

## BUSTOS DOMECCQ AND THE PRAISE OF FOLLY

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Honorio Bustos Domeccq, the fictional narrator and author of three collections of aesthetic essays and stories that bear his name, is a figment of the imagination, a simulacrum, a textual ghost. Nonetheless, Bustos Domeccq has over time acquired an epistemological status to which few fictional beings can aspire; he has been promoted from character to pseudonym, and awarded several publications of his very own, independently from those men who first gave him a voice. As well, in a collection of short stories edited by Donald Yates, a piece by Bustos Domeccq stands independently of both Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, each of whom is also represented in the book. The 1942 appearance in Buenos Aires bookshops of a new book from Editorial Sur, *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*, caused an immediate sensation: who is this new and previously unheard-from writer, Honorio Bustos Domeccq? According to one of Bustos Domeccq's creators, Adolfo Bioy Casares, there were among the writers who formed Buenos Aires' avant-garde a certain number whose sense of humor did not extend to the toleration of such parody, not even in jest (which was the idea of the collaborators Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges). A similar reception awaited Bustos Domeccq's second collection, *Crónicas de Bustos Domeccq*, in 1967. Suzanne J. Levine, in her *Guía de Bioy Casares*, provides an "author's auto-chronology" from Bioy's own pen, in which he recalls that in 1942 "con el pseudónimo H. Bustos Domeccq, publicamos con Borges

*Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*. Los amigos, la crítica, are not amused" (Levine 172). The 1967 reception of *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq* was similarly chilly: "Con Borges publico *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*. Me pregunta, alarmado, un editor: '¿No me va a decir que ustedes están contra la vanguardia?'" (Levine 174). How should one describe the collection of his essays titled *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*? Above all, what are the implications for our reading of the work? I will argue that the function of Bustos Domecq's strange, sometimes deranged aesthetic sensibility is paradoxical, as well as symbolic of Borges and Bioy Casares's sense of the unsatisfactory state of Argentine letters and the critics who ruled it during the time of publication.

By a close reading of these collections, I will show that the function of the strange, paradoxical and even disordered aesthetic sensibilities are symbolic of the unsatisfactory state (to the authors, *natürlich*) of Argentine *belles lettres* and their reigning critical elite in the mid-twentieth century. Because I read Bustos Domecq (particularly in *Crónicas*) as a parodic symbol or emblem of the Argentine literary establishment, it seems logical to examine him in terms of Ángel Rama's theoretical construct, the *letrado*. This concept, elaborated in the Uruguayan critic's 1984 book *La ciudad letrada*, identifies the *letrado* throughout Latin American history as the "man of letters," whose essential or necessary characteristic, whatever the accident of his temporal status—priest, lawyer, Crown bureaucrat, etc.—is the unending preservation of his position of power and privilege. In Argentina, many *letrados* earned their livings working for the state or for one of the great newspapers of the day (a tradition handed down from the *modernistas* at least). For Rama, many subsequent critics have missed something essential regarding the journalism that served the *letrados* as a mask in this era, suggesting that they must be seen not only as servants of Institutions but also as designers of cultural models (Rama 30). This formulation works very well as applied to Borges and Bioy Casares, given the crucial importance of writing in their works. The famous preoccupation with the consequences of a logocentric world is one of Borges's most common themes. The artistic category that Bustos Domecq praises also finds echoes

in Rama's work; the Uruguayan writes of the disjunction between real life and what he calls "the Document," that is, those pages sacralized by the power of Writing, whatever their specific content.

The most cogent point of Rama's theory for our purposes, the one most applicable to the three Bustos Domecq collections, is that the producers of these Documents do not have to choose one professional category or another—it is the act of writing that creates the *letrado*, not so much the accident of writing poems or laws, novels or Crown reports. There are superficial or formal features that tend to characterize the *letrado* as well: Rama identifies the tendency toward an extreme linguistic conservatism exemplified by Simón Bolívar, who in 1830 was still using the second person plural in *vosotros*, which most linguists would now identify as a notable anachronism in Latin America (49-50). As Jaime Alazraki notes in his review of *Crónicas* published in 1967, Bustos Domecq also deploys a grammatically distinctive language—and a hilarious one, as one would expect in a parody:

Un ejemplo de resabio novecentista, para más de un escritor de nuestro muy entrado siglo XX es todavía 'recurso' literario, es el empleo del enclítico que pareciera decirnos 'ojo, me estoy almidonando': don Bustos escribe 'fumólo', 'dijérase', 'congratulélo' (casi un trabalenguas), etc." (Alazraki 89)

The Latin American enclitic was already losing ground when Carrión de la Vandra wrote *El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes* in the late eighteenth century; Bustos Domecq uses it more even than the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published in 1554. Rama and Borges are both writers noted for a certain demonization of writing in their work; it is my contention that Borges and Bioy Casares intend particularly in the 1967 work to parody the figure of the self-interested and self-preserving *letrado* as a banal figure who enables mediocrity and balderdash to thrive.

