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To José Luis Villacañas, thriller writer

Infrapolitics and the Thriller. A Prolegomenon to

Every Possible Form of Anti-Moralist Literary Criticism. On Héctor Aguilar Camín's La guerra de

Galio and Morir en el golfo

#### I. Moral Politics and Political Morals

If the history of thought is a history of murder, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno claim in their Dialectic of Enlightenment (117), why couldn't the history of murder become a history of thought? We can link the literary treatment of murder, which seeks to unveil it, not just to express it, with the narrative form called "thriller." The thriller constitutes the dominant, and perhaps even normative narrative structure of our time. A thriller is, in every case, an ethical aestheticization of politics. It renders the political in a narrative form, and it does so from a primarily ethical stance.

An ethical stance is not a moralistic stance. Immanuel Kant succinctly established the difference between the two in a section of Perpetual Peace where he opposes the "moral politician" to the "political moralist." The former is "someone who conceives of the principles of political expediency in such a way that they can co-exist with morality" and the latter "one who fashions his morality to suit his own advantage as a statesman" (Kant, Perpetual 118). For Kant

the moralists and the moralizers are those who “resort to despicable tricks, for they are only out to exploit the people (and if possible the whole world) by influencing the current ruling power in such a way as to ensure their own private advantage” (119). The moral politician, like the ethical individual, relates to politics in a non-opportunistic way, in fact, in a way that might force him or her to postpone their own advantage given not just ethical duty but the simple legality of the situation where they find themselves: “there can be no half measures here; it is no use devising hybrid solutions such as a pragmatically conditioned right halfway between right and utility. For all politics must bend the knee before right, although politics may hope in return to arrive, however slowly, at a stage of lasting brilliance” (125).

The lasting brilliance of politics depends, of course, on its conformity to right: “A true system of politics cannot therefore take a single step without first paying tribute to morality. And although politics in itself is a difficult art, no art is required to combine it with morality. For as soon as the two come into conflict, morality can cut through the knot which politics cannot untie” (125). Cutting through the knot that moralistic politics cannot untie: that is the critical function of the thriller. Its stance is therefore radically anti-moralist, provided we stick to the definition of moralism as opportunistic behavior. To say that the history of murder may equal the history of practical thought is to say that the history of murder is the history of singular actions and reactions to radical evil in any particular political space. The thriller, insofar as it is written, is the aestheticization of such a history, i.e., its presentation in symbolic form.

In Martín Luis Guzmán’s La sombra del caudillo the only character who survives among General Aguirre’s group is Axkaná. Axkaná, the fellow who escapes the mass murder and can therefore tell the story, is the embodiment of the ethical perspective in the novel. The novel is about politics, but it gives politics an ethical treatment. Axkaná’s function is to give the political a tongue, to give letters to the political, which means to articulate politics into a discourse that,

in virtue of its very articulation, becomes thoroughly invested with ethics, with an ethical perspective. The novel pursues, within its own context, an ethics of truth, of non-distortion, and it aspires to the radicality of an engagement with things as they are, whatever happens. When one of the characters says that there are no friends in politics, that “friendship does not figure . . . in the field of political relations” (58), he may mean to make an exclusively political statement, he may mean to speak only about politics, but he cannot avoid the ethical connection even if his purpose were precisely to refute that there exist ethics in politics. Because in fact the sentence “there are no friends in politics,” in the context of a conversation, is not an ethically neutral statement: indeed it calls ethics to question, just as it calls politics into question.

Simone Weil’s writing on the Iliad might help explain what is meant here. For Weil, if the Iliad “is a miracle,” it is because the poem spares us no bitterness in its account of human misery, of the human subjection to uncontrollable force, and yet “its bitterness is the only justifiable bitterness” (33). The expression of bitterness is at the same time a triumph over bitterness. The poetic victory over force is simply its ability to express its own irreducibility to it. Because we have the Iliad, Weil says, we can claim not to be reducible to the force that spares no one. This is so for all of literature: literature is structurally “a miracle” to the very extent that it enables us, in view of its faithful representation of the human condition, to take a distance from it. This internal distance from its own object is the literary apparatus itself: what allows literature not to be confused with its object, and what thus preserves both literature and its object intact every time.

It does not matter that La sombra del caudillo is a radical presentation of the brute force of the political in Mexican life, or even of politics as brute force in post-revolutionary Mexico. What is essential is that every perspective on the political within the novel, in virtue of its structural articulation within the narrative, is always already beforehand an ethical perspective.

This is also true, for instance, of the very curious “novel without fiction” that Héctor Aguilar Camín wrote on the murder of presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994, entitled La tragedia de Colosio, and which is in so many ways, at least in its first part, a literal rewrite of La sombra del caudillo. Aguilar Camín only selectively reproduces fragments from the massive, 4-volume Informe de la investigación del homicidio del licenciado Luis Donaldo Colosio, prepared by the state attorneys investigating the case and published by the Procuraduría General de la República in 2000. But his reproduction is guided both aesthetically, since without aesthetics there would not be a novel, even a “novel without fiction,” as the subtitle reads, and ethically, since Aguilar Camín’s purpose is to render the enigma of a murder case whose very resolution, if it is true that the crazed Mario Aburto committed the murder entirely on his own, is just as enigmatic as any non-resolution would have been. The very presentation of the murder of a Mexican presidential candidate as a matter of chance, as the crossing of paths between a particular presidential candidate and a particular psychopath, is already an ethical presentation, and particularly in the context of the story regarding the succession to President Salinas, the Neozapatista insurrection, and the rivalry between Luis Donaldo Colosio and Licenciado Manuel Camacho.

The thriller therefore is always structurally the embodiment of the formal principle of practical reason. There is a formal and then there is a material principle of practical reason. The material principle says that you must ordain practical behavior in accordance to your aim as an object of the will. If you want to eat a chocolate, you orient your behavior so that you obtain, and then eat, the precious chocolate, even if you must take it from someone else. The formal principle, in Kant’s formulation, is to ordain practical behavior in accordance with the principle of freedom: “Act in such a way that you can wish your maxim to become a universal law (irrespective of what the end in view may be” (Perpetual 122). No doubt this is dumb impolitical

behavior from the point of view of the political moralist. And yet it is the only kind of behavior that opens to freedom, which in the order of the political is genuine republicanism: “genuine republicanism,” Kant says, “could be the object only of a moral politician” (122).

From a political perspective, therefore, the affirmation of an ethical stance is the affirmation of the radically democratic republicanism of the last man and of the last woman, including every murder victim: nothing else is needed. “And the reason for this is that it is precisely the general will as it is given a priori, within a single people or in the mutual relationship of various peoples, which alone determines what is right among men. But this union of the will of all, if only it is put into practice in a consistent way, can also, within the mechanism of nature, be the cause which leads to the intended result and gives effect to the concept of right” (Perpetual 123). The practice of the thriller is an ethical practice of right in literary terms. It abandons a merely technical approach to literature because its inspiration is thoroughly anti-technical: the thriller is not a means to an end, but an affirmation of the end as ethical end. It must proceed to it, of course, in view of a prior transgression against the end, in view of an ethical fault.

Any narrative under the guise of a thriller effectuates a particular chiasmus. A thriller is always a political reaction to the suspension of ethics. A crime against a fellow human being is always a suspension of ethics. A political reaction to a crime is embodied in the novel, in the thriller, as an ethical reaction through the sort of unavoidable structural elements Weil reveals for the Iliad (an epic thriller if there is one). The ethico-political structuration of the thriller, we could say, turns the thriller into a special form or a special way of thinking the political: it is an ethical form for thinking the political that is also a political form for thinking the ethical. For this chiasmatic structure I will use the term “infrapolitical.” The thriller is the dominant form of infrapolitics in literature. Infrapolitics, or better, the infrapolitical is the theoretical moment of

the thriller, that is, the moment when the thriller exposes itself simultaneously as an interruption of the ethical by the political and of the political by the ethical. We will see perhaps to what an extent the infrapolitical perspective in the thriller coincides with its most proper literary dimension—and how literature, as a result, emerges, in at least one of its dimensions, as an apparatus of practical reason to be equated neither with ethical nor with political reason: something else, for which Kant says there is a need which is obscurely related with the need for friendship.

