A STUDY OF SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF THE
CONFABULARIO BY JUAN JOSÉ ARREOLA

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

A search for critical works on the fables, or stories, of the contemporary Mexican author, Juan José Arreola, reveals a dearth of material concerning their actual content.

Arreola's fables, like hermetic lyric poetry, are not always easily understood at first reading. The difficulty lies in two principal areas: 1) an abundance of metaphorical language, whose key must be discovered, and 2) numerous erudite allusions, many of which are apocryphal, that require research. Furthermore, the reader needs at least a general knowledge of the fields in which Arreola himself is well-versed: history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and physics. The use that Arreola makes of his knowledge is often far from superficial.

The observant reader discovers recurring themes that reveal certain patterns of thought, which, taken together, form an expression of his world view. His thought, as seen through his fables, is concentrated in four main areas: anti-science, the man-woman relationship, the artist or poet, and fantasy.

One who would read Arreola needs, as it were, a guide to understanding the elusive but forceful creations he has penned. This thesis attempts to provide just such a
clarification of nineteen of the most representative fables from the *Confabulario*, which is Arreola's most successful and most challenging work to date.
The best biographical data available on Juan José Arreola are found in Angel Flores' *Historia y antología del cuento y la novela en Hispanoamérica*.  

Arreola was born on September 21, 1918, in Ciudad Guzmán. The house, number 33 on Calle Juan M. Gonzales, was constructed by his father's own hand, and Flores states that at the time of writing, some of the Arreola family still resided there.

As a mischievous youngster Arreola was given to reciting poems, organizing *jarabes*, and presenting plays. Although his formal education never went beyond elementary school, his knowledge was greatly augmented by the literary atmosphere of his home. At an early age his sister manifested her creative talent by writing poems, and Flores writes that Juan José felt her competition keenly and resented her as a person. In spite of the influences of a cultured home and an erudite teacher, Alfredo Velasco, Arreola forsook his studies and began earning a living at a tender age. His various jobs included apprenticeships in bookbinding, printing, coffee mill operating, and clerking in a clothing store and a *papelería*. At sixteen he went to Guadalajara and served as a *mozo de cuerda* in the Mercado.

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Corona. In 1937 he moved to Mexico City where he studied theater with Rodolfo Usigli and Xavier Villaurrutia and worked as a tax collector. There he wrote three farces and his first short story, which initially appeared in the newspaper Vigía and later was published in an anthology for children. After a year in Manzanillo, where his family operated a soft drink business, he returned to teach history and literature at a high school in Ciudad Guzmán. At this time he widened his reading in the library of his teacher, Velasco, worked with amateur theater, and wrote some of the short stories, such as "Hizo bien mientras vivió," which were later to make him famous. From 1942 to 1945 he worked on the newspaper El Occidental in Guadalajara, and organized the magazines Eco (1943) and Pan (1945) with Alatorre and Arturo Rivas Sainz.

In 1944 Arreola married, and from this union were to come three children. The following year, however, he left alone to visit Paris at the invitation of the French actor Louis Jouvet, whom he had met in Guadalajara. He studied theater in Paris until poverty forced his return in May of 1946. In Mexico City he led a picaresque existence as a three-peso-a-pair sandal vendor in the poorer sections of the city. At night he was an active member of the sparkling theater crowd, which included playwrights, actors, and dancers. After a time he left his street sales and
went to work for the Fondo de Cultura publishing house. From Mexico City College he received a scholarship and was able to write his first book, Varia invención (1949). It was not a work destined to produce a large impact, but accolades there were, one of which came from the French author, André Gide. Through Gide's support the French literary magazine, Cahiers du Sud, accepted "Pablo" for publication during that same year.

From 1950 to 1951 Arreola was endowed by a Rockefeller grant which enabled him to write the Confabulario. After that his fame as one of Mexico's leading writers was assured. In 1955 the play, La hora de todos appeared and was awarded several prizes. After having been severely criticized for several years for his lack of patriotic fervor, he succumbed to popular demand and wrote a semi-costumbrista novel about the early days of Ciudad Guzmán, La feria.

Described by his friends as a brilliant, sensitive, neurotic who has difficulty forcing himself to write, he presently lives with his wife in Mexico City where he works in a managerial capacity in a state publishing house, and is editor of a magazine, Mester.
INTRODUCTION

Juan José Arreola, magical realist, stylistic innovator, and seeker after the deeper meaning of life, is a modern-day Mexican fabler. Historically, Angel Flores places him in the generation of 1940, a group of writers whose common characteristics are these:

Escriben en prosa limpia y castigada que repugna tanto lo ramplón como lo cursi y lo grandilocuente. ... Además, aprovechando los hallazgos de Freud, adentran más profundamente en las regiones sub-lunares o tenebrosas del alma humana. Parecen también más duchos en la ardua y agobiante tarea de componer, de estructurar. ... Los logros se deberían en gran parte a su virtuosismo-técnica y dominio estilístico. Preponderante será el tema de lo fantástico y de lo psicológico. En lo fantástico, soplan principalmente de las catacumbas praguanas de Kafka; en lo psicológico, de los laberintos de Joyce, Proust y Virginia Woolf.²

The production of Arreola, far from being large, includes a number of stories that appeared in the magazines, Pan, Eco, and El Occidental, in the early 1940's in Guadalajara; a play, La hora de todos; a novel, La feria; and a novelette, Gunther Stapenhorst. A series of vignettes, fables, and short stories under the titles, Prosodia, Varia invención, and Confabulario were later grouped with a

² Angel Flores, "La novela y el cuento en Hispanoamérica," Etcaetera, IV (Mexico 1953), p. 152.
As the title would imply, the Confabulario consists of fables and stories intended to confound. This study will attempt to explain or explicate in selected works, the insights and implications of the Confabulario.

The stories of this group are highly condensed, usually consisting of two or three pages in length, frequently narrated in the first person, and rarely containing dialogue. Although the emotional tone varies, three moods are predominant: pessimism, which is evident in the stories dealing with personal relationships, the creative artist, and the narrator's recurring paranoia; and humor and cynicism, which are inextricably combined in the Confabulario. Schade says of Arreola's pessimism: "In a large number of his stories and satires he chips away at love and its illusions. . . . He is particularly hard on women and marriage." As for humor and cynicism, this critic remarks that Arreola

laughs gleefully and wickedly at man--and by implication at himself--puncturing all the foolishness he indulges in. . . . With mordant descriptions, pungent attacks, or sly irony, he shows how silly mankind is, how outrageous man's behavior and antics are, how one is at the mercy of a world and society that more

often seems to care for what is trivial and ephemeral than for what is essential. Arreola jabs at complacency and ruthlessly exposes pompous and hypocritical attitudes.⁴

Categories that fall victim to his impudent wit include science, commercialism, advertising, bourgeois taste, infidelity, and Romanticism.

Although Arreola's fables generally do not follow the traditional fable pattern of including a moral in a humorous anecdote, he does use humor in couching the presentation of his more serious preoccupations: "... sutiles casos de consciencia, imbricados problemas intelectuales ... la teología, el infinito, en general los problemas metafísicos."⁵

The use of the fable itself indicates that the author is working with some form of didacticism, but the quantity of predication in Arreola's work is minimal. The critic Emmanuel Carballo describes his idea of the absence of any moralizing in this fashion: "adopta un perfil distinto del secular, no propende a la cátedra ni al sermón, no da recetas infalibles ni infunde maneras de comportarse, simplemente pone ejemplos."⁶ But because Arreola is interested in probing the consistency of man's thought and being, his

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⁶. Ibid., p. 28.
relationships with his fellow men and his creator, as well as exposing the sham that clutters up our daily existence; his work incites a reader to deeper thought. This, then, is the form of his didacticism.

Arreola's fable is an excellent vehicle for the kind of fiction generally regarded as magical realism. He adheres to the dictum of this school in his preference for precision and density, in his clinging to reality to prevent the magic of his myth from flying off into supernatural realms, and in not catering to popular taste, but rather to the sophisticated reader who is able to divine the subtleties of aesthetic mystery. 7

It is in the subtleties of the Confabulario that the reader perceives the vast knowledge that Arreola has accumulated, in spite of the fact that he never finished elementary school.

Arreola's range includes not only the present, but much of the past. He has a special penchant for medieval times, attested in such pieces as "The Song of Peronelle," "Sinesius of Rhodes," or "Epitaph," a short sympathetic biographical sketch of the poet. François Villon. Erudite allusions from other literatures and history crop up often in his prose, as well as learned references to writers and their works in other fields—anthropology, psychology, science. And he seems astonishingly knowledgeable about a variety of esoteric subjects, for example, Roman and other ancient war machines, which he describes in an hilarious story called "On Ballistics." 8


Arreola himself gives a more modest indication of his own awareness of the sources upon which he draws: "no sé qué me pasa: pero en tomando la pluma me acuerdo de todo lo que sé, he leído o me han contado, pues mi memoria está untada de colodión y reproduce cuanto conoce."  

Not all critics have expressed a favorable opinion of Arreola's production. One writes, in a decidedly harsh value judgment, "sus descripciones han perdido exactitud, empiezan a sugerir algo y se pierden de súbito en vaho nebuloso, obnubilante, se ponen a chapotear en lo informe y terminan por no decir nada."  

The intent of this study is to prove the fallacy of the latter phrase. A more accurate appraisal of Arreola's oblique method is provided by Beatriz Espejo: "Juan José encontrará en los símbolos la fórmula para ser sincero y enigmático, accesible y difícil. Revestirá problemas reiterados pero vitales, les prestará novedad y vigencia."  

In this same vein of value judgments Ramón Xirau contends that "in the use of symbols and metaphors, Arreola is the most precise artificer and artist among the new Mexican writers."  

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10. Emilio Tiran, "¿Qué ha pasado con Juan José Arreola?" Libro y el pueblo (March 1960), p. 104.


Despite the interest that Arreola has aroused in critics both in Mexico and abroad, this thesis was motivated by the fact that there are no studies in depth of any of the author's existing works. It is with this purpose in mind that an effort is made here to articulate some of the profundities that abound in what is for me his pithiest compilation, the Confabulario.
METHOD

The stories selected from Arreola's *Confabulario* fall into four principal thematic categories: anti-science, the man-woman relationship, the artist or poet, and fantasy. These categories appear in that order in the present work. The largest number of stories will appear in the man-woman relationship and the artist or poet groups. On the whole, the stories with fantasy or anti-science themes reiterate many of the same ideas. These categories therefore will be limited to one outstanding story that I feel is the most successful of its group.

Each story will be treated individually in a two-part presentation; a brief synopsis, followed by a detailed explication. The exceptions are those few stories whose meaning is on the surface and which therefore will be given brief interpretative explanations.
"En verdad os digo" is perhaps Arreola's most powerful anti-science fable. From the knowledgeably misapplication of such technical allusions as the quantum theory, Carrel's experiments, a steam clepsydra, and the use of heavy water, osmium, and molybdenum, it is apparent that the humor of the story is directed toward an audience well-versed in the sciences.

The plot of the tale concerns the scientific process of transmutation, or the changing of one element into another by radioactivity. In Arreola's story the process involves changing a live camel into a filament that will penetrate the eye of a needle and then revert to its original state.

The story begins in a conversational tone, advising those persons interested in seeing the camel pass through the eye of the needle to sign the list of benefactors for Niklaus' experiment. The research, opposed to that of the death-dealing atomic scientists, has a humanitarian end: the salvation of the souls of the rich.

The most serious difficulty encountered thus far in the project is the lack of funds to purchase an atomic plant. Although a committee is busy with a world-wide subscription drive, at present the scientist has only the needle and the camel with which to work. The needle is a marvelous object designed to resist the friction of a stream of electrons flowing at an ultrasonic rate.

Within a very short time Niklaus expects to have the approval of the societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals and the moral support of the Interplanetary League; the latter group is interested because of the length that the filament is expected to reach once the transmutation is perfected.

Precautions have been made to warn the world powers of charlatans who will propose a similar project, but whose method will be limited to dissolving the camel in sulphuric acid.

For those persons interested in attaining eternal life it is suggested that rather than melting tons of candle wax and spending money on indecipherable good works, it would be more efficacious to subsidize the disintegration of the camel. The reward for all contributors will be the same; what is necessary is that payments begin as soon as possible. Since the final outlay of capital cannot be estimated, subscribers should pay out their investment
pledges patiently over the years. A provision for Niklaus' successor will be mandatory, because the time required for research may extend over generations. A possible by-product of the personal-salvation project may develop in the field of human transportation; men will then be able to move great distances at high speeds by dissolution.

The possibility of failure is even more pleasing than that of success. If Niklaus is followed by a succession of imposters he will go down in history as the man who initiated the disintegration of capital. The rich will then be able to enter heaven through the narrow gate, even though the camel may not pass through the eye of the needle.

The humor of "En verdad os digo" is largely a product of the deliberately nonsensical frame of reference of the scientific terms.

The science-oriented reader becomes convinced that the story is a spoof rather than science fiction upon reading Niklaus' mathematical evaluation of the quantum energy discharged by a camel's hoof. The quantum theory, devised by Max Planck in 1901, concerns the movement of the radiant energy of matter compared to the frequency of the energy. According to the quantum theory radiant energy is not a uniform flow, but takes place in minute bundles,

called quanta, just as matter is not continuous, but made up of separate atoms." 15 What makes the mention of the quantum energy discharged by a camel's hoof funny is that Niklaus is making a tremendously complicated computation involving the radiant energy of a substance of no graver import that the dust the hoof raises.

The composition of Niklaus' needle is equally far-fetched. The scientists conjecture that it is made of osmium, molybdenum, or "crystalline clusters encysted in dense masses of siderite." 16 The reason for its wondrous composition is that it must resist the friction of electrons flowing at high speed. The humor of this allusion lies in the exaggeration; the fact is that any dime-store needle would serve the purpose, and the insistence on a mysterious, specially-constituted needle heightens the nonsense.

Although work has been done in transmutation to make Niklaus' wild scheme appear almost credible, the time allotment for the actual procedure is ridiculous to the point of provoking mirth. The skein stretches for so many millions of light years that the Interplanetary League has already developed an interest in the experiment. Light travels at 186,300 miles per second. This means that


Niklaus is proposing to wind a skein in three-fifths of a second that stretches for this immense distance. Mathematically the proposal would appear like this:

\[
\frac{186,300 \text{ mi.} \times \text{seconds per yr.} \times \text{millions of yrs.}}{\frac{3}{5} \text{ of a second}} = \text{velocity}
\]

The allusion to Carrell's chicken tissue emphasizes the possibility of success even in failure. Arreola's simile is that even if Niklaus' project fails, "su obra humanitaria no hará sino aumentar en grandeza ... como el tejido de pollo cultivado por Carrell" (p. 55). Alexis Carrell was a French doctor who won the Nobel prize in 1912 for his studies of the preservation of tissues outside the body organism.¹⁷

The larger connotation of irony developed in the account is based on the scientific presumption of attempting a projected secular solution to the problem of the salvation of man's soul. The title of the story itself is ironic. The words, "En verdad os digo," are Biblical. The English version of these words, then, is not "I'm telling you the truth," as Schade renders it,¹⁸ but "Verily I say unto thee."¹⁹ This phrase is employed by Christ in the Gospels when He

¹⁸. Schade, p. 64.
¹⁹. John III:5.
informs His listeners that the ideas that will follow are of signal importance. "En verdad os digo" is as ironic a title for the story as the misapplication of scientific terms within the story is a contrast to true scientific venture.

The source of Arreola's camel and needle is found in the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus is asked by a rich young man how he may attain eternal life. Jesus responds by telling the young man to go and sell what he has and give it to the poor. When the young man hears this he goes away saddened because he cannot bring himself to part with his possessions. It is at this point that Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."20

The most implicit satire of Arreola's story is the scientist's literal interpretation of Christ's counsel. Arreola, through the satire, makes a negative evaluation of the scientific soul-saving scheme. He also treats negatively the implication that if this plan fails the rich can attain immortality just as easily by ridding themselves of their wealth. In equating the loss of riches with the camel's penetration of the eye of the needle Arreola is demonstrating that both routes are unacceptable.

