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Charles W. Scheel

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APUNTES POSTMODERNOS NOTES

MANUEL RAMÓN DE ZAYAS

SANGRE Y ARENAS: MACHISMO, HOMOSEXUALIDAD Y SUBVERSION

VICTOR FOWLER CALZADA

ARENAS: HOMOEROTISMO Y CRITICA DE LA CULTURA

CHARLES W. SCHEEL

OF BULLETS AND SUSPENSION POINTS IN REINALDO ARENAS'S
OLD ROSA AND ARTURO THE BRIGHTEST STAR

CARLOS VICTORIA

LA CATARATA

TRADUCIR A ARENAS:

Andrew Hurley - Liliane Hasson -

Klaus Laabs - Monika López

FRANCISCO SOTO

EL COLOR DEL VERANO: INNOVACIONES TEMÁTICAS Y
APORTACIONES IDEOLÓGICAS A LA NOVELA DEL DICTADOR

RITA MOLINERO

DE ASALTOS, FURIAS Y FALOS: EN DONDE ARENAS
DESCUBRE "OTRO" DE LOS MUNDOS POSIBLES



NUMERO MONOGRAFICO
DEDICADO A LA LECTURA
DEL TEXTO DE REINALDO
ARENAS Y SU TEMATICA.

Of Bullets and
Suspension Points
in Reinaldo Arenas's
Old Rosa
and
Arturo
THE BRIGHTEST STAR

For the Spanish or the French reader of Reinaldo Arenas's works, the English language volume entitled *Old Rosa*¹ comes as a surprise. It unites, under the subtitle "A Novel in Two Stories" (*Old Rosa* and *The Brightest Star*), two texts put into English by two different translators, which have been published -not only separately- but also under distinct genre headings in the original Spanish: *La Vieja Rosa* as a short story (a rather long one: 40 pages)² and *Arturo, la estrella más brillante* as a novel (a very short one: only 53 pages)³.

Along with the change of generic label, it may be noticed that Arturo's name also disappeared from the subtitle of the publication at hand: the original Spanish title of the novel, *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*, is reduced here to the phrase *The Brightest Star*. Thus, it is not only its status as an independent novel that the second story in the English edition loses, but also the name of its hero in the title: exit Arturo... Of course, Arturo's loss somehow becomes Rosa's gain, since her name now heads a novel rather than a mere short story.

Obviously, there were enough reasons in 1989 to prompt these editorial choices and it may be assumed that the author had -if not approved- at least accepted them. But from a scholarly point of view, the result is at the least intriguing and perhaps questionable: are there good literary reasons to consider that these two stories, written respectively in 1966 and 1971, form a novel, as it is now claimed? Also, is *Old Rosa* a satisfying title for the combination of both texts?

THE POINTS OF CONGRUENCE IN THE STORIES, AND THEIR LIMITS

As it happens, the description on the volume's dust-jacket furnishes some indications as to why these works were gathered in a single publication. It starts thus: "The two stories of this terrifying and beautiful novel converge on a single charged point in the lives of a Cuban mother and son." Arturo is, indeed, Rosa's third and last child. What the mysterious "single charged point" is remains untold, but a brief summary of

Charles W. Scheel teaches Literature at the University of Metz, France. He is the author of the soon to be published *Magical versus Marvelous Realism as Narrative Modes in French Fiction*. He wrote this article for *Postmodern Notes*.

each story follows: Rosa's starts with her marriage, her becoming a mother and gradually the proud and shrewd head of a prosperous farm, before her world crumbles in despair when her eldest son joins Castro's rebels and she then finds her youngest son, "Arturo, her favorite, her 'brightest star,' in bed with another boy." The second story, we are told, shows Arturo imprisoned in one of Castro's brutal camps for homosexuals, where he writes with "passion and soaring poetry" on any scrap of paper he can find, in order to "preserve a dream of beauty and love." But the wonderful creations of his imagination "always revolve, and dissolve, around the image of Old Rosa, their fateful confrontation, the house in flames, the charred body of his mother, the one who loved him enough to kill him."

Such a presentation clearly emphasizes the passionate and tragic mother-and-son relationship between the respective protagonists of each story. It has the double advantage -for the editor- of promoting a rather sensational type of plot (which, presumably, might appeal to a broad public) and of justifying the "novel" label for the narratives thus united. Unfortunately, this presentation is not only inaccurate but constitutes a biased and very reductive reading of both texts.