## II. Chance and Necessity

At the end of Aguilar Camín's La guerra de Galio the murder of his protagonist, Carlos García Vigil, terminally suspends an important decision. Just before his death Vigil does not know—or the reader does not know if Vigil knows—if he would have accepted the offer to return to the newspaper La república as general editor or if he is more interested in continuing his work as a historian, which also includes the writing of a novel about his catastrophic personal experience as a journalist during the 1970s in Mexico; journalist or historian, in a context where the option of journalism suggests fundamentally a political affirmation and that of historiography (or literature) is bound to the priority of an ethical stance. But the alternative is no real alternative, hence the indecision. If the very potential for politics in Mexico is in fact profoundly determined by the country's history, then the ethical option is more fundamentally political than politics itself. If, on the other hand, the move towards journalism is determined by a sufficiently sophisticated degree of historical consciousness and a maturity of experience, then the apparently political option acquires a predominantly ethical aspect. The contraposition of terms that allows for the shifting of politics into ethics and of ethics into politics—and this is

crucial to the literary game in the novel—also sets the stage for its meta-literary dimensions, that is, for its intentional lessons on experience and knowledge.

The intersection of ethics and politics in the novel is not an intersection of reciprocally autonomous spheres. Both seem to be subordinate to a decision of an epistemological nature (a decision regarding the historical consequences of seeking social change through violent means, which of course cuts across both ethics and politics), and such a decision takes place against the backdrop of the collapse of revolutionary illusions that are represented in the novel by the guerrilla experiments of the Mexican 1970s. The narrator notes of Vigil's labor as historian: "In his first book he had allowed a certain juvenile sympathy for socially-motivated violence to appear between the lines—for villismo or for zapatismo—alongside an explicit rejection of conservative violence, whether militaristic or reactionary. In his second volume he maintained a sympathy for the confused but profound thirst for justice that charged the people's armed brigades, but his perspective on violence was uniformly pessimistic, drawing no distinctions between ideological camps or ultimately cruel motivations" (Guerra 511). The sum of Vigil's journalistic experience happens between the writing of the two books. He works first for La república and later at La vanguardia, in both cases under the orders of Octavio Sala. It is also the time of the end of his youth, of the death of his friend Santoyo, killed for his participation in revolutionary armed struggle, and of the death of his true love, Mercedes Biedma.

In early middle age Vigil must decide how to negotiate the tedious emptiness he suffers. He is murdered before doing so, which also keeps him from reading the book that his antagonist and mentor, "the conservative intellectual, the genius of evil, the fascist" Galio Bermúdez, had promised to write for him (Guerra 452). When Galio's book is eventually published we learn that its fundamental idea is that "all of Mexican history could be read as a struggle between

modernizing elites and traditionalist societies, like a permanent civilizing coercion that descended from impatient and despotic heights to recalcitrant, immemorial foundations” (547); that it was a book “‘against Utopia and against urgency,’ ‘against the idea of ‘shortcuts and historical epiphanies,’ against ‘rupturist solutions and also against paralyzing stability’” (509).

Galio’s book is of course Galio’s war, which gives the novel its title. If Galio’s book is the referential horizon of the novel’s narrative, we must perhaps understand Aguilar Camín’s book as politically reformist, committed to the unhurried modernization of the Mexican state, to its gradual democratization, to a fight against historically-grounded violence and injustice that affirms their teleologically determined defeat in the final maturity of the nation, in some perhaps not-so-distant future. The patently state-centered nature of such a political stance emerges clearly during an early conversation between Vigil and Galio. Galio says: “Mexico, like Gaul conquered by Caesar, is still a barbarous place that propagates itself in a state of nature beyond the borders of civilization. If history is correctly perceived as always already universal history, as Hegel would have it, our path could not be, nor will it be for quite some time, different from what it has been: the path of necessity. Mexico has to pay its share of violence in order to tame its barbarism and open itself to the realistic possibility of civilization, of history accomplished. This is the war of the history of the world” (198). These are Galio’s words. Is the implied author also speaking through Galio, or does a turn of the screw come to complicate matters, and to develop within the novel an alternative vision of the political? It will be useful to turn to the novel that precedes La guerra de Galio in Aguilar Camín’s production: Morir en el golfo.

The novel, published in 1988, recounts events that principally occurred between 1976 and 1980, more or less the period of López Portillo’s presidency. All good thrillers tend towards ontological eternity, even though their ostensible topics are always and precisely concerned



with nothing other than time and history. The political context of the novel's setting is the beginning of the long terminal crisis of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in the post-revolutionary period, the moments that would result in the "Mexican oil boom" (Morir 121).<sup>1</sup>

In Morir en el golfo there is love, the narrator's anguished and pathetic love for Anabela Guillaumín, and there is money—the prospect "of an enormous federal investment in Chicontepec's Paleolithic canal zone, whose potential petroleum supply . . . was equivalent to that which the country had possessed in its entire history" (Morir 117). Such an influx of federal funds sets the stage for the "imminent completion of Francisco Rojano Gutiérrez's wildest dreams of being right on the crest of the wave, where the money and the power were" (117). Rojano, who is married to Anabela, is vying for the municipal presidency of Chicontepec, the site of the investment. He is also trying, along with Anabela, to acquire land within the municipality, which brings him into conflict with the apparent plans of his protector and/or political rival, the oil boss Lázaro, or Lacho, Pizarro. With this predicament on the horizon, Rojano requests the help of his old friend and capable political journalist, our narrator. Rojano capitalizes on the long-standing friendship and, above all, on his friend's painfully obvious love for his wife, which, as both Rojano and Anabela are well aware, continues to smolder. Rojano and Anabela—or, perhaps, Anabela and Rojano—get the journalist mixed up in an investigation into the assassinations, supposedly committed by Pizarro's hired guns, of ejidatarios (collective land owners) who stand in the way of the latter's land grab. The reasons for Pizarro's designs on the land are, in addition, complicated, as they go beyond simple economic calculations: "A working-class popular revolution is underway here," Pizarro tells the journalist. "What we're doing here is a socialist revolution because we are going to take over the factories, the capital, the production . . . The petroleum-workers' union defends all of the country's marginalized" (98). The union will not hesitate to reach these objectives by any means necessary: "two lives

are worth more than one and three are worth more than two. It's the arithmetic of history and of true equality . . . violent deaths are unavoidable because that's the law of history. To transform them into fertile deaths, creative deaths, that's the task that faces us now. Nothing else" (107-108). Pizarro's socialism is a socialism of the will to power, only tactically committed to respect for the law. It coincides historically with what was then referred to as "Oil Maoism." Anabela and Rojano's desire for land is, on the other hand, entirely meretricious.

The coordinates of an infrapolitical thriller are emerging: the narrator's possible ethical stance, difficult to the very extent that he must overcome his "pathological" attachment to Anabela, is set against Pizarro's grand politics, and both of them are set against Rojano and Anabela's greed. There is ethics on the one hand and a desire for power on the two other sides. The narrator acts out of friendship and love, although not necessarily freely, and he must confront, in the midst of radical suspicion, which is also radical doubt, the excesses of those who are prepared to pursue their desire for accumulation at all costs. As an ethical agent, the narrator represents honor. The opposition of honor against corruption lies at the heart of all thrillers. Aguilar Camín structures his novel around a relatively conventional double articulation. In the first moment or register, the narrator, who is a journalist in the place of a detective, seeks fulfillment of the law of the community against those who transgress its principles: Pizarro, that is, initially, until he notices that Rojano and Anabela are also doing it. In a second moment, which is always the truly heroic moment of the double articulation, the detective must abandon his first register, pass beyond his fantasy of legalistic fulfillment, and compromise his very being in an act of violence—the ambiguity regarding the act's character as an ethical act, i.e., whether the act is an ethical act of violence or an act of ethical violence, must remain—that will alter the coordinates of the possible and reestablish a new possibility of civility.