Inherent in Arreola's humorous treatment of the scientist's literal interpretation of the Bible quotation is that his preposterous plan for salvation ignores completely the closing words of Christ's advice to the rich young man, "come take up the cross and follow me." The omission intensifies the satirical nature of the story, although the irony is meaningful only in proportion to the religious background of the reader. The Oxford University lecturer and scholar, Edersheim, provides the following explanation, which is one of several that are possible.

Jesus' advice that the young man sell his goods and give the money to the poor not only provided both a means and a test, but made possible an expression of a deeper need. The means to eternity involved the young man's separating himself from his riches. Arreola's negative treatment implies that he does not consider this solution to be sufficient. The test that the young man of the Biblical incident faces is parallel to the one that Arreola presents to his characters: that of sincerity. It is not just a question of whether or not they want to live forever; obviously it is a normal impulse to seek a remedy for the finality of death. The sincerity implied in this instance is whether or not


their desire for eternity stems from an overt trust in the love of their Creator or merely an effort to insure that the cushy state they enjoy on earth will be continued in the hereafter. Obviously both the young man in the Biblical account and the characters in Arreola's story fall into the latter group. The last part of Edersheim's three-part explanation, the need, pertains to the obligation that people who have a communion with God feel to demonstrate their devotion in tangible acts. In Arreola's tale there is no more internal evidence that the characters were impelled by this feeling than there is in the Biblical reference. The young man goes away because his fervor is not great enough to lead him to serve anyone but himself. He is saddened that the price for eternity is too great. The young man's need is conspicuously absent in the Bible. If the reader follows Arreola's reasoning to its logical end, this omission is also a relevant part of his satire.

Categorically, the satire of "En verdad os digo" skewers both science and religion with equal efficacy, although the remarks directed against the latter are minimal. In this selection Arreola complains that science is assuming a position in the lives of men that is not only excessive, but encroaching on areas that rightfully belong to the metaphysical. His case against organized religion is much simpler: he thinks lighting candles is wasted effort, and
he resents having to contribute money for "indescifrables obras de caridad ..." (p. 54).

Underlying the bigger themes of the follies of science and religion is a satirical attitude toward inordinate expenditures on projects of both. Niklaus' project will involve thousands of employees, a fact the narrator presents ironically as a desirable facet of the undertaking. Beyond his allusions to the actual spending of money, however, his main preoccupation here is with the futility of following certain external paths to salvation.
"El rinoceronte"

The dominion of a wife over her husband is the theme of "El rinoceronte." A tyrannical, obese, gluttonous, sexually-crude man is reduced to docility by his second spouse. His first mate provides a commentary revealing some insight about her own emotions concerning his change.

The major flaw in the former marriage bounds the story in the opening and closing lines. In the latter, Elinor envisions with relish the enormity of the change in her ex-husband: "Pero sobre todo, me gusta imaginar al rinoceronte en pantuflas, con el gran cuerpo informe bajo la bata, llamando en las altas horas de la noche, tímido y persistente, ante una puerta obstinada" (p. 59). What brought about the initial discord in their marital relations can be inferred from the less than favorable auspices under which it began. The emphasis of Joshua's original offer of marriage was one of respectability rather than love. Although Arreola leaves Elinor's motivation for marrying to the reader's conjecture, he implies that whatever the arrangement, she soon bemoaned the fact that love was not part of it: "Renuncié al amor antes de saber lo que era ..." (p. 58). This statement does not preclude the fact that Joshua had no
feeling for her because of her own admission of his "ternura momentánea" (p. 58), and his seeking another Elinor in his second wife. At any rate, his unwillingness to express emotion was deplored: "Joshua me demostró con alegatos judiciales que el amor sólo es un cuento que sirve para entretener a las criadas" (p. 58).

The specifics of Elinor's complaints are evidenced by her perception of the contrast between the new marriage and the former one. In the matter of rapport Elinor observes, "Con Joshua, yo naufragaba en el mar; Pamela flota como un barquito de papel en una palangana" (p. 58). The two wives' means of coping with Joshua's animal propensities are opposed. Elinor waged open warfare: "Diez años luché cuerpo a cuerpo con el rinoceronte ..." (p. 58). Pamela's tactics are more devious: "Joshua McBride ataca de frente, pero no puede volverse con rapidez. ... Pamela lo ha cogido de la cola, y no lo suelta" (p. 58). Elinor attributes Pamela's success in coping with Joshua to the fact that she is the daughter of a vegetarian minister who has taught her the secret of handling people who are difficult: "Es hija de un Pastor prudente y vegetariano que la enseñó la manera de lograr que los tigres se vuelvan también vegetarianos y prudentes" (p. 58). In ten years Elinor's only triumph against Joshua's oppression was to wrest a divorce from him while Pamela's gains include quelling his fits of anger,
rationing his pipe tobacco, and restricting his whisky. The former wife, observing the change in her ex-mate's physical appearance as a result of his vegetarian diet perceives, "Tal parece que Pamela, con sus dos manos frágiles ... le ha ido doblando el espinazo ..." (p. 59).

Seymour Menton states the essence of the story from Elinor's point of view: "[Elinor] a primera vista, parece estar muy contenta de que éste haya sido totalmente domado por su segunda esposa Pamela. ... Aunque le gusta ver al rinoceronte domado, en el subconsciente la primera señora McBride envidia el éxito de Pamela y no puede menos de contrastarlo con su propio fracaso."23

Menton also points up Arreola's debt to Arévalo Martínez.24 The "psycho-zoological" story developed by the latter finds a parallel in Arreola's use of animal characteristics to portray human failings. The rhinoceros image increases the impact of the shortcomings of the husband and helps justify the behavior of the wives: Elinor is driven to divorce, and Pamela resorts to ruses as a means of attenuating Joshua's overpowering behavior to the extent that she can endure living with him.


24. Ibid., p. 37.
"La migala"

In a filthy hut in a street market a man and a woman pause to look at a lethal bird spider. Later, without the woman, the man revisits the shop to purchase the insect for the purpose of realizing his desired destiny of death. He contemplates the import of the poisonous spider in the innocent box which he will unloose in his home to supplant his man-made hell with the hell of another, deadlier sort. From the moment when the spider moves crab-like under a piece of furniture, the man endures a life of inexplicable horror, perfecting and preparing his soul uselessly, because the spider does not bite him. Days pass as the man lives in suspended animation hoping to convince himself that the spider has gone. At times he feels defrauded; he thinks the vendor has sold him a harmless beetle for an exorbitant price. His momentary fears, however, are of little importance, for he knows that eventually the spider will be the agent of his death.

In sleepless conjecture the man envisions the insect climbing walls and excitedly sniffing the presence of another spidery being. The thought of the insect's mate reminds the man that he no longer misses the intolerable presence of his own.
The story is ostensibly about the mental chaos the narrator creates for himself by buying a man-killing spider. As occurs frequently in Arreola's writings, however, the bulk of the story is merely a framework for another story of weightier content. Arreola does not spell out his intended meanings in simple terms, but instead weaves through the fiber of the work a tenuous pattern of disingenuous remarks that belie their profundity. This highly-synthesized technique is designed to make the reader wonder.

It is not until the last sentence of "La migala" is read that there is any insight into this story-within-a-story. "Entonces, estremecido en mi soledad, acorralado por el pequeño monstruo, recuerdo que en otro tiempo yo soñaba en Beatriz y su compañía imposible" (p. 61). What conclusions can be drawn from that apparent non sequitur? The man is alone. From the words "estremecido en mi soledad" one might conjecture that his is not an entirely happy state, for "estremecido" seems to indicate the void of warmth provided by human companionship. Does he mean that he yearns for her presence in the cold climate of his solitude? On the contrary, he has so thoroughly adapted himself to his loneliness that he no longer feels the need for her. What significance did she have in his life that at one time he could dream of her and yet contend in the same breath that that time has passed? No clue is given; whatever need
she filled in his life, he still remembers her as intolerable company.

At this point the reader retraces the devious steps the author has taken to supply the real meaning of the story. The first clue, guilelessly obvious, is that Beatriz accompanies the man the day he has his initial encounter with the bird spider, yet he returns without her in order to purchase it. As he carries it home he remembers that "dentro de aquella caja iba el infierno personal que instalaría en mi casa para destruir, para anular al otro, el descomunal infierno de los hombres" (p. 60). Whether or not Beatriz was the instigator of his man-made hell one can only surmise. At face value "compañía imposible" at least indicates that the man-woman incompatibility made his life so discordant that he chose to annihilate himself.

The insect itself provides another clue. The excited sniffings of the spider sensing a companion bring to the narrator a sudden awareness that he feels no need for his own mate. The introduction of the invisible companion in the work makes it evident that the narrator in this story accepts the fact of two beings together as fundamental to life.

The spider's role in the unraveling of the secondary plot is completed with the narrator's words, "Me di cuenta de que la repulsiva alimaña era lo más atroz que podía
depararme el destino" (p. 60). The man rejects his state to the extent that he procures the spider to bring about his destruction. The next sentence, "Peor que el desprecio y la conmiseración brillando en una clara mirada," contributes to our understanding of their union. The "clara mirada" can belong only to Beatriz, if it is in accordance with the later references to her. The man, because of her "conmiseración," does not condemn her for being devoid of all human sensitivity, but the addition of the word "desprecio" indicates that he does not credit her with any real sympathy either. The resultant dichotomy is not further developed.

The theme of the inner story of "La migala" is one of meaninglessness. This would imply an existentialist focus, although the element of suicide, being an anti-existentialist concept since it is purposeful, tends to nullify this interpretation. Existentialist influence can be identified, however, in three areas: the lack of meaning in the protagonist's union, the lack of importance he places on life in general and his own being in particular, and the abortive aspect of the attempted suicide. Thus Arreola presents the reader with an unresolved paradox: the non-existentialist suicide desire versus the opposing failure to accomplish this positive act.
The observations made by Menton in a brief sketch about "La migala" are somewhat at variance with those developed in the preceding paragraphs. He regards the story as existentialist in nature, citing the unhappy marriage, but he does not consider the meaninglessness of either the protagonist's life nor of his thwarted death. Menton possibly uses the term marriage in order to include it in a generic grouping, because there are no details defining the union as either legal or holy. The inspiration for "La migala" according to him is Dante's Inferno. He apparently bases this connection on the references to hell, the name Beatriz, and the words, "Entonces estremecido en mi soledad, acorralado por el pequeño monstruo, recuerdo que en otro tiempo yo soñaba en Beatriz y en su compañía imposible" (p. 61), which he seems to feel are parallel to "Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria." Although the tenor could be called Dantesque there seems to be no internal evidence for such an assignment of influences.

Menton regards the spider as the symbol of the protagonist. It would be more accurate to say that the spider is not a symbol, but an extension of the meaninglessness in the life of the narrator. With the exception of

the day when the protagonist brings the spider home, it exists only in so far as he imagines it. It serves, therefore, as an extension because its reality is only a mirrored reality of the man's state of mind. The spider reflects the attitude of meaninglessness in two instances: in the futility of life, seen in the man's imperviousness even to the basic sex drive, as exemplified in his response to the spider's sniffing for a companion; and in the impossibility of attaining death, as demonstrated by the spider's ineffectualness as a death weapon.
"Pueblerina"

In "Pueblerina" don Fulgencio awakens to the discovery of the growth of a splendid pair of horns, when by making a supreme effort to move his head, he succeeds in hooking his pillow. Menton points out by comparing opening paragraphs that Arreola's inspiration for this story is Kafka's Metamorphosis, in which the protagonist, Gregor Samson, also has difficulty arising because his entire being has taken on the form of an insect. The horns of the lawyer-protagonist in "Pueblerina" are ignored by his wife, ridiculed by a youngster, and stared at by an old lady. Don Fulgencio is so incensed by the latter that he chases her into her house, banging his head soundly as she slams the door. His new horns make him a popular figure in the courtroom and quite an unpopular one at parties. As a result of the innumerable skirmishes to which the townspeople subject him, he bleeds internally to such an extent that one day he dies from plethora. As was requested in his will, his horns are shorn, but a carpenter adds a jaunty pair to his coffin that heightens the merriment at his funeral.

"Pueblerina," or as it is translated by Schade,

"Small Town Affair," is an account of the spiritual crises a man undergoes after learning that his wife has been unfaithful. The treatment given it by the author goes beyond the man-woman relationship, however, and makes it a reiteration of the theme of man's inhumanity to man. Arreola reveals the infidelity with a centuries-old device, the horn, symbol of the cuckold. Knowledge of the promiscuity leads to reactions from three directions: the wife herself, don Fulgencio, and the townspeople.

When don Fulgencio sends his pillow flying with his horns the words, "Lo que hasta entonces fue una blanda sospecha, se volvió certeza aguda" (p. 79), indicate that the wife had kept the knowledge from him at least for a time. At breakfast she is exquisitely tactful, making no betraying gesture that she is aware that he knows of her other relationship. Only by one brief, timorous glance does she seem to be in any way cognizant of the fissure in the normality of their lives.

It is at this point that she joins ranks with the other merciless people who wittingly, or unwittingly, bring about her husband's undoing, by throwing the first goad, the "dardo de la divisa," a kiss. The dardo is a paper-banded arrow, which as a simile indicates that whatever the nature of the kiss, guilty, cool, or just perfunctory,

28. Schade, p. 90.
it hurts don Fulgencio, and he goes out into the street muttering to himself, spoiling for a fight.

When the couple ceases to be invited to the social gatherings of the town because don Fulgencio's loss of self-esteem has made him unwelcome as a guest, the wife is somewhat less than contrite about her share in the responsibility for his bellicose behavior. By complaining bitterly that it is don Fulgencio's evil disposition that has made her life solitary, the woman ironically demonstrates two of Arreola's principal social criticisms: 1) that man has an almost unlimited capacity for self-deception, and 2) that "women are given to treachery and adultery." 29

Despite the fact that Arreola uses the woman as the vehicle for his barbs at society, her reaction is of lesser importance; the dominant response is don Fulgencio's, and it develops from puzzled disbelief to fatal trauma. Arreola employs the horns to signify the adulterous act and does not once depart from the symbol. "El autor nunca hace la menor alusión a dificultades matrimoniales pero la presencia repentina de los cuernos sólo se explica así. Si no fuera por esa interpretación, el cuento no tendría sentido." 30

Therefore in order to explicate don Fulgencio's emotional behavior the horns must of necessity be the focal point.

29. Schade, p. ix.
30. Menton, p. 46.
Initially he is bewildered: "Frente al espejo no pudo ocultarse su admiración ..." (p. 80). He tries on his hat and feels foolish: "Eso le daba un aire de cierta fanfarronería" (p. 79). He is enraged when people stare at him. "Eso le da ha mn aire de oierta fanfarronería" (p. 80). He is shaken and humiliated as the full implications of his wife's affair dawn upon him. "Lejos de ser una apariencia, los cuernos tenían que ver con la última derivación de su esqueleto. Sintió el choque y la humillación hasta en la punta de los pies" (p. 80). He transfers his belligerence to his profession: "Los clientes acudían a él entusiasmados, porque su agresividad se hacía cada vez más patente en el ataque y la defensa" (p. 80). He becomes so disposed to attack that the people give him no respite: "Las serenatas del domingo y las fiestas nacionales daban motivo para improvisar ruidosas capeas populares a base de don Fulgencio, que achuchaba, ciego de ira, a los más atrevidos lidiadores" (p. 80). His resentment reaches such grandiose proportions that he ceases to act with reason: "Llegó a la hora de verdad lleno de resabios y peligrosos derrotos, convertido en una bestia feroz" (p. 80). The change in his character, as mentioned earlier, is catalyzed by the continuous ridicule of the townspeople. In death he imagines they have come as a body to a bullring of gigantic size in order to attack him: "Con ojos nublados, vio abrirse a su alrededor un coso gigantesco;
algunas imágenes un Valle de José F. lleno de prójimos con trajes de luces" (p. 81).

Arreola, as a satirist, caricatures the extent to which derision can be inhuman by intensifying the reaction of the townspeople through the course of the narration. As his point of departure he uses the role of the cuckold as one which frequently evokes laughter.

