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púgil

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The Functions of Guilt and Shame in Juan José Millás' *El mundo*

and

My Olive-Green Fridge and I: The Posthuman Identity in *El púgil*

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Functions of Guilt and Shame in Juan José Millás' *El mundo*
and
My Olive-Green Fridge and I: The Posthuman Identity in *El púgil*

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In his celebrated 2007 novel *El mundo*, Juan José Millás tells the story of the development of Juanjo, a simulacrum of himself, and describes a series of negative developments that the protagonist faces in his childhood. While much has been written about Millás and the “testimonial realism” of his literary generation, little has been written about the psychological factors that influence his characters. In this paper I analyze Juanjo’s development as understood from the gradation of guilt to shame, depression, and later suicidal thoughts. Because Juanjo is not able to find an appropriate mechanism of release for his guilt, he spirals into an ever-increasing psychological distress. Thus, his actions do not become an escape *per se* from the oppressive forces in Spain; but rather, they are mechanisms of delay caused by the subconscious effects of living under Franco’s Spain during the 1950s.

Mike Wilson-Reginato’s first novel *El púgil*, published in 2007, mixes intertextual references to music, film, and literature to craft a space for the posthuman identity. The two protagonists of *El púgil*—Art and his olive-green refrigerator, Hal—combine in a new cyborg-like formation. Unlike the cyborg envisioned by Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” the mechanical-biological union never takes place at the corporeal level, but their union occurs in a psychological dimension within Art’s hallucination. To describe the union of Art and Hal, I use Jacques Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage to explain Art’s adoption of a perceived superior identity and Jean Baudrillard’s study of simulacra to show how this adopted identity is an imagined simulacrum. Thus, the combined image of the two characters creates a cyborg identity that erases the distance between man and machine.

Keywords: *El mundo*, Juan José Millás, *El púgil*, Mike Wilson, Baudrillard, Lacan, guilt, shame, identity, cyborg, posthuman, simulacrum.

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The Functions of Shame and Guilt in Juan José Millás' *El mundo*

Qué mecanismo psicológico tan raro,
y tan común, el que provoca el sentimiento de culpa y de pudor
en la víctima y no el Verdugo

Juan José Millás

In his 2007 novel *El mundo*, Juan Jose Millás brings together fiction and autobiography to create a narrative space where readers confront the Spanish reality as retold through the eyes of Juanjo, the protagonist of the novel. *El mundo* portrays the development of Juanjo from childhood to adulthood, describing his interactions with Spanish society and his psychological reaction to growing up in a restrictive environment. Because of the difficult times and poverty that many individuals faced in post-Civil War Spain, Millás' main character represents the plight of other children who became aware of their traumatic situation in the early 1950s. The economic and social crisis of the time triggers feelings of guilt and then shame in Juanjo as he struggles to understand his place in his neighborhood. Millás employs these emotions throughout the novel to describe key developments in Juanjo's life, ranging from small acts of theft to alienation from his family and society, as well as self-deprecating actions as a way to escape his traumatic youth.

In this paper I will analyze Juanjo's negative development as understood from the gradation of guilt to shame, depression, and later suicidal thoughts as he is not able to find appropriate mechanisms of release. I will thus describe these different stages in Juanjo's childhood and the measures he takes to live with his culpability. Juanjo's release mechanisms become akin to the Lacanian *objet petit a*, because they always stop short of release. Thus, his

actions are not an escape *per se* from the oppressive forces in Spain; but rather, they are merely mechanisms of delay from the subconscious effects caused by living under the impoverishing conditions of Franco's Spain during the 1950s.

While the protagonist's name in *El mundo* is Juanjo Millás, which is short for Juan José Millás – the same name as the author – this work merely gravitates around the real figure of the author. As Roland Barthes sustains in *S/Z*, “This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite” (10), and one should not directly correlate Millás the author and Juanjo the character. In the essay “Literatura y realidad,” Millás mentions that literature and reality “de un lado se excluyen y de otro se complementan” (125). The ‘I’ expressed on paper thus represents a multitude of meanings and texts that can no longer be explicitly attributed to the author. In the same essay Millás also argues that literature and reality act as a dichotomy in his writing; both literature and reality are attracted to and exclude each other in the formation of his characters. However, Juanjo is a written simulacrum of Millás, and the two are only separated by the use of memory as a recollective device affected by time and experience. Thus, the novel becomes not only representative of Millás' Spain but also everyone's world. Millás recounts, “‘El Mundo' (sic) es la calle de tu infancia” (elmundo.es), explaining that the novel can have a universal appeal and direct correlation to the life of readers that grew up during his time. The novel becomes a masterpiece in the exposition of the development of a child within the society of the time.

Part of a post-2000 group of writers dealing with historical memory, Juan José Millás, Almudena Grandes, and Javier Cercas reexamine the past with modern eyes. In comparison to the other authors, Millás' apparent intent with *El mundo* is less nation-oriented and more individualistic. He describes the formation of Juanjo's identity as affected by the Franco regime

without openly discussing Franco. Instead, he focuses on Juanjo's development and describes how the protagonist's early experiences in life are internalized as oppressive emotions of guilt and shame. Millás describes how the novel "le ha costado mucho [escribir]" and that this novel "cierra una etapa personal de mi vida" (elmundo.es) that he does not want to reopen. Millás compares writing with an electric scalpel early in the novel to describe how writing is both a painful reopening of the past and at the same time a cure to deal with his childhood experience.

As a seasoned writer, Millás does not simply ascribe blame to Franco for the difficult times but rather presents the novel as a story of development. Millás does not satisfy the reader's expectations to blame the hardship of the times on the oppressive government. For example, while reading a story, Juanjo discovers this same illusionary technique. He reads about a father who rediscovers his deceased son through the descriptions of his son's ex-girlfriend. These conversations position the girlfriend and the father in a sexually tense relationship as they become closer friends in meeting to discuss the son. Juanjo describes the situation: "Veo la tensión sexual que hay en el ambiente como la padeciera yo ... Yo la habría abordado, habría abordado sexualmente a la chica, sin ninguna duda, pero el personaje de la novela no, decepcionando de este modo al lector, que espera que lo haga" (109). Similar to the disappointment that the reader of *El mundo* feels in not finding Franco specifically mentioned in the novel, Juanjo finds disillusionment in the father's denial to sexually approach the girl. Juanjo continues, "Comprendí que se trataba de una decepción estratégica y que la literatura, como leería años más tarde, era una <<espera decepcionada>>" (190). In this manner and evidenced in *El mundo*, Millás's literature also becomes a disillusioned wait in which the reader is led to believe that the trauma of the protagonist is caused by Franco, but Millás plays with this

deception by not discussing Franco in the novel. Thus, readers see traces of the traumatic times and wait for the obvious to be exposed, but in the end their expectations remain unfulfilled.

As in his other novels, Millás chooses to write *El mundo* without a strong condemnation of the political regime of his youth. Even without strong accusations of oppression, Millás definitely engages in writing literature about Franco and his system of governance in a covert fashion. In “Vivir de la huida: Entrevista con Juan Jose Millás,” Katarzyna Olga Beilin asks the author why the protagonists in his novels *Visión del ahogado* and *Jardín vacío* seem to be “traumatizados por la vida” (119) and are not heroes living at a time of transition from Franco’s death to democracy. Millás responds that he chooses to represent the death of the dictator as the falling apart of a couple that had been together only for political reasons. Millás says, “Mi intención fue comentar la transición sin nombrar la dictadura y de hecho creo que ese recurso resultó eficaz. Yo creo que es una novela que refleja muy bien la atmósfera de aquellos años” (120). Thus, commenting on the politics of transition and refraining from mentioning Franco is a purposeful mechanism in his writing. Millás also mentions, “*Jardín vacío*, era un intento de escribir una novela sobre el franquismo sin nombrarlo” (120). Because *Visión del ahogado* and *Jardín vacío* deal with Franco without mentioning the dictator, I postulate that *El mundo* is also a novel that deals with Francoism without specifically mentioning it. *El mundo* falls into the same category as *Jardín vacío* and *Visión del ahogado*, and Juanjo is also a traumatized protagonist.

Juanjo’s emotional development is afflicted by the oppressive government where his neighborhood and school are centers of trauma. In an environment of fear and menace where Franco’s influence is felt but not directly mentioned, Juanjo grows up feeling inadequacy, which is later transforms into guilt. In the same interview with Beilin, Millás mentions, “El tipo de miedo y de amenaza que se respira es justamente el de una dictadura como la de Franco aunque

no se menciona directamente” (120). Millás indirectly portrays these feelings of ineptness and impotence on Juanjo and showcases them through his protagonist’s lack of effective actions to counter the oppressive influences in his life. Furthermore, and with a trace of embarrassment, Millás recounts that the reason why his protagonists are “non-heroes” and “traumatized by life” is because they cannot be heroes when “se recordaba muchas veces que Franco murió en la cama” (119). Criminals and tyrants decried by the heroes of the people do not simply die in their beds; they are judged, reviled, or executed. Because the many attempts to subvert Franco were defeated, Millás’s protagonists are also repressed and depressed.