Why is love always on the side of the character that searches for truth, while money and power are always the enemy's ill-gotten gains? The answer is simple: the structure of the thriller always works to maintain Kantian moral law—including, if necessary, its anticommunitarian moment—as the only possible support of civil community (the social as such is not at stake, as there can be society in a state of nature, but there can be no civil society in a state of nature). But this means that love, in a thriller, is never simply a pathological affect, but always already an ethical allegory of the moral law, as Rafael Bernal's El complot mongol fascinatingly established for Mexican literature. Love in the thriller is a narrative representation of the categorical imperative, which commands one to act so that the maxim of conduct can be upheld as a universal rule.<sup>2</sup> The thriller establishes, in a first register, a conflict between ethics and politics in which the implied author can appear to be systematically on the side of ethics. And the resolution of the story consists of the dialectical transformation of ethics into politics, and in the subsequent reduction of what once appeared as political to pathological affect. This is the thriller's substitution of every possible moralism for ethics, and also the thriller's fundamental position that, in Kant's words, "morality will cut through the knot that politics cannot untie" in order to reconstitute a properly republican politics.

As the allegorical incarnation of the moral law, the detective's position incarnates a transcendental field of pure potentiality. Potentia, or dynamis, belongs to the transcendental detective long before the concrete detective can make it his or hers. Or, one could say, the detective can only enjoy his pure potentiality between cases, and not during the cases themselves.<sup>3</sup> The detective's dynamis works against the fallen energeia of the agents or patients whom he must investigate. In Morir en el golfo none other than Pizarro recognizes this fact when he describes our narrator as "a wa'ya, as they say in totonaca, a hawk, a vulture: one who, while seeking food, is always planning to soar again" (133). The actualization of the

detective's pure potentiality, always reluctant and uncommitted, can only be explained by love. For the detective, the possibility of action—an exceptional possibility, as the possibility of resolving a case or of attaining thought always is—has nothing to do with war. War—the war between Lacho and Rojano or Anabela, for example—can only produce commitment, and thus ideology. The detective withdraws from war as he engages it—engagement and withdrawal are the same gesture—because war is, in the best of cases, an interruption of dynamis. Polemical action is a distraction and a descent into energeia. Literary truth in the thriller thus coincides with literary truth in general as it works to constitute a politics of non-power, a moral politics against every moralism, against every pathology of power or of money, against every merely personal advantage. But Morir en el golfo also complicates its structural oppositions.

The political horizon against which the narrative unfolds is clearly utopian in at least one way. The approaching oil boom was, in 1977, “the promise of collective euphoria based on a potential utopia, a Mexico without the same old brutal and excruciating flaws, sovereign and wealthy, desirable; another country, noble and generous, as we always believed and wanted it to be; the great country equal to our nationalism and our ill-fated love for it” (122-23). Although he remains skeptical, shaken by the evidence of corruption that practically defined the political class under López Portillo, and although he is suspicious of his friends' motives, the narrator does not hesitate to support Anabela and Rojano's war against Lacho Pizarro's rising provocations. Anabela requests it after another day of lovemaking: “the war has begun. Anything you can do to help us counts. Each and every columnist or paper that tracks your information, every political opportunity, every conversation, every step that supports Pizarro's defeat is of fundamental importance” (153). The narrator publishes an article that describes incriminating acts that, according to Rojano and Anabela's story, seriously compromise Pizarro. But the narrator's contact in the Ministry of Interior, who is in charge of the Mexican political

police, shows the narrator how his friends have been manipulating him by presenting evidence that Rojano and Anabela had tampered with the photographs used to make their case. Events unfold at a dizzying pace. The narrator breaks off his adulterous relationship with Anabela, puts up with Pizarro's righteous anger, and decides to forget everything out of spite. A few weeks later, however, Rojano is murdered, lynched by the enraged inhabitants of his town. His body appears with a shot to the temple, a style of execution that, according to what Rojano had told the narrator, is Pizarro's calling card. The journalist, shaken and moved to action once again, returns to his "paper war" (174). His articles so effectively incriminate the petroleum union, and thus PEMEX (the giant state-run Mexican oil corporation) indirectly, that the President's Office intervenes. Negotiations are made to appease Pizarro, and Anabela and her children move in with the narrator, abandoning the countryside of Veracruz and the land she and Rojano had purchased in better times. Peace seems to have arrived, the past is past, and the narrator settles into a pleasant domestic routine, which is only to be abruptly interrupted by the news that Anabela plans to have Pizarro killed, that, in fact, she has already ordered his murder.

The assassination attempt fails, but Pizarro, who was gravely wounded, will not live much longer. Anabela and the children must leave Mexico. The narrator, now alone, stubbornly adheres to a merciless work regimen, shutting himself off: "Never before those days did I feel so immersed in the simple tasks of investigating and communicating. Never so neutral, so detached from my writing's personal and political implications, so dispossessed of secondary purposes, so objective and dispassionate, at absolute peace with myself" (265). The narrator has returned to his dynamis, his moral ataraxia, and he faithfully fulfills his non-pathological destiny. But his ethical peace crumbles after one of his columns exposes information prejudicial to Pizarro's oil Maoism. The latter summons the narrator, via the chief of the political police, suggesting that if the narrator does not attend the meeting Anabela and her children might be

endangered. The narrator, obliged to come forward, discovers that Pizarro is in fact about to die, but not because of what turns out to be the non-existent hit job Anabela had supposedly paid for, rather as a result of a more prosaic pancreatic cancer. Pizarro's death makes Anabela fill with joy.

The second articulation of Aguilar Camín's novel becomes clear at this point. In virtue of the first articulation, the narrator would not have wanted anything but to help his friends defeat a corrupt caudillo, or despotic regional leader, who had no problem turning to crime as a way of realizing his own political ambitions. But things have changed, for the narrator has become aware, in spite of himself, of the infinitely complex situation that is entrapping him in a game of mirrors. Pizarro is not innocent, but there are no innocents. The narrator's efforts appear, in retrospect, to have been distorted by an erroneous moral impetus, based on ignorance. His ethics are exposed as a particularly pathological form of politics. His actions have been disastrous. There are now two alternative versions of reality, the one Anabela prefers to endorse, and the one the narrator knows via the chief of the political police in his Bucareli Street building. Of them,

Bucareli's version of a long series of coincidences, misunderstandings, and a minor delinquent's mythomania seemed to be more in the realm of the real, closer to the true dramatic imperfection of things, its always slack and true texture. It conceded some facts, centrally among them Rojano's execution in Chicontepec. But the rest faded away in the crucible of motivated fabrications, lies, false conclusions, spectacular coincidences, and the natural course of events. Anabela's version described, on the contrary, a strict geometry of combat, a battle of clean and radical lines, whose coincidences were effects clearly caused by the contestants' will; any element of chance merely disguised

the decisions and their results, the terminal point of an arithmetic whose essence could not be summed up by anything better than Pizarro's own motto:

He who knows how to add knows how to divide. (303)

The problem is not that the narrator cannot choose; rather, that the will to choose gets lost in the face of the choice itself. Anabela chooses, and her act leads to the tragic necessity that the narrator renounce her. The truth of that which the detective ascertains is excessive with respect to the truth—the truth exceeds itself by casting aside an uncontainable reality with respect to which any construction of subjectivity is false or illusory. The detective “traverses his fantasy,” and he loses not only his object of desire but, more profoundly, his pathological will itself: he can no longer desire, and, with his pathology, he loses his capacity to follow any kind of moral law.<sup>4</sup> He is paralyzed. He has lost his honor, and everything else with it. What remains for him? Or rather, what remains for the thriller, for the reader who is alert to the literary truth that might or might not emerge there?

Through the deconstruction of the ethical stance by the political stance and vice versa, Morir en el golfo carries out a process of infrapolitical affirmation. The infrapolitical is the political interruption of ethical sovereignty and simultaneously the ethical interruption of all political sovereignty. Oil Maoism cannot sustain itself in the infrapolitical dimension, but neither can Rojano or Anabela's hateful greed, and neither can the anguished moral conscience of the detective, whose actions always end up being as premature as they are late. The narrator always acts too late or too soon, and there is no glory in his untimeliness, only ridicule. For us, however, the infrapolitical remainder persists as the double possibility of thought: against politics, against ethics, but not outside of ethics, not outside of politics.