The town awakens innocently enough to the news of don Fulgencio's plight. A wiseacre youth who gives up the sidewalk with a torero-style feint recapitulates don Fulgencio's own lack of seriousness at his discovery: "Como tener cuernos no es una razón suficiente para que un hombre interrumpa el curso de sus acciones ..." (p. 79). The stares, however, are alarmingly unsettling, and it is only when he is able to view the act through the eyes of other people that he comes to recognize the intensity of his pain.

Through the matter of don Fulgencio's popularity as an attorney, notoriety is added to Arreola's catalogue of hurts that the protagonist endures. Ostensibly the litigants seek him for his aggressiveness, but by considering the analogy of the horns ("De lejanas tierras venían los litigantes a buscar el patrocinio de un abogado con cuernos," [p. 80]) it is possible that the gossip-loving community found the details of his private life to be such a juicy morsel, that they also came because of the scandal. From
the extent to which don Fulgencio is injured in the denouement, it may be assumed that as a sensitive man he would be further injured by having the topic of his ever-present domestic unpleasantness bandied about in the courtroom.

In "Pueblerina," as in many of his short stories, Arreola reveals his penchant for paradox: "A decir la verdad, nadie le echaba sus cuernos en cara, nadie se los veía siquiera. Pero todos aprovechaban la menor distracción para ponerle un buen par de banderillas . . . " (p. 80).

Thus the populace changes the direction of its jibes; it stops ridiculing his situation and begins to belittle him. The ultimate wound the people are able to inflict is to ignore his heartbreak in death, which they do by making his funeral an occasion for jocularity.

Donald Yates observes that Arreola's pessimism is more cultivated than convincing.\(^{31}\) To a certain extent this observation is applicable to "Pueblerina." Although the townspeople illustrate graphically Arreola's pessimism about the damage of gossip and the lack of compassion, one feels no deep sense of tragedy in the protagonist's dire predicament.

"Apuntes de un rencoroso"

"Apuntes" is a nebulous scrutiny of the poignant involvement of a man and a woman made by an observer who is also enamored of the feminine character. The narrator, by means of a monologue, expresses the loneliness he feels as a rejected lover observing the spectacle of the couple's "felicidad bochornosa" (p. 107). By consoling himself that satiety will eventually cause the girl's regard for the other man to pall, the narrator assuages his suffering and bides his time. His hopes are never realized, however, and he ultimately admits defeat: "Repitiendo las letanías del amor inútil, el lúcido amanecer me encuentra siempre exhausto y apagado, con la boca llena de palabras ciegas y rencorosas" (p. 107).

Dominant in the impressionistic style of "Apuntes de un rencoroso" are words and images linked with the lovers which are reminiscent of the characteristics of Latin American Modernism, while the descriptions the narrator makes of himself hark back to the "yoísmo" of Spanish Romanticism. Among the desultory words and phrases which exhibit these tendencies are "hastío," "cansancio," "tristeza" (p. 107), "languidece," "emanación," "halo de anestesia," and "embriago en ondas de tenue incienso" (p. 108). Typical of the remarks of the narrator concerning his own responses which are concordant with Romanticism is the opening line:
"Huyendo del espectáculo de su felicidad ... he caído en la soledad" (p. 107).

In "Apuntes" Arreola forsakes his customary introduction of a secondary plot for an augmentation of the central theme, which he unfolds by employing some of the most subtle implications of the Confabulario.

The larger meaning of the situation of the lovers and their envious spectator is intricately hinged on two allusions, "el joven médico," and "galeno" (p. 108). George D. Schade translates galeno as Galen, identified by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as Claudius Galen, a celebrated physician of the Roman Empire during the second century, A.D. Further internal evidence lending validity to the supposition that the girl's present lover is a doctor lies in the symbolism of the sea imagery. Medical ministrations are implied in these metaphors: "Deferente y sumiso el esclavo fiel la desembarca de purpúrea venera. La despega cuidadoso de su sueño de ostra" (p. 107); "El joven la asiste en los ritos monótonos de su pereza malsana" (p. 108).

Numbers provide additional proof that the new lover is a doctor. Arreola establishes early the presence of no more than three people in the group: "Los dos me sacaron a empujones" (p. 107); "Aquella noche salí disparado como

31. Schade, p. 119.
As if the process of elimination were not sufficient to give the lover the role of the doctor, Arreola links him to the amorous entanglement by calling him the "erótico galeno," thus eliminating the possibility that the doctor is merely an additional figure in the story.

If the hypothesis is valid that the new lover and the doctor are one and the same, the impressionistic allusions of high seas, ships and shipwrecks, anchors, tides, etc., are symbols that enlarge the reader's store of knowledge about the situation. The task of clarifying the symbolism is an arduous one, but certain questions that assail the reader about the lack of cohesion in the plot lead to an explanation of the significance of the allusions.

The immediate question about the lack of verisimilitude concerns the improbable frequency with which the observer or rejected lover is allowed to visit the new lover and the girl. He begins by admitting that they started their love-making in his presence: "Ellos compusieron su pareja ante mis ojos" (p. 107). He discusses intimate bedroom scenes in which the woman sleeps, is awakened, and is watched breathlessly by the new lover at the side of her bed. What prompts the spectator to remain while the new lover leaves? "El joven desaparece melancólico por las desiertas calles, pero yo estoy aquí ..." (p. 108). These
details, added to the observer's familiarity toward the
girl ("Te conozco y te amo. Amo ... tu alma. En él sé
hallar mil cosas pequeñas y turbias que de pronto resplan-
decen en mi espíritu" (p. 107), are strong indications that
the observer is either the girl's husband or someone with
whom she is living. A doctor would be permitted in this
instance to attend a person who is ill. The metaphors and
symbols which suggest illness are prevalent. The girl
"implora y ordena" (p. 107). Her sleep is "espesado de
narcóticos," and she wears an "halo de anestesia" (p. 108).
"Se queja, interminablemente se queja" (p. 108).

With the evidence given about the doctor, the hus-
band, and the sick girl, the symbolism of the marine
allusions unfolds. "A veces, ella despierta en altamar y
ve la silueta del joven en la playa, desdibujada por la
sombra. Piensa que lo está soñando y se sumerge otra vez
en las sábanas" (p. 108). The sea allusions represent
manifestations of some malady, either fever or delirium.
The phrases, "Ella navega horizontal ..." (p. 108) and
"encalla en la arena final del mediodía" (p. 107), confirm
the symbolism. The lover-doctor "va remando a la orilla,
desvelado, silencioso, con tierna cautela, como quien lleva
un tesoro en una barca que hace agua" (p. 108). The husband
or former lover, continues the symbolism that the image of
the boat is the woman by lamenting that he is an anchor
fallen to the rocky depths without the ship that sustains him. "Yo estoy aquí, caído en la noche, como una ancla entre las rocas marinas, sin nave ya que me sostenga" (p. 108).

The development of the story occurs within the framework of the concern of a doctor for a sick woman, although Arreola leaves the understanding of its totality to the reader's ingenuity. The husband, or former lover, recognizes the mutual attraction of the doctor and the patient, but cynically expects them to tire of each other shortly. When the lovers are sated, his own well-being will return: "Sacudiré de mis hombros la carga insoportable de la felicidad ajena" (p. 107). The sex act appears to be considered as inevitable by the husband, and he is at a loss when he sees that their love has not been consummated: "Morosos, los dos detienen y aplazan el previsto final. El demonio de la pasividad se ha apoderado de ellos, y yo naufrago en la angustia" (p. 108). That the lovers have not heretofore been intimate is established by the girl's "falso lecho de Cleopatra." If Cleopatra's bed signifies concupiscence then the false bed would conversely indicate chastity. The denouement finds the husband in a state of hysteria because the lovers "aplanzan el acto decisivo, el previsto final" (p. 109).
In "Apuntes," Arreola limits the material which would tend to destroy the analysis. The observation by the husband that the doctor and the woman indulge in a "conjugal" embrace can be explained because the words "solapado" and "secreto" connote that they did not embrace at all, that he only imagined some physical contact to be lascivious, because he later searches for evidence of intimacy even in the odor of the bedroom and can find none. The irony of their chaste relationship is in keeping with that of other stories treated here.
"Balada"

The recondite quality of "Balada" is signal even as compared with the majority of Arreola's abstruse works.

The form, although congruous with the highly-condensed, dialogue-lacking short story vignettes of the Confabulario, varies slightly by having four sections separated by a refrain. The content, apparently divergent within the sections, is linked in the first two by a common closing phrase, "mira tu paloma" (p. 110). The enigmatic repeated line, which logically would be the common denominator of the story, has no visible relationship to any of the material contained in it.

The theme of the first section is self-abnegation by virtue of impelling need. A sparrowhawk gains height by loosening his grasp on a turtle dove and is left with an empty stomach as a result of his ambitious flight-plan. A boatman in a craft with a dangerously low waterline dumps his cargo overboard. A fleeing bandit who throws down a money pouch through fear of apprehension escapes the gallows but forfeits a fortune. An aeronaut, making a grandstand gesture for no worthier purpose than impressing the common rabble below, cuts the cables of his balloon and is set adrift. These incidents say to the narrator, "look to your dove." Then follows the refrain, "Ya puede ser del chivo, del puerco, del caimán y del caballo" (p. 110).
Total self-destruction is paramount in the second portion of "Balada." Suicides and madness counsel the narrator to look to his dove.

The description in the third part lends credence to the assumption that the image of the dove is carried over from the two previous parts. Without naming the antecedent, the narrator describes her spinning dive from the apex of love into the midst of a herd of pigs as the expected fulfillment of the laws of gravity. He vividly recounts her treatment after the fall, "enganchándose en los cuernos, entrando por el hocico emperrado de colmillos, yaciendo en los lomos calientes y desnudos" (p. 110). She is plucked by the kitchen maids, spitted for roasting by the obscene cook and is ultimately stuffed for the pleasure of rascals and rogues: "trufada de anécdotas para el rogocijo de los bergantes y el usurrueto de los follones" (p. 110).

The fourth and last part is a cryptic response to a letter. Addressing his communication, "Amor mío" (p. 111), the narrator equates the effects of the letter with having been sent the carnage of the world's combined butcher shops. He envisions himself as a tearful shipwreck on a sea of dispirited worms. The refrain continues but with a change of subject, "Ya puedes tu ser del chivo, del puerco, del caimán y del caballo" (p. 111).
The lack of continuity in the subject matter of "Balada" is not conducive to a clinical explication. From the vantage point of a few key words some meaning can be ascribed to the story, although on the whole Arreola leaves the reader to his own conjecture. The dove is obviously the motivation for the narrator's incisive introspection in the first two parts. The fallen feathered being of the third part who is hooked, plucked, and cooked must be the dove, although Arreola supplies no corroborating evidence. The last section, beginning "Amor mío" (p. 111), by emphasis and chronology implies that the narrator's lover has been his major concern throughout the entirety of the work. No other allusion being common to the four sections, excluding the animals of the refrain, the dove is therefore assumed to be Arreola's intended symbol for the woman.

The pejorative tone of the last two sections indicates a rupture in the relationship between the first person and his lover. The allusion of the shipwreck in "Apuntes de un renoroso" paralleled the dejected state in which the man found himself because the woman preferred someone else.

Word groupings such as "con pocas alas y mucho bodego," "dándolo todo al diablo," "intima ley de su gravedad," and "y aciendo en los lomos calientes y desnudos"
tend to substantiate that the dove's fall was a moral decline.

The second part points up efforts at escape which result in annihilation. When the narrator casts off the encumbrance of an impossible union, he too destroys himself.

Thus "Balada" unfolds the tale of a man who courts his own destruction when he removes himself from the woman he loves. In spite of the fact that he cannot evade the weight of his guilt nor his deepening love for the woman, he cannot forgive her promiscuity.
"El faro"

"El faro," as indicated by the title, is a story about three people who live in the intimate confines of a lighthouse, pretending a lie is a truth as concerns the honor of the woman and the loyalty of the other man to the woman's husband.

Unlike the husband of "Pueblerina" who allows the hurt of his wife's infidelity to destroy him, the lovers feel that the husband, Genaro, uses his knowledge of the affair as a weapon to impair their happiness.

The other man observes in the opening paragraph that Genaro is using unexpected weapons. The latter tells the pair a story about a cuckold and heightens their discomfort with his "grandes carcajadas falsas." He keeps them on edge: "Hace ya algún tiempo que la actitud de Genaro nos sorprendía" (p. 117). He accepts incredible explanations and gives them free rein for their secret meetings. For a while they live in tortuous anticipation of being discovered in a compromising situation, but rather than surprising them he increases their torment by ignoring their intimacy.

The insidious effectiveness of Genaro's machinations gradually nullifies the lovers' ardor. As long as they believe they are running a risk, their love is clean in the
sense that they admit their shame. As they cease to fear Genaro they become stultified with the sordidness of the triangle: "Ahora estamos envueltos en algo turbio, denso, y pesado" (p. 117). Their love becomes tasteless: "Nos amamos con desgana, hastiados ..." (p. 117). Little by little they tolerate Genaro until he becomes a part of the routine of their relationship: "Su presencia ... no nos estorba; más bien facilita la rutina y provoca el cansancio" (p. 117). Occasionally the lovers' outlook brightens when the messenger who brings the provisions indicates that their lighthouse may be closed down. Genaro is stricken: "¿A dónde iremos?", nos dice. "¡Somos aquí tan felices!" (p. 118). Then he looks at the other man and adds, "Tú vendrás con nosotros, a dondequiera que vayamos." Y se queda mirando el mar con melancolía" (p. 118).

The stoic acceptance of the wife's affair by the husband occurs in other tales of the Confabulario. In "Apuntes de un renacido," the husband accepts the situation between the doctor and the wife because he expects to regain her affections when she tires of the new lover.

Arreola has a tendency to paint husbands in ridiculous hues. While the husband of "Apuntes" waits in vain for the physical consummation of the lovers' affair, in "El faro" the husband makes a fool of himself by tolerating the promiscuity.
Arreola employs the sea symbol to connote masculine insecurity in several stories. The setting of the lighthouse is a reinforcement of the husband's pathetic situation: "El horror de la situación se destaca aún más por el escenario: un faro solitario." In "Balada" the narrator is shipwrecked on a sea of worms. In "Apuntes" the husband falls in the depths of the sea like an anchor without a ship, is covered with slime, and cries out to be rescued from his rock in the sea. In "El faro" the husband's insecurity is fortified by the symbol of a solitary lighthouse standing in the midst of the lonely expanse.

Although the lovers think that Genaro uses the knowledge of their intimacy to destroy their delight, the actual destructive agent is the husband's cowardice, which leaves the reader to conjecture that perhaps Genaro makes no aggressive effort to combat the situation, but acts as he does through fear of losing the wife. Genaro weighs the hurt he experiences from the knowledge of the wife's infidelity against the trauma he would suffer if he were to force the lovers' hand and cause their departure. From his behavior in the story the reader knows he has decided the latter event would be worse.

33. Menton, p. 46.
"La canción de Peronelle"

"La canción de Peronelle" is a brief amorous episode in which Arreola makes a frank departure from his customary treatment of the man-woman relationship by creating an idyll. It is a felicitous blending of contrasting contemporary form and Renaissance content. The language is straightforward and simple, the sentences short and lucid, and the symbols, although traditional, are modern in context.

The content, on the other hand, is gently patterned after the Spanish Renaissance pastoral. The general tenor of the story is one of sweetness and innocent delight. The romance begins in an apple orchard, where a young girl fills a basket and includes a love poem she has written to the aged French poet, Guillaume de Machaut. The Renaissance ambient is further established by the poem she sends, a rondel, which inspires him to take up his rabel and serenade the town. After they meet they express their ardor by the pastoral practice of singing songs and reciting poems. "La vieja sirviente no salía de su sorpresa, viendo cómo el maestro Guillermo y Peronelle pasaban las horas diciendo rondeles y baladas ..." (p. 82). In addition to the mood he sets with poetry and music, Arreola hints at the technique of Renaissance chiaroscuro painting: "el mensaje cayó como un sol de primavera en la vida oscurecida del poeta" (p. 82). The religious tone provided by the visits to
churches along the way to St. Dionisius' festival also contributes to a reflection of the literary age. Even the name of the heroine, Peronelle, might be found in a work of that time.

