" (112). But, still, there is no fixed and true perception. Without a clear evidence in the photography, it may all be an illusion, a false impression, a wrong memory, a Shadow.

We may conclude that the second story happens in a different place and time. It is dislocated from the quai to the room, from reality to the world of art, the world of the photograph. This second story fills in the gaps and corrects the mistakes of the first

story. It is projected through a different, more experienced perspective. So, this story is presented as a corrective one. It disrupts the order of the first story. It changes the meaning. It changes the worlds. It is like a trope. The sign remains the same, what is changed is the constellation and the meaning. The same characters are at the same place and time, with the same gestures, but with a completely different semantics, a completely different view of the world, a completely different ethical system of values.

The third story: the film code of memory

The third story suggests an analogy between the code of motion pictures (movies/films) and the code of memory. It is decoded with the help of the photograph set into motion like a movie by his mind (memory and imagination combined). This is instigated by the magnification of the photograph and its tacking onto the wall, which reminds Michel of a movie screen projection: "in the end an enlargement of 32 x 28 looks like a movie screen, where, on the tip of the island, a woman is speaking with a boy and a tree is shaking its dry leaves over their heads" (112). He begins seeing things that are not there, the figures in the photograph start moving: "I had just translated: „In that case, the second key resides in the intrinsic nature of difficulties which societies . . ." — when I saw the woman's hand beginning to stir slowly, finger by finger" (112–3). He is replaying in his mind the events that took place when he was taking the photograph, allowing them to take charge of the direction, as if he was watching a movie projection, imaginatively directed by his subconscious. Since he is a photographer, he clearly sees this movie's frames as if they were shot by his camera. He is reliving the entire experience, placing himself behind the lens of his camera.

Three subsequent movies take place in front of his eyes in this way. The first subconscious movie is when he sees the initial scene with the three participants acting out their inverted roles, and thus discovers the man in a grey hat is the "real boss"/"true master", the blonde woman is his vicarious slave, and the boy is her prisoner, so entangled in her slimy web that he has already given up: "The kid had ducked his head like boxers do when they've done all they can and are waiting for the final blow to fall" (113). The narrator relays to us the first part of the second story while retelling this first movie.

But then, Michel continues to see them play out the second subconscious movie about what would have happened if he hadn't interfered, as if his intervention was somehow irrelevant and their plot was destined to be fulfilled: "I had to accept the fact that he was going to say yes, that the proposition carried money with it or a gimmick" (114). The three of them seem to be "mocking him", "taking their revenge" on him, "demonstrating clearly what was going to happen" (114). The order gets "inverted", they are "alive", "moving", and "deciding" on "their future", while he is stuck to be "an impotent eye", a "prisoner of another time, in a room on the fifth floor, [...], to be only the lens of my camera, something fixed, rigid, incapable of intervention" (114). He feels that this time he "could do absolutely nothing" and he "couldn't yell for him to run, or even open the road to him again with a new photo, a small and almost meek intervention which would ruin the framework of drool and perfume" (114). And even though he feels this way, he still manages to scream and help the boy escape once again: "For the second time he'd escaped them, for the second time I was helping him to escape, returning him to his precarious paradise" (114). He seems to compare the boy to a free bird at that moment: "at that instant I happened to see something like a large bird outside the focus that was flying in a single swoop in front of the picture, and I leaned up against the wall of my room and was happy because the boy had just managed to escape, I saw him running off, in focus again, sprinting with his hair flying in the wind, learning finally to fly across the island, to arrive at the footbridge, return to the city" (115).

And then, the third subconscious movie starts rolling when he suddenly has the dark epiphany that, after the boy escapes, now the blonde woman is in actual life-threatening danger, by which the narrator relays the second part of his second story. He sees the follow-up scene by the railing that he had not seen, the angered man in a grey hat lifting his hands to hit the woman, but this time possibly killing her with the blow. Michel imagines him raising his hands, and then he could not look anymore:

> Of the woman you could see just maybe a shoulder and a bit of the hair, brutally cut off by the frame of the picture; but the man was directly center, his mouth half open, you could see a shaking black tongue, and he lifted his hands slowly, bringing them into the foreground, an instant still in perfect focus, and then all of him a lump that blotted out the island, the tree, and I shut my eyes, I didn't want to see anymore, and I covered my face and broke into tears like an idiot. (115)

This movie ends with us (the readers) realizing that the narrator is so shaken by these subconscious movies that his health or life may be in danger. So he may have become the next victim caught in the "Devil's Cobweb". But this last discovery makes a new jump in the meaning of the story, is it just imaginary guilt that troubles the narrator or is it some personal secret trauma that he is reliving and projecting on the characters? The narrator Michel proleptically anticipates this third story, as well: with the thunderhead cloud with sharp edges that symbolically goes by in the sky in his narrator's interruptions (111), or when he suddenly describes the trembling tree leaves that he chose to frame up in the photograph as "almost-furtive" (almost secretive and nervous, because of guilt or fear of trouble) (112).

