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Linda M. Willem
Butler University, lwillem@butler.edu

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The Music of Borgesian Destiny in Saura's *El Sur*

Linda M. Willem

Carlos Saura's *El Sur* was aired on Spanish television in 1993 as part of a series of six programmes based on selected short stories by Jorge Luis Borges. The entire set of these hour-long productions has recently been released on video by the Films for the Humanities, thereby granting easy availability to what thus far has been one of Saura's most difficult to acquire, and consequently least known, films. Described in its opening credits as an 'adaptación libre', Saura's *El Sur* differs considerably from Borges' short story of the same name. This is not surprising given Saura's long-standing refusal to serve as what he calls a mere 'ilustrador' of an already written text.[1] A self-proclaimed auteur, Saura places his own personal stamp on all of his films, recasting original material to conform to his own vision of what it should be. Indeed, in a 1996 interview with Antonio Castro, Saura stated that his *El Sur* had been designed 'para hacer un ensayo sobre Borges a través de un personaje interpuesto', explaining that 'a veces, he querido hacer una especie de ensayos cinematogra´ficos sobre un determinado personaje. Por ejemplo Lope de Aguirre, San Juan de la Cruz, Borges, Goya'. For each of his cinematic essays Saura extensively researches his subject's life, but the resulting film does not take the form of a biography. Rather, as Saura goes on to say, 'siempre es, más que un ensayo de toda su vida, un fragmento de su vida, que a mí me parece esencial, y que de algún modo explica su vida'.[2] For *El Dorado* it is Lope de Aguirre's expedition to Peru, for *La noche oscura* it is San Juan de la Cruz's nine months of imprisonment in a convent in Toledo, for *Goya en Burdeos* it is the artist's period of exile in France, and for Saura's latest cinematic essay, *Buñuel y la mesa del rey Salomón*, it is the friendship forged between Buñuel, Dalí and Lorca as university students.

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[1] Valeria Ciompi, '*Antonieta*, Carlos Saura entre el presente y el pasado', *Papeles de Cine Casablanca*, 21 (1982), 31–37 (p. 33); reprinted in translation as '*Antonieta*, Carlos Saura between the Past and the Present', in *Carlos Saura Interviews*, ed. Linda M. Willem (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2003),72–83 (p. 74).

[2] Antonio Castro, 'Entrevista: Carlos Saura', Dirigido Por, 249 (1996), 52–67 (pp. 67, 64–65); reprinted in translation as 'Interview: Carlos Saura', in *Carlos Saura Interviews*, ed. Willem, 115–43 (pp. 142, 137–38).

In the case of *El Sur*, Saura was provided with his fragment of Borges' life when he was asked to adapt what is considered to be the Argentine writer's most autobiographical short story. The protagonist of that literary source, Juan Dahlmann, undergoes an ordeal similar to the one that Borges himself had endured when he sustained a head injury due to an accident in 1938, underwent surgery, and nearly died of septicaemia. The short story further links Juan Dahlmann with his creator through similarities in their type of employment and ethnic heritage. For his cinematic characterization of Juan Dahlmann, Saura built on this existing duality by incorporating an element from Borges' biography—the death of his father just prior to this accident—which is not present in the short story. By creating this additional similarity through the concept of the father, Saura was able to rework the original story's themes of destiny and ancestry in a way that paralleled the father/son relationship in Borges' life. During Borges' youth, his father had turned his hand to writing, but with little success.[3] However, his failed attempts to establish a literary career for himself were ultimately realized through his son's own accomplishments as an author. In an analogous fashion, Juan Dahlmann's father in Saura's film had failed to accept the challenge to a knife fight, so Juan travels back in time to accept it. In both cases, the son fulfills the destiny of the father. But Saura's protagonist goes one step further. He does so not just for his father, but as his father. Furthermore, during Juan's transformation into his father, the identification of Juan Dahlmann with Borges that is merely implicit in the short story is made explicit in the film through his reading, reciting and writing of various texts by Borges. 'Siempre me ha influenciado Borges, casi desde que empecé a hacer cine', Saura has acknowledged, and he frequently cites Borges' labyrinthine games of time and identity as being at the core of that influence.[4] By foregrounding Borges' presence in this 'adaptación libre', Saura has created a cinematic essay that not only pays homage to his literary master, but also highlights those aspects of Borges' style that he most admires.