The most important Renaissance factor in the story is that of the theme, Platonic love. Embodied in the theme are certain elements which are exploited in a contrasted fashion. The polarization of the ages of the man and the girl contributes to the motif of chastity. The symbols of the apple and the leaf contrast sensuality and purity. When Guillaume received the gift, "mordió la carne dura y fragante de las manzanas y pensó en la juventud de aquella que se las enviaba" (p. 82). Menton writes, "El simbolismo de la manzana, fruta prohibida de la Biblia, es utilizado por Arreola de una manera paradójica ... A pesar de los deseos ardientes del poeta, su amor siempre fue casto." The hazelnut leaf completes the symbolism of their relationship when Peronelle places it between their lips as she kisses him. Thus the key to their relationship is chastity, although ironically the poet's impotence does not deter the poignancy of their love because he carries the leaf over his heart until his death.

"La canción de Peronelle" lacks the mordant satire found in other stories by Arreola about the relationships

34. Menton, p. 40.
between men and women. There is a dearth of the puzzling symbols and hidden meanings which are much in evidence in his other works. Also missing are the enigmatic last lines which customarily introduce the story within a story. The overtones of jaded, cynical, neurotic pessimism are not present. This story gives witness to the wide range of artistic abilities of Arreola as a short story writer.
"In memoriam"

The device that provides Arreola a sounding board for further observations and insights about the sexes is, in the instance of "In memoriam," a book, *Historia comparada de las relaciones sexuales*, by Baron Bussenhausen. This selection is related stylistically to previously-mentioned stories of the *Confabulario* by the recurrence of an allusion within the story:

En este cuento son las piedras que forman la base de las imágenes. Después de leer la dedicatoria de la famosa obra de su marido, la señora Bussenhausen deja caer el libro 'como una pesada lápida mortuoria sobre el pecho de la baronesa viuda ...' (p. 119). El matrimonio se compara a un molino prehistórico en que dos piedras rotativas se muelen continuamente hasta la muerte ... (p. 120).

There is a specific similarity between "In memoriam" and "Anuncio" in the ironic aside which serves Arreola for one or two brief slashes at the perversities of society. Presenting the lines as simple, straightforward observations about the subject at hand, Arreola prefers to tickle the metaphorical flesh of a smug society with a rapier point rather than reveal the sick parts by opening a gaping wound. The outstanding aside of "In memoriam" appears in the guileless description of the *Historia comparada de las relaciones sexuales*: the reader reaction came from a public so diversified as to make the most austere scholar envious.

Then, in parentheses, he notes that the English translation
was a best-seller. Although the parenthetical aside follows a paragraph in which the success of the book is touted, the line is a deceptive sequitur and is ironic because it assumes the reader will accept the improbable sequence from technical study to best seller. Adding intensity to the ironic exaggeration is the fact that the English translation was abridged. Thus the popularity of the technical work would ensue when, by deletion of scientific data, the public is provided with a type of sex exposé not dissimilar to the Kinsey report. Arreola's highly-condensed, trenchant statement is a thumbnail sketch of the taste of a U.S. public that consumes sex with titanic appetite in its movies, advertising, and reading.

After describing the popularity of the Historia comparada, Arreola describes the reception given the work by groups of intellectuals, such as historians, theologians, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, and literary critics. Continuing the stylistic device of exaggeration, Arreola tints the account heavily with satire. The literary critics snidely suggest that the research the author did in the Baroness's bedroom was wasted effort, but friends protect her from this and other details of the literary furor.

Arreola condenses the material of the Baron's work, enumerating the latter's views on the background and present practices of the conjugal union. Marriage originated as a
punishment that condemned couples to absolute intimacy while their fellows enjoyed free love. It was a common characteristic of Babylonian cruelty. On the basis of the study of primitive Samarra he concludes that modern man has changed marriage from a punishment into a catharsis for neurotics and a pastime for masochists. Religions have converted matrimony into a spiritual exercise in which two souls can perfect each other or grind each other to dust: "Expuestas a un roce continuo, dos almas tienen la posibilidad de perfectarse al máximo pulimento, o de reducirse a polvo" (p. 120).

In the closing paragraphs of the story the narrator questions whether the frenetic documentation makes it truly a scientific work and concludes that because the Baron's technical approach frequently falters, many consider his work as a disguised, pornographic résumé of history. He does not concur with those just mentioned, but rather sees the work as a domestic epic, "consagrado a una mujer de temple troyano" (p. 122).

The destructiveness of marriage is the theme of "In memoriam." Although Arreola admits that the totality of the union does not necessarily result in the impairment of its two members "dos almas tienen la posibilidad de perfectarse ..." (p. 120), further evidence in the selection makes it plain that he feels damage is inevitable.
Another subtle viewpoint, heretofore unexpressed in the *Confabulario*, is couched in the scientific record of the uncivilized peoples where happiness is equated with license.

Adding dimension to the account of the *Historia comparada de las relaciones sexuales* is the influence of the Baron's private life on his book. The psychoanalysts contend that his work was a sublimation of depraved passions, and in truth, what he attributed to the uncivilized races were his own libidinous dreams and secret guilts. The literary critics pity him as a pure, although weak, soul whose physical relationship with his wife was so unsatisfying that it added nothing to his research. The narrator, noting that the Baron's scientific treatment occasionally falters, suggests that this be overlooked because of the years the Baron spent, "en el molino, con una mujer abrasiva, de quien lo separaban muchos grados en la escala de la dureza humana" (p. 121).

Arreola frequently links the first and last paragraphs to create or clarify the inner story. "In memoriam" is no exception, for the dedication at the end leads to certain cogent, if unspoken, questions about the Baroness' awareness of the injurious effect she had on her husband, and raises the question of whether she was in any way remorseful.
Does the Baroness cry because there are no endearing phrases accompanying the full formal title of the Baroness? Or is it because she senses that her husband thought she would expect a cold, formal dedication? After all she is the daughter of a poetess and a celebrated entomologist, and was a countess in her own right. Is it because a dedication of that sort is truly in keeping with the quartz-like hardness of her character and the Baroness recognizes the truth for the first time? Arreola, by the material in the body of the work, suggests that the Baron might have written the dedication thus because it was suitable to their relationship, but provides no motive concerning her tears. Whatever other import the dedication has is not clear, but the answer to the Baroness' lack of remorse is buried in a brief, enigmatic, parenthetical aside. "(A estas horas, en la soledad de su lecho, la viuda gira impávidas aristas radiales sobre el recuerdo impalpable del pulverizado barón)"(p. 121). The Baroness is drawing mental halos around his memory and apparently feels no regret whatsoever at having been the agent of her husband's destruction.
"Anuncio"

Adding to the short stories of the Confabulario whose thematic material is concerned with the man-woman relationship is "Anuncio," written in the form of an advertisement heralding the new mechanical woman, Plastisex C. Highly reminiscent of the Miss America dolls chapter in Philip Wylie's *The Disappearance*, the Plastisex C Venus is a perfect specimen of foam rubber, complete with a one-half horse-power motor, speech, bodily secretions, rippling flesh, and a plastic hymen. The mechanical woman can say "yes" in all living and dead languages, can be purchased in all sizes and colorings, is hygienically safe, and has a perfect-service guarantee for ten years. Plastisex C is available to the Army and Navy, and educational and penal institutions. The product is praised by sociologists for having struck a blow at prostitution and condemned by critics who claim that it encourages infantilism. Religious leaders vary in their responses, some pointing out that intercourse with an inanimate object is a venial sin and others enjoining marriage vows to abrogate the illicit nature of the relationship between the plastic dolls and the men who use them. Jealous lovers can encase the doll-mate in impregnable steel, and married men can order faithful copies of their

wives for times of illness or absence. The advertisement asserts that when the use of Plastisex G becomes popularized, feminine genius will come to the fore, and woman, freed from her traditional erotic obligations, will establish the pure reign of the spirit.

In "Anuncio," Arreola departs from somewhat banal observations of the frailties of the relationship of the sexes and makes a criticism of a universal basic evil, man's regard for woman as limited by the circumference of her usefulness and appeal as an erotic toy. Arreola continues his censure by suggesting that the role woman is forced to play not only is shameful because it de-humanizes her, but because it further nullifies the contribution she might make to society: "Al popularizarse el uso de la Plastisex G, asistiremos a la eclosión del genio femenino, tan largamente esperada. Y las mujeres, libres ya de sus obligaciones tradicionalmente eróticas, instalarán para siempre el puro reino del espíritu" (p. 132).

The body of the short story, "Anuncio," is largely a matter of description of the physical characteristics of the doll, which closely parallel those qualities in a woman that are deemed important by the men Arreola caricatures.

That it is of utmost importance that the woman be complaisant is attested by the very nature of the mechanical woman-toy. Arreola describes her as "la mujer que ha soñado
toda la vida," who can be manipulated "por medio de controles automáticos" (p. 128). A regulator assures passion, "Un regulador asegura la curva creciente de sus anhelos ..." (p. 130). She says "yes" "en todos los idiomas vivos y muertos" (p. 128). She is submissive: "Ella quedará a sus órdenes mediante un tablero de controles ..." (p. 128).

The great variety of Plastisex O dolls, "alta y delgada, menuda y redonda, rubia o morena, pelirroja o platinada ..." (p. 128), offered by the seller substantiates the universal truth, "De gustibus ..."

The juvenile masculine tendency to abhor the vestiges of age in a woman is made apparent. "Nuestras damas son totalmente indemnes e inarrugables, conservan la suavidad de su tez y la turgencia de sus líneas ..." (p. 128).

Being skilled in contemporary dances and music is cited as a feminine asset: "cantan y se mueven al compás de los ritmos de moda" (p. 129).

Second in importance to acquiescence is all that which can be encompassed in the realm of the evocatory. Allusions that treat of the appeal to the visual are numerous: "pelaje femenino, y lo que supera en belleza, textura y elasticidad" (p. 130); "las características más superficiales o recónditas de la belleza femenina" (p. 128); "el rostro se presenta maquillado ..." (p. 129). The dress
of the Plastisex C doll is equal to that of most distinguished ladies. "Desnuda es sencillamente insuperable ..." (p. 130). Other references to visual eroticism are "la ilusión perfecta del desplazamiento de los músculos bajo la piel, y el equilibrio hidrostático de las masas carnosas durante el movimiento" (p. 129).

Olfactory eroticism as part of man's sensual pleasure is alluded to in the aroma for the dolls' armpits made from a base of sandalwood and musk, "hasta las más recias emanaciones de la mujer asoleada y deportiva ..." (p. 130).

Satisfying the gustatory sense as a part of the evocatory requirement of woman is evinced in the Biblical allusion, "honey and milk are under thy tongue ...." which Arreola heightens by suggesting that the user of Plastisex C add port or Benedictine according to taste.

Other characteristics that men consider requisite in women are stamina, fidelity, and economy. The Plastisex C doll has a magnesium frame, is unbreakable, and vigorous. The makers claim that "hemos superado el antiguo ideal del cinturón de castidad; un estuche de cuerpo entero que convierte a cada mujer en una fortaleza de acero inexpugnable" (p. 130). They also maintain the doll is so utilitarian, that "se paga ella sola" (p. 132).

The fears experienced by men that deter sexual relations as stated by Arreola in the description of the doll are pregnancy, menstruation, and social diseases. For the users of the doll these anxieties are eliminated: "dice que varios modelos ... han quedado encinta y que ... sufren trastornos periódicos. Nada más falso" (pp. 130-131). "El agua ... cumple funciones ... fisiológicas e higiénicas" and assures "la limpieza rápida y completa de las Plastisex C" (p. 129).

Included in the description of Plastisex C are some ironic asides that thrust amusing jabs at human nature. In the ten-year service guarantee Arreola lampoons the transience of romantic love, or to be more specific, the brevity of time in which a man and woman enjoy rapport. "Nuestras venus están garantizadas para un servicio perfecto de diez años--duración promedio de cualquier esposa-- ..." (p. 129). The parenthetical sentence that follows the suggestion that the doll owner add liqueurs to the cranial milk and honey deposit "(Hasta ahora nos hemos reservado bajo patente el derecho de adaptar las glándulas mamarias como redomas de licor)" (p. 129), is a bit of incisive satire on the commercial bent to capitalize on man's perpetual susceptibility to self-indulgence. A husband who might desire a doll to care for his creature comforts during his wife's illness or absence, seeks, because of fidelity, an
identical copy of his spouse. The irony of fidelity of this ilk is made even more biting with the added phrase: "(generalmente con algunos retoques)" (p. 131).

Other ironic material in the short story "Anuncio" is incorporated in the reaction of religious groups to the doll. Arreola deprecates bourgeois morality when he remarks that "una secta disidente de los mormones ha celebrado ya numerosos matrimonios entre progresistas caballeros humanos y encantadoras muñecas de material sintético" (p. 131), adding evidence to the supposition that in the Confabulario Arreola's frequent adverse view of marriage might tend to further his identification as a neo-platonist.

Because the story of a substitute woman is in itself unique, when it appears in another work as well known as Wylie's Disappearance, not to consider the similarities of the two would tend to make a study of "Anuncio" incomplete. Furthermore certain subtleties of the "Anuncio" can be more readily explained when the stories are contrasted.

The key words in the "Anuncio" are "valores humanos," and although the words as such do not appear in The Disappearance, Wylie's profound explanation demonstrates clearly what Arreola states only through nuances.

The plot of Wylie's novel concerns the disappearance of women. The mechanical doll is one of the solutions men
are offered to the problem of living in a world without their women. The protagonist, Gaunt, is repelled by the baseness of the whole idea but suddenly recalls that even while the women lived, some men treated their mates much the same way they would a mechanical being. The following selection is Gaunt's soliloquy on this behavior:

Men of that sort were allured by the externals. Their response to the opposite sex was limited to physical sensations. They chose a mate according to criteria of eye and nose and touch. They married not a personality, a mind, a cultural entity, a bundle of genes, ideas, or a soul, but a blue-eyed blonde with a good figure and a low voice who used a perfume called Détroyez-moi. . . . Their "love" was confined to using her as an erotic toy.37

One lone allusion in the "Anuncio" indicates the infantilism of some men's search for a mate who would not age. "Nuestras damas son totalmente indeformables e inarrugables, conservan la suavidad de su tez y la turgencia de sus líneas . . ." (p. 128). Wylie's amplified treatment enumerates the ramifications of this kind of man's penchant for youth:

Excepting for the physical differences of size and color and smell (and, possibly motorization) the dolls and the doll-like women were interchangeable, . . . hence they were monotonous as individuals and monotonous as a group. A man seeking to escape he knew not what insatiety (since he would hardly recognize his own limitations as the cause of his tedium) could clasp a hundred such ert bodies without sur-cease, and would likely try to do so.

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Meanwhile, his chosen mate would age. . . . The lowly ideal would go on dancing before his mind's eye while childbearing, child rearing, domestic duties and perhaps a job (along with the years) would gradually destroy in his mate every vestige of the reason he had once discovered for marrying her. So he would turn to prostitutes, younger women, or consort with high-school girls. . . . He would get a doll a generation behind himself. He would pervert an instinct to be the suitable father-image for his daughters, into a quasi-incestuous relationship with their contemporaries.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the young American woman called her old beau "daddy" or . . . that a universal term for woman was "doll." 38

Another comparison between the works of the two authors concerns the value judgments surrounding virginity.

If it were not for the fact that the pervading tenor of "Anuncio" is one of irony, Arreola's emphasis might not be noted:

Y por lo que toca a la virginidad, cada Plastisex C va provista de un depositivo que no puede violar más que usted mismo, el himen plástico que es un verdadero sello de garantía. Tan fiel al original, que al ser destruido se contrae sobre sí mismo y reproduce las excrecencias coralinas llamadas carúnculas mirtiformes (p. 130).