This story revisits the events of the first two stories one more time. This story is a triple reconstruction—of reality, the narrated reality, and the photographed reality. It is not a common language nor a simple narrative. It is a revision story, an interpretation story, a metanarration story, and even a subconscious story. The subconscious is a powerful source of information. The subconsciousness is a rather autonomous form of memory, which may revalue all other forms and traces of memory. This film story is semantically more shocking and aesthetically more intensive because it grotesquely opposes the established order of interpreting the events, both by the first and the second stereotype. This is a conflicting story. The meaning is shifted to a symbolic plane, which paradoxically has the power to return the subject to the 'real' reality.

When the identity of the narrator is metafictionally problematized in the initial frame of the short story, it is conspired that the real narrator is dead: "I who am dead (and I'm alive, I'm not trying to fool anybody, you'll see when we get to the moment" (100). Later, as the break-down begins, it is said that he cannot finish the 'translation' from Spanish to French (which, by the way, may hide one of the keys to the interpretation): "There was nothing left of me, a phrase in French which I would never have to finish, a typewriter on the floor, a chair that squeaked and shook, fog" (113). In the concluding frame of the short story, it is again symptomatically conspired that the narrator belongs to a different time, that he has no power to change reality, that he remains stunned before the man in the grey hat "with the black holes he had in place of eyes" (114), and that there is a huge semantic gap (delict) between the first representation of reality and this one here and now, after

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the film of memory (the story about life) has been running back-and-forth for some time:

> Now there's a big white cloud, as on all these days, all this untellable time. What remains to be said is always a cloud, two clouds, or long hours of a sky perfectly clear, a very clear, clear rectangle tacked up with pins on the wall of my room. (115)

Is the narrator alluding to a symbolic death in the form of numbness after an emotional break-down, or to the implied or the real author who will one day be dead when the story is read, and that there is a projection of the author in the narrator?

> So, I have to write. One of us all has to write, if this is going to get told. Better that it be me who am dead, for I'm less compromised than the rest; I who see only the clouds and… (100)

The third story is autobiographical and this autobiographical dimension is discrete, barely noticeable. As a matter of fact, this story is not certain, just as the identity of the narrator or the boy are not certain. If there were elements to draw an analogy between the narrator and the character of the boy, then one might be able to claim with greater certainty that the story includes autobiographical elements, as well. The third story integrates the first two stories, but in this case, it does not refer to an unknown boy but, rather, the narrator himself, one might say even the author, if the narrator and the author (or, at least, the implied author) can be connected. This time, the boy becomes the victim of the large man in a grey hat, then he becomes neither alive nor dead, more dead than alive, then he tries to forget, and turns his life into an attempt to forget, in dumb silence, until one day, after many years, with the help of a similar event, sight, photography, or film, he unlocks the closed door of trauma, and tells it in an encoded story. As he does, crying like an idiot, he remains speechless again. Oblivion again. A translation unfinished. A sentence stopped half way. A lost breath. A life taken. Again, clouds that cover everything, and some unstoppable drops of rain that fall over the photograph, "weeping reversed" (115), a sense of grief, loneliness, and otherworldliness.