To begin with, and contrary to what the last sentence quoted above suggests, Old Rosa didn't kill her son, but only attempted to do so. The miss-quotation refers to a passage in Arturo's narrative in which he realizes, long after his mother's funeral, that she was "the only person who had ever loved him, loved him so much that *she would have killed him had it not been* for an error in calculation and the decrepitude of the firearm" (56).

This episode, in which Old Rosa tried to shoot her son, may indeed be considered -almost literally- as "the single charged point" of convergence between their stories. Arturo (and his friend) managed to escape by jumping through the window, but this last image of his mother, enraged and determined-to-kill-him, haunts the son from then on. It also recurs at the very end of his story, shortly before being shot (for good) in a desertion attempt:

Arturo discovered himself running toward a squad of soldiers advancing slowly toward him with rifles at their chins, [...] he saw with irrefutable, inarguable clarity that the man at the procession's head was not one of the camp's many first or second lieutenants, [...] but his mother, Old Rosa, boiling mad, in uniform, gun in hand, screaming at him, Faggot, faggot, faggot, you won't get away this time. (103)

Other strong images from the first part of the book also recur in the second. Thus the horrible picture of Old Rosa's charred body in the ruins of her house, which Arturo found on the very night after the shotgun episode: totally discouraged and maddened by the "treason" of her last and favorite child, Rosa had set the farm ablaze. But when it is said on the dust-jacket that, in Arturo's poetry, "we can see the magnificent castles, the lush hanging gardens, the crystal palaces of his imagination -which always revolve, and dissolve, around the image of Old Rosa, their fateful confrontation, the house in flames, the charred body of his mother," the exaggeration is patent because there are all kinds of other images or hard facts which upset Arturo's flights into fantasy and, as shall be seen, the images of his mother are not as victorious as it is put here.

Another of those recurrent pictures in both stories is the one of Old Rosa pointing out the most brilliant star in the sky to her young son, on a late evening ride through the estate:

... Arturo listening to his mother talk, talk to him, to nobody, to the stars, or about the stars, yes about the position of the stars, [...] and of all of them the brightest one is that one, she was saying, this tall figure whose silhouette by now was one with the horse, and she pointed to the lucifer-looking spark sputtering just over the hill-tops" ... (63-64)

This episode seems to lead to a confusion which is probably at the origin of the editorial choices discussed here. Indeed, the presentation on the book's dust-jacket equates (in a sentence already quoted), the phrases "Rosa's youngest son, Arturo, her favorite, her 'brightest star'." But it is not Rosa who considers Arturo "her brightest star." That association is made by Arturo himself (in the second part of the book):

... but it was only much later [...] that, as he was leafing out of simple curiosity through a volume titled *Astrology for the Fairer Sex*, Arturo discovered, with sad chagrin, that that star, the evening star, his mother called it, [...] was called, so the book said, Arcturus - Arcturo, Arturo, oh, Arturo, everything is so absurd, he thought furiously, and he put the book back on the shelf (64-65).

It is quite clear from the above quotation, that Arturo sees nothing positive in the chance fact that he and the star bear the same name. As it happens, around that time, Arturo was already plagued by guilty visions of his mother, whenever he was tempted to initiate a furtive homosexual move:

and she, the protector figure, that loved and loving figure [...] saying, Look, and at crowded, stinking, shrill bus stops [...] with an eye always on the crotches, [...] knowing that even when one of those agreed, accepted, nothing was going to change [...], no happiness or repose was he going to find, even there, there too, that imposing, imperative figure sprang up, pointing at the sky, and on sidewalks, [...] crawling with police or official blackmailers, informers, stool pigeons, *agents provocateurs*, even there too, she stood [...] (64)

This passage shows how strongly ambivalent Arturo's feelings for his dead mother are: "the only figure honestly and truly venerable" is associated, at the same time, with sordid police informers, and the memory of her "pointing, maybe to mock him, [...] to assert herself, pointing to the brightest star (64)" is not pleasant but disturbing.

Later on, in the forced-labor camp for homosexuals which constitutes the main setting of Arturo's story, the association *Arturo, the brightest star* acquires an ironic ring as Arturo "who always wore the shortest skirts now, who made himself up the most outrageously (56)" found himself elevated to the throne by acclamation "when the Queen of the captive Queers was selected amidst a din of shrieks and cries and a sea of burlap skirts (69)." It is these pathetic and derogatory self-references which are implied -partly- in the story's title *Arturo, The Brightest Star*, and not a term of endearment that Old Rosa would have used with her son, as it is suggested on the dust-jacket.