Wylie, on the other hand, leaves no doubt as to the pernicious effect that this traditional concept of virginity has on the relationship between the sexes:

The American male did not want a Mrs., for his companion, but a Miss. . . . It was a Miss the male yearned to possess even on the connubial couch; so in the mere act of marrying, he had, in millions of cases, devalued his bride in his own estimation.

What woman . . . required to perform the principal function for which she is designed in body and spirit, could gracefully or happily take up the endeavor when, consciously or not, she was aware the very acceptance of marriage had classified her downward in the minds of her own spouse as well as of millions of other men?39

In a fine combination of style and content Arreola artfully sprinkles "Anuncio" with elements of late nineteenth-century decadent prose, recognizing the inherent bond that exists between this sensual style and his topic. By employing such a medium as an advertisement, well gilded with these decadent details, Arreola presents a humorous tour de force of masculine foibles instead of merely a stark indictment of man's bestiality.

In "Eva" Arreola recognizes the interdependence of man and woman as he exploits the theme of seduction. The interplay of the characters, whom Arreola presents as prototypes, reveals a timeless universality in the masculine prerogative to pursue and conquer as opposed to woman's efforts to resist. Contrasted with the primordial treatment of the sex act is the setting of a library, whose resources suggest the weapons with which the youth and the girl wage their conflict.

As the girl takes flight she bases her defense on the secondary role man has forced woman to play, and points out that five thousand years of gross mistreatment separate them. The boy persists, tremulously enumerating his own virtues, hoping to be excluded from her mass-condemnation. Sensing his ineffectuality, he searches the texts in order to reinforce his argument, but is confronted instead with the literature of the Golden Age and its damaging concept of honor. He realizes that in order to subdue the girl he must first erase her image of woman as man's plaything, and he attempts to comfort her with quotes from the nineteenth-century archeologist, Baehofen, who contended that women once ruled in prehistoric civilizations. Recognizing his ruse for what it is, the girl's resentment increases, but suddenly in the midst of her flight he finds the key to her
resistance in the thesis of one Heinz Wölpe. If this author is real, there is a paradox in the use of recorded formal material as a means of realizing the primitive act of seduction. If he is invented, the boy seduces the girl through a hoax.

The end results are the same. When her pursuer relates that man developed from woman's own organ and that when woman could no longer procreate independently, she had to seek him in order to be whole, the girl understands that the boy is expressing his own incompleteness and she succumbs: "Se acercó a Eva temblando y Eva no huyó" (p. 77).

The boy, on the other hand, by giving her a favorable image of woman in order to weaken her defense, succeeds to the point that after hearing the Wölpe quote she feels superior to man.

Menton writes, "El amor violento ... es el tema de 'Eva' donde ... una doncella inocente ha sido seducida."40

Based on internal evidence, however, it would seem more logical to state that Arreola's stress is not on violence, but on the mutual need of the sexes. Although the author leaves no doubt as to consummation, neither is there any substantiation for the idea stated by Menton that "las relaciones sexuales que se entablan fuera del matrimonio

40. Menton, p. 46.
no son menos trágicas. ..." Arreola does not seem to convey any feeling of the "tragic" in his development of this particular relationship between a man and a woman.

41. Menton, p. 46.
"Una mujer amaestrada"

In the stories concerned with the man-woman relationship, Arreola provides a virtuoso's finish in "Una mujer amaestrada" and thus adds another facet to his spectrum of attitudes toward the subject.

The plot of this selection is developed around three central figures: a mentally retarded woman, exhibited as a circus oddity, her trainer, and an onlooker, who narrates the story.

In a chalk-drawn circle on a pavement, a dusty barker draws a gawking crowd to watch the trained woman perform simple routines. The woman, accompanied by a drum-playing midget, occasionally blunders and causes the trainer to tremble in distress. Sensing an immoral relationship between the two, the narrator recognizes that the trainer feels both proud and guilty. A policeman questions the legality of the woman's kissing the men who toss coins, but he is turned away after the trainer produces a filthy paper bearing official stamps. When the policeman is sent away the second time after accepting a bribe collected by the crowd, the trainer's face becomes streaked with tears, "ya que en el fondo de su corazón cifraba todas sus esperanzas en la cárcel" (p. 44). In his frustration the barker curses the dancer, and the crowd, caught up in the enthusiasm of his earlier false diatribes, claps its
approval. Turning his attention from the man to the girl, the narrator decides to contradict his earlier ideas of criticism and compassion and jumps into the circle to join the dancer in her now frenzied performance. In the finale he feels it appropriate to fall to his knees.

Being comforted by his own compassion and yet chastened by his unanimity with the crowd's collective criticism, the narrator is faced with a spiritual dilemma of whether to remain silent or to act. Arreola's narrator apparently is motivated by the same idealism which impels Don Quixote to free the galeotes. Arreola, unlike Cervantes, does not develop the situation in order to demonstrate that the deeds of well-wishers frequently miscarry. Instead, Arreola's protagonist, feeling that both compassion and criticism degrade its recipient, vindicates his former attitude by joining those he formerly judged.

The treatment which Arreola employs to bring the protagonist to his involvement is neither markedly romantic nor idealistic, but has properties of both. The narrator is not prompted to act because of righteous indignation at seeing a mentally retarded woman chained and trained as if she were an animal. The chain is actually more symbolic than restraining. "La cadena que iba de su mano izquierda al cuello de la mujer, no pasaba de ser un símbolo, ya que el menor esfuerzo habría bastado para romperla" (p. 142).
He reacts because he feels guilty, and he involves himself to alleviate his guilt.

The presence of the almost *sine qua non* of Spanish naturalism, *lo feo*, is evident in a dichotomy of abnormalities: psychological in the person of the woman and physiological in the instance of the dwarfed son of the trainer. Although Arreola suggests that the baseness of the performers' relationship is undeniable, he merely intimates that the reader will draw a similar conclusion and does not pursue the matter further: "Quien profundice en ella, llegará indudablemente a una conclusión obscena" (p. 143).

In this selection, in common with the rest of the *Confabulario*, irony, fantasy, and reality play in consonant counterpoint. The irony of "Una mujer amaestrada" is not in the asides as was the case in "Anuncio" or "In memoriam," but is instead situational.

The trainer wants the protection of jail. When he is thwarted in this desire, within the space of a few moments his reaction changes from trembling, because the woman does not perform properly, to a frustrated rage. His fury whips the drummer, the woman, and the crowd into a near-paroxysmal state. The trainer's anger is induced because he himself presents a paper validated by official stamps, and the crowd, sympathetic, or perhaps only eager to see the freak, collects the bribe which placates the
policeman, thus eliminating the trainer’s hope for jail.

The elements of irony, fantasy, and reality are discussed by Emmanuel Carballo in general terms, which apply specifically to "Una mujer":

Nunca se condensa la ironía, el misterio o la sorpresa en lugar determinado. . . En contadas ocasiones la sorpresa por imprevista resulta sumamente eficaz: en otras con toda deliberación la elimina, sorprendiendo así de una manera negativa. Este efecto lo va preparando mediante un ambiente de misterio, disparando después de una sucesión de hechos creíbles, lo increíble. . . como sugiere Biy Casares, 'la tendencia realista en la literatura fantástica.'

The final lines of "Una mujer amaestrada" corroborate the theme of compassion. "Como actitud final, nada me pareció más adecuado que caer bruscamente de rodillas" (p. 114). The narrator falls to his knees in repentance for his unspoken criticism and pity, although he does not retract his conviction that the performers are meritorious of both. He does have empathy for their squalid circumstances and is therefore moved to the ultimate form of compassion, which is identification.

A feminine critic, Beatriz Espejo, interprets differently the story and the motivation which occasions the gesture:

"Una mujer amaestrada" presenta un personaje femenino dependiente de su hombre hasta lo inverosímil. Una especie de representación obscena

y sobrecogedora en que la mujer baila y se contorsiona espoleada por el látigo del marido. De pronto, el escritor que lo observa todo ... cae de rodillas. Les rinde fervoroso tributo.43

The theme of compassion does not conflict with the cynicism which pervades Arreola's attitude toward the relationships of men and women. "Una mujer amaestrada enriquece(n) el contenido de Confabulario pero en ningún sentido lo altera(n)."44 The emphasis is not so much a matter of the recipients' having the compassion conferred upon them as it is an expression of personal integrity in which the narrator demonstrates to himself a compassion that is honest.


44. Mentom, p. 51.
THE ARTIST OR POET

"Interview"

The plot of "Interview" falls within one of Arreola's favored categories in the Confabulario, that of the artist or poet. Within the circumference of this theme, two ideas, whose common denominator is the symbol of the whale, are intimately juxtaposed. The structure is a dialogue in which a reporter interviews an author about his latest efforts.

The reporter, attempting to select quotations that would be suitable to the level of his reading public, makes prosaic interpretations of the author's esoteric commentary. The latter tells of a poet friend who conceives of himself as a tiny sucking fish against the inner stomach wall of a whale, which represents his wife. The reporter sees Jonah's whale as synonymous, but the author corrects him by saying it is a kind of total whale that represents the world, and for this reason the poet is able to enjoy only a small part of the sweet flesh that sustains him.

With the closing lines Arreola reiterates the theme of the artist. In response to the reporter's query about taking a photograph, the author replies that he would prefer
that he depict a panoramic view of a whale that has everyone inside, which would include a small, shining light representing the author himself.

In "Interview," two levels of reality occur simultaneously. One level is that of the real reporter interviewing an author who in turn tells of an existent poet and his wife. The second level is fantasy. The symbolism, reflected by the poet's attitude toward his wife and the author's conception of the world, indicates that they both regard destruction as an inevitable end.

Paramount in the poet's attitude toward his wife is the lack of illusion. After condemning her as a gentle but lethal force whose enormity he equates with a whale, he voices no other criticism. He yearns for no change and feels no regret. This is simply how things are. The poet's choice of a symbol, however, indicates that he allows her to be an invincible source of destruction only by the complete surrender of his own will.

The writer, sensing the correlation in the bigness of the symbol and the wife's role as the poet's universe, enlarges the symbol even further and gives it a somewhat existentialist significance. The whale is the world and everyone on it is swallowed up, slowly digested, and cast out into the void.
"El discípulo"

In "El discípulo," Arreola uses Renaissance Italy as a background for a tale of a gauche young artist beset with fears of his own ineptitude. The master art teacher contributes to the erosion of the youthful artist's self-esteem by openly preferring a student of more cosmopolitan wit and tastes to the sensitive, honest bumpkin from San Sepolcro. The story opens as the master buys for his favorite an ermine and black satin cap, adorned with silver. Then, in a democratic gesture, he stops in the market to buy the narrator a common gray felt one. Using the caps to provide a learning situation, the master tells the students to paint each other in their new headgear. He is pleased by the efforts of the preferred student and ridicules the work of the narrator. At this point a teacher-demonstration is added to the lesson as the master draws what he considers to be a bad sketch of the narrator's love, Gioia. The visual aid miscarries, however, and all the young man can see is the splendid, open face of his beloved. Annoyed at the young student's lack of perception, the master resorts to a bit of sixteenth-century Florentine discipline as he thrusts the student's hand into the hearth's fire to retrieve the torn pieces of the picture.

Hurt and angry, the young painter wanders the streets of the city weighing his love of beauty against the mistaken
rejection of his father's trade and Gioia, who now will certainly marry the merchant's son. The blue and gold streets, at first so lovely, turn dark and menacing in the twilight. The boy, seeing in the lonely obscurity an omen of his artistic oblivion, clutches his body and runs to escape his own thoughts and the deepening dusk.

Menton sees the master's lesson as an attempt to educate a novice painter about the superficiality of purely representational art:

El gran pintor critica la obra de su discípulo. Para reforzar la lección, le dice al discípulo que le va a enseñar cómo se destruye la belleza. Esboza una bella figura y proclama: 'Esta es la belleza' (p. 74).

Después de terminado el cuadro, el discípulo lo contempla embelesado pero el maestro le afirma que acaba de destruir la belleza. Rompe el cuadro y se lo echa al fuego. El discípulo ingenuo y prosaico, ... se extasía ante la vista brillante de Florencia a la luz del sol pero se asusta ante el crepúsculo. La estética de Arreola queda clara: la verdadera belleza consiste en sugerir la belleza. Cuando la obra hace más que sugerir, entonces pierde su encanto.

The categorical significance of "El discípulo" encompasses the problems inherent in a career in the creative arts. Arreola's vehicle is cleverly couched in the reference to the narrator's arrogant companion, Salaino. According to art historians, this would be Andrea Salaino, who lived from 1483 to 1520, serving as life-long assistant

45. Menton, pp. 40-41.
and friends to the great Italian painter, Leonardo da Vinci. Historical details concerning da Vinci add a new perspective to Arreola’s treatment of these problems.

The two perspicuous issues deal with the perfecting of an artistic technique and whether or not the talent of the artist merits the sacrifices he must make for this achievement. In "El discípulo" the narrator has to forego both material and emotional security. After the master’s harsh punishment the narrator wonders of his sacrifices have been to no avail. "No seré un gran pintor, y en vano olvidé en San Sepolcro las herramientas de mi padre. No seré un gran pintor y Gioia casará con el hijo de un mercader" (p. 75).

The identity of the master as da Vinci points up another problem that a young artist faces concerning how much trust he should have in his particular aesthetic intuition, adding a further dimension to the issues just related.

Because of historical evidence regarding da Vinci’s personal relationship with Salaino and his professional relationship with students in general, Arreola seems to be telling young creative talent, pugnacious enough to ferret out his caliginous nuances: "take heart, you may be

46. Cyclopedia of Painters and Paintings, eds. John Denison Champlin, Jr., et al. (New York, 1900), IV, p. 104.

47. Ibid.
better than they think you are." The narrator senses that the master's laughter is more vindictive than a mere professional opinion would warrant. "Cuando yo estaba más embélesado, el maestro interrumpió su trabajo y comenzó a reir de manera extraña" (p. 74). When the young painter looks with love and wonder at the master's sketch of Gioia, the master's animosity is heightened. The frenetic laughter, contrasting with what the narrator describes as the master's usually silent manner, and the thrusting of the hand into the fire indicate that in addition to artistic requirements there might have been demands made on the affections of the students. If the author completes the meaning of da Vinci as master, he is nullifying the evaluation the painter makes of the narrator's work because in Arreola's story it appears to stem from a personal rather than a professional judgment.

Further proof of Arreola's exhortation to young artists is found in history's evaluation of Salaino. Although in "El discípulo" the narrator's work may or may not have compared favorably with Salaino's, it is noteworthy that despite da Vinci's endorsement of his cosmopolitan young student, critics today remember him for his "... distinct personality, but his artistic achievements remain obscure."48 The dates of Salaino, 1483 to 1520, also

suggest that perhaps the narrator was one of those individuals affected by the indefinable eclectic stimuli which cause artists separated and dissimilar to initiate new movements simultaneously in the creative arts. The master's criticism of the *horror vacui* of the student's work and Arreola's subtle treatment of the *chiaroscuro* effect created by the crepuscular Florentine streets leave a tenuous impression that Arreola is implying a transition of the early Renaissance style to that of the heavily ornamented Baroque. If so, the master does not concur with the young painter's idea of aesthetics because the latter's instincts are pioneering an artistic epoch which is alien to da Vinci. By establishing the master's identity Arreola adds implied historical footnotes which are evidence for this hypothesis because da Vinci did dominate his pupils' creativity to the extent that of his ten greatest students it is written, "He is their common factor—their mannerisms are exaggerations of his effects."  

Apart from the historical connotations, "El discípulo" presents Arreola's own theory of style. The master's commentary, "No faltan líneas en tu dibujo pero sobran muchas" (p. 74), represents Arreola's *ars poetica*. It reiterates Gautier's theory of "sculpere, lime, cisèle;"  

highly condensed style in the *Confabulario* shows him to be a dedicated adherent to this literary adage. Menton writes that "*El discípulo*" is outstanding in this context because, "En ningún otro cuento se expresa más claramente la estética de Arreola ..."51.

The final note that Arreola leaves in his consideration of the problems of young artists is optimistic. Despite the sacrifices, the adverse criticism, and the failures, the narrator states, "Pero yo sigo creyendo en la belleza" (p. 75). This belief is not only an exhortation to the novice to continue his efforts despite the costs, but also a reminder that when an artist upholds his ideas of beauty he is thereby perpetuating his belief in himself.