But this autobiographical interpretation allows for yet another 'turn of the screw', which adds one more symbolic layer to it. Let's reiterate the translated sentence in the middle of which the narrator's break-down starts happening: „In that case, the second key resides in the intrinsic nature of difficulties which societies . . ." (112–3). For the sake of argument, we may consider this sentence to actually be some kind of a second key to the interpretation of the short story (since it is, by no means, a coincidence that the author has chosen that precise fragment). If the personal autobiographic trauma is some kind of a first layer, couldn't the intrinsic nature of social trauma be the second layer implied here? Especially considering Cortázar's critical attitude toward the forceful, criminal, or corrupt ways the official politics led in Latin America was dealing with their deep-set social problems, and his open support for socialist and Marxist politics and revolutions (Cortázar 1973). And especially considering Cortázar's short story "Apocalypse at Solentiname", in which he is mentioning "Blow-Up" (Cortázar 2012; Eller 2017a). We couldn't find any information on the quoted "treatise on challenges and appeals by José Norberto Allende, professor at the University of Santiago" (102) to provide some context around the quoted work or author, so we'll consider only the meaning of the quoted fragment. It seems that maybe the whole narrated story is merely a metaphor for a troubled society, and the author's parallel with the narrator Michel is their shared feeling of impotence, their inability to do anything to help a difficult social situation. The man in a grey hat and his enslaved blonde woman may symbolize social decay of any kind, which is led by morally degraded and psychologically impaired individuals, who target and subdue inexperienced youngsters by traumatizing them for life and weaving relentlessly their devil's spiderweb that continues for generations in a circulus vituosus. They leave many victims behind, alive and dead corpses alike. Social trauma leaves intrinsic psychological scars on individuals. All who get touched cannot undo the damage; the author, the narrator, the characters, and the reader included. This interpretation may imply countless victims of these Devil's spiderwebs who have fulfilled similar roles to these characters.

The identity of the story and the semantic delict

Without this multifaceted make-up of the story, the discourse of "The Devil's Cobweb" would be bordering banality. This way, it legitimizes itself as enigmatic and literarized. A banal and monosemic discourse inspires neither the need nor the desire for interpretation. Understanding within it happens automatically. The aestheticized discourse, however, cannot be interpreted automatically. It commits a semantic delict, and there are obstacles to understanding it. The aestheticized discourse of a short story has multiple reasons to desire interpretation and to inspire different kinds of interpretation. It inspires a yearning for interpretation. This is why interpretation necessarily surpasses the circle between story and discourse toward an open literary and cultural context, where it gains meaning. This is the reason why initial interpretations end up being possible and probable but not accurate and satisfactory. This is why interpretation changes multiple times, going from one to another story, from one to another discourse/medium, from one to another plane of interpretation. Without any unforeseeable turns in the sequence of events, there would be no 'story' that would represent the axis of the short story. All would already be seen, semantically empty, philosophically meaningless, ethically indifferent, and aesthetically ineffective.

In essence, the 'threshold of expectation'—which is a category linked to the reader, introduced with the theory and aesthetics of reception by Hans R. Jauss (1982), also actualized by Hans G. Gadamer (1991) and his theory of 'fusion of horizons'—has been regarded as an aesthetically-poetic parameter ever since antiquity. The effect of surprise is considered a constitutive poetic principle, beginning with Aristotle, and all the way up to the Russian Formalists and Semiotics (making form and meaning difficult, estrangement, defamiliarization, de-automatization, prolonging/slowing up perception). The phenomenon of the story is a phenomenon of creating a story-telling turn/delict with semantic implications. Hence, these semantic turns may be founded on some of the basic rhetoric principles: proximity, contact, or contiguity (metonymy, paronomasias, etc.); contrast (irony, satire, antithesis); contradiction (oxymoron, paradox, grotesque); or hybridization of sensory perceptions (synesthesia).

Interpretation follows the logic of decoding the places where the conventional flow of narration is broken. The short story consists of delicts, noises, knots, twists, and obstacles for the interpreter to decode. If the literary text has the arche-structure of a trope, it is perceived on at least two levels, the literal (grammatical) and the figurative (aestheticized, literary) level. What is presented as a 'delict' on the grammatical and linguistic level is reconstituted as a logical semantic configuration of a higher type on the poetic level. Each new meaning is a revision and not a discontinuation of a previous meaning. In this process of semantic revisions, what is created is a complex system of meanings, a text full of nuances, a literary world full of enigmas and mysteries.

The semantic knots in fictional texts are a delict, a trespassing of established aesthetic, ethical, cultural, and semantic conventions and values. But, if there were no semantic knots in a text, there would be no story. Ethical, narrative, mythical, aesthetic, and cultural delicts generate the story. Interpretation is in search of the literary identities that are hidden behind the semantic delicts. The semantic delict has the power to cause a 'change of government' so-to-speak, to dethrone a stereotypical, semantically empty place in the text, and to cause estrangement and shock. The semantic delict scandalizes the reader. Shocked, the interpreter must ask himself, what is this now, what does the writer want to say, or to have a laugh sometimes, to feel that something is upset in his stomach, that darkness falls before his eyes, that his mind is holding out against accepting something implied as 'truth', so that he must cross the threshold of the pre-verbal and articulate it into language. Interpretation is an entry into language and a crossing point from the precognitive into the cognitive sphere. Interpretation is a necessary precondition for becoming human.