Bustos Domecq is a multifaceted character in the three works that carry his name: in *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* (1942) he serves as an extradiegetic pseudonym for the bicephalous author called by Hernández Martín "Biorges", the collaborative voice of Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares; in *Crónicas de Bustos*

*Domecq* (1967) he becomes an intradiegetic writer of literary essays; and in *Nuevos cuentos de Bustos Domecq* (1977) his character serves primarily as an intradiegetic narratee, similar in structure but different in implicit function to his role in the 1942 work. I intend in this essay to concentrate on the character of Bustos Domecq in *Seis problemas* and *Crónicas*, the texts that give us the most insight into his own contributions to the *letrados'* continued occupation of scriptural power.

A word on the genre of the texts. *Seis problemas* is undoubtedly a collection of short stories, narratively less innovative than works published by Borges and Bioy under their own names. While the works in *Crónicas* and *Nuevos Cuentos* are decidedly fictional, though, even the word so commonly associated with Borges—"ficciones"—does not quite describe Domecq's writings all the time. The pieces in *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq* are certainly narrative after a fashion: at the very least they adhere to Genette's third definition of narrative, i.e. "an event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of recounting taken in itself" (Genette 26). In point of fact the work it most resembles within Borges' own *oeuvre* is *Prólogo con un prólogo de prólogos*, itself a playful examination of fictive works. Serendipitously, while searching for a different term, I came across the perfect descriptor for this particular genre or subgenre: "*causerie*." J. A. Cuddon defines the term as "denot[ing] an informal talk, essay, or article particularly on literary topics" (116). (While the term is most often associated with nineteenth-century writings like Saint-Beuve's *Causeries de lundi*, Roland Barthes' book *Mythologies* is a perfect example of more contemporary *causerie*.) Bustos Domecq, a fictional character, writes *causeries* on fictional works of art by other fictional characters. The consequent layers of fictional representation permit a parodic twisting of the contemporary art scene in 1960's Argentina—the era when the book was published—into a jocose satire of artistic and literary criticism as a genre. What we see in this narrative complex is the authors freeing themselves to parody everything in their text: the narrator is parodic, the topics are parodic, and the characters Bustos Domecq profiles are parodic.

In this way, by passing through layer upon Derridean layer of fictionalized voice, “Borges” push their vision of the bizarre essential critical logos of late modern Argentina to the fore, purifying it through successive narrative filterings. Bustos Domecq is the ultraist critic par excellence; nothing can go too far for his tastes. As we shall see, the art he praises is similar in structure and goals to artistic experiments that have actually occurred, simply carried to the nth degree—as Umberto Eco laughs in one of his prefaces, “This is parody’s mission: it must never be afraid of going too far. If its aim is true, it simply heralds what others will later produce, unblushing, with impassive and assertive gravity” (5). The essay, by nature a “centered” text in that it serves (theoretically) to expound an author’s sentiments or intellectual convictions, is here distorted by “centering” itself on a fictional voice—and not just any fictional voice, but a critical perspective so far gone into the aesthetic of the avant-garde that the artistic endeavors he most praises are, to the reader, exercises in semiotic lunacy.

The first collection in the “life” of Bustos Domecq is *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*—the significance of the eponymous character’s surname is evident. According to Rodríguez Monegal, the seed for the stories was planted in 1937, when Borges and Bioy Casares spent a week at Bioy’s father’s estate, El Pardo (365). They plan a story that though never written created the original idea for the creation of Honorio Bustos Domecq. The surnames originate with the authors themselves; Bustos was a great-grandfather of Borges, and Domecq an ancestor of Bioy. (This is also the origin of the name Suárez Lynch, associated with Borges and Bioy’s *Un modelo para la muerte*.) While Bustos Domecq already had a kind of existence for Borges and Bioy Casares, the reader is hard pressed to derive much about his “personhood” from the stories published under his name. Nonetheless, the satirical attitude toward the *letrado* is clearly evident, especially in the two stories that had been published independently in the review *Sur* before the appearance of the collection in book form: “Las doce figuras del mundo” and “Las noches de Goliadkin.”