From the above remarks, it should be clear that the two stories are, indeed, linked by an unusually passionate and ambivalent mother-and-son relationship. But it is quite arguable that this relationship is the most important aspect of any of those texts, even if Rosa's narrative develops, to a large extent, around the castrating-mother theme (which, incidentally, permeates much of Arenas's work, whether fictional or autobiographical), starting with her reluctance and then refusal to have sexual intercourse with her husband (who eventually hangs himself in despair), and ending with her attempt to kill Arturo because she is not willing to accept his sexual preferences. All major aspects of Rosa's life, such as her finding refuge in hard work or her religious bigotry, are presented as consequences of her refusal of sexuality. Other aspects of the religious theme are hubris (Rosa tends to address "God" in rather commanding terms) and the presence of an angelic figure ("a mocking, cackling, devilish, radiant winged youth, laughing at her with its hand placed over *that accursed region* (42)," with whom she battles and dies in the final, apocalyptic scene:

[...] the angel too was burning. Yet, for a moment, they remained motionless. Then the fire began to consume the two figures, which no longer were distinguishable. (43)

Arturo's story also boasts the presence of an ambivalent angelic figure. In this case, the relationship between angel and protagonist is far more intricate, as shall be seen further, but some aspects are comparable. Just like Rosa's constant and bigoted cult of Saints and Virgins does not prevent her from being dispossessed, cruelly disappointed by her children's lack of gratitude for her efforts, and mocked by an angelic figure, Arturo's heroic attempts to liberate himself from the labor camp's stifling universe through flights into an imaginary esthetic realm and literary creation are, in the end, mocked and thwarted by the very figure, the "Divine Youth," to whom those ceaseless efforts had been dedicated.

Thus, from the point of view of action, both Arturo and his mother are tragically affected by the Revolution. Rosa goes mad mostly because she is dispossessed of the property she had spent a lifetime working for (ironically it is Armando, her eldest son, who forces her to sign her farm over to a cooperative).

Arturo too dies in a fit of madness, provoked by his being deprived of freedom and forced to labor for a State that would not allow him to live as a homosexual. Since he had already been nearly killed by his own mother for the same reason, it may well be said that he is doubly cursed. But whereas indomitable Rosa had long forced the respect of all the people in and around her ever-growing farm, Arturo has been subjected, first, to routine humiliations as a gay civilian in a policed and macho society, and then to the vilest treatments during his whole stay at the prisoners camp, having to crawl like a dog or to parody himself as a "queen" in order to merely survive. And while Rosa dies -madly but also grandly- along with her farm, Arturo suffers the ignominious death of a tracked-down animal or a coward: shot in the back during a desperate attempt to run away. Altogether, he cuts a figure as pathetic and sub-human as his mother's seems admirable and super-human: if Old Rosa qualifies, existentially, as a heroine, her son makes for an anti-hero.

Such are some of the more obvious points of congruence between the two stories, which may explain why they were put together in a single novel under the title *Old Rosa*, a figure undoubtedly more awesome and perhaps more conventionally admirable as a protagonist than Arturo. In the part devoted to Arturo's story though, there appears the essential and redeeming dimension of creative writing, as the main theme and as an illustration of a new writing mode. It is the latter aspects that show, under potentially misleading formal similarities, the deepest differences between the two parts of the "novel."