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[3] Jorge Guillermo Borges' sole novel, *El Caudillo*, was published at his own expense in 1921.

[4] Paula Ponga, 'El Tango según Saura', *Fotogramas*, 1859 (1998), 94–96 (p. 96); reprinted in translation as 'Tango According to Saura', in *Carlos Saura Interviews*, ed. Willem, 150–55 (p. 153). For additional information concerning Borges' influence on Saura, see Agustín Sánchez Vidal, *Retrato de Carlos Saura* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 1994), 90; Alberto Sánchez, *Carlos Saura* (Huesca: Festival de Cine de Huesca, 1991), 153; and *Charlando con Cervantes: Carlos Saura*, El Instituto Cervantes & CUNY-TV-75, 1995.

To establish the multiplicity of identities for his protagonist, Saura took advantage of a component of cinematic narration which is not available to its literary counterpart: music. 'La literatura es maravillosa', Saura has stated, 'pero lo que no se puede contar dentro de la literatura es esta mezcla de ruidos, de música, con imágenes. Allí la literatura no llega nunca, no puede llegar. [. . .] En el cine, la música, los sonidos, están presentes, y colaboran en la formación de un coro complejo, más allá de la ópera, en mi opinión'.[5] Indeed, in both opera and film, music works alongside the visual and the verbal to create meaning. This is particularly important in *El Sur*, where Saura borrows a common operatic device—the leitmotif—to alert the reader sonically to Juan Dahlmann's transformation of identity.

In opera a leitmotif is a musical theme that is used to refer to a person, event, place, object, emotion or concept. It functions by acquiring associations based on what is seen on the stage and/or what is voiced by the characters during the initial instances in which that music is heard. Subsequent appearances of that music will then evoke these associations regardless of whatever else is happening on stage. As such, leitmotifs serve as a form of musical communication between the composer and the audience. It has long been acknowledged by scholars, critics and composers that the 'classic' Hollywood film score is a continuation, in simplified form, of this system of operatic leitmotifs.[6] Despite the overall similarity, however, a fundamental difference does exist between the score of a film and that of an opera. Typically, movie music serves a subordinate role to the visual narration occurring on the screen.[7] But in opera, a more integrated practice of leitmotifs places the score and the libretto on a par, with the performance of both music and text providing a concurrent source of information to the viewer. It is this

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[5] This quote is from a personal interview with the filmmaker conducted on 7 July 2000, which appears in translation as 'The Image and theWord: A Conversation with Filmmaker and Novelist Carlos Saura', in *Carlos Saura Interviews*, ed. Willem, 156–66 (p. 158).

[6] The 'classic' film music model, which emerged in the 1930s, was vigorously critiqued by Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno in 1947 in their landmark book *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford U. P.). For more recent discussions of the Wagnerian connection to film music see for example Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1987); Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1992); and two articles in *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn and David Neumeyer (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 2000): Scott D. Paulin, 'Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity', 58–84 and Justin London, 'Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score', 85–96.

[7] Mervyn Cooke, 'Film Music', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell, 2nd ed., 29 vols (London: Macmillan, 2001), VIII, 799.

complementary interdependence that Saura exhibits in *El Sur*. At various points in the film, recurring music is used not only to reinforce but also to surpass the meaning that is being conveyed visually and verbally.[8]

The key factor in the use of leitmotifs is repetition. In order of appearance, the five pieces of music in *El Sur* are as follows. All but the final one are repeated.