In "The Devil's Cobweb" nothing is said unequivocally. The story changes the narrative levels constantly (narratively, semantically, symbolically, discursively). As a result, all the following are mobile: the story, the narrator, the lens, the observer, the code of perception, and the description of reality. The multiplications make the discourse of the short story more complex. The initial identities are brought into question. The literary identities are constituted in a process of constant revisions. The interpretation of the short story is an interpretation of destabilized and complex identities. As a result, the interpretation of this kind of texts with complex literary identities is a risky undertaking. But revealing its identities brings a particular pleasure, which we shall call 'hermeneutic pleasure'. Faced with "the limits of translatability of literary texts, which occur in the most varied nuances" (Gadamer 1991, 218), the interpretative concept will either be confirmed, betrayed, or nourished to infinity.

Hermeneutic keys

The narrator of "The Devil's Cobweb" is telling his troubling story slowly: "We're going to tell it slowly" (Cortázar 1971, 102). By this, he seems to be signaling the readers to also interpret slowly, to take nothing for granted, not to rush to conclusions, and not to give "sharp responses"—this last thing being a gift "the French have been given", he remarks ironically (112). As readers, we are advised to move slowly and carefully through the semantic jungle of the short story. There is a key to everything, it just needs to be found. There is a first key. But there is also a second key. Then, there are more other keys. There are many keys to an interpretation. So if you, as readers, follow the example of what the narrator does in this short story, you would be encouraged to go back, look at everything again, magnify the image if you have to, change the medium, project a movie, quote the text of others you are translating or have read, remember, find all the details that take part in locking the story and its meaning, find all the keys you can, and recreate the story multiple times if you have to.

The author of "The Devil's Cobweb" gives multiple metatextual, paratextual, and other autoreferential instructions and, from the position of a narrator, he warns the readers to come back again to what they have already read, to look for a second key of interpretation, and not to forget that the answer lies in the narration itself, since the narrator says that the most difficult thing was "finding a way to tell it" (101). The readers find themselves in a situation where they should reconstruct the order in the story by themselves, since this order is consciously disrupted by the author and the narrator, but also by the very pragma (the things done, the facts, the events) as the object of narration. Then, they understand right away—since it is accentuated from the very beginning in the discourse of the narrator and in his frequent narrator's comments in brackets—that they should be careful of the semantic and narrative distinctions in the narrator's use of personal pronouns (I, you, he, we, her), as well as of the adverbs of time and place, which may signify very different things depending on the context (for instance, "here" and "now" may mean on the quai, on November 7th, but also at home, in the atelier, several days later). The narrator clearly states that he is doubtful of what the "I" is, and he even lashes out at the word "now" at one moment, while he is retelling what happened: "Right now (what a word, now, what a dumb lie) I was able to sit quietly on the railing..." (103).

The narrator's comments in brackets are very symptomatic to the interpreter of the short story. One gets the impression that the readers are led back and forth in the story on purpose, with the intention of drawing them into the hermetic labyrinth of interpretation and ambiguous meaning. In "The Devil's Cobweb", nothing is as it seems at first (inert) glance. Every statement is used both in its narrow context of the short story, but also in a broader context, concerning reality, life, literature, photography, art, etc. For example, the narrator and main character Michel has definite flâneur characteristics, he strolls around Paris and loves to recite poems and tell stories, also to ramble on to himself and to chew over and over already told stories in a stream of consciousness manner, then he likes to imagine people's stories and make things up about them, and by all this, he tends to end up "meddling" in other people's business (112) and poking his "nose in to upset an established order" (113). So, he describes himself as "guilty of making literature", which is defined as "indulging in fabricated unrealities" and "to imagine exceptions to the rule, individuals outside the species, not-always-repugnant monsters", "nothing pleases him more" (108–9). Such is the blonde woman who "invited speculation, perhaps giving clues enough for the fantasy to hit the bullseye" (109). Michel closes his eyes to sense with his inner eye and his imagination what the biographies of the people he is observing might be: "Closing my eyes, if I did in fact close my eyes, I set the scene…" (108).

But then, Michel is also an amateur photographer and he would like to photograph her. Later on, he imagines motion pictures with her being projected on the wall where he tacked the enlarged photo. Now, the change of the artistic medium seems to play a certain role here that we haven't looked into, so in the following segment, we will observe how the author uses other hermeneutic keys from several artistic media to his literary and interpretative advantage. This multimedia artistic dialogue of interpretations is an introduction to cultural hermeneutics. Moreover, it is our belief that the dialogue of interpretations between literature, photography, and film is necessary in building the ethics and the culture of interpretation in the world, and thus in the humanization of the world.