The same infrapolitical remainder constitutes the horizon of the construction of knowledge in La guerra de Galio. There are numerous structural parallels in the novelistic

composition between La guerra de Galio and Morir en el golfo. In the first place the protagonist, who in Morir en el golfo is also the narrator, is essentially an intellectual who writes, who locates through writing the unstable center of his own social being. Second, both protagonists are painfully marked by affect: love and friendship not only strike intimate and catastrophic chords within them, but in a certain sense constitute them through an emotional homelessness with respect to which writing serves as refuge and salvation, or compensation. Writing is always for them a way out of the aporias of their affect. Third, in both cases affect and writing intercede for an ethico-political option against the corruption and violence of power. In the fourth place, the impossibility of attaining a clear conscience, the impossibility of thinking that positive options are immediately transparent and unchallengeable, the impossibility of believing that it is enough to be against the corruption and violence of power in order to work effectively against them—these impossibilities are the very object of the narrative. Democratic voluntarism ends in ridicule in Morir en el golfo, and it ends in the worst kind of corruption in La guerra de Galio—the corruption of Octavio Sala, who is eaten up by resentment and the desire for revenge. It is as if Aguilar Camín were warning us that there is nothing necessarily good about good intentions—that something else is needed, and that, without it, we are beyond lost, in the very hell of willful stupidity.

Both novels theorize a crucial moment of decision, beyond any program for action. It is the moment that in each case sutures the relationship between ethics and politics. But the decision never completes itself textually—even if nothing but decisions take place within the text. In the earlier novel, as we have seen, the narrator is unable to decide between the conflicting versions of reality presented by Bucareli's version of the facts and by Anabela's version of the facts. In the later novel, *Vigil*, the protagonist, is murdered, under circumstances never clarified, before the decision is made evident in its practical effects (the reader never



knows if the protagonist decides before dying, as the narrative strategy in La guerra de Galio is elaborated through an interposed, non-omniscient narrator). But it is precisely the fact that the decisions are never textually complete that reveals how both novels are structurally invested in the very act of making a decision.

The later novel's narrator, who is Vigil's former professor, refers on two occasions to the "insoluble practical problem" that he used to enjoy discussing with Vigil. The second reference appears in the narrator's direct transcription of Vigil's journals, in which Vigil describes his last conversation with his professor:

He told me: "I have dedicated my whole life to constructing those obscurities, as you know. Because only in the darkness can light exist." I reproached him for his maieutic facileness, telling him that where there is light, no light is needed, because nothing needs to be illuminated. He accepted my impertinence and returned affectionately to the insoluble logical problem that he had detected and with which he knew how to hypnotize his students, generation after generation. "Is it possible to avoid a car accident?" I remembered the argument and told him: "Impossible. If it could be avoided, by definition it would not be a car accident. It would be a voluntary act. An effect of someone's will who, capable of avoiding his misfortune, does not avoid it." "Not bad," said the professor: "What is the practical conclusion of this exercise?" "Live however you want," I said. "What must happen will happen" (Guerra 535)

A decision, then, only implicates the decision itself, in a context in which there are no possible guarantees that its result can effect a possible gain, and in which there are no possible guarantees that in any case it could be correctly oriented. "Where there is light, no light is needed." If there is a decision, there is no light.

Everything has to do, then, with how to choose your decision, with the intimate dynamics of the idea to “live how you want,” take any decision you want, which does not change destiny but that, precisely because it can’t change it, affirms it or subtracts it. Gilles Deleuze, in Nietzsche and Philosophy, refers to Nietzsche and Mallarmé’s radically opposed conceptions of the act of decision. For Nietzsche, according to Deleuze, “the dice which are thrown once are the affirmation of chance, the combination which they form on falling is the affirmation of necessity. Necessity is affirmed of chance in exactly the sense that being is affirmed of becoming and unity is affirmed of multiplicity” (26). For Nietzsche, “the second moment of the game [the roll of the dice on the table] is also the two moments together or the player who equals the whole” (27). To affirm the law of becoming, to affirm necessity in chance, is therefore an act of affirmation of the totality and a commitment to the decision, a “live however you want” that is at the same time, and impossible to dissociate from, a “love how you live:” amor fati. Mallarmé’s understanding of the decision, according to Deleuze, is alternate and even opposite, for Mallarmé “always understood necessity as the abolition of chance” (33). Deleuze continues: “Mallarmé’s poem belongs to the old metaphysical thought of a duality of worlds; chance is like existence which must be denied, necessity like the character of the pure idea or eternal essence . . . It matters little whether depreciation of life or exaltation of the intelligible prevails in Mallarmé. From a Nietzschean perspective these two aspects are inseparable and constitute ‘nihilism’ itself, that is to say, the way in which life is accused, judged, and condemned” (33).

Nietzsche’s operation is opposed to Mallarmé’s operation. La guerra de Galio offers a version of the mutual opposition of these two operations precisely through the confrontation between Galio and Vigil. Galio occupies the place of Mallarmé, and Vigil the other position. Galio’s state-centered and teleological perspective, based upon, as he himself tells Vigil, the

Hegelian idea of world history or Weltgeschichte, is a perspective based upon the well-known duality opposing barbarism to civilization. In the Hegelian historical teleology, the East, Greece, Rome, and the “Germanic” world (the latter representing the totality of modern Europe) are orders of experience oriented toward the final subsumption of history into the state apparatus that constitutes its culmination and utopian promise. From this point of view, as Ranajit Guha has insisted, the historicity of the world does not coincide with but remains as what is negated by Hegelian Weltgeschichte, since the latter only accepts for its constitution the teleological elements that lead to the formation of a state apparatus understood as the end or the goal of history.<sup>5</sup> The book that Galio publishes after Vigil’s death is titled The Enlightened Coercion, and it grounds itself precisely in the insistence upon the gradual development of a state-centered system in Mexico. Galio explains to Vigil the tragic “vulnerable hypothesis” that sums up his life’s work:

There is only one instrument capable of completing the civilizing task that we need, capable of ending our own war against the barbarism of our past . . . This instrument is what we imperfectly call the State and what our forefathers called simply Federation. The federation’s cold steel, its centralizing, civilizing bayonets, like Caesar’s, spill blood today in Guerrero, blood both innocent and young that will prevent further bloodshed . . . I regret each one of the deaths that our barbarity accrues in Guerrero. But in the midst of the howls and the fire, I can see a possible form of the country, opening a path toward itself, finding its territorial identity, its political nucleus, its potential civilization. In a word: deciding its history. (199)

Galio’s legitimation of state-supported violence is, therefore, the necessary logical consequence of the will to abolish chance. State violence is necessary because undertaking the

task of abolishing chance is necessary.<sup>6</sup> Against teleological necessity, however, against Hegelian Weltgeschichte, chance incarnates the full and open historicity of the world. Through its open historicity, Vigil's book, Vigil's future work, presents the unfulfilled promise of a way of condemning violence as "uniformly dark," regardless of where it may find cover. For Vigil the decision—the decision to dedicate himself to journalism or to history, to ethics or to politics—is not primarily a decision between those two terms or in favor of either of those modes of action. It is above all a decision against violence, against the paradigm embodied by Galio, who is the unconditional defender of a "dictatorship of the sabers," in Juan Donoso Cortés's formulation, that would be preemptive of the decomposition of the world into anarchy and disorder.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore a decision in favor of absolute historicity against the fetish of state violence and against the fetish of anti-state violence; against teleology, in whose justifying logic there is always seated an abolition and not an affirmation of chance.