To show Juanjo’s incremental journey into depression, I first describe how guilt is defined and evident in the protagonist’s actions. Expressing the end result of his guilt, Juanjo relates, “Cada uno por su lado había logrado fugarse de aquella condición infernal, de aquel barrio espeso, de aquella calle húmeda” (Millás 151). Explaining guilt, Herant Katchadourian defines it as a complex, non-primary feeling that all common people experience (7). He portrays it as an ethical feeling which depends on social interactions and writes that both shame and guilt “are considered *moral emotions* because they involve social judgments about how one should and should not behave” (7). Not behaving in accordance with the norms established by the family or culture creates cruel feelings of not living up to expectations. Because Juanjo finds himself in a world of contradictory values, Juanjo doubts himself and his actions. These contradictions shape Juanjo’s world as “un mundo hecho a la mitad” (Millás 15) where few things are satisfactory. In the same paragraph Juanjo continues, “[T]eníamos la mitad de calor que necesitábamos, la mitad de la comida y el afecto que necesitábamos para gozar de un desarrollo normal, si hay desarrollos normales” (15). Juanjo describes his formative years as filled with insufficiency and lack. He lives in an uncomfortable world where growing up is

traumatic. Katchadourian further mentions, “[T]hese emotions are linked to the welfare of others and society as a whole. They provide moral force to do good and to avoid doing evil” (7). Thus, these emotions act as ideological guiding forces in society that figures of authority use to prevent abnormal behavior. This idea is problematic for Juanjo because his guilt constantly increases as he tries to be a model citizen and to express himself freely. On one hand, acting against the tyranny is illegal and dangerous, and on the other, not acting against tyranny strengthens the government’s power and endurance while increasing Juanjo’s feelings of inadequacy.

According to researchers like Lewis, Tangeney, and Katchadourian, guilt and shame are overlapping social, ethical emotions with differing key roles. For example, Katchadourian explains, “It has long been maintained that guilt results from the violation of a moral code that entails *crossing* a line – a trespass. Shame, by contrast, results from *falling short* of a line by failing to measure up to a personal and social standard” (18). From this definition, it becomes apparent that both emotions can coexist within an individual. Throughout *El mundo*, Juanjo shows signs of remorse for stealing and later for participating in an anti-Franco rally. As these feelings of guilt deepen, Juanjo is driven to feelings of shame for participating in self-defeating activities like using drugs, trying to run away, and entertaining suicidal thoughts. Both emotions are complex and far-reaching in defining Juanjo. Towards the end of the novel, Juanjo laments, “[L]ograba convencerme de que no había nacido” (Millás 187). Perhaps this statement was his way of finally confronting the pain he associated with his childhood. Juanjo’s self-deprecating acts and thoughts provide him with some satisfaction, but, in the end, they are damning to his psyche because he cannot find an appropriate mechanism of release.

Symptomatic of the political regime, Juanjo discovers that the people in his neighborhood seem to act differently in private and in public. Befriending el Vitaminas, a boy plagued by “una

enfermedad del corazón” (43) the two start exploring the organization of adult life. Discussing Vitaminas’ father, the two conclude that he was leading a “doble vida” (45); he looked like “cualquiera de nosotros, pero en realidad fuera comunista” (45). At the same time, Juanjo’s mother shows a similar doubling. She listens to the radio while sewing but never lets her children listen to it. Though free radio stations were very popular, they were illegal. These double standards lead Juanjo to alienate himself from his parents and declare, “[Y]o no era uno de ellos” (125). This perceived doubling is then duplicated by the children, Juanjo and el Vitaminas. Their childish secretive play is emblematic of the larger situation that causes adults to act differently inside and outside the home. Even though sick, el Vitaminas conspicuously acts as an informant for the Interpol for his father “anotando las costumbres de la gente” (45). Juanjo also reflects, “Tuve claro en seguida que quería ser como él, lo que significaba llevar una vida aparente y otra real” (45). Even though the life of the parents is exaggerated and sometimes confabulated in the imagination of the children, their playful tales are indicative of the repressive government’s effects on the lives of its people.

Paralleling the behavior of their parents, el Vitaminas’ and Juanjo’s friendship is also based on secrets they keep from their parents, their most immediate figures of authority. El Vitaminas entices Juanjo to participate in one of his secrets: a new way to spy on their neighborhood. Juanjo later discovers that this new way of seeing the neighborhood is nothing new at all; it is seeing it from a different vantage point. He notes, “La revelación me pareció una extravagancia, pues para ver la calle no hacía falta asomarse a ninguna ventana, vivíamos en ella” (46). El Vitaminas’ proposition appears ridiculous, but el Vitaminas “lo dijo con tanto misterio” (46) that Juanjo could not resist joining him. This new angle is playful and voyeuristic at its core because the children can see out but cannot be seen from the outside. This way of

spying on the neighborhood empowers them by allowing them to gaze on others from a privileged unseen position and to form a special relationship with the street. Juanjo explains, “Más que mi calle, era una versión mística de mi calle” (48). This know-without-letting-know position mirrors Spain’s panoptic monitoring of the country’s citizens. Juanjo’s position of seer gives him a feeling of power which in turn transforms the street, imbuing it with a “calidad onírica” (52). The relationship with el Vitaminas also changes when el Vitaminas, despite being Juanjo’s friend, decides to charge for the privilege of seeing the street. He charges Juanjo “diez céntimos al principio; veinte, cuando comprendió que ya no podría vivir sin ver la calle” (50). This unexpected financial burden on Juanjo and the accompanying addiction to the power that the gaze gives him bring the protagonist to the guilt-inducing act of stealing.

The first and only victim of Juanjo’s theft is his father. Juanjo admits, “[M]e aficioné a robarle, aunque con enorme sentimiento de culpa” (51). The guilt that Juanjo feels is psychologically damaging because he is unable to stop stealing and thinks that this theft will destroy his life. Juanjo’s fear is exaggerated in relation to the gravity of the crime. At one point he recounts, “acabaré en la cárcel” (52), despite the fact he only steals ten to twenty *centimos*. This exaggerated fear exposes not only the guilt associated with stealing but also his fear of acting outside the acceptable social norm. Like Juanjo predicted, the addiction to stealing increases with time until Juanjo steals five pesetas from his father’s wallet. This amount seems so great that he thinks he can “ver la calle desde el sótano del Vitaminas durante el resto de mi vida” (53). The illusion of wealth and the ability to spend provide Juanjo with both pleasure and distress. The pleasure is power, as he can steal and spend anonymously, while the distress comes from the guilt that is accumulated by stealing in increasing quantities. Stealing the five pesetas causes such an intense feeling of remorse in Juanjo that he knows he cannot use this money to

watch the street. He must either return it or destroy it to relieve himself of the psychological burden. Afraid of being sent to prison, Juanjo thinks, “[A] esa hora comprendí que ni mi conciencia soportaría el peso de un delito de esa naturaleza ni la policía sería tan torpe como para no dar con el ladrón” (53). Juanjo’s fear of being caught is representative of the ideological state apparatus that guards against theft in Spain by using guilt as a deterring factor. This mechanism is so effective that it deeply disturbs Juanjo, and he feels that his apprehension is inescapable. Further emphasizing the effects guilt from theft, Juanjo feels terrorized by the fact that “todo el mundo me miraba” (54). He feels guilty for stealing, and he tries to cover his acts by destroying the five pesetas. According to Bybee, Merisca, and Velasco in *Guilt and Children*, “[W]hen faced with a guilt-producing event, some participants try to cover their tracks, literally hide the evidence, and lie to protect themselves” (208). Similarly Juanjo shows his guilt by trying to protect himself through hiding the evidence and lying to conceal his actions. Unfortunately, Juanjo’s guilt cannot be cured because, as Bybee, Merisca, and Velasco mention, guilt is usually alleviated through confession, not hiding. By not confessing his acts of stealing, Juanjo does not alleviate but increases his remorse. Accordingly he learns from his mother that “la destrucción de dinero era un delito” (Millás 54), which further increases his distress. Stealing mars Juanjo with guilt. Ironically, “mi padre no echó nunca en falta aquella fortuna, por lo que la policía tampoco apareció por casa” (56), ending this first guilt-laden episode in the narration of *El mundo*. Because Juanjo does not find an appropriate release from theft through confession and resolution, he commits further guilt-inducing acts.

Juanjo’s guilt continues to grow as he feels that he cannot express himself because of the repressive society. Millás introduces María José as a symbol of the repressed as seen from Juanjo’s point of view. In this instance, the author chooses to foreshadow María José’s leftist

political orientation with the predominant use of her left hand. He describes María José as a person that “se encontraba en un mundo al que no pertenecía” (136). By all indications within the text, Millás works in this mechanism of deceit to inform the reader of Juanjo’s own political inclination. Millás writes “el hecho de que fuera zurda pareció una señal” (136) to place emphasis on her leftist condition and its importance to the narration. Even though being left-handed is rarely problematic, Millás lets the reader know that María José’s *zurda* condition was taken seriously by her educators. At her school, the teachers “habían intentado obligarla a escribir con la derecha” (137) to assert their power over those students that deviated from their concepts of normality. Subsequently, María José tells Juanjo that “el mundo estaba pensado <<por un diestro y para un diestro>>” (138) and that anyone opposing it is excluded from the county’s discourses. Thus, through María José’s comments, Millás symbolically portrays *el falangismo* to be the only ideology accepted in Spain at the time. To reinforce this ideology, guilt is often used by society as a mechanism to instill orderly living. Donenberg and Weisz explain, “Guilt is also an important tool for parents, teachers, and society. Parents and teachers are responsible for helping children learn how to function in society, establish meaningful relationships with others, abide by societal laws and norms, and feel a commitment to the larger society” (247). In this manner, guilt becomes an ideological tool that the leaders of society use on the country’s subjects to guide their behavior. This emotion is meant to inspire the citizens to keep the laws of the land and feel committed to their presently instituted society. To demonstrate how guilt is instituted as an ideological state apparatus and as a mechanism of repression, Donenberg and Weisz add, “Thus, guilt is a critical part of lessons that parents and educators are asked to teach children. Finally, society depends on its members to feel a certain degree of guilt in order to maintain social order” (246). In this way the feeling of culpability helps rear

contributing, peaceful, and respectful citizens, and at the same time represses possible dissensions. Thus the socio-political tension manifest in María José's need to maintain her sense of individuality in the face of external pressures to conform to codes of conduct is contrary to her sense of self. Millás' apparent intentions in the discussion of left versus right-handedness and the possible political implications are revealed as María José and other students embark on a brave, but already doomed, demonstration against the regime. This episode of the novel shows the government's repression when guilt fails to instill orderly living.