The hermeneutics of photography

In the autoreferential discourse-within-discourse of the narrator of this short story, a remarkable account on the poetics of photography has been made. It is no accident, since reportedly, Cortázar wrote "Las babas del diablo" based upon a true story the Chillean photographer Sergio Larraín told him (Sheeran 2018). The narrator finds photography to be very important in life, especially to combat nothingness, boredom, "level-zero" (as translated

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by Blackburn), or *"combatir la nada"* in Cortázar's original:

> One of the many ways of contesting level-zero, and one of the best, is to take photographs, an activity in which one should start becoming an adept very early in life, teach it to children since it requires discipline, aesthetic education, a good eye and steady fingers. I'm not talking about waylaying the lie like any old reporter, snapping the stupid silhouette of the VIP leaving number 10 Downing Street, but in all ways when one is walking about with a camera, one has almost a duty to be attentive, to not lose that abrupt and happy rebound of sun's rays off an old stone, or the pigtails-flying run of a small girl going home with a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk. (102–3)

Many opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of photography as an art are stated. For instance, the narrator Michel claims that a photograph is best seen when looking at it face to face, when "the eyes reproduce exactly the position and the vision of the lens" at the very moment the photograph was taken (111). The main character accidentally positions himself "exactly at the point of view of the lens" when he looks at the enlarged photograph, and the narrator comments that it is "the best way to appreciate a photo" (111).

The enlargement of the photograph itself is considered by the narrator a "fatal act" (112), which shows him something he would not have noticed otherwise—other fatal acts. At one point, the photograph is even a form of vengeance. It is seemingly frozen and dead, but at a given moment, it may have the power to bring the memory of the past to life, to connect the lost thread, to untangle the knot, and to find the way out of the labyrinth of assumptions and doubts: "My strength had been a photograph, that, there, where they were taking their revenge on me, demonstrating clearly what was going to happen" (114).

Also, reality behaves differently in a photograph than in literature. There is always a surplus of reality on the photograph, which revalues the image of reality, since there is a discrepancy between the events and objects that are photographed, the photographer, and the camera lens. This is perhaps due to the fact that there is a difference in the range, the perception, and the eye, as well as in time and space, resulting in the photograph remembering more and differently than the photographer. The narrator explains that the camera insidiously imposes ways of looking upon the world that are inherently different than his own personal ways of seeing the world, even different than the way his photographer persona sees the world through the technical distractions of the photographic medium:

> Michel knew that the photographer always worked as a permutation of his personal ways of seeing the world, as other than the camera insidiously imposed upon it […], but he lacked no confidence in himself, knowing that he had only to go out without the Contax to recover the keynote of distraction, the sight without a frame around it, light without the diaphragm aperture or 1/250 sec. (103)

The photograph seems to impose some kind of a counting mechanical aura around the human experience, analogue to what the clock is in relation to the passing of time. So the narrator feels free to enjoy the timeless moment when he is not looking through this 'devilish' device, and here lies another clue to the layers of meaning around the notion of the devil:

> Right now (what a word, *now,* what a dumb lie) I was able to sit quietly on the railing overlooking the river watching the red and black motorboats passing below without it occuring to me to think photographically of the scenes, nothing more than letting myself go in the letting go of objects, running immobile in the stream of time. And then the wind was not blowing. (103)

But a photograph lies less than literature, for it is "a frozen memory" in which "nothing is missing, not even, and especially, nothingness, the true solidifier of the scene" (111). The photograph encompasses in its frame even that which the human eye cannot see. Yet, the photograph is still just a form of looking, and it may still lie, it may change reality, as well: "every looking oozes with mendacity, because it's that which expels us furthest outside ourselves, without the least guarantee" and "perhaps it suffices to choose between looking and the reality looked at, to strip things of all their unnecessary clothing" (104).

The photograph may interfere in the lives of others, but it may be "meddling" or it may sometimes be "a good act" (112)—in this case, preventing the abuse of the boy and helping him save himself: "The important thing, the really important thing was having helped the kid to escape in time (this in case my theorizing was correct, which was not sufficiently proven, but the running away itself seemed to show it so). […] In the last analysis, taking that photo had been a good act." (112). But, even those good acts may not entirely be good, for they may transform (as a result, or on a different level) into "fatal acts" (112), which, by saving the perfect victim, actually cause another, unplanned "disaster", "abusive act" (114), or a gruesome game that "was played out" (115). The road to hell is paved with good intentions. A victim is unavoidable: if not the boy, then the woman! And who was the boy? It is him, it is it, and me, and we… "This biography was of the boy and of any boy whatsoever" (106).