In the novel Galio is the reactionary subject of pathological affect in the Kantian sense, while Santiago and Carlos Santoyo, Paloma and the rest of the guerrilleros are also pathological subjects of a will to power that is anti-state but not therefore any less teleological or less based in Hegelian Weltgeschichte. The liquidation of the guerrilla adventure in Guerrero, as a violent and martial adventure that perpetuates violence and thus also the legitimation of state violence, extends into the open pathologization of Octavio Sala's character, a subject defined by resentment and bad faith, who is defeated, more than by his expulsion from La república, by his own ghosts, which reveal how, in the end, the game of truth and journalistic transparency that Sala played was an equivocal game of tricks, because it was the pathological-political instrumentalization of an ostensible factual truth that will be sacrificed the minute it becomes expedient.

Thus Galio's war is not a war restricted to the Mexican political class, but rather the war of all those who, in the novel, give themselves over to the fight for power on the basis of their own desires. Just like Anabela in Morir en el golfo, Sala and the guerrilleros, despite the tragic disparity of force, maintain in La guerra de Galio the pretense of "a strict geometry of struggle, a battle of clean and radical lines whose coincidences were effects brought about unquestionably by the will of the combatants; chance was there a disguise of decisions and results." But the political decisions and results, the abolition of chance, are always products of darkness: "Real politics always occurs in the shadows. It is by nature vampiric, secret . . . The politicians of the open societies you're talking about simply dedicate a bit more time to protecting themselves from the light, in order to be able to act like one acts in politics: in the cellars, in the shadows" (Guerra 151). Real politics, the narrator is telling us, is always the expression of the moralism of power—but of course the very fact that such things can be said, following Weil's lesson, introduces the very necessity of another kind of real politics: fundamentally anti-moralist, republican, ethical.<sup>8</sup>

Where there is light no light is needed. Vigil's in/decision, or infrapolitical trajectory, equal to that of the narrator in Morir en el golfo, presupposes something other than an open denunciation of politics that would condemn its necessary reliance on cellars, traps, and betrayals, on violence and concealment. This trajectory equally presupposes something other than a well-meaning and thumb-sucking form of ethics. The infrapolitical trajectory in Vigil, and in the narrator of Morir en el golfo, affirms the necessity of an infinite interruption of the ethical by the political and of the political by the ethical, and thus the acceptance or affirmation of chance as necessity. Within absolute historicity—the realm of chance—neither the political nor the ethical is closed. Both open themselves to a mutual deconstruction whose slippage can also be understood as the obligation to an infinite democratization of the state—a republicanism of

the last man and of the last woman, since such is the other side of the teleological abduction of the state by civilizing and despotic elites. This is the decision Vigil must make, either in historiography or in journalism: a decision perhaps more literary than philosophical, but in any case a transcendental or theoretical decision, like every decision. As to the narrator of Morir en el golfo, his decision was always already made: he understands, after the fact, that he no longer has to choose. He had in effect chosen, and it was the game of dice that led him to confront consequences not of his making.

In Morir en el golfo and La guerra de Galio Héctor Aguilar Camín presents two superb political novels whose defining characteristic is a radically disenchanting vision of the political and an equally disenchanting but fiercely stubborn embrace of the ethical stance. Their “impoliticality,” to borrow an expression from Roberto Esposito, has very little or nothing to do with fashionable pieties, be they reactionary or progressive. That literature, in these two texts by Aguilar Camín, finds itself at the service of politics means that literature, in this case, reclaims its undeniable privilege as a means of thinking about democracy, which is also, or above all, a means of imagining the possibility of a decision outside calculative reason. Decision guarantees nothing—the roll of the dice in Mallarmé’s Igitur does not resolve, as we have seen, anything more than a Hegelian abolition of chance, within which are concentrated all of the horrors and all of the truths of domination. Those are precisely Galio’s dubious wager, his “vulnerable hypothesis.” But there is another kind of decision, the non-militant and infrapolitical decision, upon which depends any possibility of access to the antiutopian realm of absolute historicity. It holds up against any abduction of history—by the powerful, by the treacherous, by the subjects that pathologize upon occupying moral law and who thus become worthy of the hardly romantic accusation of Kantian radical evil. This is literature against civilizing elites—something uncommon, moreover, in a tradition that continues to oscillate between the two tendencies of

Sarmientismo; a tradition that, given the opposition between civilization and barbarism, cannot but redefine it, hardly daring to suspend it.

### III. Anti-Moralist Exposure

The infrapolitical dimension of the thriller, or even the thriller as infrapolitical dimension, gives us a possible way to think about the literary outside national allegory, or outside the national-identitarian ideologies that have plagued Mexican and Latin American literary reflection for more than a century.<sup>9</sup> It also gives us a possible form to think about the ethico-political, and thus to understand the possibility of a properly democratic literature, a literature thoroughly invested by and in ethical universalism. That is no doubt what Paco Ignacio Taibo and Subcomandante Marcos tried to do in the novel published as a serial in La Jornada and entitled Muertos incómodos (falta lo que falta). It is a bad novel, but it is also a novel that has a democratic intentionality, that thinks of itself as democratic literature, and literature for democracy.<sup>10</sup> And of course between La sombra del caudillo and Muertos incómodos we have all the crime fiction written in Mexico after the Revolution. It is possible to read through that history of Mexican crime fiction—and who will say that not every piece of fiction is always already crime fiction? Roberto Bolaño opens his Mexican novel Amuleto with a statement that is no doubt intended as a possible shibboleth for all literature: “This will be a terror story [or: a history of terror, historia de terror]. It will be a police story, a serie noir or a terror series narration. But it won’t look like it. It won’t look like it because it will be me telling it. I am the one who speaks and that is why it will not look like it. But at bottom it is the story [the history] of an atrocious crime” (4)—an interesting history of ethico-political reflection in Mexico that has little to do with the communitarian or at least apparently communitarian thought of the nation.

In the very long section of 2666 devoted to the murders of Ciudad Juárez, Bolaño says: “Nobody pays attention to those murders, but they hide the secret of the world” (439). In the murders of Ciudad Juárez the secret of the world hides, and lies concealed. An obligation to investigate them—the never fulfilled obligation to pay attention to those murders—is an obligation of knowledge. Literature cannot claim the disciplinary monopoly of that investigation. But literature thinks of those murders—the murders of Ciudad Juárez or any other murder—in order to unconceal the secret of the world. That investigation, in literature, has a literary character—sociology does not have a literary character, and anthropology looks for anthropological facts, but literature looks for literature, although the goal of literature is perhaps not literary. To recognize, to unconceal, to show the secret of the world, if that is the essence of the literary, is an extraliterary essence. The relation between literature and murder seems to posit that the essence of the literary is not itself literary, that the literary apparatus deploys its potentiality at the service of something other than itself. That something other—the secret of the world—determines the structure of the literary apparatus.

We could then speak of a radical heteronomy of the literary apparatus: the essence of the literary apparatus is transliterary. Literature cannot determine its own conditions of enunciation. Literature is therefore not properly, but rather improperly literary. And in that radical impropriety literature displays its historical presence, and its historical and political efficacy, or effectivity. If the effectivity of the literary depends on its capacity to unconceal the secret of the world, that is, if the effectivity of the literary follows heteronomous and transliterary conditions, where hides the final order of determination? In the name of what or with respect to what is literature effective? Is the secret of the world of a theological, ontological, historical, political, or ethical nature? At what level, in what order do we find a



possible autonomy of knowledge? Of what order of activity could we say that its essence is thoroughly contained by and in itself?

When Bolaño says in 2666 that in the investigation of the crimes of Ciudad Juárez nothing other than the unconcealment of the world's secrets is at stake, the necessary question is the question about the epistemic nature of that secret. If the secret is not literary (although it may be sought by the literary), is it a historico-political secret? An ethical secret? Is Bolaño promising without promising an ethical revelation? If literature's secret is in itself transliterary, if that can be accepted from the thought that literature, when looking for the secret (which literature always does), is looking for something other than itself, and if from that point of departure we must question the transhistorical, transpolitical, transontological nature of literary revelation, would it be a surprise to discover that we might not be able to affirm that such a revelation is also transethical? The revelation of what revelation destroys, in Maurice Blanchot's sentence on literature (Blanchot 47), could end up having a thoroughly ethical nature.<sup>11</sup>

But it would not be an ethics of the good life. Infrapolitical ethics comes with a bite, and it is not enough to say that it serves to condemn every possible moralism. Infrapolitical ethics must also encounter and critique the moralistic residue in contemporary philosophical positions whose appeal to weak definitions of the ethical seem to empower them to occupy some kind of self-assigned high ground. I will briefly reference two of them: Giorgio Agamben's endorsement of an apparently Deleuzian ethics of the blessed life; and Peter Hallward's endorsement of an apparently Badiouan ethics without others. To the extent that infrapolitical ethics are always necessarily the supplement to a radical republicanism of the last man and of the last woman, to the extent that they might constitute something like a subalternist ethics, they reject the notion of an ethics without others as well as every possible notion of an ethics of

mere life. I will try to show how both notions conceal a misguided moralism of ontotheological origin—regardless of their good intentions. Or precisely because of them.