To illustrate the ideological state apparatuses in Spain, Millás shows the power of the ruling forces. After a recital at the university, Juanjo joins the demonstration against the government where María José plays an important organizational role. The seemingly peaceful atmosphere is turned violent in an instant. Juanjo recalls, "Apenas habíamos recorrido quinientos metros, cuando apareció delante de nosotros un grupo de policías a caballo" (Millás 145). These officers are prepared to dismantle any form of opposition. The demonstrators suddenly feel a sense of impotence and terror as they disperse in all directions. Even though they had planned to throw "bolas de acero" (145) at the officers' horses, their plan proved ineffective as "[n]o se cayó ningún caballo" (145), and the officers broke up the demonstration by charging at them on horseback. Juanjo describes, "La carga, brutal, rompió el cuerpo de la manifestación, que se dividió en varios grupos que corrieron, ciegos, en todas las direcciones" (145). Unable to resist, some demonstrators disperse while others are arrested. Juanjo is left to ponder two feelings after the swift reprisal by the police: one of terror and the other of guilt. The feelings of terror occur as he sees María José violently "arrastrada en medio de la avenida por un gris que la metió a golpes en un furgón" (146). Juanjo's feelings of guilt during the same experience are very complex. He feels guilty for breaking the law and openly rebelling against the government, but he also feels

sorrow for not expressing himself and for letting the policemen abuse his friend. Amidst emotions of remorse and fear, Juanjo describes himself, “Estaba paralizado por la posibilidad de que me detuvieran” (145). Knowing that he would lose his job if he is caught at the rally, he decides to hide rather than continuing the fight. On his way home, Juanjo sees the widespread power of the repressive forces in Spain and witnesses how some menacing men “habían puesto la bodega [de Mateo, el padre de María José] de patas arriba y la estaban registrando palmo a palmo” (147). Unharmful and undiscovered by the police, Juanjo wonders: “¿Acaso podía yo haber hecho algo?” (146). Juanjo feels blamed from all angles. He experiences impotence in front of a controlling power that he cannot manage, he is terrorized that he might lose his job, and he feels incapable of expressing his political opinions. Martin L. Hoffman masterfully explains how witnesses of traumatic events experience guilt: “Observers who do not help, however, may often feel guilty about their inaction. In this case, the self-blame attribution that turns empathic distress into guilt is due to the awareness not of causing the victim’s distress but of allowing it to happen or continue” (98). In *El mundo*, Juanjo’s inability to help María José or save Mateo’s shop evokes further emotions of guilt. These feelings, in addition to the previous guilt associated with stealing, imbue Juanjo with thoughts of alienation. By repeatedly failing to release his accumulated guilt, Juanjo sees himself like “el hombre más solo del universo” (Millás 146). He gradually sees himself as a failure, which turns his ever-increasing guilt into shame.

As a reaction to his guilt, Juanjo engages in a variety of shame-driven actions. These actions are both a means of escape from oppression and also a mechanism of delay for his guilt. Because these deeds do not alleviate his previous distress nor resolve his desire, they only further damage his psyche. According to Jacques Lacan, guilt is caused by not satisfying one’s desire. He writes, “[T]he only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to

one's desire" (319). Discussing ethics, Lacan describes guilt as the result of deferring one's desire for a smaller lure in the form of an *objet petit a*. In Juanjo's case, instead of standing up for his opinions, he resigns to his fate and postpones releasing his guilt by using drugs. As a commentator on Lacan, Slavoj Žižek discusses the repercussions of an unfulfilled desire in relation to living with guilt. He writes, "[T]here is a *forced choice* which marks the subject's existence with guilt ... this traumatic situation is then *repeated*, 'replayed,' opening up to the subject the possibility to 'redeem' himself/herself by means of a suicidal *act*" (80). Žižek describes how living with one's guilt drives that person toward suicide if no other escape is possible. Likewise, Juanjo internalizes his guilt, which pushes him toward suicidal acts as a form of release. While the desire to commit suicide is explicit, it too remains unfulfilled similar to an *objet petit a*. This unfulfillment parallels his inability to find appropriate releases for any of his other oppressive emotions.

Millás shows how Juanjo internalizes his guilt as he first experiments with hallucinatory drugs. In his father's workshop Juanjo finds a "frasco de éter" (Millás 56) from which he inhales vapors and experiences hallucinations. Juanjo describes, "Y lo olía de vez en cuando, pues había llegado a descubrir y apreciar sus propiedades narcóticas" (56). Smelling the ether gives Juanjo a sense of elation, but unfortunately it does not provide a means of bettering his condition or releasing his guilt accumulated from stealing. Instead, drugs alienate Juanjo from his family, school, and the society and do not resolve his core emotional problems. Rather than dealing with the consequences of his actions, Juanjo prefers to abuse drugs. He writes, "Durante algunos días apenas salí de casa y abusé del éter más de lo debido" (64). This fascination with drug-inducing narcotics numbs his body and mind, thereby temporarily transporting him away from his feelings of guilt. Consequently, instead of resolution, drugs alter his perception and delay the steps he

could take to alleviate his guilt. Thus, drugs become akin to a Lacanian *objet petit a* that serves as another mechanism of deception or postponement of action. In drugs, Juanjo finds a semi-escape from his guilt, while he further alienates himself from his world.

As an adult, Juanjo ponders drugs and other drug users in Spain. He compares the effects of drugs to the guilt caused by not being able to effectively express their political opinions. He thinks that “no sé que habría dicho Marx de esto de las drogas” (164) and then continues, “Seguramente la hierba era una droga pequeño-burguesa, una droga de clase media, *de quiero y no puedo*, una droga sin ambición formal ni instinto de cambio, una droga de mierda” (164, emphasis added). In this way, drugs are not an escape from tyranny, but rather show a clear impotence of rejecting the status quo and accepting guilt as a defining condition. Juanjo calls marijuana “una droga de clase media” (164) because he considers the middle class to be content with its position and unwilling to take drastic measures to better itself even when the opportunity arises. Even though Juanjo recognizes the deprecating function of drugs, he lights his joint and, “me lo fui fumando yo solo, muy despacio” (164). He is not only unwilling to rebel but also chooses to submerge in his guilt. In drugs, he finds a temporary release while in his state of non-action. This partial release functions like an *objet petit a* and moves from a mechanism of delay to a desired object itself, thus obstructing the greater desire for self-expression. In another instance, Juanjo relates his use of pot to the greater Spanish society declaring, “Nosotros, al ingerirlo, sólo nos suicidábamos un poco” (27). Juanjo explains that drugs were not taken to defy the government but rather as a statement of cowardly complacency. In contemplating this emotion, Žižek writes that one can “conceive the very act of assuming *guilt* as an escape from the real traumatism – we don’t only escape *from guilt* but also escape *into* guilt, take refuge in it” (44). In this fashion, Juanjo’s guilt increases as he delays his desire for freedom. Millás

demonstrates the role of drugs in his contemporary society. “Esa necesidad de narcotizarse está muy presente en el mundo contemporáneo. Es una manera de escapar de la realidad y de la conciencia” (Beilin 124). Escaping from conscience is a clear symbol of guilt. As one escapes into guilt, culpability becomes a mechanism of delay. Because Juanjo feels he cannot escape his condition, he incorporates this emotion and takes refuge in it as a means of escape in the less-desired but semi-sufficient *objet petit a*.

Juanjo’s unresolved and repeated feelings of guilt in time turn his attention from his wrongful deeds to himself as the cause of the problem. When Juanjo places blame on himself and not on his deeds, his guilt turns to shame. Though shame is a complex feeling that is similar to guilt and arrived at from similar acts, the difference is subtle. Katchadourian observes, “The more sensible approach is to view regret, embarrassment, shame, and guilt as distinct emotions that nonetheless overlap and flow into each other” (8). The lack of complete definitions for where guilt ends and shame starts leads us to conclude that both emotions can be interconnected in Juanjo’s development. Katchadourian explains that “wrongdoing elicits guilt; shortcomings elicit shame. Guilt makes the person feel bad (‘I’m no good’); shame makes the person feel inadequate (‘I’m not good enough’)” (18). Thus, shame is more damning to the individual than guilt because it places blame on the self and not the deed. While shame normally leads to either confession or concealment, in Juanjo it leads to extreme embarrassment, alienation from his peers, the desire to shrink, and finally to the possibility of suicide as a redeeming action.