"Monólogo del insumiso"

In "Monólogo del insumiso" nineteenth-century Romanticism plays the whetstone to Arreola's satire-sword.

The plot concerns an identifiable twenty-four-year-old Mexican poet of the nineteenth century who is stalked by the rejection of his loves and his muse. He introduces his first-person rogue's lament with an uncomfortable confession of seducing a girl at the scene of her father's wake, her ensuing hatred and the poet's subsequent street-drubbing by the grand old man of Mexican letters, who is also enamored of the girl. Although he ceases to have rapport with the laundress, a former lover, and the girl who once played Dulcinea to his artistic forays no longer listens to him, he consoles himself that his adoring public of proper young girls and old men of Positivist leanings is far removed from the taint of gossip.

In weighing his indebtedness to the critics of the future he justifies his failure by noting that he inherited only a sack of worn metaphors which by now he has exhausted. If he were to lead a healthy life he could be a part of the new poetry of the twentieth century, but in his century he feels condemned to go on repeating himself and others. He imagines himself at eighty, and rather than be told by a smart young critic to move back with the representatives of Romanticism, he decides to leave at once. This way he can
play the role of a blossom nipped in the bud and enjoy the comfort of his romantic tomb. Fame, at eighteen, might have dissuaded him from leaving, but it is no longer of any consequence. He would like to do something diabolic but nothing occurs to him. He muses that he would at least like to find in himself and in Mexican literature something of the odor of bitter almonds exuding from the liquor he is about to drink.

In the fables concerned with the artist or poet, the protagonists as well as other characters within the work are frequently famous people. In the case of "Monólogo," a biography written by Benjamín Jarnés provides information that necessitates our identifying the poet as Manuel Acuña and the man who beats him as Guillermo Prieto.

The poet's seduction of the girl during her father's wake is described by Castillo y Piña in Jarnés' work. "Llegó la noche ... se fueron consumiendo las velas hasta que llegó un momento en que se quedaron a obscuras y Acuña, abusando de las finezas que había prestado a aquella pobre mujer desamparada, cometió un crimen con ella."

Juan de Dios Peza, named as Acuña's closest friend, denies the legend of the physical relationship of Acuña and his laundress. Soledad, or Celi, as she was called by Acuña,

52. Manuel Acuña, poeta de su siglo (Mexico, 1942), p. 78 et passim.
53. Jarnés, p. 78.
according to Peza was an adoring mother figure whose greatest act of love was performed after his death. She, with scant means, purchased the first headstone for Acuña's hitherto unmarked grave. Guillermo Prieto, mentioned by Jarnés as an acquaintance of Acuña's, warns the Dulcinea of "Monólogo," Rosario de la Peña y Llerena, "Rosario, no le correspondas a Acuña. Te quiere engañar. Tiene de querida a su lavandera y además, un hijo con. ... [sic]"

The sources for Prieto's beating of Acuña with a cane are perhaps personal ones, but Arreola's description identifies Prieto: "el viejecillo que mira nuestro siglo a través de sus maliciosos quevedos. ... Me refiero a ese anciano señor que preside las letras mexicanas tocado con gorra de dormir de los memorialistas. ..." Pictures of Prieto in his night cap and glasses are found in McLean's biography.

Jarnés also names Esproncede, Campoamor, Bécquer, and perhaps Ruiz Aguilera as authors from whom the poet of "Monólogo" says he inherited his sack of worn metaphors.

Arreola's lines that tell of the poet's religious experience have little importance in the story. Because of

55. Jarnés, p. 129.
56. Jarnés, p. 87.
57. Malcom D. McLean, *Vida y Obra de Guillermo Prieto* (Mexico, 1960), illustrations 3 and 4 in the section beginning on page 32.
the close parallel between Jarnés's biography of Acuña and Arreola's story, the allusion to faith does give added information about the theme of "Monólogo" as well as questioning a traditionally-accepted truth about the poet. Jarnés does not challenge Acuña's atheism although he ponders the fact that the poet makes repeated references to the Deity during the period when his denial of the existence of God is most discernable.\textsuperscript{59} It is evident that Arreola has abstracted a refutation of Acuña's atheism from the chapter "las golondrinas vuelven" because of the lines in "Monólogo": "Y a nadie le he podido contar la atroz aventura de mis noches de solitario, cuando el germen de Dios comienza a crecer de pronto en mi alma vacía" (p. 87).

Jarnés' solution to the disparity between Acuña's allusions to God and his atheism lies in the poet's attachment to his mother: "¿Cómo al recordar su cuna—su primer amor, el materno—invitaba a Dios a recuperar su puesto de honor en aquel hogar hecho tema lírico? Es que—démonos cuenta—se trata de su madre; y como su madre allá en Saltillo, sigue teniendo como confidente a Dios. . . ."\textsuperscript{60}

Jarnés includes other references in which Acuña alludes to the Deity. One incident concerns a bit of historical evidence left by Acuña and his friends in the

\textsuperscript{59} Jarnés, pp. 26-27.

\textsuperscript{60} Jarnés, pp. 27-28.
form of a decorated skull. Acuña had neatly lettered above the skull's eye-socket these words, "Dios y Compañía, Opticos." 61

Very few of the details of the fables of the Confabulario cannot be explained either from the context of the story or from material provided by research. Ordinarily the proof is obvious. In the lines which enumerate the people who will mourn his death, the narrator mentions, "un joven sardónico que comprenda mi secreto . . ." (p. 88). Biographies of Acuña make no specific allusion as to what his secret might have been. In Arreola's choice of a young man to feel empathy for the secret, coupled with information provided by Jarnés, 62 there is a covert implication of two possible solutions: fathering an illegitimate child, or homosexuality. The latter possibility, also present in "El discípulo," plays a minor part in the explication of that story, whereas in "Monólogo" the secret, whatever it may be, apparently has no bearing on either the plot or the literary connotations of the fable.

As in many of the vignettes of the Confabulario, the structure of "Monólogo" favors the implication of satire of Romanticism rather than the open statement. The identification of the paranoiac young Mexican poet as Manuel Acuña


serves merely to make a graphic illustration of ideas prevalent in the nineteenth-century literary movement. The satirizing of Acuña's attitudes is categorical rather than personal or individual.

Arreola begins the satire by recounting a series of escapades involving physical love. Three dominant romantic traits become evident: the predilection to rush into emotional experiences without a logical evaluation, the expression of personal liberty which often disregards the rights of others, and the resultant feelings of rejection, isolation, and futility, that literary critics call "yoísmo."63

The ironic material which bridges the amorous adventures to the remainder of the story, relating to the poet's work, conveys the lack of relationship between real life and literature in Romanticism: "Por fortuna estas infames habladurías no pueden llegar hasta mi querido público. Yo canto para un auditorio compuesto de recatadas señoritas y de empolvados viejitos positivistas" (p. 87).

The allusion to the "recatadas señoritas" indicates readers neither knowledge in reality nor desirous of learning about it. Although the little old men subscribe to the Positivist philosophy, which is in itself an anti-romantic

63. Guillermo Díaz-Plaja, Introducción al estudio del Romanticismo español (Madrid, 1942), lines 16 and 17, p. 57.
reaction, old positivists are ultra-conservative, idealize
the past, reflect on their lost youth, and react in a way
that smacks of Romanticism. Arreola criticizes the reading
public that clings to Romanticism because it is neither
up-to-date with life nor with literature, whereas he in-
dicates through his satire, that his own public is not only
receptive to the contemporary, but is impatient even for
newer and more exciting literary trends.

The visual image that the narrator paints of himself
reinforces further the satire of Romanticism, here directed
at the popular conception of the person of the Romanticist
as contrasted with his writings; "Para ellos sigo siendo el
pálido joven que impreca a la divinidad en imperiosos ter-
cetos, y que restaña sus lágrimas con una blonda guedeja"
(p. 87).

In Arreola's gleeful garroting of Romanticism few
of its frailties escape. The brevity of the movement's
period of acceptance is observed with, "Estoy acérríllado
de deudas para con los críticos del futuro" (p. 87). The
language is satirized in the lines, "Heredé un talego de
imágenes gastadas. Pertenezco al género de los hijos
pródigos que malgastan el dinero de los antepasados pero
que no pueden hacer fortuna con sus propias manos. Todas
las cosas que me han ocurrido las recibí enfundadas en una
metáfora depresiva" (p. 87). The idea that poetry exists
outside of the poet, an idea perhaps best expressed by Bécquer in "poesía eres tú . . . ,"\textsuperscript{64} is implied in "Hay un diablo que me castiga poniéndome en ridículo. El me dicta casi todo lo que escribo. Y mi pobre alma cancelada está ahogándose bajo el aluvión de las estrofas" (p. 88). But the statement, of course, is ironic, because Arreola is obviously an adherent to Huidobro's theory that a poem is a creation of the poet alone. Unstated, but implied, is the idea that the Romantic wants to place the responsibility for his art on something other than himself. The choice of the devil as a muse is an interesting contrast to Vicente Huidobro's lines, "El poeta es un pequeño Dios."\textsuperscript{65}

The void of innovation in Romanticism is satirized in the poet's desire to leave before he can be accosted by critics who know the new poetry. He prefers the safety of the tomb to living on, repeating himself and others.

The poet's leap from adolescence to old age is a satire on the inability of the Romantic to cope with reality without a total loss of illusions: "La gloria que amé a los dieciocho años me parece a los veinticuatro algo así como una corona mortuoria que se pudre y apesta en la

\textsuperscript{64} Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Rima XXI, Rimas y leyendas (Madrid, 1959), p. 28.

\textsuperscript{65} See, e.g., Alberto Baeza Flores, Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana (Buenos Aires, 1959), p. 110.
The accusation that Romanticism is a role is evinced in "quisiera hacer algo diabólico ..." (p. 88). The lack of originality in the literary movement is diagnosed in the rest of the sentence, "pero no se me ocurre nada" (p. 88).

The conclusion of "Monólogo" deals with the poet's desire that some of the odor of bitter almonds which exudes from the potion he is about to drink, might also permeate the whole of Mexican literature. Bitter almonds is the smell identifiable in cyanide, the poison actually used by Acuña in his suicide. The key which unlocks the theme of "Monólogo" is found in the paragraph where the poet discusses the paucity of his literary heritage. In this paragraph no deviation is made from the topic of literature until Arreola unexpectedly enters the subject of religious conviction: "Y a nadie le he podido contar la atroz aventura de mis noches de solitario, cuando el germen de Dios comienza a crecer de pronto en mi alma vacía." This statement represents the confrontation of Acuña, or the poet, with his literary integrity. The poet found his work hollow, plagiaristic, and without satisfaction. From this it can be assumed that in "Monólogo" the suicide motivation can be attributed at least in part to his dissatisfaction with his art. In wishing that some of the odor of bitter almonds
might emanate to the whole of Mexican literature, Arreola is implying that literature should also have a confrontation of conscience and die. The use of death as regards literature is obviously metaphorical and indicates change.
"El lay de Aristóteles"

In "El lay de Aristóteles" Arreola sees the conflict in art between youth and passion on the one hand, and age and reason on the other.

Aristotle is old and bent. In the meadow he drops his papyrus scroll to the ground as the dancing of a provocative young muse reminds him of a slave girl he once wanted to buy long ago in the market at Stagira. In vain he closes the window and lights his weak oil lamp. Harmony continues her light and flaming dance in his mind. The dialectic prose he is writing loses its gravity as the vigorous iambic recaptures the smells of the country in his memory. He abandons his work and goes outside where the garden opens like a huge spring-filled flower. Harmony's dance is a labyrinth of fleeting forms where reason goes astray. Suddenly he pursues her, but she vanishes as if on wings into the forest. Exhausted and ashamed he returns and weeps for her loss. When he looks out again and sees her dancing he decides to write a treatise that will destroy the moods and rhythms. In humiliation, he submits to verse as an inevitable condition and begins his masterpiece, De Armonía, which burned on Omar's fire.

Although the muse dances throughout the time he is writing, the vision ceases as he completes the last verse. His soul is freed from beauty's jabbing needle until one
night he dreams that Harmony is mounted astride him as he walks on all fours in the Grecian spring. The next day he prefaces his manuscript with these words: "My verses are as awkward and sluggish as a donkey's walk, but Harmony rides upon them."

Arreola's choice of Aristotle to aid in unfolding the content of his personal if tenuous artistic manifesto, introduces in the *Confabulario* the role of the soul in an artistic creation, a problem which has baffled Aristotelian scholars through the ages.

The unraveling of Arreola's fable hinges on the following elements: an old Aristotle's being confronted with the memories of his youth; the presence of the muse, her name Harmony, and the evocation of sensuality; the use of the words dialectic and iambic; and the acknowledgment to Harmony that the philosopher makes in the treatise he writes at the story's end.

It should be noted at this point that there is no internal evidence as to what extent Arreola is steeped in Aristotelian tradition. It can only be assumed by his use of the previously enumerated elements in "El lay de Aristóteles" that the depth of his learning is sufficient to reveal information adding to his literary credo. For this reason, only a superficial treatment of the historical and philosophical implications of these elements need be developed.
For Aristotelian scholars the word "harmony" has several traditional meanings; among these, there are two principal usages: harmony in the aesthetic sense, and harmony involving the relationship of the body to the soul.

The problem facing Arreola's reader is to determine a definition of harmony that will correspond to the rest of the story.

Arreola himself aids in solving this problem by depicting an aged Aristotle reflecting on his youth, for it was in the early part of the philosopher's life that he wrote the *Eudemus*, in which he discusses harmony in connection with the soul and refutes the materialist view that opposes the doctrine of immortality: "He attacked it [immortality] in the same form as it has in the *Phaedo* [Plato], namely that the soul is nothing but the harmony of the body, that is to say, while different from the sum of the body's elements, it is the product of the right arrangement of them."66

The sensuality of the muse may or may not strengthen the hypothesis that Arreola uses the word harmony as a symbol for the soul. It is noteworthy that Aristotle observed that when man's soul is in proper harmony with his physical appetites it makes for moral goodness.67


With the consideration of the aforementioned elements of "El lay de Aristóteles" it is the muse, Harmony, that largely determines the literary implications. A muse, in any context, is tantamount to inspiration. If, for the sake of explicating the literary content, an oversimplification might be allowed, it is Aristotle's contention that inspiration comes from forces which border on the divine:

He . . . sets inspiration above reason and moral insight, not because it is irrational—on that ground Plato, in genuine Socratic fashion, had put reason above enthusiasms—but because it came from God. Rational morality misses infallibility. It is the product of mere sober reflection. The sureness of inspiration on the other hand is like lightning: as a blind man, no longer seeing what lies before his eyes, has a far better memory and sees everything clear before him within, so the man whom God inspires, though blind, is surer than those who see.68

Thus despite the apparently anti-Romantic contradiction of "Monólogo del insumiso," where the poet is the god of his own creation, in "El lay de Aristóteles" Arreola asserts that the artist is still subservient to a higher power. In terms which belie the popular concept of a purely scientific Aristotle, Arreola predicates that the artist does not create by reason alone.

In addition to the limitations of reason, "El lay de Aristóteles" treats of the conflict between reason and emotion. The philosopher combats the sensuality of his muse

by writing his treatise, *De Armonía*. The treatise, of

course, is imaginary and Arreola's literary saving-device

is that it was burned in Omar's fire (p. 100). Under the

influence of the muse, the measured dialectic prose breaks

off into sonorous iambic verse. In the real *Poetica*,

Aristotle measures verse against historical prose and states

that verse is "more philosophic and of graver import." 69

However noble poetry may be, Aristotle's description

of those who create it is less glowing: "Hence it is that

poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one

with a touch of madness in him; the former can easily assume

the required mood, and the latter may be actually beside

himself with emotion." 70 The verse form Arreola chooses for

the protagonist Aristotle of "Lay" fares little better.

The iambic, according to the actual writings of the philo-

sopher, is inferior to the trochaic.