Agamben's essay "Absolute Immanence" constitutes a rather uncritical endorsement of the later Deleuze's determination of the "plane of immanence" as something resembling what another philosophical tradition would have called the name for the Being of beings. The Deleuzian plane of immanence is equated by Agamben to a new thought of life that establishes, he says, "a legacy that clearly concerns the coming philosophy" (220). Agamben establishes a first divide in modern philosophy which would concern immanence and transcendence. On the side of immanence, he would place Spinoza and Nietzsche, and after a certain detour through Heidegger's anti-subjectivism, Foucault and Deleuze. On the side of transcendence, Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida. If Heidegger succeeds in pointing us in the direction of "the new postconscious and postsubjective, impersonal and non-individual transcendental field" (225), after Heidegger immanence becomes, Agamben says quoting Deleuze, "the vertigo of philosophy" (226). Levinas and Derrida would suffer from ear trouble, and they can't handle the vertigo. They would have proven unable to hang on to what is for Agamben the most difficult and extreme thought, namely, the thought of the plane of immanence as the movement of the infinite (228). Levinas and Derrida would have fallen victims to a "necessary illusion" which would consist of "think[ing] transcendence within the immanent" (227), and precisely by opening their philosophies to a thought of the other which they register as the limit of every possible immanence. For Levinas and Derrida the other is the transcendent. But not for Deleuze.

Spinoza is invoked as the predecessor, given his thought of the conatus as the universal persevering of every being in its own being. Through the Spinozan conatus Agamben can gloss Deleuze as the thinker of "a life," i.e., the transcendental field of every concrete life, which is

nothing but the immanence of desire to itself, the desiring of one's own desire. In conatus desire and Being coincide "without residue" (236). The program for a philosophy of the future must hold on to the new potentiality without action of the plane of immanence in order to reach "complete power, complete beatitude," which are not the consequences of a life, but rather the very content of a life itself: "A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete beatitude" (Deleuze, "Immanence" 386). The ethical program for such a philosophy would be to uphold the priority of "a life" over against any concrete life, through the discernment of "the matrix of desubjectification itself in every principle that allows for the attribution of a subjectivity" (238); and, in order to avoid the danger that beatitude, power, and desire become transcendental illusions, that is, in order to avoid the danger that the upholder of desubjectification become resubjectified through its own principle of action, "we will have to see [and, one figures, eliminate] the element that marks subjection to biopower in the very paradigm of possible beatitude" (238). This is then a program for an ethics of the good immanent life, an ethics of power increase at the service of the desubjectified, impersonal "contemplator without knowledge," free "of all cognition and all intentionality" (239). Whether one likes the rhetoric or not, it is still obvious that the Nietzschean moralism of the strong is active here, even if this time through the affirmation of a certain necessary practice which, to the extent that it demands consistency with the transcendental field of immanence, turns toward asceticism in its disavowed attempt to fill the otherwise impossible gap of desire. No politics are possible under this conceptualization other than a politics of the increase of power, where the very encounter with the power of the other as ethico-political encounter can only be understood as an encounter with the power of bad biopolitical power—which needs to be resisted, and somehow overcome.

The very notion of an ethico-political encounter is rejected from the start by Hallward's positing of an "ethics without other" in Badiou. Badiou's statement, quoted by Hallward, is certainly unequivocal: "the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned" (29-30). Badiou's ethics is not an ethics of life, but rather an ethics of truth, which therefore exercises itself in a fidelity to events of truth that are indeed constitutive of the subject as such. Politically, the ethical condition of a truth is that it be valid for all and based upon the principle of universal equality. His is therefore a republicanism of the last man/woman, and there is no possible infrapolitical objection to the ongoing critique of every particularity, or to the indifference to every difference from the point of view of the affirmation of political universalism. Where is, then, the moralistic residue? In the very fact that the rejection of recognition, the stubborn refusal to negotiate the political encounter with beings for whom the event of truth might be differentially interpreted, or for whom there has been no political truth-event, and thus no political constitution of subjectivity, runs the risk of turning Badiouan political practice into always already Jacobinist, and way too impersonal. Yes, "philosophy has never been possible without accepting the possibility of an anonymous statement" (27), but political life in the name of anonymous statements could be dangerously close to unhinged moralism, since there is always a subject of those anonymous statements, namely, the subject of truth. And knowledge of truth is power over the ones that do not have it, or that refuse to have it. Hallward mercilessly criticizes, in Badiou's name but also in his own name, the ridiculousness of those who think "that ethics should be organized around the will of the other," perhaps refusing to understand that the ethical "passivity" endorsed by Levinas and Derrida, for instance, is far from being a renunciation of responsibility, an acceptance of compromise, or an embrace of "antiphilosophy" in Badiou's sense. That passivity is nothing but the recognition that the demand for universal equality is empty if it is not accompanied by the

transcendental priority of the rights of others over my own rights. If I affirm my own truth to be universal and valid for all, and refuse to let my neighbor disagree for his own good, the fundamental problem is not intolerance: it is rather the fact that I become structurally incapable of engaging in the ethical adjudication of any possible ethico-political conflict, whatever the lasting brilliance of the politics at stake. The truth of politics is the last refuge of a moralism that will not listen to the untruth of the other.

Crime fiction—that is, the thriller—would in any case be the kind of literature that would enable us to reach that conclusion. We say that any murder conceals or hides a secret. Crime literature seeks to unveil that secret. Such a secret, the secret inscribed in the Ciudad Juárez murders, for instance, conceals the secret of the world. So crime literature looks at the world from an ethical perspective. The attempt to unconceal the secret of the world is an ethical endeavor, because no murder is primarily a theological, a historical, a political, or a literary murder (although there may be literary murders, as in Taibo and Marcos's novel). Rather, every murder is primarily an ethical breach, an ethical fault. Otherwise it would not be murder. Every murder is a relation to the other, and it is essentially a relation to the other. There is no murder, and there can be no murder, if the "ethical predication based upon recognition of the other [is] purely and simply abandoned." There will only be political adjudications of murder. Murder radically suspends the ethical imperative of the radical priority of the other, and it is therefore a negative relation to the other. But the inversion, the negation of a relation, does not destroy the relation.

The relation between literature and murder shows thus, in a privileged and remarkable way, the heteronomy, the impropriety of the literary. In particular, it shows the ethical impropriety of the literary, since literature must yield its autonomy to the pressure of ethics. In that relation, ethics disappropriates the literary, whereas literature does not, and cannot,

disappropriate the ethical, which is structurally embedded in the form of language. The murders of Ciudad Juárez, not Bolaño's novel on the murders of Ciudad Juárez, hide the secret of the world. Literature looks for it, if it is at all true that something or someone looks for it, rather than that no one pays attention to any murder. If literature seeks an ethical secret, then the ethical relation to the other dominates literature, and imposes its law.

It is possible to imagine a comprehensive literary history that would deal with the relations between literature, politics, and crime. Literature is an epistemic apparatus whose radical heteronomy manifests itself fundamentally as ethical impropriety, or even as ethico-political impropriety. This is not because literature is improperly ethical, rather it is because literature is disappropriated by ethics even as it follows the law of ethics. Literature's impropriety is not just ethical, it is also ethico-political. If the murders are fundamentally an ethical relation, albeit denied or suspended, the need to investigate literarily, as much as the need to investigate historically, or even fiscally, or by the police, the very presence of murder in a given community or in the social is a need of a political order.