Juanjo’s alienation from his family, school, and neighborhood is further evidence of his shame. Coming from a large family with few monetary resources, yet with the expectation of pertaining to a higher class than the other children in their neighborhood, creates a painful dichotomy for Juanjo. He struggles with the idea that he is different from other children. His

parents tell him that “la calle era un territorio prohibido” (Millás 23) and that playing with the other kids would hurt his ambitions. Thus, Juanjo becomes aware that it is optimal to engage the street from an outsider’s perspective. The street where he resides is not his street. For this reason he befriends the sickly Vitaminas because he does not play in the street as other children.

Juanjo’s relationship with the neighborhood is a fantastic and semi-traumatic guilt-inducing and shame-provoking event. He discovers the concept of mediation when he views the neighborhood through el Vitaminas’ basement window. This mediation thus becomes a defining *objet petit a* for the rest of his interactions because he chooses to stop short of his actual ambitions. His relationship with the street is indirect. Instead of going into the street to play, Juanjo prefers to observe other children in a semi-voyeuristic fashion. Juanjo mentions that seen this way “la calle despedía de el fulgor que debe quedar tras un ataque nuclear” (48). Through the mediation of the window, Juanjo alienates himself from the neighborhood and from his future relationships.

As mentioned previously, Juanjo interacts with his mother and el Vitaminas’ father, Mateo, through a mediated and alienated perspective. As a symptom of shame, his relationship with the other characters reveals his inability to easily connect to other people. Juanjo befriends el Vitaminas because of the advantages this friendship offers him, not necessarily because they get along. El Vitaminas offers him privileges like viewing the street through the surreal window and getting to know María José, his sister. He mentions, “Comprendí que, aun estando el uno al lado del otro nos encontrábamos en dimensiones diferentes” (75). Specifically, Juanjo never even learns his friend’s true name; he is el Vitaminas, a person named because of the many pills he takes to keep him healthy for as long as possible. Even though Juanjo has removed himself from his friend, el Vitaminas’ death further alienates him from his relationships with other characters. As with el Vitaminas, Juanjo’s relationship with María José is characterized by mediation. He is

attracted to her even though he considers her ugly and has a lifelong desire to befriend her. After being constantly rejected by her, an unexpected opportunity to have a sexual relationship with her arises. Nevertheless Juanjo stops short of realizing his dream and only kisses her. Sitting next to her, he makes the startling discovery that “quien me miraba desde sus ojos era el Vitaminas, que estaba dentro de ella” (156). María José reminds him of his deceased friend. He forgoes his sexual pursuit because he finds completion in finding out the reason he was attracted to her. El Vitaminas becomes as an *objet petit a* in his relationship with María José.

To further emphasize Juanjo’s alienation, his relationship with Luz is just as mediated by a *objet petit a* as his relationship with María José and el Vitaminas. Though he considers Luz the prettiest girl in his neighborhood, Juanjo finds his relationship with her difficult. Sitting next to each other in a summer class, their legs touch and Juanjo recalls that “mientras escribíamos, mi pierna izquierda y su derecha se aproximaban y permanecían juntas en una suerte de caricia prolongada, sin que nada, por encima del mueble híbrido, delatara esta actividad subterránea” (191). Touching their legs underneath the desk and showing no affection above the desk is symbolic of the condemnation of expression in Spain. Juanjo does not fail to mention the quintessential “por arriba sucedían unas cosas y por abajo otras, así de simple” (191) to express that this surreal way of living extends beyond himself to other people as well. Resorting to this duplicity is a symptom of shame in Juanjo because he chooses to satisfy his desire only partly “under the table” and not to pursue Luz openly. Katchadourian equates “shame with failing to fulfill the expectations of the *ego-ideal*” (18). In the relationship between Juanjo and Luz, they express hidden affection under the desk in private, but, because of the expectations set by the *ego-ideal* and their peers, they cannot openly admit to their feelings. This embarrassing emotion gives way to shame and alienation from the narrative world and is another way through which

the characters in *El mundo* deal with the prohibitive regime of the time. Hiding is essential “en un mundo en el que siempre había una vida oculta en el interior de la manifiesta” (192). Through the example of these relationships, Juanjo expresses how living under the dictatorship of Franco and the strict guidelines of his parents cause him to deal with life through mediation. The alienation from his peers increases and causes him psychological stress that finds no release.

Juanjo’s feelings of alienation caused by shame continue to manifest themselves in his desire to run away, shrink, and disappear. Juanjo writes that “he dedicado gran parte de mi vida a escapar de aquellas calles” (24). He not only desires to escape the streets but also himself as he considers his childhood an “infancia miserable” (159) and an “infancia de mierda” (161). Because he has no suitable way of releasing his pent up distress, his childhood becomes delineated by lack, simulation, and repression. Bybee, Merisca, and Velasco find, “Shame is typically accompanied by a desire to shrink away, to hide, and to leave the situation” (207). Juanjo is the perfect embodiment of this aspect of shame throughout the novel as he tries to find a way out of every situation. In the family, he feels oppressed because of the lack of funds and the double standards of his parents. In the school he feels abused by the strictness of the teachers. In his personal relationships, he feels alienated, and politically he is restrained. While in this restrictive situation, Juanjo passionately escapes every situation. Throughout his escapes, as previously seen, he runs away on a mental level instead of physically dealing with the situation. He compares himself to a termite that has to get its food on the harsh surface but lives in tiny tunnels where it resides in safety. Again, Juanjo relates the dichotomy between the publicly restricted life and the hidden life common to the characters in the novel. Juanjo says that not only were the holes where he hid as a termite a place of rest, but that “las galerías subterráneas se construyen también para escapar de algún sitio” (Millás 120). This form of escape is emblematic

of shame because it does not deal with an action or consequence but with the self. Unfortunately, Juanjo blames himself for his failed actions instead of blaming his circumstance. He discusses his delayed escape and its meaning: “Yo huía, a través de ellas [las grietas de las hormigas], del barrio, de la familia, de aquella vida que, incluso sin haber conocido otras, no valía la pena” (120). He defines his escape as not only an escape from others that cause him harm and oppress him, but as an escape from himself. The thought that his own life is not worthwhile is an indication of the shame he feels for his multiple failures. Pondering himself, he comes to the conclusion that he is valueless.

The height of Juanjo’s shame is best illustrated in his childhood attempt to commit suicide. The feelings of shame become tense enough to bring Juanjo to the possibility of releasing his shame through suicide as a final solution. Lacking the ability to decisively take action marks Juanjo with guilt, which in turn “open[s] up to the subject the possibility to ‘redeem’ himself/herself by means of a suicidal *act*” (Žižek 80). Unlike previous mediations, suicide opens up a way for Juanjo to permanently end the infinite cycle of escapes curtailed by the *objet petit a*. The physical pain and emotional belittlement that Juanjo suffers in school are the final motivators for his suicide attempts. Because of Juanjo’s poor performance in school, his parents decide to enroll him in a private academy renowned for improving the grades of the “repetidores” (Millás 194). Instead of a school, this institution is a correctional facility where humans are treated like animals. The sole purpose of the school is the supposed improvement of the deficient students, and the unfortunate students enrolled are beaten for every mistake they commit with sadistic pleasure by the three school masters. Because of the intensity of the memory, Juanjo describes the traumatizing experience at the academy, “Lo diré rápido: aquello no era una academia, era un centro de tortura” (195). With few words, Juanjo describes the

school where the development of the students is secondary to the sadistic satisfaction of its masters. The shame-infusing actions of the teachers lead Juanjo to depression and eventually drive him to thoughts of suicide. According to June Tangeney, when children feel humiliated they are prone to sentiments of rage which can either be exteriorized or interiorized depending on the person and the situation. In any case, “either route – shamed withdrawal or shamed rage – centers on behaviors that are unlikely to rectify or remedy the negative effects on one’s transgressions” (7). Comparatively, Juanjo finds himself in a situation he cannot rectify. He mentions morality, shame, and rage in the same paragraph when expressing his disdain for the school. He pens, “[M]e moría de vergüenza cuando me pegaba la mujer y de rabia cuando me pegaban el cura o el hombre. El dolor físico, atroz, se transformaba, apenas regresaba al pupitre, en un malestar moral que me acompañaba todo el día” (Millás 196-7). The physical pains on top of the emotional weight created by the traumatic events in the academy bring Juanjo into a state of dangerous depression. Because the beatings continue even after Juanjo “reforms” academically, the shame associated with the exposure of his weakness to his peers and the rage of not being able to retaliate against the teachers deepen his desire to “sink into the floor and disappear” (Tangeney 7). Juanjo gives evidence of the constant torture he suffers by empathetically suffering alongside his companions. He mentions, “[L]as torturas que aplicaban a los demás me dolían casi tanto como las que ejercían sobre mí, pues lo que se me hacía insoportable era la atmósfera de humillación general en la que vivíamos” (Millás 198). Paradoxically, Juanjo’s solution to escape the corporeal pain caused by his tutors is to substitute it with more pain. Depressed, Juanjo tries to evade this general shame by seeking suicide.