Poetry . . . broke up into two kinds according to the
differences of the character of the individual poets,
for the graver among them would represent noble
actions and those of noble personages, and the meaner
sort the actions of the ignoble. The latter class
produced invective. . . . In this poetry of invective
its natural fitness brought an iambic meter into use;
hence our present term 'iambic' because it was the
meter of their 'iams' or invective against one
another. 71

69. Ingram Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*

70. Bywater, p. 49.

71. Bywater, p. 11.
With these insights into Arreola's knowledge of the Poetica, the words, "Humillado, acepta el verso como una condición ineludible . . . ." (p. 100) become less opaque. Arreola perhaps was not acquainted with more recent findings about the iambic:

In the context, this seems to offer an explanation for the adoption of the iambic verse . . . [as the verse] best suited to invective. But there is no parallel elsewhere in the Poetics—or in Aristotle—for such a description of the iambic, and on closer inspection we see that the sentence does not quite say that . . . ( . . . the iambic trimeter) is so called now because "they used to 'iambize' (berate, satirize, vilify, flout) each other" in it: in other words, Aristotle is saying that the term has derived its connotation from its use. The remark is only incidentally a characterization of the verse.72

Another reason for Arreola's choice of the iambic has to do with the lines in the Poetica which state that poetry is imitative.73 Following Auerbach's theory that "the imitation of reality is the imitation of the sensory experience of life,"74 it is possible that the baser iambic is chosen because the treatise was not quite a catharsis of Harmony's sensuality after all, since she appears later to him in a dream.

The two levels of the story are now apparent.


73. Bywater, p. 3.

Arreola refers to Aristotle's youthful period in which inspiration, harmony, and the word "dialectic" are equated in the Eudemus with the philosopher's belief in the divine, or that the artist may not find all his resources within the grasp of reason.

On the other level, the iambic verse and the muse represent emotion and eroticism. The pursuit of the muse is symbolic of the temptation of the wiles of Romanticism. Where a younger, more immature writer might succumb, the veteran conquers emotion by writing a reasoned treatise.

The dream in which the muse rides astride an Aristotle on all fours is a humble and tender acceptance of the idea that after all is considered, reason is rather pedestrian.

Arreola's philosophical debt is not only to Aristotelian logic; "El lay de Aristóteles" also gives a brief glimpse of his debt to surrealism. This movement, which Guillermo de Torre calls a religion,75 was concerned, among other things, with the problem of a reason-nurtured society, and it developed as one of its vehicles an artistic technique involving oneiromantic phenomena and the expression of automatic impulses:

It is in these . . . fields of the subconscious that the surrealists are trying to tap a rich new reality. . . . They are tired of reason. In support of their

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whole system they point to the fanciful art of the 15th century Dutch masters, . . . to the imagery in the Song of Songs, to primitive art. Last, and most poignantly, they point to the sick, miserable condition of the world today so carefully fed on reason.76

Arreola's particular use of the dream sequence, therefore, coupled with his treatment of the question of reason, fall squarely within the mainstream of surrealism's contribution to twentieth-century literature and enrich his artistic presentation of what is primarily a problem of Aristotelian logic.

"El condenado"

Of all the fables in the *Confabulario* concerned with the theme of the artist or poet, that which demands the most arduous research is "El condenado." The meaning of Arreola's inner story is dependent upon the identification of the narrator, who may either be one of the myriad literary acquaintances made by Enrique González Martínez over a period of sixty years or an unidentifiable fictitious poet. Because of the obvious complexity of the identification problem, the more profound nuances of Arreola's fable may not be stated. There are, however, several prominent facets of the fable that justify even a less thorough explication.

The tie with González Martínez is established by Arreola in the first-person epigraph, in which the poet relates how he learned of his own death through the news media of that time.

The plot of "El condenado" centers around the subsequent disappointment the narrator experiences because the falsity of the poet's death notice nullifies his most brilliant work, inspired by the occasion of the demise. The poet never overcomes the stultifying effect of the loss of the poem. He finds some consolation in the fact that he is able to outshine his adversary in a duel of acrostics. The rival, who may or may not be González Martínez, falters at
the fifth verse. Ten years later the narrator comes to read his own erroneous death notice. While the reputation of the rival has been increasing through these years, the narrator's production is slight: "Soneto a bodas," written for María Serafina, and the lyrics to the school hymn, "Al progreso." He bitterly resents the fact that his fame depended upon the indispensable condition of his adversary's death. Every morning the angels come to read the narrator some new poem by his rival, but his prejudice sends them away crestfallen. Forty years pass and the narrator's modest coffin has become riddled by humidity, wood borers, and envy, while he continues to weigh and deny the fame of a poet who threatens his immortality.

In spite of the fact that an epigraph ordinarily sets the mood of a work rather than forming a part of its content, the likelihood that the adversary is Enrique González Martínez is heightened by the textual relationship between the epigraph, "Durante varias semanas estuvieron llegando a mi casa revistas de provincia y diarios de México en que aparecieron sendos y largos artículos sobre mi fallecimiento," and the first sentence, "Al leer la noticia de su muerte fui presa de la inspiración" (p. 101).

The title of the narrator's unfinished eulogy,

77. Enrique González Martínez, El hombre del buho (Mexico, 1944), pp. 147-148.
"El elegido de los dioses," tends to strengthen this identification in so far as it reflects González Martínez' stature as a poet. An interesting coincidence as regards the "dios" appellation is provided by Luis G. Ureña in the prologue of González Martínez' translations, Los jardines de Francia, in which he refers to the poet in a group of six "dioses" of Mexican poetry at the time of writing. 78

Unlike the other fables with the artist or poet theme in which Arreola suggests through a famous personage literary opinions of his own, no new statement is made, either overtly or otherwise, in the "Condenado." The literary similarities between Arreola and González Martínez that might produce an implication of some statement are of small significance. In fact, Enrique González Martínez, who scorned the same Modernista literary movement from which he drew heavily, is as far removed from the incisive, magical-realist, Juan José Arreola, as any Mexican writer of this century. Because both are writers and Mexicans, nevertheless, parallels are bound to exist. Two possible correlations are indicated. Ureña authors the first statement concerning González Martínez' literary production:

"Esconde cada huella de la existencia exterior y cotidiana. Es desde los comienzos, autobiografía espiritual: obra de

78. (Mexico, 1915), p. xiii.
arte simbólico, no con los materiales nativos, sino con la esencia ideal del pensamiento y la emoción."79

The second correlation lies in the author's agreement with González Martínez's aversion to critical explanations: "El poema dice mucho más que el comentario. Hay en la poesía tal sugerencia cuya aclaración destruye el misterio inefable de la poesía, y tal colaboración exige del lector con el poeta, que todo intento explicativo parece inadecuado, inútil o inoportuno."80

The artist's fear that he can never attain immortality also recurs in "El condenado" in the concluding statement, "Yo repaso y niego la grandeza de un poeta que me amenaza inmortal" (p. 102).

The dominant impression manifested in "El condenado" pertaining to Arreola's literary attitudes is a personal one that can be classified as a frequent theme of the Confabulario: that of a rivalry in which the narrator is relegated to second place.

79. Ibid., p. xv.
80. Enrique González Martínez, La apacible locura (Mexico, 1951), pp. 50-51.
"Cocktail Party"

In "Cocktail Party," the concluding story of the group having to do with the artist or poet, Arreola describes a young artist's wry pronouncements concerning the limitations of art patrons.

The narrator's disapproval of the art lovers is immediately established in the first lines of the one-page vignette: "¡Me diverti como loca!" dijo Monna Lisa con su voz de falso, y ante ella se extasiaron reverentes los imbéciles en coro de ranas boquiabiertas" (p. 98).

The artist's girl friend, Monna Lisa, is the prototype of a glamorous, self-centered, posturing devotee of the arts, whose cacaphonic effect on the soul of the sensitive painter brings a heightened awareness of his solitude in the crowd. Oblivious to his bitter mood, the young woman laughs and trills inane remarks "como el chorro solista de una fuente insensata" (p. 98). His sole reason for attending the party is to see Monna Lisa, "en calidad de representante del espíritu" (p. 98). Instead of enjoying intimate conversation with her he is besieged by congratulations, handshakes, offers of caviar canapes, drinks, cigarettes, and queries of "¿Qué pinta usted por ahora?" (p. 98). Blind with anger, he tries to direct Monna Lisa's attention toward the great profundities, but she nibbles on the superficialities while elegant people devour her with
their eyes. Surrounded by false disciples he takes his
glass of hemlock and tries to hide, but an elderly lady
invades his corner sanctuary, requesting that he create for
her a birthday cake, a single-spigoted bathtub, or some
lovely statues like those Michelangelo modeled at the
Medici palace. In his capacity as representative of the
spirit he helps the lady with some of her more difficult
ideas. He waits a while longer, drains his glass, and makes
his farewells to Monna Lisa. As she stands in the door,
his face shadowed by furs, she repeats her evening litany
of what a marvelous time she has had.

Aside from the literary value attributable to this
dense vignette, there is an implied social criticism,
unique in Arreola's writings, which presents itself in four
guises: the stated criticism of the custom of the cocktail
party as a medium for gathering together artists and fans;
the trenchant lambasting of this select, inner group of
people whose prerogative it is to laud or condemn the
artists' works; a lament about the dearth of high-level
human communication even among people who share a common
interest; and a complaint about the more personal lack of
empathy that exists between a man and woman who consider
themselves close acquaintances.

Arreola's distaste for the cocktail party per se is
easily discernible. He dislikes the mass anonymity of
beings who from all appearances have no loftier purpose than
to gape or be gaped at. In a succession of negative iden-
tifications Arreola labels them "imbéciles," "ranas
boquiabiertas," "monstruos de brocado y pedrería," "los
elegantes de verbo ampuloso," and "falsos discípulos" who
wander in and out of the "acuario de humo" (p. 98). The
most mordant criticism of the patrons appears in the brief
references to his credentials and the kinds of objets d'art
that the dowager demands. The lines concerning the cre-
dentials,"recibía a cada paso los parabienes, los apretones
de mano, los canapés ... , previa exhibición de mis
credenciales" (p. 98), are tantamount to an ironic observa-
tion of the falseness of a group of art patrons who are so
excessively aware of status that before the artist can be
accepted as a human being and enjoy the conviviality of the
group he must first produce credentials impressive enough
to warrant an open demonstration of hospitality on their
part. The art patrons' general lack of perception and good
taste is made evident in the dowager's demand for "pastel
de sorpresa ... , una tina de baño con llave mezcladora para
el agua caliente, o unas estatuas ... , como esas que Miguel
Angel modela ... en el palacio Medicis ..." (p. 98). The
obvious meretriciousness of creating a surprise cake or a
bathtub spigot is no less incongruous than imitating the
Michelangelo statues. In the dowager's requests Arreola
characterizes two elements of the taste of the bourgeois
celui-qui-ne-comprend-pas: the emphasis on utility and
the desire for blatant ostentation. One is reminded of
Darío's treatment of the same theme in "El rey burgués,"
where he synthesizes the middle-class attitude in his well-
known phrase, "Por moda y nada más."81

In employing the cocktail party as some sort of
epitome of a vacuum in human communication, Arreola presents
an obvious parallel to T. S. Eliot's well-known play of the
same title. In an interview which occurred four years
before he wrote The Cocktail Party, Eliot reveals the seed
of the problem in answer to a question concerning how he
might wish man to develop out of the bitter experience of
the present age. His response encompasses one of the more
profound implications of Arreola's "Cocktail Party":

I should speak of a greater spiritual con-
sciousness, which is not asking that everybody
should rise to the same conscious level, but that
everyone should have some awareness of the depths
of spiritual development and some appreciation and
respect for those more exceptional people who can
proceed further in spiritual knowledge than most
of us can.82

The artist in Arreola's story is intensely aware
that no viable communication exists between himself and the

81. Rubén Darío, Azul (Valparaíso, 1888), p. 3.
82. David E. Jones, The Plays of T. S. Eliot
art patrons. Were it to develop it could be a source of immense satisfaction to both the lonely, beleaguered artist who describes his state of mind in the aside, "(Esa noche en que las aguas de amargura penetraron hasta mis huesos)" (p. 98), and the patrons, whose expression of respect is limited to "parabienes, ... apretones de mano, ... [offers of] canapés ... y cigarillos..." (p. 98).

The point of divergence between the two cocktail parties of Eliot and Arreola as regards the theme of human communication is largely a matter of depth and development. Although the people of Eliot's play are all patrons of the arts to a greater or lesser degree, his emphasis is less specific than Arreola's and is more concerned with all people.

In Ethel F. Cornwell's comparison of T. S. Eliot with five other writers, The 'Still Point,' she regards the source of man's self-imposed isolation as "a result of the blow that modern science dealt to conventional religion, to man's concept of a purposive universe and his place in it, and the consequent regression from an early-Victorian optimism to a twentieth-century despair..." 83 Eliot, perhaps more than any author of this century, makes a conscious effort to remedy this despair. His Cocktail Party reflects a great interest in, and a desire for, an organic communal life of

83. (New Brunswick, 1962), p. 3.
all parts of society, based on mutual understanding. Thus it is that Eliot moves the social group to the center and the exceptional person to the side, while Arreola spotlights the artist and condemns the social group as imbeciles, frogs, and monsters. Although a one-page vignette, because of its obvious limitations, cannot provide the range of development of a drama, Arreola's "Cocktail Party" recognizes the illness, but, unlike Eliot's play, makes no effort to effect a cure.

The cure which Eliot provides appears in the form of of the Unidentified Guest, who eventually acts as a catalyst to weld the disparities of the characters' misunderstandings into a united front of spiritual awareness.

Arreola merely hints at a catalyst when he twice identifies the narrator as a "representante del espíritu" (p. 98). Arreola, through these words, recognizes that a reconciliation of attitudes between the creator and his patrons is possible, and the painter's behavior at the party proves his awareness of this fact: "En mi calidad de representante del espíritu ignoro cortésmente todas las insinuaciones de la señora, pero la asistí en su parto de difíciles ideas" (p. 98). The implication is that only through the bond that links both the artist and his public

84. Jones, p. 123.
to the artist's creation, can the hiatus of non-communication between the two factions be resolved.

The last facet of Arreola's social criticism manifests itself in the artist's disappointment with the girlfriend. He comes to the party as a representative of the spirit, but with the stated purpose of establishing rapport with her. Sadly, he finds her not to be the person capable of deeper understanding he had imagined earlier, but merely another member of the shallow crowd of alien patrons who have a "wonderful time."

In the circularity of Monna Lisa's expression of having a wonderful time exists a striking similarity of form between the works of Eliot and Arreola. The litany itself is comparable to the dialogue between Edward and the Unidentified Guest in the play. Variations of the following dialogue occur at frequent intervals throughout the first act:

Edward: . . . would you rather have whiskey?
Unidentified Guest: Gin.
Edward: Anything in it?
Unidentified Guest: A drop of water. 86

The resemblance in form is seen in the opening and closing lines of Arreola's story, "Me divertí como loca," and the anticipation of a cocktail party which begins and ends Eliot's work.

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This final story of the artist or poet theme group is unlike the previous stories in that it adds no new information about Arreola's personal *ars poetica*. It does provide, however, several intimate insights about the lonely world, in which, by his choice of profession, the creative artist finds himself condemned to live.
"El Guardagujas"

The widely-read and frequently-published "Guardagujas" is a dialogued potpourri of fantasy and reality whose palpable deeper meanings do not require a technical explication of the sort necessary in the majority of vignettes and fables of the Confabulario.

Arreola's skill in making an utterly incongruous fantasy appear to be a natural and commonplace occurrence has often caused him to be categorized by critics as a magical-realist.

In "El guardagujas" the incident of a man waiting for a train provides a prosaic ground bass for an ensuing fantastic fugue concerned with life in general and the eccentricities of the Mexican railroads in particular.

The story begins in a deserted railway station as a traveler arrives hot, disheveled, and out of breath at the exact hour of departure. The train, however, is nowhere in sight. Suddenly, a little old man vaguely resembling a railroad worker and carrying a tiny red lantern appears out of thin air, and smilingly acknowledges the queries made by the dejected traveler. The preposterous,
Mad Hatter-like commentary immediately establishes the tenor of the fantasy.