The first story, according to Rodríguez Monegal, can be supposed a parody of Chesterton, the English writer of detective sto-

ries so admired by Borges in particular (367). It deals with the adventures of a young journalist—again the figure of the *letrado*—who believes that he has murdered a prominent member of Buenos Aires's Druze community. Desiring to solve the mystery, he consults a singularly unlikely detective: a prisoner in the Buenos Aires penitentiary named Isidro Parodi, falsely convicted in the accidental death of a scion of an influential family and sentenced to twenty-five years' imprisonment. The young journalist, Aquiles Molinari, works mornings in a library in the south of the city; perhaps an autobiographical note from Borges. When he visits Parodi in his cell, Molinari speaks a Spanish liberally sprinkled with anglicisms, and Parodi answers in a language that should be, according to Rodríguez Monegal, the typical Spanish of his neighborhood and social class. The two men converse on various topics, including the recent waves of immigration; Molinari and Parodi agree that the Italians are certainly the least desirable of all, seemingly not noticing the origin of their own surnames. Molinari mentions that just the day before his visit to the prison, "no más entró en la Gran Pizzería Los Hinchas y lo primero que vio fue un italiano" (*Seis problemas* 19). Thus the reader perceives that, though the satire has not yet developed to the biting heights it will reach in *Crónicas* and *Nuevos cuentos*, the figure of the *letrado* is already here singled out for ridicule.

After this ideological talk, the men settle to speak of the case at hand. Molinari believes that he has killed a man. The young journalist had desired to join a Druze secret society, and during the initiation rite (in which he had to keep his eyes closed and chant quietly the twelve signs of the Zodiac), his host was murdered. Molinari believes himself to be guilty, but through logical investigation Parodi demonstrates that it could not have been him; rather the murderer was one of the dead man's presumed friends. The feature satirized in the young *letrado* here is his credulity, a characteristic key in Bustos Domecq's later development. The Lebanese play a trick on Molinari, telling him that if he pronounces the signs badly, or out of order, then the world could come apart or worse. The problem, then, is the peculiar susceptibility of the *letrado* to this kind of trickery, since they are uniquely accustomed to that

universe of signs, and there is a kind of truth for them that the correct signs must be continuously repeated at the correct times, so that the world, at least the world as it exists under their codified domination, does not stop existing. It is their normality. Alonso refers to *letrados* as "ceaselessly engaged in scriptural activity," an activity directly intended to preserve their powers (40). Thus the plebeian Parodi proves to Molinari that he has no reason to worry, and what reaction might we expect from a *letrado*? Molinari's great logical triumph is published in the newspapers, because in the *letrado's* world (represented by Buenos Aires) the epistemological quiddity of an event is incomplete and blurry until it has been written up and published, so fixing its "truth" for good.

The fact that the first case is published opens the door to the collection's second story, "Las noches de Goliadkin." This story introduces a new character whose importance in subsequent collections will grow: Gervasio Montenegro. While Molinari symbolizes the credulity and awe that the *letrado* feels before a figure skilled at the manipulation of codes of signification, Montenegro — who as well as serving as the protagonist of one story writes the prologue of the book, both for *Seis problemas* as well as *Crónicas* afterwards — is a figure who symbolizes the *letrado's* egotism, the incapacity and unwillingness to see reality as it is, and the tendency to describe all events, even the actions of other characters, in terms of himself. As Hernández Martín notes, "self-consciousness is comically absent from the locutions of the characters of *Six Problems*. They tell their tales in their own words, deaf to the way they sound and blind to the peculiar way in which they have perceived the events they tell" (108-09). It seems evident to me that Hernández Martín's notion is especially applicable to Montenegro, the actor and *homme de lettres* who narrates and serves as protagonist in "Las noches de Goliadkin."

Montenegro, we find, is involved (as was Molinari) in a capital case: it is suspected that he has murdered a wandering Russian on the Pan-American railway (a train significantly similar, it seems, to Christie's Orient Express). Having heard Parodi's abilities to solve unsolvable cases rumored in the press, he goes immediately to the prison cell. Parodi asks to hear Montenegro's

narration first-hand, and the actor relates to him the succession of events in a manner like that of Molinari previously. Aboard the Pan-American railway, Montenegro meets a large and varied *dramatis personae*. Among others, there is a nervous Russian who shares Montenegro's compartment, a priest, a baroness, and an American colonel whose grasp of Spanish is less than profound. Many strange things happen, and Montenegro ends up winning from the Russian a diamond the size of a golf ball. The following dawn, the Russian has vanished (from a train that never stopped) and the police are waiting for Montenegro. The problem, then, is not (as was the case of Molinari) that the protagonist believes himself guilty, but that he has been unjustly accused and is now in mortal danger.