Juanjo’s first step toward suicide involves a nail in his shoe. When a nail in Juanjo’s shoe becomes displaced, Juanjo purposefully steps on the nail instead of fixing the problem by either

removing the nail or pushing it out of its uncomfortable position. He hopes that his foot will get infected and writes, “[Y]o llevaba semanas alimentando aquella herida con la esperanza de que me atacara el tétanos, para morirme” (199). Even though the nail causes him harm, it also releases some emotional stress. The everyday school beatings and the shame felt because of them increase Juanjo’s death drive. Of particular interest in this case, his suicide is impeded again by *objet petit a* as the nail in the shoe acts as a pleasure-purveyor and desire-inhibitor. Because death is his desire, the nail in the shoe becomes a temporary solution and an obsessive distraction. To further emphasize Juanjo’s pain as an *objet petit a*, he recounts, “Caminaba, pues, cargando el peso del cuerpo en ese lado, apretando los dientes para soportar el dolor dulce porque me iba a sacar de la academia, me iba a sacar del barrio, de la familia, de la vida” (199). He describes the pain that he feels from the nail as *sweet* because it could kill him and end his emotional sting. Juanjo’s shame-inducing actions are directed at himself and further damage his psyche. Ironically, like an *objet petit a*, the wound from the nail does not lead to death. The pain produced by the nail was partly play: “Me gustaba hurgar en la herida abierta que, milagrosamente, ni siquiera se infectó” (199). By playing with the wound and talking about the sweetness of the pain, Juanjo becomes distracted from his desperate desire to escape the academy through death.

Juanjo’s desire to die as an escape from shame is postponed in the same way as his previous attempts to alleviate his guilt were delayed. Katchadourian describes how guilt, and by correlation shame, is associated with aggression and suicide. He ascribes that intense feelings of guilt are most commonly internalized, acting against the self as repressed aggression. He writes, “The accusations the depressed direct at themselves may be unconsciously intended for others. Moreover, their hostility is turned inward and directed at themselves, most dramatically

manifested when it results in suicide” (121-2). Thus, Juanjo’s anger is misguided in its focus on himself instead of toward those that cause him pain. The beatings he receives in school, his family’s poverty, and the repressive system of government act as external causes of his anger. The hostility he turns inward is marred by guilt, shame, and the various *objet petit a* that impede him in self-expression. Juanjo makes many attempts at harming himself. He tries to asphyxiate himself with gas from hot coals on the brazier, and he ponders jumping from the window but lacks the courage to do so. Thus death escapes him, and he continues shamed.

Juanjo’s inward spiraling negativity leads to more suicidal attempts. To avoid the beatings at the academy, he wanders aimlessly in the rain instead of going to class. Drenched in water and his guilt, Juanjo walks “pegado a la pared, como un prófugo” (Millás 201). Unable to escape, Juanjo continues submerged in guilty thoughts of how others will react to his truancy and judge his actions. As he tries to “huir de la vergüenza” (202), he seeks to get hit by a loose cornice that never loosens enough to hit him. When this method offers no escape, he decides to remain wet, hoping that illness will finish him off. He reasons, “Si me mojo, podría morirme de una pulmonía” (204), but then “[p]ero no pasa nada. Sigo vivo, vivo y sufriente” (204). As a result of the accumulated feelings of shame and guilt and Juanjo’s inability to find release even in death, his depression darkens. At this point he ponders returning to the academy drenched in rain. He does not want to face the teachers’ punishment nor his parents. Referring to his teachers, he says, “[L]a pena, ya lo había comprobado, excitaba más a nuestros torturadores” (206). Conscious that his humiliating situation would further incriminate him in the eyes of his teachers, Juanjo goes home feeling shamed. There he ponders: “Qué mecanismo psicológico tan raro, y tan común, el que provoca el sentimiento de culpa y de pudor en la víctima y no el verdugo” (200). In the midst of his suicidal thoughts, Juanjo comes to this enlightening

conclusion about his shame, yet he is unable to conquer it and find release to his emotions. While he understands the process of psychological transference of guilt from the tyrant to the subject through ideological discourse and repression, Juanjo cannot impede it. Because of these experiences, guilt and shame become the defining characteristics of Juanjo's childhood.

As Juanjo progresses through various traumatic episodes in his youth, his psyche is weighed down by oppressive feelings of guilt and shame. Even though he feels dejected because of the guilt associated with theft and later his inability to meaningfully express himself politically, it is shame that causes the most lasting damage. His use of hallucinatory substances leads him to alienate himself from others and to attempt suicide several times. Juanjo worsens his situation because he is caught in an ever-eluding cycle of desire and the *objet petit a* that keeps him from fully releasing his emotional pain. Only as an adult, Juanjo starts to understand his predicament and discovers writing as a way out. Of writing Millás reveals, "El escribir guarda más relación con el área de la necesidad que con la de la voluntad, porque en ese acto se satisface una deuda no contraída se cancela un compromiso no firmado y se restituye algo que jamás se tomó" ("Literatura y necesidad" 187). The debt that Millás refers to is guilt, and this emotion ties him to the past and pushes him to write as a way to heal. It also motivates him to create Juanjo with these same emotions. As Katchadourian explains, "The association between guilt and debt goes back to ancient religious codes and continues to color our legal and moral views" (21). In the case of Millás, his youth in Spain drives him to write, as evidenced in his reflectory character Juanjo. As a cathartic response to guilt, Millás confesses, "[H]e conseguido convertir en una manera de vida lo que en mi infancia era un modo de huir de la realidad" (Beilin 127). Similarly in *El mundo*, Juanjo's escape from guilt turns introspectively and is channeled into writing. Writing becomes his escape from his childhood experience.

To frame shame and guilt as an innovative way to interpret Juanjo's development in *El mundo*, I refer to the reoccurring image that embodies Millás' writing: the electric scalpel. In post-Franco Spain, Millás' writing becomes a tool for remembering, identifying, and healing. It is intended for a Spanish audience plagued with problems similar to Juanjo. When the electric scalpel cuts, "cauteriza la herida en el momento mismo de producirla" (8). Similarly, when Juanjo becomes a writer, he opens old wounds to relive the trauma of his childhood and also cauterizes these wounds through the confession his shame and guilt. "Volví a escuchar la frase fundacional de esta novela, quizá del resto de mi obra (cauteriza la herida al tiempo de abrirla), y supe con efectos retroactivos que aquella fascinación de mi padre [el inventor del bisturí eléctrico en España] había constituido para mí un programa de vida" (225). Through Millás' writing, Juanjo thus becomes a symbol of identification for countless children, and *El mundo* becomes a literary release from a repressed youth.

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My Olive-Green Fridge and I: The Posthuman Identity in *El púgil*

The simulacrum is never what hides the truth –

it is truth that hides the fact that there is none.

The simulacrum is true.

Jean Baudrillard

In the early pages of *El púgil*, Mike Wilson Reginato introduces the two main protagonists of his novel, Art and his little olive-green refrigerator (Hal) by engulfing them in a collage of intertextuality. They ride in a Falcon and listen to “She’s Lost Control” by Joy Division, which reminds Art of “las animaciones de plastilina como *Rodolfo el reno y Frostiy el hombre de nieve*” (27). At the intersection between fiction and reality, old American cars, British music, and children’s film combine to create an environment where the reader can both recognize and lose himself in the semi-tangible world of pop culture. Part of the Chilean writing group Freak Power¹, Wilson avoids writing a characteristic science fiction novel and embraces a new cyberpunk style of writing that relies on the modification of both high technological advances and low culture. He mixes obscure pop-culture references to critique the current construction of the world. This novel exemplifies the use of multiple intertextual references from various audio-visual sources to immerse its reader in this new narrative world. Wilson appropriates the more general intertextual trends of the Freak Power movement and applies them to the creation of his novel and his characters. Wilson irrevocably twists the symbolic function of his interconnected references from their original signifiers and gives them new meanings to create an original work. He both alienates the characters from their previous experiences and gives them new meaning by uniting them in a symbiotic relationship. This symbiosis culminates

in the birth of a cyborg-like, shared identity of the two protagonists. Crafting this new identity for his characters through intertextual references is Wilson's strongest point, and I venture to explain the transformation of his characters toward a posthuman identity.

In this article, I argue that the two protagonists' cyborg union occurs inside Art's hallucinatory experience of the world. Though Art and Hal's mechanical-biological union does not take place at the corporeal level, their union occurs at the psychological level in their desire to become like the other. Because their simulacral relationship occurs in Art's hallucination, I use theories from both Jacques Lacan and Jean Baudrillard to explain the protagonists' connection as a mirror image identity formation. Thus, Lacan's theory of the mirror stage shows why the two protagonists are attracted to each other, and Baudrillard's study of simulacra both classifies the novel and shows how the relationship between Art and Hal evolves toward total simulacrum as the only place where their union can occur.

While the application of the orthodox definition of the cyborg is unlikely in relation to Wilson's protagonists, I propose that Art and Hal's union is valid because it happens at the psychological level. In her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway explains that the cyborg is a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). In this way, Haraway describes the cyborg as a creature that combines both flesh and machine into a new being. Wilson's cyborg in *El púgil* varies from the machine-flesh physical union; nevertheless, the protagonists combine at a psychic level to form one entity. Regarding the possible creation of a mental cyborg, Katherine Hayles observes in *How We Became Posthuman* that a cyborg can form between two subjects as a mental construction as well as a body-machine combination. Hayles argues that when a subject collaborates with another through a computer chat interface, they form a cyborg. Their

communication mediated by the computer screen negates the value of their bodies and emphasizes their mental connection through a machine. In the virtual chat, the only viable points of interaction are achieved through their mental communication. She writes, “This construction necessarily makes the subject into a cyborg, for the enacted and represented bodies are brought into conjunction through the technology that connects them” (xiii). Hayles thus defines mental collaboration with the aid of a machine as the basis of a cyborg. Though the subjects never incorporate the computer physically, they form a cyborg. In *El púgil*, the connection between Art and Hal is precisely this kind of a relationship. They never unite physically; yet their bond makes them act as one entity.