Photography is some kind of keynote (a prevailing tone, a central theme) for understanding the meaning of this short story. It is tuned in the keynote of photography as a metaphor of the human's in/ability to perceive and interpret reality. The photograph is not just a form of memory but also another form of interpretation, which is different from the literary and the cinematic. It can aid the hermeneutics of literary texts. It has its own code that adds an extra impulse to recognize and understand the code of a literary text or an event in reality. Similarly to literature, it is a laboratory for creating stories. It is a paradigm of the creation of the world, and for creating worlds.

The hermeneutics of intertextuality and intermediality

The short story "The Devil's Cobweb" can also be interpreted in relation to the short story "Apocalypse at Solentiname", published seventeen years later by Cortázar (2012 [1976]). Both short stories use and problematize the relationship between short stories, photography, and movies: both show what narration looks like in a short story, in photography, and in a movie. The continued interest of the author in these intermedial relations is no coincidence since Cortázar's short story "Las babas del diablo"/"The Devil's Cobweb" provoked Michelangelo Antonioni to make the movie "Blow-Up"—in a way, in response to Cortázar's short story—but later, the movie inspired Cortázar to write this new short story, "Apocalypse at Soletiname", in response to Antonioni's movie "Blow-Up".

This is how Antonioni describes his dialogical response to Cortázar's short story: "The idea […] came to me while reading a short story by Julio Cortázar. I was not so much interested in the events as in the technical aspects of photography. I discarded the plot and wrote a new one in which the equipment itself assumed a different weight and significance." (Peavler 1979, 887). The Russian-Estonian semiotician Yuri Lotman was among the first to interpret this movie as a "meta-semiotic text", where cinema

begins "to be aware of itself as a sign system and to consciously make use of this property" (1976, 104). We are not going to interpret Antonioni's movie here, but we are going to mention that, although there are numerous analyses of the ways Antonioni diverges from Cortázar's short story in his film adaptation (for which Cortázar gave his full approval), an increasing number of critics find the intertextual and intermedial ways in which both authors connect on a deeper level.

For instance, literary critic Terry J. Peavler shows that "many of the difficulties in interpretation are due to a priori assumptions of readers and viewers alike and that the similarities between the film and the story are far greater than has been supposed" (2020 [1979]). Comparativist Marvin D'Lugo argues that "the story and film reveal a remarkable consistency in their treatment of the aesthetic crisis of perception and its ensuing psychological complications" (1975). Hermeneutic scholar Walter Geerts finds that "Antonioni hermeneutically meets Cortázar's short story in the well-orchestrated impression of substantiality dissolving into its opposite" and that "adaptation in this case operates on a 'deep' level, that of the ramified web of connected texts, a level where fundamental questions are raised about mimesis, particularly concerning the fragile condition and ephemeral existence" (2017). Thomas Beltzer, a cinephilic author, thinks that Cortázar "is suggesting with the title that the camera is a drooling devil—a lustful voyeur that is capable only of lifeless illusion and is ultimately impotent" (2005). For him, "both film and story are meditations on aesthetics and morality": "Cortázar and Antonioni are saying that our media is inherently alienating and dehumanizing. The camera has turned us into passive voyeurs, programmable for predictable responses, ultimately helpless and even inhumanly dead. These are dark thoughts indeed, but the work of Cortázar and Antonioni is not exactly known for its optimism." (2005). More recently, Will Hair, another cinephilic author, explains how "the ambiguous nature of reality proves to be both Antonioni and Cortázar's primary concern", how the ambiguous representations of reality are "conveyed through content and style" in both media, and how "central to the meaning of both is the role of technology and artistic form in the construction of realities" (2022).