**DECEIVING STRUCTURAL AND
STYLISTIC SIMILARITIES, AND
QUITE DISTINCT THEMES**

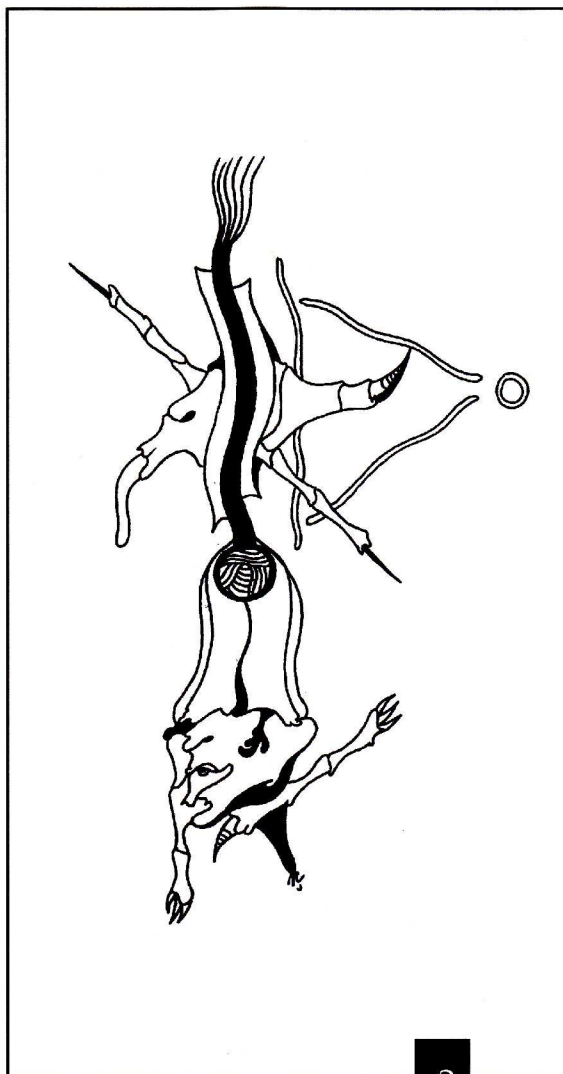
Merely leafing through the book reveals some common formal aspects. The most striking one is that both stories form a single paragraph each (respectively 40 and 53 pages long): there are no subdivisions, except for the narrow blanks created by occasional suspension points.

From a broad structural point of view, the two sections are also fairly similar, inasmuch as they display a circular development: Rosa's

story starts with her final situation ("In the end she went out to the yard, almost enveloped in flames"...), and proceeds then through a series of flashbacks of memorable moments till it reaches the tragic ending (already quoted) again. Arturo's narrative also starts with an image that reappears in the very last sentence:

"I have seen a land of regal elephants, far, far away," he had written some years ago, not many really, when he was still convinced that a cluster of signs, a cadence of images perfectly described -words- might save him . . . (49)

... and it was not until Arturo reached the monumental row of stately, regal elephants that the bullets struck him down at last. (103-104).



The above lines show quite clearly how the opening sentence prophesizes the tragic end: whatever words Arturo had been able to put to paper did not stop him from being shot by the guards. But the precious visions he had put into words did keep him from seeing the sordid real till the last moment: what he reached, when dying, was the paradise of his own creation. This main theme of creative writing is totally absent from Old Rosa's story, in which the narrator actually takes the trouble to distance his use of images from the protagonist's:

[Rosa's] face, shrouded in a reddish halo,
looked at times like the face of a little girl
lost in the middle of one of those storms that
only occur in hallucinatory illustrations accompa-
nying stories of witches and other phantasmago-
rias, which she had never read. (3)

So there are indeed some formal and structural similarities between the two texts. But these are outweighed by other differences of a stylistic, thematic and narratological nature. Looking a bit closer at these two long chunks of text, it appears that their respective combinations of punctuation and narrative stance are quite different. The purpose of suspension points, for example, varies strikingly from one story to the other.

In *Old Rosa*, they occur nine times and indicate either a large gap in the chronology of events narrated (9, 11, 12, 15, 28) and thus function as a paragraph or a chapter division in conventional fiction style, or -in keeping with convention- an unfinished thought or utterance (24, 32, 37, 39). Otherwise, and except for the fact that no quotation marks or tabs are used to set off direct-speech utterances, Rosa's story can be considered, from the formal point of view, as a rather conventional third-person narrative, with an alternation of internally focalized⁴ passages (the latter tie into the narrative mode of magical realism,⁵ especially those scenes where Rosa sees or perceives the angel) and externally or non-focalized ones, of a quite realistic nature (with references to Castro's revolution and other social or cultural Cuban facts).

Arturo's story is structured quite differently and is altogether a more difficult text to read. To start with, it is actually composed of a single (conventional) sentence, since the final period is the only period in all of the 53 pages.

Sentence-like semantic units (often quite long; up to two pages) are separated by semi-colons or suspension points which are not followed by a capitalized letter for the first word. Such an unusual device may seem gratuitous, since the reader soon identifies the semi-colons or suspension points with a period. But still, he/she can never enjoy the moment of rest and the convenience that a period usually allows in conventional writing. This simple device symbolizes, rather effectively, Arturo's predicament in the forced-labor camp which never affords him a minute's peace, where he can never be himself or let down his defenses. Only the final volley of bullets will grant him rest, and only then does a period close the narrative and put an end to the reader's predicament...