Murder is a suspended ethical relation, but the investigation of murder is always an ethico-political relation to murder. Literature, in the concrete case of crime literature, or of the thriller, when it makes of any murder, or of any crime, its focus of investigation, becomes a political apparatus that seeks to give response to an ethical suspension. Murder is ethical, insofar as it is primarily a negation or suspension of the ethical. But the need to investigate murder, the need to understand it, and the need to articulate that comprehension in language, is no longer primarily an ethical obligation. It seeks to intervene in ethics, to reconstitute ethics, to correct, even if symbolically, an interruption or a suspension of ethics. But it is already improperly ethical, because the attempt itself, the need and the expression of the need to investigate, to understand, can only be determined out of its own distance from the ethical.

That distance from the ethical is already of a political nature. Even if the very need for a literary investigation of murder finds at its very point of departure the ethical law of the radical priority of the other, if that is its heteronomy or secret law, the ethical imperative determines the literary need only improperly. The literary need is primarily, even if not exclusively, the need for a political response to the suspension of ethics, and enters an ethico-political relation with the suspension of ethics, not just an ethical relation. This is the other side of infrapolitics, the other side of literature's heteronomy. Because literature is language, and the language of a community, its ethical impropriety expresses itself necessarily in a political dimension.

That is, the literary need, as a response to the suspension of ethics, is marked by ethics, but it is also marked by the political mediation of its own apparatus, unavoidably. From the point of view of the literary apparatus itself, it is conceivable that the relation be seen as a literary mediation. But, from an ethical perspective, the literary mediation is always already political. So, from an ethical perspective, a literary reaction to a crime, or to crime, constitutes a political response to the suspension of ethics. But it is a political response that is thoroughly conditioned by the ethical relation. It is therefore an ethico-political response, and improper at that, on both sides. It is infrapolitical.

We have the paradox that the infrapolitical impropriety of the literary apparatus, as an ethico-political response to the suspension of ethics, may be literary property or literary propriety itself. Could it be that crime literature is the condition of possibility of all literature? Could it be that the thriller is not just the dominant narrative form of our time, but in fact of all time? What interests me in particular is the regional question of the relation between literature and crime, and its relation with the ethical secret of the world. Literary history, or literary criticism, could investigate the historical conditions of articulation of literature's ethico-political impropriety. Mexican literary history could be reinterpreted from the point of view of the study

of the ethico-political reactions to the suspension of the ethical in Mexican life. What is at stake is the study of an improper ethics, of an improper politics, marked by literary articulation. What is at stake is the history of Mexican literary ethics as an ethico-political history of the suspension of ethics. This brings us to a technical problem.

Is the suspension of ethics in itself historical? Or is the suspension of ethics the limit of history and its condition of possibility, the always already past event of history that determines every possible history and every possible historical temporality? If there is a history of literature, is there also a history of denarrativization? If there is a history of ethics, can there be a history of the suspension of ethics? Or are denarrativization and the suspension of ethics theoretico-practical moments equivalent to the conceptual moment of the subaltern in Gayatri Spivak's phrase "the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized as logic" (Spivak 17)? Perhaps the study of the improper relation between literature and crime in Mexico is nothing other than the study of the concept of the subaltern in Mexican literary production.<sup>12</sup>

The ethical impropriety of crime fiction, the radical heteronomy of the literary in general and of murder literature in particular, configures a structure at the very heart of the Mexican literary apparatus that disarticulates every attempt to present Mexican literature as national allegory, or as an identitarian enterprise. Impropriety is paradoxically or aporetically literature's most proper tradition. The improper literary tradition, if it is a tradition, that says that literature can never think of murders (remember Bolaño: "nobody pays attention to those murders"), but rather that literature is thought out by the murders, that tradition that restitutes a sinister heteronomy at the heart of the literary, that tradition that denies the thorough textualization of the literary, the Romanticization of the literary apparatus, that tradition that says that literature is thoroughly ruled by an outside-the-text, and that this outside-the-text is of an ethical nature, and is only given a response through the ethico-political relation we call literature, that is also



the tradition, if it is a tradition, that says that, in terms of national allegories, transculturations, identities, or any other form of attempting to configure a thinking of the nation, literature always stays short or goes too far; that it is always too literary, and thus not literary enough. Murder literature, any thriller, as part of the ethico-political apparatus devoted to a response to the suspension of the ethical, cannot find in the national horizon any secret of the world, but rather shows that the secret is always beyond the national, and that it is inaccessible to the national; that the national, and any of its present-day variations, such as the local, the global, the regional, is in fact the structure that covers over, that conceals and betrays the unthinkability of the secret. Every national/communitarian proposal in literature is a part of the ideological structure of compensation for the suspension of the ethical, for crime as such, and cannot constitute a political response to the suspension of the ethical. It is a political response, but it is not a commensurate political response. It is rather the negation and the suspension of a proper political response. The assumption of absolute historicity, as we saw, implies an affirmation of chance, a rejection of teleological necessity, and an embrace of the infrapolitical stance. Everything else is moralism.

If the elaboration of a nationalist structure in literature, or of any of its variations, is an antipolitical gesture, in virtue of being always too literary, hence not literary enough, then literary nationalism collaborates in the suspension of ethics and is therefore implicated in the crime that nobody pays attention to, but that nevertheless conceals the secret of the world. Literary nationalism is, in Mexico, and everywhere else, a heteronomous structure of concealment of the suspension of ethics, that is, concealment of the suspension of the radical priority of the other, and hence a concealment of the process of subalternization and sacrifice.

Against nationalism, and against any of its identitarian variations, one can only affirm democracy. Literature's impropriety, literature's ethical heteronomy, is the democratic mark at

the heart of the literary endeavor—for a republicanism of the last man and the last woman. There is no crime fiction without ethical universalism and there is no reflection on the suspension of the ethical without a democratization of the political. In 1958 the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, writing in Italy after having spent a few years in Mexico, said that a democratic politics was the tendential movement towards the abandonment of the sacrificial structuration of history (Zambrano 42). Crime fiction, that is, the reflexive intersection of literature and crime, heteronomically marked by the political need to interrupt the suspension of the ethical and by the ethical need to interrupt the suspension of the political, is democratic literature, and seeks the abandonment of the sacrificial structuration of history. Crime literature configures an improper ethico-political or infrapolitical projection.

Infrapolitics is in sum the ethical charge of the literary apparatus, and the cipher of its heteronomy. In literary infrapolitics—in the not properly political but improperly ethical and improperly political—we find the link between literature and democracy, understood as the movement towards the end of the sacrificial structuration of history. Think about the literary responses needed to respond to the Ciudad Juárez’s murders.

“In Mexico, si no le madruga usted a su contrario, su contrario le madruga a usted” (Guzmán, Sombra 203); “Mexican politics can only conjugate one verb: madrugar” (220). Madrugar means to wake up early in the morning, but by making the verb transitive the sentences become untranslatable. It is by now popular to say that politics in Mexico means “madrugarle al otro,” a hard-to-translate expression that conveys the sense that politics is the art of one-upping the enemy. That would be true for Mexican politics and for any other politics. What is slightly shocking about the sentence is the cynicism involved in substituting the notion of the other by the notion of the enemy. Is every other an enemy? Is that what its companion sentence, “there are no friends in politics,” might mean? The combination of madrugarle al

otro as a definition of the political act and the affirmation that, in politics, there are no friends, is obviously deadly for any kind of anti-moralism. Indeed, the statement that the political act is the act of advantageously dealing with every other as an enemy, although widespread enough in practical terms, is the epitome of moralism, as it involves a consideration of the politician as someone who lives in the permanent suspension of the ethical law, which would not apply to him or her. But the unintended consequence of such a definition is the corollary that every politician, insofar as he or she is a moralist politician, is the enemy of the human race, that is, of every last man, and of every last woman. This is indeed the case. What would be the infrapolitical response?