The traveler has to be in T-- by tomorrow at the very latest. The little old man, who later describes himself as a retired switchman, advises the traveler to rent a room at the local inn by the month.

"¡Está usted loco?" (p. 67) indignantly responds the traveler; whereupon the switchman gives a detailed account of the railroad's publication of timetables and sale of tickets for rail service that has not yet been definitely established. Fully aware of the situation, the people spend large sums of money for tickets and hopefully wait for the trains to reach their designated stations. In the meantime their patriotism keeps them from any demonstrations of displeasure.

The switchman cannot really vouch for the actual existence of a train for this city, but he knows that rails do exist, if only in the form of chalk lines, and in his lifetime he has actually seen trains pass and knows of people who were able to board. Should a train arrive, he admits, it cannot be assumed that it will automatically reach the desired destination. For those long periods of time when the train is immobile, after the passengers have already boarded, there is equipment including noise machines,
vibrators, and moving scenery to pacify the impatient occupants.

When asked by the traveler what purpose the railroad has in all this deception, the switchman replies that it hopes that the passengers will eventually succumb to an omnipotent management and cease caring about where they go.

As a result of all the bother of travel, passengers have become increasingly ingenious. In the event that axles wear out as a result of substituting chalk lines for steel rails, whole towns filled with mischievous children spring up. Once there was no bridge, and the passengers dismantled an entire train in order to cross a chasm. The venture was successful to the degree that fares now include an agreeable discount for those hardier souls willing to co-operate.

Often the passengers become so disgruntled waiting for the train, that when it does appear riots break out and the people are prevented from boarding. To avoid incidents of this nature police forces are assigned towns, schools are provided to teach passenger etiquette, and armor is provided to prevent cracked ribs. For life on the trains themselves the management includes prison cars, funeral chapels, and cemetery coaches. Stage-set stations have been erected and staffed with sawdust dummies in remote areas.
The switchman advises the traveler never to leave the train at a station unless he sees a familiar face. When he asks despairingly if there is anything he can do to insure arriving at T-- he is told to eat small amounts of food, have supreme faith in his ultimate arrival, and not to disclose his destination to his fellow passengers.

The traveler's gloom reaches the point where not even the idea of spending his time in an idyllic spot with an attractive young woman appeals to him. Just at the moment when the switchman is smiling and winking over this roguish suggestion a faint whistle is heard.

The switchman becomes very upset and runs between the tracks making wild signals with his lantern. Once more he calls back for the name of the traveler's destination. Instead of answering back T--, the traveler changes the town to X, and as the train noisily approaches the little old man dissolves in the clean morning air.

The dominant quality of the fantasy, "El guardagujas," is humor; ironic, ridiculous, and subtle. The implications in two or three whimsical lines contain whole chapters of criticism of Mexico, railroads, and people in general, impressing the reader with the fact that the entire work is indeed "symbolic in intent."

The reader senses the mood of the story in the opening exchange.

"--Usted perdone, ¿ha salido ya el tren?
--¿Lleva usted poco tiempo en este país?" (p. 67).
The remarks which follow,

"--Necesito salirme inmediatamente. Debo hallarme en T-- mañana mismo.
--Se ve que usted ignora por completo lo que ocurre" (p. 67).
are an example of G. K. Chesterton's observation that "The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman . . . has lost everything but his reason."88 It is within this ambient of reason that the humor appears most stridently.
The knowledged old switchman, be he elf, apparition, or creation of the traveler's own mind, understands the crazy foibles of the railroad from first-hand experience. Thus the naivete of the traveler intensifies the reasonableness of everything the switchman says. Through the ignorant sane man's confrontation with an enlightened madman Arreola creates an atmosphere of orderly normality out of untenable absurdities.

Only by analyzing the humor of the story is the reader initiated into Arreola's veiled criticism of trains and society. The question that the old switchman gives in

answer to the stranger's inquiry as to whether or not the train has left, "¿Lleva usted poco tiempo en este país?" (p. 67), makes an obvious suggestion that in this country trains never arrive on time.

By the time the switchman suggests that the traveler take a room by the month instead of waiting for the train, the idea that the trains never arrive on time is intensified to a ludicrous degree.

Encompassed in the switchman's advice about the room is one of the more salient aspects of Mexican self-criticism. By the absence of faith in an operation that has been his life's work he is guilty of what Mexican journalists and writers have been complaining about since the revolution's end, "la falta de respeto por lo propio." Later Arreola does alleviate the switchman's lack of faith, however, by having him enjoin the traveler to believe in the train's ultimate arrival, thus rounding out ironically his observations concerning the universal fallacy of "Do as I say, not as I do."

In addition to Arreola's satirical reference to "la falta de respeto por lo propio" are eight specific prognoses of man's frailties. Although the totality transcends the nationalistic quality of their utterance, as chronological parts of the organic whole, they are undeniably Mexican in essence.
The issuance of false timetables, the sale of tickets for non-existing trains, and the use of chalk lines for absent rails point up a problem that was described by Martín Luis Guzmán as the tendency to rely on the indomitable quality of the Mexican spirit in the face of grave technological inadequacies:

La nuestra ... era una actitud genuinamente mexicana --en lo bueno y lo malo--. Porque el hijo de México, como el de toda nación que se sabe físicamente débil ante la naturaleza o ante el poder de otras naciones, compensa su debilidad refugiándose en una excesiva fe en la potencia del espíritu frente de la fuerza bruta. Lo cual, si malo de una manera, es bueno de otra: malo puesto que conduce a los fracasos y mata en la cuna todo impulso a construir sobre cimientos tangibles, seguros--hay algo más nuestro que la convicción de que todas las cosas pueden, en un momento preciso, surgir del seno mismo de la nada?--; y bueno, puesto que prepara las almas para las raras ocasiones ... en que el desequilibrio del poder físico sí puede remediar, en virtud del lado materialmente más débil. 89

The inability of the masses to behave in an orderly fashion when subjected to duress is present in the switchman's account of the riots, fights, and exchanges of insults which occur because of the train's late arrival.

The venality of officials and the willingness of the affluent to corrupt them appears in the account of the ineffective railway police forces.

The predilection for dishonest dealings on the part of public servants and persons engaged in private enterprise is attacked in the account of the apparatuses provided

to convince the travelers that the train is moving, the stage-set stations with their sawdust personnel, and the train's desertion of passengers in order to create colonies in remote areas.

Governmental practices involving futile, insignificant adjustments instead of the large-scale changes actually needed are satirized in the formation of schools for train etiquette and the provision of armor to prevent cracked ribs. Arreola's implication in the story is that the railway management supplies picayunish remedies instead of prompt, efficient train service that automatically would have eliminated their necessity.

The Mexican penchant for governmental intrigues and conspiracies is implied in the switchman's warning about the railroad spy system.

Perhaps the most profound complaint that Arreola lodges against the government can be deduced from the lines, "Se aspira a que un día se entreguen plenamente al azar, en manos de una empresa omnipotente, y que ya no les importe saber a dónde van ni de dónde vienen" (p. 72). In the implication of the people's suspension of will Arreola is touching on one of the recognized sore spots of Mexican politics: the failure of the government to produce the reforms that were an integral part of the motivation for the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The conclusion that the
discerning reader draws from the lines in the story is that Arreola accuses the Mexican government of wanting to be an entity unto itself rather than an organ to serve the people.

The final criticism, although a relatively incon­sequential facet of the satire, is in perfect keeping with the gleeful tone of the fantasy. The switchman's counsel, "consume la menor cantidad posible de alimentos ..." (p. 72), in order to arrive at the station, could easily be a reference to the hygienic difficulty of travel that apparently afflicts Mexican tourists with the same efficacy that it does Americans.

The universal applications of Arreola's whimsical social criticism are basic age-old faults of all mankind: greed, dishonesty, sloth, lack of discipline, and disease, whose myriad ramifications are neither limited to races nor countries.

The success of the "Guardagujas" rests upon the fact that Arreola has been able to express an insight concerning man's existence on this hectic planet and to dramatize it forcefully by reducing its immensity to the limited, yet inspired vehicle of an imaginary Mexican railroad.
In retrospect it becomes noteworthy that, taken as a whole, the stories selected for this study point up a strong resemblance in author intent between Arreola and a revealing line from Walt Whitman: "For it is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book, /Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it . . . /For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit, that which I hint."\textsuperscript{90}

The elements involved in Arreola's artful method of insinuation are many.

In practically all these stories he makes use of the device of the apparently-ingenuous final sentence. More often than not it completely cancels the superficial meaning that the reader has gained from reading all that precedes it in the story, and frequently serves to increase the enigma.

Paradox plays a large role in the confounding process about which Arreola himself cautions us in his title. Yates writes that "Arreola's target is man and his entanglements with logical absurdities; but the paradox inevitably

interests him more than the plight."

He skilfully manipulates irony, sarcasm, and satire over a base of obvious erudition and a rare sense of humor.

Through this multifaceted sense of humor Arreola deluges the reader with scholarly allusions, occasionally apocryphal, often merely recherché, whose sources come from many areas of human study, including the Bible. The false ones are used to create a mood or an impression vital to the success of the selection. The authentic ones add flavor to the reading or act as valuable keys in unlocking the fable. They also serve as titles, bases for the content, or witty asides that may trap the careless reader into false conclusions. At any rate the sum of their appearances is an impressive testimony of Arreola's broad and profound knowledge of the fields of human endeavor.

The pervading aura of the Confabulario is disillusionment, tempered with wit. The tragic flaw in many of Arreola's criticisms is the inability to lose sight of self, probably resulting from the throes of self-expression which he is subject to as an artist. In his critical material there is no moralizing. The predications must be intuited on the whole through inverse logic beginning with the satire. He expresses little hope for mankind. Although the mood that expresses this void is one of pessimism, he

91. Yates, p. 32.
has been described as "a curious type of satirist whose professed pessimism is more cultivated than convincing." However cultivated this mood, there are those instances when Arreola's narrators are convincingly paranoic. These stories tend to form a sharp contrast with the sardonic humor than prevails on the whole.

The criticisms of the author ferret out the weaknesses in many areas of life, but three main points of contention are woven and rewoven through the text: anti-Romanticism, anti-materialism, and opposition to flatulent bourgeois morality. His anti-Romantic position is not limited to literature, but entails a whole attitude of thought. In his anti-materialism he shows a desire for the development of the spiritual side of man. His presentation of this desire is not as direct nor as straightforward as that of earlier Latin American writers, like Rodó, who expressed in expository prose what Arreola merely threads through his stories. His criticism of bourgeois morality is less severe and often presents itself in a half-serious argument against the churches' insistence on marriage in those obvious cases of incompatibility.

It is possible, however, to include his case against bourgeois morality in the larger category of criticism of people in general. It then takes on an aspect of much

92. Yates, p. 32.
greater importance. The scope of censure in this area ranges from such mundane complaints as gossiping to the graver ones concerned with man's appalling inhumanity to man.

The dearth of human understanding is a problem which gives Arreola pause. He cites as contributing factors the varying degree of personal sensitivity and the inability to communicate. The absent elements of forgiveness and contrition intensify the problem.

The lack of human compassion he recognizes as an important flaw. Unlike the treatment in much of his criticisms, in this situation he does suggest a remedy. Rather than slathering on coats of sympathy at appropriate occasions he feels that active identification is a better way to evince compassion. Sympathy, while cathartic to the donor, is degrading to the recipient, according to Arreola.

In an examination of many of the attitudes of the Confabulario, added to the Biblical incidents and quotations, the thought-provoking non-sequiturs in the plots, and allusions to people who exhibit tendencies in this area, it becomes apparent that Arreola has some affinity for religious feeling. In the Confabulario it is impossible to spell out in lucid terms what is fairly obvious in others of his works such as the Varia invención. It is entirely
possible that in the Confabulario he is merely capitalizing on what is an inherent part of Mexican culture and has no personal inclinations in this direction.

Marriage is a topic about which Arreola has much to say. His method of expression has a certain uniformity in that the marriages he chooses to delineate are always unhappy ones. In the Confabulario they are consistently plagued by the woman's infidelity, the man's suspicion and jealousy, and both partners' inability to convey empathy and tenderness, or to show consideration. In general he approves of romantic love, but his prognosis is for a short duration. Although he makes an open affirmation of the sexes' need for each other, he implies that any satisfaction brought about by marriage will not be emotional. Some of his more trenchant ideas on the subject include the following: marriage is a mill which slowly grinds people to dust; marriage is the digestion of a small fish, the man, by a whale, the woman; marriage is an exercise for neurotics, a pastime for masochists; marriage is a shipwreck in which the man is left a castaway. Apart from his colorful vilification of marriage he points out that one of the biggest drawbacks to the union is the loss of individuality it causes.

In his general lambasting of marriage as an institution Arreola enumerates specific shortcomings of
men and women, although he is less expansive about the former group. In his attack on the perversities of women, he assails them as domineering, unfaithful, remorseless, and selfish. They delight in making a man feel awkward. They try to ration his whisky, tobacco, and rich food. They deny him sex and consort with their lovers under his very nose. They are heartless and indestructible. Arreola does give them credit, however, for evincing qualities that men demonstrate to a lesser degree: realizing the importance of love and relying on their emotions.

The barrage against men is equally uncomplimentary. A married man, according to Arreola, is essentially a weakling. Although he may begin as a vigorous, aggressive male being, the change is inevitable. To an extent, he is the author of his own undoing. His biggest mistake is his tendency to regard women as little more than playthings and helpmeets. When the full impact of the wife-image dawns upon the woman she initiates a full-scale struggle for survival. The husband, oblivious to his wife's motive, passively relinquishes the scepter of rule and entertains long brooding thoughts about self-annihilation.

The chronology of the enumeration of faults is not a sequential development within the work, but rather an order which suggests itself by the content of the internal evidence.
As is in keeping with Arreola's attenuated style, characterizations as such are almost non-existent. He does favor two distinct types of female characters: the feminist and the machinatar. He provides the feminist a more sympathetic treatment: she is given to unselfish actions and her domination is to a lesser degree than that of the machinatar.

Second in importance to the ideas developed about people are those that concern the creative artiste. Arreola's stories of this theme name the tensions which creative people find troublesome: determination, ambition, fear of failure, small production, and humiliation over being relegated to second place by a rival. Also included in the stories of this theme are some rather strong observations about the literary or artistic pretentiousness of people who assume knowledge they do not actually possess. He decries their lack of taste and laments their want of respect for truly talented people. He recognizes that while beauty is not absolute, the criteria to judge it fairly must come from the knowledgeable and not the uninitiated.

Included in this group of stories is a condemnation of Romanticism and Mexican literature. He wishes that integrity might prevail, and although he does not prescribe the steps, the implication exists that eliminating romantic elements would effect part of the cure.
In the general tenor of Arreola's attitudes in the Confabulario are two elements common to Existentialist philosophy and writing: anguish and absurdity. Although they appear throughout the work, they are more apparent in the selections dealing with marriage and science.

Although the view that Arreola has of science in general is undeniably contemporary, it is traditionally anti-positivistic to the extent that he prefers science restricted to its true role, away from the metaphysical.

Congruent with Arreola's thematic material treated in this study is his medium of presentation: more real perhaps than realism, Arreola's fantasy is one bent on capturing truth. As exaggeration in satire gives truth a greater dimension, not so much because it adds to the quantity of truth itself, but rather because itheightens our grasp of it. Thus it is that fantasy often puts reality into sharper focus.

Arreola's technique of magical-realism, as epitomized in "El guardaguajos," creates a situation that can be manipulated for whatever truth or truths he wants to convey. Keeping the framework of normality he empties the situation of natural, real-life details and replaces them with ludicrous, incredible, preposterous imaginings for an artful purpose. Like a leitmotiv that keeps recurring unrecognised in all the melody instruments of an orchestra, Arreola's
chosen reality is affirmed and reaffirmed throughout the fantasy. Just as a hard lesson inductively learned stands out in sharp relief against a maze of previous confusion, Arreola's subliminal technique distills life with a pungency, severity, and audacity hitherto rare in Mexican prose.
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