Cortázar himself seems to feel similar to these authors when he sums up his collaboration with Antonioni in an interview:

> He had recently happened to buy an Italian translation of my stories, and had found in "Las babas del diablo" an idea that had been pursuing him for years; an invitation followed for me to meet him in Rome. We had a frank conversation there; the central idea of my story interested Antonioni, but its fantastic developments left him cold (also he had not fully understood the end), and he wanted to make his own film, make another invasion of the realm that was natural to him. I realized that the result would be the work of a great cinematographer but that I should have very little hand in the adaption and dialogue, although Antonioni was courteous enough to suggest a collaboration in the actual filming; so I let him have the story, […] I left Antonioni absolutely free to depart from my story and follow his own ghosts: in his search for them he met with some of mine, because my stories are more contagious than they may seem to be […] I went on to the first performance of the film in Europe: on a wet afternoon in Amsterdam, I bought my ticket like any of the Dutch who had gathered to see it, and there came a moment, during the rustle of foliage as the camera raised toward the sky above the park and focused on the trembling leaves, when I had the feeling that Antonioni was winking at me, and that we were meeting above or below our differences. (Cortázar 1973, 292–3).

Antonioni's movie and all the controversial publicity around it motivated Cortázar to write "Apocalypse at Soletiname" on a similar subject but with a totally different storyline. This new short story widens the context in a political sense, as it directly evokes situations with a political background from Latin America: the story and the memory of military dictatorships. As one critic explains, this new short story "directly engages with a historic period of time leading up to the FSLN overthrow of the Nicaraguan government during the Revolution in 1979", and it becomes a part of Cortázar's "revolutionary literary aesthetic" (Eller 2017b). Here, he puts himself as the main character and narrator: the writer Cortázar travels to a press conference in Nicaragua, and visits the Solentiname community established on one of the islands in Lake Nicaragua by his poet friend Ernesto Cardenal. The fictional Cortázar takes photographs of the naive paintings he liked there, which were filled with natural landscapes and communal life, but when he comes back to Paris and projects the negative on a slide-projector, what he sees projected on the wall are prophetic images of political violence committed on the people all over Latin America (military attacks on women and children, mass graves, people shot, exploded, and tortured).

Almost the entire storyline—except for the fantastic ending—is based on a real-life event, a real press conference, and a visit to the Solentiname community in Nicaragua that happened to Cortázar previously. He explains this in one of his lectures given at Berkeley in 1980: "The story—I'll say this again so it's very clear—is absolutely true to the events it recounts, except what happens at the end" (Cortázar 2017). And, when he mentions the fantastic ending of "Apocalypse at Solentiname", he explains that the unusual elements in his fiction are "signals, pointers, used to increase the sensation of the reality of the action, the plot" (Cortázar 2017). He explains that he uses fantasy to accomplish and impact reality:

> At the end of that story, there appears a totally fantastic element, but it's not an escape from reality; on the contrary, it's a little like carrying things to their ultimate consequences so that what I want to express in a way that reaches readers more powerfully, which is a Latin American vision of our times, explodes in their faces and obliges them to feel implicated and present in the story. (Cortázar 2017).

So, in a way, Cortázar uses fantasy to wake the readers up to see the deeper reality of alienation and dehumanizing moral dilemmas in their comfortable and technologically advanced everyday lives, to shake them out of their conformity and complacency, and to show them that they are the ones that are just as "hemmed in" as the Solentiname island community or the people of the entire continent of Latin America in "Apocalypse at Solentiname" (Cortázar 2012, 16), and just as caught in the devil's drooly spiderweb as the narrator and all the characters in "The Devil's Cobweb". Maybe there lies the silver lining of the dark and troubling ideas of "The Devil's Cobweb", which is symbolically implied by the two clouds mentioned in its beginning: "(now there're two small ones passing, with silver linings)" (Cortázar 1971, 102). In his lecture on "Apocalypse in Solentiname", Cortázar insists that he doesn't appreciate fantasy that is used as an escape from reality, but quite on the contrary, he is using fantasy to cut deep into the facade and expose reality more clearly:

> What I wanted to say […] and what I will repeat now perhaps more clearly, is that at this time, above all, and very especially in Latin America considering the current circumstances, I never accept the kind of fantasy, the kind of fiction or imagination, that spins around itself and only itself, where you feel that the writer is creating a work of only fantasy and imagi-

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> nation, one that deliberately escapes from the reality that surrounds and confronts him and asks him to engage with it, have a dialogue with it in his books. Fantasy—the fantastic, the imagination that I love so dearly and that I've used to try to construct my own work—is everything that helps to expose more clearly and more powerfully the reality that surrounds us. (Cortázar 2017)

Fantasy is his choice as the most powerful weapon in dealing with reality and finding a solution to reality as a writer:

> I use the word fantasy as a general term; within fantasy we can include everything that is imaginary, fantastic [...] you all know very well how important it is, not only for what I have written but also for what I personally prefer in literature. [...] it would never occur to me to diminish the importance of everything that is fantasy for a writer, for I still believe it is a writer's most powerful weapon, the one that finally opens doors onto a much richer and often more beautiful reality. (Cortázar 2017).