Tracing the steps of the formation of the cyborg between the two protagonists in *El púgil* reveals Art’s doubt of the value of his human identity. As a successful boxer, Art finds himself in front of an opponent who tears him down blow by blow. The hits are so strong that Art realizes this might be the end of his career. As the match continues, Art finds himself on the floor of the ring and confesses that the fight is “un baile patético y embriagado” (Wilson 11). The punches darken his sight and the assault ends with the bell, but Art does not return to his designated corner. He stays in the middle of the ring. The narrator describes the situation: “[E]l púgil cayó de rodillas y se puso a llorar. Es importante que no haya confusión, éstas no fueron unas pocas lágrimas que se podían disimular con el sudor, es decir, se puso a llorar de verdad, sin reparo” (12). The spectators in Luna Park look at him in amazement, the sound of the constant shutters of cameras shower him, and his career ends pathetically at the weakest point in his life. Even though his pugilistic career ends, his rediscovery of himself commences. Looking for a new understanding of the self is essential for Art in the face of the massive humiliation suffered in the ring. When Art hears the radio announcer calling him a “maricón [que] se pone a llorar como una

na” (17), Art “desenchufó la radio” (17) in disgust to the portrayal of his identity. Faced with the dissonant choice to either rescue his dignity or continue shamed, Art attempts to redefine himself. The omniscient narrator then subtly introduces the reader to the second protagonist. The “refrigerador pequeño verde-oliva” (13), who “Art ... apodaba *el androide*” (12), becomes the object of a second identification for Art to supplant his human weakness. Seeking the realignment of Art’s identity is his response to the psyche-damaging effects of the fight that terminates his career and distorts his public image.

The realignment of Art’s identity is best analyzed in the theoretical framework of the mirror stage. In *Écrits*, Jacques Lacan explains that the creation of the self is a realignment of the current “I” combined with a perceived superior “Ideal-I.” Art seeks a secondary identification because his “I” is consumed and fragmented as a result of the loss in the boxing ring. Because of the stares of the spectators and the spectacle of the paparazzi, Art is forced to rethink his identity. To deny the shame of exposure he experiences, Art associates himself with a new image that he perceives is stronger than his own. While the mirror stage is best known for taking place in infancy when a child sees himself reflected in a mirror while in the arms of a caregiver, in Art’s case, this identification occurs much later in adulthood during a period when his psyche reverts to a childlike state because of his fragmented identity. Lacan writes that the mirror stage is primordially “an identification ... the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (2). In the mirror stage, one becomes associated “with an organized image of the self that defends against its fragmented experience and motor incompetence” (Williams 48). Art fulfils both these requirements as he perceives that his identity is shattered and his motor skills are not as effective as they were before the Luna Park incident. Art “alzó la guardia, inclinó la cabeza” and thought introspectively that “[e]sas manos habían sido su vida” (Wilson

13). Reflecting on the motor inconsistency of his hands and how they functioned in the past as hammers in a boxing ring, Art attempts to identify with an image that is capable of overcoming the insufficiencies of his humanity.

Art chooses to identify himself with a machine. The connection to the machine had been an inviting option for Art even before the boxing incident. In an experiment a few years before, Luciana, one of Art's friends, connects a camera to a television and points it at the screen. The mysterious result shocks Art. "En la tele aparecía un abismo de luz y sombra, una infinita serie de cuadros, uno dentro del otro... era algo profano. En el fondo del abismo, le pareció ver un vacío irrefutable, no lo entendía. Echándose atrás, se estremeció y apartó la mirada" (16). Art is disconcerted by the televised abyss of replicated images and turns his head away from the image as if to escape its powerful suction. In the auto-referent image he also uncannily recognizes himself. He discovers that "él era como esa tele conectada a una cámara" (16). His personal self-image is in flux between the human and the auto-referent. Looking at Luciana's experiment, Art comprehends that "no hallaba su identidad, su consciencia su yo ... estaba convencido de que él era una de estas máquinas autorreferentes ... no había un Art pensador, solamente un conjunto de pensamientos" (16). In this way, Art mistrusts the reality of his human self and shows that the questioning of his identity had began long before the failure in Luna Park. As the subject in the Lacanian mirror stage fuses his identity with a superior identity, Art seeks the image of the machine to overcome his dissonant reality. Thus, Art becomes predisposed to a powerful identity shift.

Consequently, the posthuman auto-referent image becomes an answer to Art's identity concerns. While he contemplates his identity, he symptomatically hears a strange sound in the corner of his apartment. His olive-green fridge is coming to life. Typical of a hallucination as an

auto-referent image, the world around Art seems to fade away. From this point in the novel, time becomes irrelevant. Art “ignoraba la hora cuando llegó a su apartamento” (19) and to relax, Art “[v]olvió a enchufar la radio. Estática. Buscó una estación... nada” (19). Similarly, the radio and all that Art has known as real become inconsequential. The fridge becomes the only functioning reality. It directs Art’s attention to it as the only important object. As his mind is drawn toward the fridge as the location of the strange noises, he hears “[un] zumbido eléctrico” (19) that intensifies with time until it explodes into a semi-clear enunciation of his nickname *Brujo*. As Art realizes that the sound comes from his olive-green fridge, he feels claustrophobic, much like he did in the boxing ring. “Art dio unos pasos hacía atrás, alejándose del aparato hasta que su espalda dio con un rincón, estaba acorralado. Contra las cuerdas.” (20) In this way, Art associates the boxing ring with his apartment and the fridge. While in the boxing ring, Art fragments his identity; in his apartment he finds the possibility of a new self-discovery. The fridge’s first word – repeated three times from an unclear pronunciation to a clearer “brujjohh” (20) – also has special significance to Art. Art becomes *el brujo*, a shaman figure, because he animates the fridge to self-consciousness in his hallucination. Thus, Art becomes subordinate to Hal’s image as the *locus* of a superior identity. In the novel, Art and Hal are subject to desires that can only be satisfied by the other. To describe mirror stage identification, Lacan sustains, “[T]he mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world ... the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double*, in which psychological realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested” (*Écrits* 3). Understood this way, mirror stage identifications produce a variety of situations and psychological realities only coherent to the subject. These identifications can be formed from any heterogeneous realities and produce meaning from otherwise meaningless data. In a similar manner, an inanimate object like a fridge can come to life, as well as become a

superior image for the subject's desire. The olive-green fridge becomes the *locus* of a new realignment of Art's identity because it comes to life at the precise point when Art doubts his human identity. He views the android as a means of escape from his fragmented self-image. From this identification, Art commences toward the union with the machine as a cure for his unstable human psyche. Reflecting on his reaction to Luciana's experimental auto-referent image, Art realizes that his identity is as unstable as a mirror turned on itself. Because of the negativity he feels while watching this fluctuating image, Art seeks to anchor his identity within a more stable figure. This realization leads Art to question his humanity and seek a realignment of his identity through the olive-green refrigerator, Hal. Because of his previous emotional failure, Art seeks identification with the android and considers the mechanical order superior to organic matter.

At the same time, a similar identification crisis occurs in the android. Inside Art's hallucinatory experience, Hal feels insufficient in his current rectangular shape and wants to appear more human. Hal wants to acquire appendages to become more like Art. For both Art and Hal to become complete, they need to erase the corporeal and mental differences between each other. Consequently, Hal proclaims that his corporeal inadequacy is impeding their effective communication. He says “—me miras. te soy adefesio... sí... lo tuyo. no es asombro. te repugno. debo pensar... entiendo. no soy compatible con tu realidad” (Wilson 21). In this fashion, Hal describes his deficient condition, and Art acts as an ideal corporeal form for him. Hal mentions that their realities do not fully match because his body is not a congruent reflection of Art's body. For their cyborg-like union to take place in the mirror stage, their body images must also align. Hal further explains, “lo que rechazas. es mi apariencia... soy incongruente. lo sé. mi fisionomía. quisieras ver un antropoide, —pensamientos involuntarios le invadían la mente—

algo más humano svsss” (21). Hal deems himself incongruent with Art because of his non-human appearance. Because of this lack, Hal pursues his objective to gain a body similar to Art’s form. Hal mentions, “yo sería menos desconcertante. lo sé. si svsss tuviera brazos, piernas... ojos. sí especialmente ojos. las ventanas... svsss no tiembles. mi apariencia será otra” (21). Thus, Hal expresses the need to obtain an anthropoid body as he tries to humanize himself.

The erasure of their physical differences drives the two protagonists toward their final mental union. As Lacan’s mirror stage subject “find[s] completion” in a “world of his own making” (*Écrits* 3), Art and Hal find hallucinatory completion in each other. Hal’s voice becomes for Art “lo único que tenía sentido” (Wilson 25), while the rest of the world “se desdibujaba y era sumamente inestable” (25). As Art increasingly constructs his reality around this new identity with the android, the voice of Hal pronounces their goal: “tenemos mucho que hacer. svss. tú y yo. seremos una unidad. brujo y hal (25). Their cyborg union becomes their goal. As the reality around the two protagonists blurs, their quest to unite sharpens. Art, under Hal’s direction, finds parts and reconstructs the android in an anthropoid shape. As Hal’s body becomes more anthropoid-like, Art becomes more like an android as suggested by his incremental submission to Hal. These two inescapable desires bring them together. Both Art and Hal sense that their current condition is insufficient, and both seek parts of the other’s physical and psychological identity to satisfy their lack.