Part of the difficulty in reading Arturo's story, which also hinges on its particular use of suspension points, is of a narratological nature. Contrary to what happens in *Old Rosa*, the many suspension points (95) in *The Brightest Star* do not indicate a gap in the chronology of events told, but a change in the protagonist's line of thoughts, feelings and visions or an interruption (often imposed from the outside) of the act of writing. The interesting aspect is that it is often difficult to determine whether these changes and interruptions affect the protagonist or the author/narrator because, though the story is told in the third person, the focalization on/by Arturo is as unrelentingly internal as a fictional narrative mode will allow (in fact, the discourse often lapses into a plural first person which includes the protagonist and the narrator, if not the author and all Cubans). The theme of the text is literary creation at all costs, and the stylistic devices are geared to bring these costs home to the reader. Thus, for instance, the reader ploughs through six dense pages before the pronoun "he" which refers to the protagonist (and is not quite the other "he" in italics) becomes "Arturo:"

[...] it looked like this time, today, he had chosen the right spot, he'd actually managed to escape, to slip away without their seeing him, had gotten past the guard and everyone else, gotten away from the camp and found a place and made a nest [...] far away and all alone, independent, or alone at least till he, the exquisite one, arrived [...]; yes, it looked like he'd chosen his site well,

and at least for the time being there was no way for them, or the others, or the rest, either [...], no way for any of them to come and bother him, so that he actually had time, so much time that had he wanted to, Arturo could probably have afforded himself the biblical luxury of a rest before going on with his magnificent creation ... (53)

The above passage illustrates well the story's ornate and meandering style, while also touching upon some core thematic aspects. The "yes" (a direct speech utterance) shows, even more evidently, how the narrator's discourse (formally in the third person) is focalized internally by the protagonist: it is constantly introspective, a non-stop stream of consciousness in which Arturo is forever fending off the brutal intrusions of the outside, the dreadful reality of the concentration camp, in order to pursue his vocation: creating the fantasy world where "he," the "Divine Youth," some Prince Charming, will settle some day. Also remarkable is the parallel with the biblical creation of the world, suggestive of hubris.

Repeatedly, the extreme closeness between the narrator's discourse and the protagonist psyche (it should be noted that the very first word of the story is a quoted "I" which stands for the protagonist as a writer, not as Old Rosa's son) is shadowed -or echoed- by a striking play on the couple of pronouns "he and he." This aspect ties into the core theme and into the main structural device of the narrative; it is also reflected in the title, as we shall see.

From the very first page, the "he" (who becomes Arturo) is presented as the creator of images and ideas, whose "efforts only now, really, at last, were beginning to take on a supreme coherence, were tending toward a perfect, orderly, rare, grand, and grandiose conclusion" (49). This perfect "great work" was made for "him" and against the perpetual influence, hindrance or opposition of "they, the others, the rest, all of them" (50). The latter enumeration refers, in that order, to the other imprisoned "fags," the soldiers who keep them, the officers above those in the camp, the high officers close to Castro (the Alfa Romeo-ed clique), and the Cuban population at large. All of these constitute the various rings of Arturo's personal Inferno, in which managing to write is truly heroic but also the only possible form of grace, as he understood in a flash:

and then, just before dawn, he collapsed virtually exhausted on his bunk [...] and suddenly he jumped up and began groping through the things Rosa [his sister] had brought him, because that very night he decided that to save himself he had to start writing now, and so he started writing [...] because he was going to fight, [...] to rebel, [...] to testify to the horrors (71-72)

Even before reporting Arturo's decision to actually put pen to paper, the narrative had brought up, early on, the issue of his special call, his genius as a visionary, which not only separated him from the others, but also split him in two:

in this rarefied space he went up, and up and up, guided, liberated, by the impulses of his genius, his *genie*, which in his eyes had taken on such dimensions, such virtuosity, that it was as though it had declared its independence from the rest of his being [...]; as though someone -he himself yet not he- were performing, playing some inconceivable role [...], and now at last he was seeing himself bestow those wonders on the world, he was seeing *him* . . . (50)