It behooves us to reinforce the importance of the eponymous character, Isidro Parodi. He serves almost as an anti-*letrado*: he is no great reader, neither knows nor wishes to learn French, and speaks in a manner typical of his origin and social position—that is, low. Especially noteworthy are the particulars of his function as detective, given that as a prisoner he may not leave his cell. In the cases of Molinari and Montenegro, Parodi is able to descry the truth hidden behind the discourses. While the *letrado* is by definition a constructor of texts, a codifier, Parodi is a de-constructor and a de-codifier. Even the narrations of the two young *letrados* cannot deceive him. What is questioned here is the relationship between narrator and reader (or in Parodi's case speaker and listener, provoking questions too of performance and orality). As Hernández Martín notes, "The Parodi detective stories foreground both the function of narrators who are suspect . . . or at least not reliable . . . and the function of the reader who, like Parodi, must interpret and order chaos wholly in and from language" (109). The *letrado* occupies himself with converting chaotic reality into Documents, making them fit into the universe of signs that Rama describes, while Parodi is expert in taking those Documents, in his case oral narrations, and reading within them the underlying reality, thus perceiving the true solutions to the problems of his "clients." Unfortunately, as often happens, the *letrado* clients end up taking the credit for Parodi's successes, whether accidentally or intention-

ally. Molinari publishes the solution Parodi has given him, and thus it is Molinari's name that becomes associated with the affair; Montenegro comes to ask that Parodi literally save his life, and upon receiving the answer thanks the prisoner with the words "Pierda cuidado, mi querido Parodi: no tardaré en comunicar mi solución a las autoridades" (*Seis problemas* 55).

From the pseudonymous short stories of the 1942 collection, we move to the aesthetic causeries of *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*. The first section I examine is titled "Homenaje a César Paladión." As in many of the sections, the object-artist is compared to a major canonical figure, in this case Goethe. He is said to be similar in physical appearance to the German, as well as to "radiate manliness" in a like fashion (*Crónicas* 17). Bustos Domecq provides a brief history of the poet's literary career, which begins with the 1909 publication of *Los parques abandonados*, proceeding onward to include such greats as *El sabueso de los Baskerville* and *La cabaña del tío Tom* (17-18). Paladión has been accused, at several times in his life, of plagiarism. But no: it is not plagiarism, according to the critic. Rather, it is simply the technique of quotation taken to its "logical" conclusion. Bustos Domecq observes, "En nuestra época, un copioso fragmento de la *Odisea* inaugura uno de los *Cantos* de Pound. [...] Paladión, en 1909, había ido más lejos. Anexó, por decirlo así, un *opus* completo, *Los parques abandonados*, de Herrera y Reissig" (19).

The idea of quoting an entire collection of poetry resonates with the theories of Derrida and Barthes. If the author is merely a recombiner of already existent texts, then how can plagiarism exist? The text here parodies a common reaction to the idea of the "death of the author," the notion that without authorial ownership of a text, then the text disappears or dissolves in some fundamental way. Derrida wrote that "Pure repetition, were it to change neither thing nor sign, carries with it an unlimited power of perversion and subversion" (296). We see this sort of aesthetic in Pop Art (particularly Warhol and Liechtenstein), for example. For Derrida, however, mere quotation cannot be considered engagement with the text, for the writer has not entered into any sort of play—Pop Art's love of kitsch is not equivalent to a straight-faced

reproduction of an artistic work.

In this case, though, the subversion falls back not on the putative author, Paladión, but on the critic whose job it is to valorize the work, Bustos Domecq himself. As a *letrado*, Domecq must write as he must breathe. Carlos Alonso, after Angel Rama, identifies various avatars of the *letrado* through Latin American history: "A Crown bureaucrat during the colonial regime, a state bureaucrat after Independence, a *doctor* during most of the nineteenth century, an autodidact *homme de lettres* toward the fin-de-siècle, an essayist of cultural affairs during the twentieth" (38). Bustos Domecq (not unlike Borges himself) neatly straddles the last two descriptions. The evident purpose of his work, like that of the *modernista* poets that Paladión copies, is to give the artworks he examines the polish of "criticism," to sing them to greatness. The real purpose, if we follow the ideas of Angel Rama, is to maintain his privileged position. Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, praises the vocation of critic, particularly lauding their love of attempts at genuinely new aesthetic experience (324). Nietzsche's support notwithstanding, there is a qualitative difference in the value of a sign that is repeated ad infinitum. It is well known that Borges in particular exults in semiotic experimentation of this sort, as in "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote." What differentiates the narrative voice of Bustos Domecq from that voice usually employed by Borges for the same purposes is the credulity, the awe. Borges-as-narrator in "Pierre Menard" politely chuckles, where Bustos Domecq salivates and reaches for his autograph book.