Art and Hal’s mirror stage hallucinated connection solidifies their symbiotic relationship. The superior image or “Ideal-I” that Art adopts as a mask on his identity is merely a created simulacrum of a perceived higher value. Thus, the simulacrum becomes the defining way Art incorporates Hal’s image, and the application of this image produces their cyborg identity in the mirror stage. Under these suppositions, the images evolve (or dissolve) from reflections of reality

to pure simulacra that reflect only themselves. Similarly, the two main characters act as thematic symbols of the novel as they disintegrate from reality to simulacra. In their hallucinatory mirror state union, Art assumes the simulacral image of Hal as a negative construction of his ideal self. Consequently, Jean Baudrillard's exposition of the image aids us in analyzing how Hal's simulacrum is created and why the simulacrum is the only space where their mental cyborg can form. Baudrillard describes the four stages of the image before it becomes a total simulacrum as follows:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the absence of a profound reality;

it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (6)

While representations of Baudrillard's first two stages appear briefly in Wilson's *El púgil*, they act as a guiding metaphor for the simulacra that unites Art and Hal. The latter two stages of the image are much more prevalent, and they are the main characterizing trait of the novel. Only in the space of the total simulacrum, Art and Hal unite in the mirror stage to develop this unorthodox version of the cyborg.

To exemplify the first step toward the simulacrum, the olive-green fridge is a reflection of a symbolic reality with a set representation in the narrative world. The fridge is the creation of the "la Cooperación Prototype" (Wilson 107), a company intent on conquering the world with their superior electro-domestic appliances. The olive-green fridge that later takes on the identity of Hal is the first fridge off their assembly line, and he is aptly named "*the first of a kind*" (107). Hal's later ability to communicate and his intense desire to obtain appendages stem from his

parent company's similar desire to grow and expand by aggregating and devouring smaller companies, incorporating them as appendages for the further strength of the company. Wilson explains, "al poco tiempo [the Cooperación Prototype] comenzó a devorar otras compañías globales, agregando así apéndices subsidiarias a su cuerpo colosal" (107). This intent is hereditarily grafted into Hal, who later becomes obsessed with obtaining appendages for mobility, power, and a more human aesthetic. Even so, at the beginning of the narrative, Hal functions as nothing more than an appliance, and Art uses the fridge for storing food and soda. At this stage, the olive-green fridge does not have any meaningful representation in Art's desire, thus embodying Baudrillard's first step in the formation of the simulacrum.

The objects and the characters in the novel slowly distort and gain new functions that alter their previous roles. In the second stage of the image, it "masks and denatures a profound reality" (Baudrillard 6). In *El púgil*, Art questions the purpose of his existence after giving up the fight in Luna Park. He has previously placed a supreme emphasis on the strength of his fists and arms, but they no longer serve him in the same way. Art reflects on his livelihood, "Art se miró las manos, abriendo y cerrándolas como si recién descubriera su función" (Wilson 13). Looking at his hands, he sees them as new appendages that hardly function outside of the ring. They look like his hands, yet they are not fit for boxing and show only a glimpse of their former use. In a similar way to the change in his appendages, Art is not able to recognize himself, "[Él] era alguien que no conocía su yo de ayer" (15). Finding himself in a psychologically unstable condition brings Art to the brink of despair. He notes, "Esas manos habían sido su vida, alzó la guardia, inclinó la cabeza y lanzó un puño hacia el vacío" (13) to test if his hands function as they did in the past. The break from his previous life then becomes definite. Art punches into "el vacío" to show the lack and negativity that he now identifies with his existence. His identity

fluctuates toward a total loss of meaning as a consequence of the events in Luna Park and his doubts about himself. Art questions his identity in its entirety and consequently tries to find new identifications as a cure for his fragmentation.

While Art discovers the negativity of his identity, he also determines that his reality is as unstable as himself. Like Baudrillard's third progression of the image that "masks the absence of a profound reality" (6), Art attaches himself to an image that acts as an "Ideal-I" but in effect, is an absence. The trauma of a disastrous failure in Art's life causes him to rethink his current status and seek a realignment of his image elsewhere. As Lacan demonstrates, "It doesn't matter whether it is real or hallucinated, such an identity will always tend to be established. If it isn't lucky enough to coincide with reality, it will be hallucinated" (*Ethics* 31). Likewise in *El púgil*, the realignment of Art's identity toward the android takes the protagonist into alternative realities. By the same token, Art hears his olive-green fridge make the first noises resembling words: "Art volteó la cabeza. Perplejo, se enfocó en el refrigerador verde-oliva" (Wilson 17), wondering if he was going mad or whether his fridge was indeed talking. The world around Art distorts into a world that is post-meaning and without signifiers. It becomes a world of simulacra where objects, people, and images mask absences in the real world². Wilson creates meaning for both the reader and his protagonist based on simulacral images related to pop culture, music, science fiction literature, and film, rather than information from the character's physical experience. As such, when Art turns on the radio to listen to the news, the radio does not function as it did previously and only renders static. There are no functioning radio stations, and the novelistic world changes from its basis to a total simulacrum. The world around Art becomes a mask upon an absence; Art can no longer contextualize his world because it is transformed in simulacra.

In this environment of simulacra, Hal emerges as a self-conscious machine. He is alive in Art's reflection of a world marked by absence. Even though Hal is conceptualized, he must inscribe himself in Art's symbolic world for their communication to be effective. This incorporation allows their cyborg union to occur as a mirror stage identification. When Hal chooses his name as "algo familiar ... es algo que te agrada" (21), Hal attaches himself to a character in Art's favorite film. He associates himself with a self-aware robot from the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* directed by Stanley Kubrik. Thus, Hal attempts to bridge the gap between himself and Art by verbally inscribing himself in Art's concept of the world. Taking the name of the computer HAL9000 facilitates their communication, even though the connection is based on the absence of meaning behind this name. Hal never becomes a ship's computer nor incorporates much of the characteristics of the filmic HAL9000. Furthermore, Hal chooses to name himself after an object that does not exist outside a film, thus reinforcing the concept of simulacra. After setting up this essential connection, Hal can communicate his thoughts to Art and, at times, even control him. The duplication of meaning in creating referent-less objects is key to understanding the movement of the narrative in *El púgil* from the real to the simulacra. Baudrillard mentions in his critique of the postmodern world that it is the "imaginary situations that feed reality" (13), not the other way around. Similarly in the novel, Art does not decide the fridge's name, but the hallucination names itself and imposes this name on Art. Based on absences, the intertextual references dictate the narration of the novel. The magic of technology and the illusion of the android influence Art's continual movement toward a new identity, mirrored in his relationship with Hal. As the imaginary dictates the real in *El púgil*, Art follows Hal's commandments to provide him with appendages for a corporeal body. The simulacrum

becomes part of Art's reality as the setting of the novel becomes increasingly invaded by simulations.

The constant use of intertextual references in *El púgil* plays with the characters in relation to the other works that appear in the text and creates a space for the mirror image identification between Art and Hal. In Baudrillard's explanation of the simulacra, the fourth step of the image "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it becomes its own pure simulacrum" (6). In this setting, *El púgil* shines. Intertextual references grow into new entities that are no longer connected to their original works; they reduplicate, change to suit the purpose of the text, and lose their original essence to become simulacra. Thus, objects that are purely fictitious invade the novel as interactive objects. In fact, Wilson explains that *El púgil* uses references to other works and brings them to life in the narrative space in an interview with Marcelo Novoa for the online periodical "Puerto de Escape." He describes the process of character creation and their symbolic value: "El otro aspecto que me pareció relevante al escribir *El púgil* era que me iba dando cuenta que mis puntos de referencia no se hallaban en la novela como forma ni como estética, sino que el texto se fue formulando a través de una serie de simulacros anclados en el cine, los cómics, la tele y la cultura pop en general." Not only are the events and the characters in *El púgil* simulations of creations found in other works, they are also simulacra as new constructions with their own meaning. In this simulacra-dominated novelistic world, Art can incorporate Hal as a realignment of his identity. Under orders from Hal, Art enters the apartment building of the "cuatro hombre" (Wilson 96), —the cyborg currently possessing the appendages Hal seeks—, and sees his reflection on a dark glassy door. The image frightens him and "[a]lzó el revólver" (87) because "[p]or un instante creyó ver a otra persona" (87). Symptomatic of the simulacra, the novel stops abruptly, and Hal's voice narrates another experience to Art's mind in which Art saw

his reflection in a train window opposite to him and felt like “otro yo te observaba la nuca” (89). As this experience illustrates, Hal has the ability to enter Art’s mind and dictate his thoughts, as well as the authority to command him to search for appendages. The simulacral space becomes a place where Art and Hal can act as one entity even though they do not connect physically.