Cortázar's "Apocalypse in Solentiname" becomes a suitable place for multiple metafictional and metatextual dialogues. This short story is the author's reinterpretation and intertextual response to his previous short story "The Devil's Cobweb", but also an implicit intertextual and intermedial response to the movie by Antonioni. During the fictional press conference that takes place in "Apocalypse at Soletiname", Cortázar decisively writes that "Las babas del diablo" now has a new title "Blow-Up", and he also answers several other questions about his views concerning Antonioni's movie and its public reception (popularity and criticism). Art and life are not that different, says Cortázar in "Apocalypse at Soletiname": "it's all one and the same" (Cortázar 2012, 16). Maybe, with this sentence, he suggests the possibility of interpreting "The Devil's Cobweb" from an auto/biographical perspective. Whatever the author's intentions may have been, as interpreters we have to take into consideration these intertextual keys offered by the short story "Apocalypse at Solentiname".

As far as intertextuality in the form of intermediality among all the arts is concerned, it is just a game of applying all the different hermeneutic codes in the right places for Cortázar. He uses them all accordingly. A movie is able to recode the event and the discourse. It brings to life the petrified reality of the photograph and brings it closer to reality once again. A photograph, compared to a movie, has a more emphasized self-referential and metaphysical dimension. An enlarged photograph (either as a poster or projected on a wall with a slide projector) has a much more life-like and movie-like effect in those times when home movies were still not possible. Cortázar seems to be using the slide projector (used to project still images printed on film) to infiltrate much more directly and synesthetically into the subconscious of his characters. The evoked reality in the blown-up photograph that only reminds of a movie is so shocking that even the interpreter/translator of reality is sucked into the fatal cobweb of the devil: "There was nothing left of me, a phrase in French which I would never have to finish, a typewriter on the floor, a chair that squeaked and shook, fog" (Cortázar 1971, 113). The story that follows then is similar to a hallucination, a memory that was awakened in a dream or during the passing from this world to the other, where "there was an immense silence which had nothing to do with physical silence" (114), where things fall into place based on some forgotten, personal logic, where a line of identicality is drawn between the boy, Michel (the photographer, the translator, and the narrator), and the author. In this place, dug out from the unconscious, the photograph has no power to help this boy here as it helped that other one from the other story and the photograph. This is a photo coming out from the subconscious. The subject who narrates and remembers, turns into a camera lens, now immobile and incapable of interfering, to do that minute intervention that will help the boy escape, and save himself. On the contrary, this boy here is captured irretrievably in that "framework of drool and perfume" (114). The identity is dispersed to a maximum. The interpretation is liminal, somnambular, treading on the edges, just like jazz (Morrison 1992).

Life ends, the translation remains unfinished, and the short story ends without full expression, just like the translation, just like the quoted sentence by Allende "in that case, the second key resides in the intrinsic nature of difficulties which societies…" (Cortázar 1971, 112–113). The interpretation, determined by what remains untold, remains untold itself. Or, vice versa, if the interpretation is real, it should find the most suitable assumption, to fill the void in the text, in the photograph, the movie, the memory. The author refuses to remember the narrator. The narrator refuses to remember the author. The narrator has a fit: "… all of this a lump that blotted out the island, the tree, and shut my eyes, I didn't want to see anymore, and I covered my face and broke into tears like an idiot" (115). That's it. "What remains to be said is always a cloud, two clouds…" (115). It all seems "like a spell of weeping reversed" (115): the short story by Julio Cortázar, the stories told by Michel (the photographer, the translator, and Cortázar's narrator), and the stories in the photograph and the 'projected' movies.

Conclusions to the analysis

This grotesque "comedy" of Cortázar's "The Devil's Cobweb" is sad, shocking, and disturbing. Its multiple internal stories create a perfect short story in which the search for identities of the subjects and events is portrayed as a search for the hermeneutic identity of meaning. Even that identity of meaning is just an assumption, enlarged, possible, and logical, yet only an assumption which we can enjoy, regardless of how hermetic it is, or perhaps just because it is hermetic! Interpretation is one of the greatest pleasures because it foresees the resolution, has elements of the detective genre, has sophisticated semantics, and has a way of predicting the meaning that was implied in the literary works but was rounded and revealed only during the act of interpretation. And the rest is "conjecture and sorrow" (114).

Translated from Macedonian into English
by Jasmina Ilievska-Marjanović *et al.*

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