From Paladión, the artist of the ultimate quotation, Bustos moves on to Loomis, the greatest of minimalists. Desiring to reject the *modernista* reliance on the metaphor as represented by Lugones's *Lunario sentimental*, Loomis arrives at a sort of semiotic compression, a Hölderlinesque autoreferentiality of the highest order: "Más dado [Loomis] a la formulación de preguntas que a la recepción de respuestas, inquiría asimismo si un fragmento de Safo o una sentencia inagotable de Heráclito no se dilataban más en el tiempo que los muchos volúmenes de Trollope, de los Goncourt y del Tostado, refractarios a la memoria" (*Crónicas* 48). With this maniac desire for concision, Loomis spends months in

the wilderness researching his Opus 1, "Oso." The entire text of the opus is contained within the quotation marks in the previous sentence.

Bustos Domecq's narration, in this section, acquires an elegiac tone, since he numbers himself among Loomis's "discípulos." Harold Bloom describes the majority of critics in his youth as "an assemblage of know-nothing bigots, academic impostors, inchoate rhapsodes, and time-serving trimmers" (ix). It is the rhapsode we see in Bustos Domecq here. In praising Loomis's work, the work is (in a backhanded fashion) made praiseworthy; and to be the disciple of a praiseworthy poet is no bad thing—again, the self-(pre)serving *letrado* can be seen. As criticism (or *causerie*), there is a surprising Romantic quality about Bustos Domecq's essay, for the exclamation points abound. In acknowledging the criticisms of some non-initiate, he characterizes Loomis' work in this manner:

La obra de Loomis, según el cómputo maligno de un crítico, menos versado en literatura que en aritmética, consta de seis palabras: Oso, Catre, Boina, Nata, Luna, Tal vez. Así será, pero detrás de esas palabras que el artifice destilara ¡cuántas experiencias, cuánto afán, cuánta plenitud! (*Crónicas* 50)

It may well be that this maniac compression of language refers parodically to Rainer Maria Rilke's "Die neunte Elegie", which sports a stanza notably similar: "Sind wir vielleicht hier, um zu sagen: Haus/Brücke, Brunnen, Tor, Krug, Obstbaum, Fenster, —/ höchstens: Säule, Turm . . . aber zu sagen, verstehs, / o zu sagen so, wie selber die Dinge niemals/ innig meinten zu sein" (291-93).

What is it precisely that Bustos Domecq is praising? It can only be the semantic loading characteristic of Romantic poetry, wherein "Wörter, wie Blumen entstehen." When Hölderlin, Rilke, or Heredia versify, they seek to capture an auto-referentiality missing from daily discourse—in effect, a private language with a heavier personal and lighter transcendental signified. When a poetic text is written in this mode, each word is intended to convey not only what we might refer to as its dictionary meaning—house, bridge, fountain, and so forth, this being the "transcendental signified"—

but also an intensely personal meaning, a private denotation that the reader can access only through total engagement with the text. Derrida writes that a decentered code of this kind can carry a heavier semantic/semiotic load because "the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" (280). The perennial question, though, is how far this extension can be taken before the signifier ceases to transmit the signified, even to a sensitive narratee. For Roland Barthes, "Language [*langue*] proper can be defined by the concurrence of two fundamental processes: articulation, or segmentation, which produces units (this being what Benveniste calls *form*) and integration, which gathers these units into units of a higher rank (this being *meaning*)" (117). Accordingly, we can assert that Loomis's "texts" may be intended to carry X or Y poetic load, but because the code breaks down at the moment of integration, there is no language and therefore no communication. The *letrado*, though, is empowered by this kind of experimentation, as it permits him to reinforce the idea of his own indispensability, allowing his superior critical gifts to exercise themselves in a way that seems almost mystical to the uninitiated reader.