For their union to be complete, Hal must equate himself as simulacra. He includes traits from the HAL9000 robot but changes this image into an entirely new simulacrum that is able to dictate Art’s reality. Hal is also similar to HAL9000 in his relentless quest to fulfill his desire, yet he uses Art as his proxy to perform the actions. In the quest to obtain appendages for Hal, Art loses his will and obeys Hal’s commands without question. Consequently, Art kills the owner of a dry-cleaning shop to obtain Hal’s eyes. The shop owner tries to fight back with a samurai sword, to which affront Art uses his gun, “[b]ala a la tráquea –esta vez no estaba hecha de Atari. Aerosol de sangre. Con los brazos abiertos, Major Tom recibió el cadáver del japonés (40). Hit by the bullet, the man cannot stop Art from stealing from his shop the two cathode tubes that serve Hal for eyes. As evidence that Hal has further separated himself from the image of the robot HAL9000, Hal comforts Art after the murder, “el hombre que eliminaste. el oriental. era maléfico. major tom. sí. ... hiciste bien. major tom, sí. no dudes de esto” (43). Hal originates as a textual reference to HAL9000 but morphs into his own simulacrum in *El púgil*, distinct from his own reference. He convinces Art to cope with the murder because it benefits Hal. The two protagonists connect mentally, and any action that profits Hal also improves Art. Thus, the hard-shelled olive-green fridge completes his transformation to a pure simulacrum. He surpasses the HAL9000 image to become a new creation. Hal roots himself in an absence, (i.e. the filmic reference), and then constructs himself as a character that is able to realign Art’s identity toward a posthuman cyborg.

Like Hal, Art inscribes himself in a simulated reality as part of his new identity. As Art and Hal act to improve each other's existence, their connection becomes stronger. When Hal asks Art to bring his eyes, he tells him "ejecuta la directiva" (32). Art obeys as if "ahora era un replicante y en sus ojos se reflejaba el abismo televisivo de Luciana" (32). He is no longer in charge of his own identity because he obeys Hal's orders as if they were input functions in a computer. Symbolic of their union, Art "[a]brió la puerta del pequeño refrigerador verde-oliva. Se acostó en el piso boca arriba e insertó su cabeza en el electrodoméstico. Cerró los ojos" (44). Art shows his full cooperation in his desire to connect with the fridge and inserts his head into the fridge as if to download new data for their next mission. Their full mental connection in the simulacrum makes possible their communication beyond their bodies. In this state, Art fully assumes his new android-like identity. In this environment, Hal's mental connection to Art changes his interpretation of his surroundings and himself. Art physically views himself as an android. For example, Art's strength appears android in nature when he grabs Alicia's hand, and she feels "su mano como una tenaza mecánica, desgarrando la carne" (72). Art's perception of the world also changes. Following the aftershock of a projectile's blast from an alien invader, Art is violently thrown to the floor. Nearly unconscious, Art describes his condition in android terms rather than human terms. Art relates, "no pu[e]do más... *se interumpe la señal*" (75). At this point, Art seems to be far removed from his humanity and describes himself in robotic terms. He accepts this new android identity which is facilitated by his mental connection with Hal. Accordingly, the further Art inscribes himself within the android, the stronger his cyborg union with Hal becomes.

The union of the two protagonists is found in their rejection of their previous identities and in their fusion into a new being. In describing these simulacral figures, Wilson connects Art

to Hal by erasing the physical and the psychological space between them. Thus, Hal seeks an anthropoid body – similar to Art’s – and Art rejects his human identity, preferring the android form. As the two adapt and are drawn together in the mirror state, they leave behind their original essences. Their final union solidifies as they become “uno, ellos dos, como siameses” (42). Described this way, their union is a cyborg. Their consciousnesses work in tandem even though their bodies remain separate. As an example of their cyborg union, Art is able to hear Hal in his mind even without a physical connection. The voice of the android “se convertía en su propia voz mental... [Art] pensaba con la voz del androide (55). The strength of their mental connection makes Hal’s thoughts become Art’s thoughts. Their converging identities find equilibrium and fulfill their desire to overcome their imperfect, fragmented identities. Wilson concludes about their unity, “No habría más confusión. Él y Hal eran uno, sus identidades se estaban convergiendo, sentía como el peso de su consciencia, se uncía a la otra –más cierta, más estable–, se deslizaba en un mar de alivio” (55). Their union brings them confidence in their shared identity. Where doubt existed previously, Art now has relief. At this point in the novel, Art and Hal’s cyborg union makes their communication effortless because they do not need words. Thus, “Hal dejó de hablar y Major Tom sabía con exactitud lo que debía de hacer” (55). In this way, Art and Hal act as one. Their link, though not corporeal, is as effective as a flesh-machine cyborg.

The cyborg creature created by the union of the two protagonists in *El púgil* is best understood in the context of both Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum and the identity-defining process of the mirror stage. Within the simulacrum, Art finds completion to his shattered identity in the confines of the cyborg. As “[r]eality is precarious” (Lacan *Ethics* 30), Art is lured by the hyperreal to complete himself. Though Art realizes that his posthuman

journey is a hallucination when he declares, “*David y Alicia me acompañarán en mi infinita illusion*” (Wilson 124), he prefers to continue in the illusion because of its stabilizing benefits. Art’s predicament leads him to reconcile his identity by realigning it with Hal, and Wilson skillfully creates a world of simulacra where Art finds healing in his cyborg connection with Hal. The cyborg in this novel is not prototypical, but it does not intend to be. Wilson purposefully experiments in *El púgil* with a new narrative style and character creation to form the heterogeneous identity described in this essay. As Baudrillard explains, this type of science fiction “would no longer be a romantic expansion with all the freedom and naiveté that the charm of discovery gave it, but, quite the contrary, it would evolve implosively in the very image of our current conception of the universe, attempting to revitalize, reactualize, requotidianize fragments of simulation” (124). The implosion of the current universe is revitalized and made quotidian in Wilson’s *El púgil* to such an extent that all objects and characters reach the order of simulacra, and *El púgil* succeeds in adding to the posthuman discourse by forming the cyborg connection between Art and Hal.

Notes

¹ Regarding the genre of *El púgil*, Mike Wilson Reginato is not alone in this new style of writing. Jorge Baradit, Álvaro Bisama and Francisco Ortega, alongside Mike Wilson are part of a young literature group that is self-entitled Freak Power. Patricio Jara describes the function of this new group in *El mercurio* by writing, “Con algo de insidia podría decirse, además, que el dream team de la otra literatura nacional, cuando come, lo hace acompañado de bebidas de fantasía. Pero es miércoles y al día siguiente deben trabajar: como profesores universitarios, como editores o como creativos publicitarios.” In other words, their lives might seem mundane, but their literature is extraordinary. According to Jara, the Freaks anticipate a new literature where “todo es tema: desde los últimos capítulos de series de televisión como Doctor House y Héroes a narradores como J. G. Ballard, Clive Barker, Stephen King y Borges, los que conviven con cineastas como Spielberg y Kubrick y los discos de Joy Division.” Making reference to pop culture, the Freak Power writers aspire to incite astute readers to participate in the novel with their imaginations instead of being fed the plot by the authors.

² Because the union of Art and Hal diverges from the classical definition of the cyborg, the narrative space it takes place in also differs from the setting of most science fiction. For this reason, the narration in *El púgil* is best understood and classified outside of the classical science fiction genre and inscribed in a new postmodern form. *El púgil* is not so much concerned with where technology leads humanity but rather purports to examine how this knowledge distorts the current models of thought in unforeseen directions. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard explains classical science fiction. According to Baudrillard, the genre “is most often nothing other than an unbounded projection of the real world of production, but it is not qualitatively different from it. Mechanical or energetic extensions, speed, and power increase to

the *n*th power, but the schemas and the scenarios are those of mechanics, metallurgy, etc” (122). Thus, classical science fiction is an expansion, without limits, of our currently constituted world. Technology is more advanced, the methods of production are expanded, and current scientific dilemmas are solved. Yet, the fiction in *El púgil* is decisively different from this science fiction. The action does not happen in the future; in fact, the time table is unspecified. Time bends forward and backward, propelling its characters in new and unexpected directions. The universe that Wilson creates in *El púgil* takes place in an almost unrecognizable simulacrum of Buenos Aires. In his work Baudrillard describes the creation of such a new universe where simulacra is the only possibility. He mentions that the entirety of the world is simulated as its own reality, “One is from the start in a total simulation, without origin, immanent, without a past, without a future, a diffusion of all coordinates (mental, temporal, spatial, signaletic) – it is not about a parallel universe, a double universe, or even a possible universe – neither possible, impossible, neither real nor unreal: hyperreal – it is a universe of simulation” (125). *El púgil*’s universe fits this theoretical framework perfectly. In the novel, it is as if Buenos Aires were a city from the 1950’s in the process of being attacked by an alien race, accompanied by a David Bowie soundtrack. The simulations mix to create an anomalous setting. In *El púgil*, Buenos Aires becomes an uncanny place as it mixes well-known landmarks such as the famous Luna Park center with foreign elements like an apocalyptic cyborg invasion. The city’s inhabitants seem to have vanished, and the protagonists are able to perform hallucinatory time travel voyages to accomplish various tasks. In this hyperreal version of Buenos Aires the city appears as a metaphor of the larger confluence of the real and unreal conventions that tie together *El púgil*. Points of the space-time continuum connect at random to place Buenos Aires out-of-sync with

reality, while at times subtly reminding the reader of the geographical space in which the novel progresses.

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