The autonomy of the political is based on the existential threat that every enemy poses. Indeed, the enemy, in politics, can only be he or she who threatens your existence. Confronted with the existential threat, the ethical law is suspended, and the political becomes an autonomous realm of action: you are permitted preemptively to destroy he or she who, given the chance, would destroy you. The autonomy of ethics, whose ultimate goal politically speaking is the consolidation of a civil constitution in the republicanism of the last man and of the last woman, is therefore an autonomy that relates to the behavior to be observed regarding the friend, or at least the non-enemy. When there is no existential threat, there is no enemy. If the field of the political is to be understood as the field of division between friends and enemies, in Carl Schmitt's definition, then it is essential to understand that only the unjust enemy is to be fought (as Kant says, abysmally enough, "A just enemy would be one that I would be doing wrong by resisting; but then he would also not be my enemy" [Kant, Metaphysics 119]).<sup>13</sup> Everybody else is a friend.

What is, then, friendship? Kant devotes four important pages in his Metaphysics of Morals to a discussion of the concept of friendship, upon which he elaborates under the heading

“Conclusions of the Elements of Ethics.” He quotes Aristotle in the first of these pages: “My dear friends, there is no such thing as a friend” (215). As the paradoxes of this position have already been explored by Jacques Derrida in The Politics of Friendship (a book that can indeed be understood as commentary on the Kantian pages I am referring to), I won’t dwell on them, or only to say that the sentence in Guzmán’s book, “friendship does not figure . . . in the field of political relations,” proffered during a conversations between friends, is a direct echo. Friendship is for Kant a duty, “no ordinary duty but an honorable one” (215). However, Kant recognizes, friendship is difficult. In its perfection, it would be “the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect” (215). But there are many obstacles in the way of maintaining such perfect equilibrium of equality, and, Kant concludes, this form of perfect friendship “is an ideal of one’s wishes, which knows no bounds in its rational concept but which must always be very limited in experience” (217).

Aesthetic friendship, therefore, friendship based on feeling or affect, Kant says, can only act as regulative idea. Moral friendship, that is, the limited form of friendship that consists of “complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other, as far as such disclosures are consistent with mutual respect” (216), is, however, not just an ideal but “(like black swans) actually exists here and there in its perfection” (217). According to Kant, the notion of moral friendship serves as a model for political activity: “A friend of human beings as such (i.e., of the whole race) is one who takes an affective interest in the well-being of all human beings (rejoices with them) and will never disturb it without heartfelt regret” (217). The friend of human beings is a moral friend. Be a friend of your friends—perhaps nothing else is meant by the notion of a republicanism of the last human. No thriller has ever said anything else.

There is, however, an enigmatic sentence in Kant's pages, and I will conclude with it: "The human being is a being meant for society (though he is also an unsociable one), and in cultivating the social state he feels strongly the need to reveal himself to others (even with no ulterior purpose)" (216). The need for anti-moralist revelation, for a self-exposure without calculation—it is not yet ethical, and it certainly has nothing to do with politics. It is something else and points to a realm of practical reason that can hardly be captured by the division of the latter into ethics and politics. Is it a rhetorical need? It conditions all rhetoric. It is perhaps from the incalculable abyss of this need that there can be something like an infrapolitical position, which is in itself neither properly ethical nor properly political, but which nevertheless abhors moralist betrayal. Is this not, finally, the ultimate reason for the thriller, for the need for the thriller? And is it not, finally, the only reason why there should be literature?

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\* The second section of this essay subsumes a previously published article entitled “Ethics and Politics in Héctor Aguilar Camín’s Morir en el golfo and La guerra de Galio” (South Central Review 21.3 (2004): 70-84). John Verbick and Ryan Long did the original translation of those pages from Spanish. I have simply revised it in the process of expansion of my argument.

<sup>1</sup> Ryan Long sustains that the novelistic paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s in Mexico remains unavoidably marked by the events of Tlatelolco in 1968. In agreement with him, it is perhaps only illusory to consider lópezportillismo autonomously, but in any case the decline of hegemony of the PRI in the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre and the Mexican oil boom directly impact Morir en el golfo. References to the Tlatelolco events will be much more obvious in La guerra de Galio.

<sup>2</sup> For Kant’s discussions of the categorical imperative, see principally Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and Critique of Practical Reason. Alenka Zupancic has explored the productive nature of the aporias that emerge from the Kantian position in regard to analyzing the cultural logic of postmodernity. See Zupancic, Ethics of the Real.

<sup>3</sup> The relationship between potential and decision is of course essential. See Giorgio Agamben, who writes “This ‘I can’ does not mean anything—yet it marks what it is, for each of us, perhaps the hardest and bitterest experience possible: the experience of potentiality” (“On Potentiality” 178); and “To be capable of good and evil is not simply to be capable of doing this or that good or bad action . . . Radical evil is not this or that bad deed but the potentiality for darkness. And yet this potentiality is also the potentiality for light” (181). See also Ernesto Laclau on the grounding of ethics in the binary withdrawal/engagement, a grounding that moves away from the Aristotelian understanding of the notion of potentia (“Ethics”).

<sup>4</sup> The notion of “traversing the fantasy” is essential to Lacanianism, where it has an unabashedly positive signification. See for instance Slavoj Žižek, “what this means is that in order to liberate oneself from the grip of existing social reality, one should first renounce the transgressive fantasmatic supplement that attaches to it” (Fragile Absolute 149).

<sup>5</sup> Guha demonstrates how the Hegelian concept of Weltgeschichte (whose proper translation would be world-history), in order to define its conceptual specificity, must base itself upon a Eurocentric notion of history that erases any possibility of recuperating the history of the world. Through his character Galio Bermúdez Aguilar Camín takes to their limits certain consequences of this Hegelian concept.

<sup>6</sup> A reference to Jorge Luis Borges’s “La lotería en Babilonia” is necessary here, since Borges’s story is the story of a systematic abolition of chance as undertaken by a “shadowy corporation”—the State.

<sup>7</sup> “One must choose between a dictatorship that comes from below and a dictatorship that comes from above. I choose the one from above because it comes from the most clean and serene regions. Finally, one must choose between a dictatorship of the dagger and a dictatorship of the saber. I choose the dictatorship of the saber” (131-32). This is also Galio’s option, against whose backdrop the novel presents the need for Carlos García Vigil to make a decision.

<sup>8</sup> Which does not mean, of course, that it is easy to tell them apart. See Fenves, Late Kant, Chapter 4, for a good discussion of the difficulties surrounding the adjudications of radical evil and moral law to the motivations for any given political or personal action.

<sup>9</sup> We seem to be far indeed from the moment in 1986 when Fredric Jameson affirmed, from the fact that “a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world” (65), that “all third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (69). Notice the mandate to the critic: texts must

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be read as national allegories. I don't think it is much in our interest to do so nowadays, which of course creates a potentially significant problem for the tradition of criticism in Latin America, which has hardly ever ventured beyond identitarian and allegorico-national frameworks.

<sup>10</sup> See Derrida, "Passions," for comments on the structural connections between literature and democracy.

<sup>11</sup> See Fynsk for an ethical explication of Blanchot's essay "Literature and the Right to Death." Fynsk thematizes the strange power of literature to endure in negation in ways that I think are closely connected to the basic position Weil detected in the Iliad. "The question [of literature], we may presume, has to do with the abstract character of the negation to which literature commits itself, possibly even the delirious character of this engagement when it is undertaken without reserve, but equally with something that escapes its murderous power: something that haunts its movement of negation and becomes an obsession" (Fynsk 229). This something that escapes any murder and every murder, and which haunts the literary, is what I am calling "infrapolitical"—although it might be something else as well.

<sup>12</sup> The initial moment of this paper was a conversation with John Kraniauskas on the importance of the intersection of literature, crime, and politics in Mexico for any commensurate understanding of the representation of subaltern struggles in that country. Of course this essay has benefitted from many more conversations with John on thrillers in general, and Mexican literature in particular.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Schmitt, Concept, for the classical definition of the field of the political as the field of division between friends and enemies, and also for his discussion of the autonomy of the political in the existential determination of the enemy as he/she who threatens your survival.