In "Lo que falta no daña," the third section of the *Crónicas*, the fictional author, Tulio Herrera, is presented as a follower of the great Loomis. He too is a minimalist of the first order, but instead of one-word poetic texts, Herrera seeks the core meaning of already current cultural texts, as well as avant-garde representation of more classical forms of verse. His collection of poems, *Madrugar temprano*, takes its title from "una moderna elipsis del secular y remozado refrán *No por mucho madrugar amanece más temprano*"—that is, from a clichéd, colloquial folk expression (*Crónicas* 98). Bustos Domecq asserts that the simplicity of the title is belied by the "complexity" of the first verse, "Ogro mora folklórico carente". Complex, perhaps, but complex to the point of non-meaning. The critic identifies this compression of meaning as "síntesis," citing a draft original of the verse which reads as follows: "Ogro de Creta, el minotauro mora/ en domicilio propio, el laberinto: / en cambio yo, folklórico y retinto, / carente soy de techo a toda hora" (*Crónicas* 98). The poet, then, has synthesized

the former text from the latter. The small matter of sense makes no impression on the critic-as-rhapsode, however, because of the fundamentally superior aesthetic ability with which (as he constantly reminds us) he is blessed. We need Bustos Domecq to tell us what the verse means, because of his razor-like intellect and because of his privileged insights into the soul of the author.

Herrera's novel, *Hágase hizo*, is an evident play on the sort of preciousity with which much of the avant-garde was fascinated: as well, for a contemporary reader the title has strong echoes of Barthes, in particular "The Struggle with the Angel" (*Image* 125), where Barthes creates a structural analysis of passages from the Book of Genesis. Herrera's text also takes its title from the Bible, from the phrase "Hágase la luz y la luz se hizo" (*Crónicas* 99). Again, in Bustos Domecq's "analysis," the reader is presented with a luxury of paratextual detail not available to the unwashed readerly masses—Bustos has access to notebooks and interviews never made public. It turns out that Herrera is actually almost a Neo-Baroque author, a lover of copious detail, the better to erase it later and send the text out into the world charged with potential semantic load. To say nothing of the Cabalistic implications of such a creative philosophy, it requires (or empowers) Bustos Domecq to enter into a priestly, interpretive relationship with the text as it relates to a potential reader. Within the field of literary study, though, this sort of privilege between the specialist reader and a text is not so laudable. Theorists of narratology like Todorov prefer a "dialogic criticism," in which the specialist reader must approach the text from a position of equality, not from some Olympian height, in order to avoid the pitfalls of a metalanguage that wrongly believes itself to be faultless and therefore takes illegitimate advantage of the asymmetrical dialogue created in the interplay of one closed and one open text (Todorov 161-62).

If anything taints Bustos Domecq's commitment to dialogic criticism, it is his wish, expressed several times through the *causerie* on Herrera, that the poet hurry up and die so that Bustos may publish his notebooks. For Bustos Domecq, as we have seen, what is most important is decidedly not the artistic work in question—it is the audience's certainty of his own indispensable na-

ture. He refers at one point to one of these semisacred notebooks that constitute, for him, a secret language of power: "Un cuaderno de apuntes que obra en nuestro poder y que daremos a la imprenta no bien sucumba el vigoroso poeta" (*Crónicas* 98). He also lets us know that *Hágase hizo* exists in an expanded form to which (of course) he has sole access. Bustos Domecq's purest motives are laid bare, though, when he offers the text de antemano: "prometemos, en nuestra calidad de albaceas, la publicación in toto del manuscrito, con todas sus lagunas y borrratinas. El trabajo se hará por suscripción y por pagos adelantados, que comenzarán a correr en cuanto el autor expire" (*Crónicas* 100).

Bustos Domecq's dream, then, is to acquire a place in history like that of Max Brod, the publisher who against Kafka's wishes published his complete works after the author's death. Walter Kaufmann writes that "everybody who admires Kafka is in Brod's debt," and it seems that Bustos would like to be remembered in the same way (Kaufmann 142). Could it be that Bustos Domecq is trying to establish some strategy of escape from *letrado*-dom? Is it even possible to write one's way out of that status? For Carlos Alonso, the answer is clear. "If writing is postulated as an inherently demonized activity that is also the principal vehicle and instrument of the *letrado*'s strength, then there is no way out from the *letrado*'s power, just as there is no way out for the *letrado*" (43, italics in original). The only way to stop being a *letrado* is to stop writing, and Bustos Domecq leaves little doubt that putting down the pen is low among his priorities.

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