1 Milonga Uruguaya by Ariel Ramírez

2 A bombo and guiro rhythmic pattern

3 Concerto in A minor for Violoncello Opus 129 by Robert Schumann

4 La Amanecida by Hamlet Lima Quintana

5 Wer nur den lieben Gott la¨ßt walten by Georg Neumark

In addition, all of the recurring music is nondiegetic. That is, it does not emanate from a source within the realm of the film's story space. As such, it is heard by the viewer but not by the characters.[9] Over the course of the film each piece of recurring music serves as a leitmotif saturated with visual and cultural associations, while the single instance of non-recurring music stands in symbolic juxtaposition to those associations. Together these five pieces of music work in conjunction with each other and with the visual elements of the narration to progressively blur the lines separating Juan Dahlmann's various identities. The remainder of this study will examine how this process unfolds.

Saura's *El Sur* opens with the first piece of recurring music, *Milonga Uruguaya* by Ariel Ramírez. As Claudia Gorbman has observed, the music that plays while a film's credits unroll often contains cultural codes designed to convey information to the viewer concerning what is to come.[10] The

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[8] This study was conceived in conjunction with my participation in the 2002 NEH Summer Seminar 'Opera: Interpretation, Reading, Staging' held at Princeton University and directed by Carolyn Abbate.

[9] Conversely, diegetic music is presented as originating from within the film's world and is heard not only by the viewer but also by the characters. For a discussion of diegetic versus nondiegetic music in film, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 366–69.

[10] Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, 13.

milonga is a song genre of Uruguay and Argentina, and here it is played during the credits, which are superimposed over turn-of-the-century photos recalling Argentina's immigrant heritage. The end of the first half of this *milonga* coincides with the appearance of a photo in which a man's face is circled with the word 'Papá' written above it. Thus, in this credit sequence Saura combines visual and aural elements to establish a connection between several key concepts—the past, ethnicity, the father—before the actual narrative of the film even begins. The *milonga* then continues as the musical accompaniment to a voice-over narration that is taken directly from the opening to Borges' 'El Sur'. As facts about Juan Dahlmann's dual heritage—evangelically German on the one side and heroically Argentine on the other—are verbally conveyed, photos of Juan Dahlmann's deceased relatives and ancestral home in 'The South' are displayed, as well as shots showing Juan engaged in everyday activities in contemporary Buenos Aires. To account for the 1990 setting, Borges' text is adjusted to make Juan the great-grandson rather than the grandson of Johannes Dahlmann and Francisco Flores, but all other details remain unaltered. This narration—spoken in the voice of the actor playing the role of Juan Dahlmann—continues through the entire first paragraph of the story, but the *milonga* fades out just short of its final chord, which prevents the expected musical resolution. Significantly, at the point where the music stops, the narration states: 'pero las tareas y acaso la indolencia lo retenían en la ciudad. Se contentaba con la idea abstracta de posesión y con la certidumbre de que su casa estaba esperándolo', thereby suggesting an unfinished, unresolved quality to what awaits him at his house in 'The South'. The voice-over narration ends with the altered final line of Borges' paragraph, 'en los primeros días de la primavera de 1990 algo le aconteció', as a frightened man holding a dagger and running away from an assailant appears on the screen. This man is played by the same actor whom the viewer has just seen in the role of Juan Dahlmann, but he is dressed in clothing from a somewhat earlier era, he wears wire-rimmed glasses rather than Juan's brown plastic-framed glasses, he has a bow tie rather than Juan's straight tie, and his hair is parted to the side rather than combed back as Juan's is. While he is slowly stalked by his assailant, the initial occurrence of the second piece of recurring music is heard in the background. It is a rhythmic pattern produced by two Latin-

American percussion instruments: the bombo and the guiro.[11] This music adds a suspenseful sense of danger to the scene and serves as the prelude to the knife fight, which ends in the fatal stabbing of the man described above. As the blade of the knife enters his stomach, the third piece of recurring music is heard for the first time. It is a cello fragment taken from Robert Schumann's Concerto in A minor for Violoncello Opus 129;[12] and its sober yet agitated sound conveys a feeling of fear and the possibility of imminent death.