The "inconceivable role" is obviously the one of poet, but it is interesting to see, above, how the initial internal split between the person Arturo and the would-be poet ("he was seeing himself") becomes more distant in the formula "he was seeing *him*." This objectification of a "he" which becomes "the other *he*" (cf. p.57) is developed steadily in the text and constitutes, I believe, its major structural principle, in which narratological, psychological (of a schizophrenic nature this time) and symbolical aspects are tied up together. The "he" is an idealized form of Arturo himself, projected ahead of himself (at varying distances): it is at the same time the visionary poet, the writer, Arturo's longed-for ideal lover, the Prince Charming or Divine Youth who would appear and live in the marvelous world built for him in Arturo's fantasy and/or written works. In the frenzy of writing, all these images can fuse in Arturo's confused mind:

as the new year went on there was a change in him, which though perceived by hardly anyone in camp, much less the soldiers, was decisive: one day when he got up Arturo discovered that he had suddenly become handsome [...]; and he was handsome,

every day more handsome, he told himself as he touched his body, [...] and imagined, saw, his slender supple perfect figure, so different from his old skinny clumsy frame- and them, how was it possible that they hadn't noticed? [...] how could they be so dishonest, so petty, that seeing it, they wouldn't recognize it [...] and praise the patent fact that] this here-and-now Arturo was one of the most perfect creatures in the universe (75-76)

It is this kind of schizophrenic attitude⁶ which is reflected in the text's complex narrative stance that mingles Arturo's inner and outer worlds, the Arturo who experiences life, the person he wishes to be and the person who writes about this dual perception. And it is this core thematic and structural aspect which is also reflected in the apposition of names in the title. There is *Arturo AND/OR The Brightest Star*, the latter being, alternatively and simultaneously, the ideal Arturo/Divine Youth, the perfect poet, the writer, and the trashiest "Queen" of the camp shows, as seen earlier.

Arturo's story develops in a word flow that is constantly trying to find the right words that may block out reality or transform it into something acceptable, something livable. Hence the striking use of repetitions, appositions, lists of synonyms and rare words, bracketed thoughts and comments. All these elements, combined with the stylistic choice consisting in the refusal of breaking up the narrative in self-sufficient sentences or paragraphs, make for an amazingly -suffocatingly-rich text. The tension generated by the protagonist's physical situation inside the sordid prisoners camp (the forced slave-labor in the sugarcane fields, the persecutions by the army guards and the vexations inflicted by envious convicts who would not tolerate any escape even into a private world) is masterfully amplified by the particular use of syntax and punctuation.

Also, far from falling into pathos -an easy enough trap, given the circumstances described- Arenas manages to work into this web of horrors, a series of literary gems. Contrary to what the dust jacket says, Arturo's memories of the magical discovery of the beauty of music, his representations of his fantasy castle, his sudden visions of the beautiful naked youth always manage -till the very

end, when the bullets strike him- to crowd out the descriptions of the dusty and burning canefields, of the endless vexations of camp-life, of the recurrent, threatening images of his stern and disapproving mother, of the memories of the random persecutions that led to his arrest and internment on the grounds of social deviancy and counter-revolutionary behavior.

Whereas Old Rosa's story culminated in a frenzy of destruction, Arturo's fall is preceded by a long, crescendo movement of construction, as hectic as his growing compulsion to escape:

and he created too, fabulous realms, unimaginable realms rife with magical flowers that transformed themselves into instruments of pleasure [...], the divine youth appeared to him, and the music commanded, ordered, impelled him to go on with his magnificent construction [...], his was a delirium of creation, he was spell-bound, entranced with the pleasure of making, his was the power to do all, [...] the power to suddenly step back from, cast off, rise above tradition, [...] the power to break, once and for all, with that shadowed and shadowy, stooped, poor, scared, tired, enslaved figure which he had been [...] and to be free, God, to create the dreamt-of, yearned-for universe, his universe . . . (96-97)

The above quoted lines make particularly explicit the soaring tribute to literary creation that *Arturo, The Brightest Star* constitutes. The fact that this narrative is dedicated to Reinaldo's friend Nelson Rodríguez Leyva ("For Nelson, in the air"),⁷ shot by firing squad in 1971 for attempting to hijack a plane in order to leave Cuba, after having spent three years in a concentration camp for homosexuals, adds poignancy to the text. It is even more poignant -and ironically so- that Reinaldo himself was to know, only a few years after writing this text, exactly those inhuman prison conditions which he described so well.⁸

One should remember, of course, that Arturo in *The Brightest Star* is neither Nelson nor Reinaldo, but a fictional character whose personality, tastes, and social predicament are rather comparable to those of the two gay Cuban writers just mentioned. Even while keeping this distinction in mind, it seems quite obvious that the motivations that led Reinaldo to write that book are rather dif-

ferent from those that brought forth the story of *Old Rosa*. In any case, the above analysis, no matter how sketchy, should have shown that apart from some superficial similarities in their formal aspects and from the fact that the protagonists Rosa and Arturo happen to be a mother and son, the texts in which they appear are quite different, both in terms of narrative technique and of literary scope.

There is no doubt that *Old Rosa* constitutes a powerful short story centered on a character larger than life, whose unusual and tragic destiny is narrated in a straightforward style, albeit some slight departures from conventional punctuation and a perceptible impact of Freudian psychoanalytical theory around the castration paranoia. *Arturo, The Brightest Star*, on the other hand, written some five years later under the auspices of a particular event (the execution of a friend, a fellow writer and homosexual), takes on an entirely different dimension, even though the text is not significantly longer. The departures from stylistic convention are bolder, the vocabulary much richer, the syntax and narrative stance far more complex, the theme more essential (in the double sense of being much closer to the creative writing act itself and to the author's own existential predicament). The mother-and-son relationship is only a small facet of this text which, in its portrayal of a schizophrenic psyche, confronts the reader head-on with a daring account of the appalling situation of homosexuals and/or dissident writers in Cuba, underlines with every sentence the necessity of sexual and political freedom, and illustrates in a brilliant and deeply-moving poetic prose the victory of literary creation over brutal repression. In Arturo's narrative we find lines which express Reinaldo Arenas's most personal credo as a writer:

against that unbearable truth, the unbearable reality, the other reality, our reality, he thought, the only weapon is the creation of a new reality, a new present to eliminate this present present, for it cannot be done with anecdotes or stories [...] and so what you have to do is overlay the image of what you're suffering with the image, the real image, of what you most desire, but not the image either, the true reality, so true you can taste it . . . (76-77)

Whether or not *Arturo, The Brightest Star* constitutes more of a novel per se than *Old Rosa* may perhaps be argued, notwithstanding the fact that it has been published in Spanish and French under that label. To me, its permanent flow of rhythmically cascading words and images, its passionate lyricism and its baroque mix of the most vulgar and the most refined languages, make it a wonderful prose poem, a rare literary gem lovingly crafted by one poet for the memory of a kinsman. Be that as it may, in the light of the above study, it seems difficult to understand why such an outstanding work should be appended to the short story *Old Rosa* and become a part of a "novel" under so reductive a title. If there were pressing editorial reasons to do so, a literary analysis hardly justifies giving *Old Rosa* such a clearly symbolic victory over Arturo. Whereas Rosa had not succeeded in eliminating Arturo with bullets, this edition has managed to remove his name from both the title and the subtitle of his story. Was that truly Reinaldo's intention?

Charles W. Scheel,

Université de Metz, Summer of 1995.

Notes.

1. Translated by Ann Tashi Slater (first story) and Andrew Hurley (second story), Grove Press, New York, 1989.
2. Published in Spanish in the collection of short stories entitled *Termina el desfile*, Plaza y Janès Editores, S.A., Barcelona, 1981. French transl. by Aline Schulman: *Fin de défilé*, Presses de la Renaissance, Paris, 1988.
3. Published in Spanish as: *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*, Montesinos Ed., Barcelona, 1984, and in French as: *Arturo, l'étoile la plus brillante*, transl. Didier Coste, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1985.
4. I am referring to Gérard Genette's distinctions in narrative voice and stance, as presented in *Figures III*, Seuil, Paris, 1972.
5. As defined by Amaryll Chanady in *Magical Realism and the Fantastic - Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*, Garland Publ., New York & London, 1985. See also Charles W. Scheel: "Magical Versus Marvelous Realism As Narrative Modes in French Fiction," PhD dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1991.
6. It may be noted too that this passage constitutes an inverted pastiche of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, in which Gregor Samsa awakes one morning to find himself changed into an ugly vermin...
7. See author's note, p.105-106.
8. Cf. Reinaldo Arenas's autobiography, *Before Night Falls*, transl. by Dolores M. Koch, Viking Penguin, USA, 1993.