The viewer becomes aware that this was a dream sequence when the setting abruptly switches to a bedroom showing Juan Dahlmann awaking from a nightmare. The *mise-en-scene* prominently displays Juan's plastic-framed glasses on a table in the foreground, thereby making an explicit contrast to the man in the dream. The glasses are further highlighted by Juan's action of putting them on after he goes into an adjacent room where a box of his father's mementos are kept. As he opens the box, the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif is heard again, and it continues as he removes the objects one by one. First we see Juan carefully unwrap a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. Then we see an old photograph in which his father looks identical to the man in his dream. Finally we see a silver-handled dagger. Although each of these objects identify the man in the dream to be Juan's father, when his mother questions Juan about what he had dreamt, Juan states that he himself had been the man in the dream: 'Un matón me desafiaba. Me peleaba con él. Imagina, yo peleando con un cuchillo en la mano. Jugaba conmigo'. This statement identifying himself with his father marks the first step in Juan's assumption of his father's destiny, the nature of which Juan is not yet aware. But the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif which was playing throughout Juan's examination of his father's possessions already anticipated this statement through the multiple associations it had acquired during the opening credits and the voice-over narration. This leitmotif will

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[11] I am grateful to Ricardo Lorenz of the Latin American Music Center at Indiana University for identifying these instruments.

[12] Saura specifically referred to his use of the cello fragment as a leitmotif in *El Sur* while talking to Antonio Castro about his preference for selecting portions of *a priori* music rather than having original music composed for his films. However, Saura misremembered it as coming from a Brahms concerto: 'hay un fragmento de un concierto de Brahms en *El Sur* que se repite como *leitmotiv*, un tema de violoncelo que aparece diez segundos, y que no aparece nunca más, y que es una cosa absolutamente genial y que yo retomo y convierto en un tema básico de la película'. I am indebted to Derek Katz of the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music for identifying the correct source. See Antonio Castro, 'Entrevista: Carlos Saura', *Dirigido Por*, 62; and in translation 'Interview: Carlos Saura', in *Carlos Saura Interviews*, ed. Willem, 133.

not be heard again until the very end of the film when its associations with the past, Juan's Argentine heritage, his father, and the unresolved nature of 'The South' come to fulfilment as Juan accepts the challenge of the knife fight that his father had refused so many years before.

Also coming into play in this scene is the first melding of Juan Dahlmann with Jorge Luis Borges through his recitation of a portion of 'El puñal' from the final chapter of Borges' *Evaristo Carriego* while staring at his father's dagger.[13] Although his voice had been heard earlier in the narration from Borges' short story, this is the first instance where the viewer actually sees Juan Dahlmann speaking Borges' words. Saura himself acknowledged that he had incorporated Borges' writings into this film in order to play on the Borgesian concept that anyone who quotes Shakespeare is Shakespeare.[14] But Saura's choice of texts for this film goes beyond creating a direct link between Juan and Borges. Each text also indirectly links Juan to his father through its content. The quoted portion of 'El puñal', for example, alludes to the homicidal use of this weapon, thereby recalling Juan's recent dream where he/his father is stabbed. However, the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif which had been playing during Juan's scrutiny of his father's things ends a few seconds after Juan's recitation begins, thereby allowing just enough music to be heard to tie Borges' text to Juan's father's dagger, but quickly shifting the emphasis away from Juan's recollections of his father and toward Juan's internalization of Borges' memorized text. Furthermore, the subsequent conversation between Juan and his mother reveals that the dagger had come from Uruguay and was given to his father by Luis Melián, which echoes a portion of Borges' 'El puñal' not recited by Juan. Consequently, the explicit and implicit references to 'El puñal' in this scene establish a subtle set of interconnections between Juan, his father, and Borges that will be fully realized by the end of the film.

Immediately following this scene Juan begins to take on the physical trappings of his father. He tries on the wire-rimmed glasses and carefully examines his face in the mirror before putting them away. He also packs for himself a pair of shoes that his timid father had not worn much because the noise they produced called attention to him. Both of these items, which are merely in Juan's possession at this point,

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[13] Daniel Mesa Gancedo has identified the various citations from Borges' works used in the film. See 'Borges/Saura: *El Sur'*, *Variaciones Borges*, 2 (1996), 152–76 (pp. 164–65).
[14] See Sánchez Vidal, *Retrato de Carlos Saura*, 90.

will eventually replace his own apparel during his gradual transformation into his father. Interestingly, no music is heard during this scene. This is what Claudia Gorbman calls a 'structural silence', which 'occurs where sound previously present in a film is later absent at structurally corresponding points. The film thus encourages us to expect the (musical) sound as before, so that when in fact there is no music, we are aware of its absence'.[15] Thus, by not employing the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif in this scene linking Juan with his father, Saura calls greater attention to Juan's actions than if it had been used.

In addition, this musical silence serves as a transition to the fourth piece of recurring music, *La Amanecida* by Hamlet Lima Quintana, which is introduced during Juan's subway ride to work. Whereas the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif pertains to the connection between Juan Dahlmann and his father, the *La Amanecida* leitmotif pertains to the connection between Juan Dahlmann and Borges. It appears not only in this scene, but in two subsequent scenes where Juan is shown engaged with Borges' work. Here he is seen reading, and his use of his own glasses to do so further facilitates the viewer's identification of the music with Borges rather than with Juan's father. But once again Saura uses this direct reference to Borges' work to make an indirect reference to Juan's father. This is done through a selective pruning of Borges' text. Juan's voice-over narration is heard reading from the final paragraph of the 'El Sur' short story. However, all reference to the hospitalization of Borges' Juan Dahlmann has been removed, as indicated in the bracketed portion below:

> Sintió, al atravesar el umbral, que morir en una pelea a cuchillo, a cielo abierto y acometiendo, hubiera sido una liberación para él, una felicidad y una fiesta [en la primera noche del sanatorio, cuando le clavaron la aguja]. Sintió que si él, entonces, hubiera podido elegir o soñar su muerte, ésta es la muerte que hubiera elegido o soñado.

[15] Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, 19.

This bracketed omission renders the pronoun ‘él’ and the adverb ‘entonces’ ambiguous. As such, the ‘él’ can now refer to the father of Saura’s Juan Dahlmann instead, and the ‘entonces’ can refer to the destiny which Juan’s father could have chosen but did not.

The *La Amanecida* leitmotif is heard in a continuous sound bridge that links shots of Juan leaving the subway, walking toward the library, entering the building, and walking through its corridor.[16] However, when Juan sits at his desk and puts on his own glasses in order to write a passage from another work by Borges, there is silence. As such, this structural silence parallels the earlier one. But whereas that scene’s silence (replacing the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif) highlighted Juan’s active appropriation of his father’s glasses and shoes, this silence (replacing the *La Amanecida* leitmotif) highlights Juan’s active appropriation of Borges’ work. Here, Juan does not engage in his previously passive activities of narrating, reciting, and reading Borges. Rather, he takes out a pen and begins to write words on a scrap of paper, as if they were his own. The line he writes is from the beginning of the poem ‘Lo perdido’: ‘¿Dónde estará mi vida, la que pudo / Haber sido y no fue [. . .]?’. Significantly, however, Juan’s version changes the verb ‘pudo’ to ‘puedo’, and the ‘y no fue’ portion is crossed out immediately after being written. By so doing, Juan personalizes Borges’ text and rejects the finality of the past. In addition, the future tense verb ‘estará’ suggests that his unrealized life still awaits him.

The next music to be heard comes after Juan picks up a letter opener on his desk. The dagger-like quality of the object triggers in Juan a memory of his dream. This memory is visually conveyed through a flashback showing the dagger entering his father’s body, and is musically conveyed through the sound of the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif blending into the cello leitmotif. Although in the dream itself a break separated the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif at the beginning of the knife fight from the cello leitmotif at its end, Juan’s recollection of the dream overlaps the two, thereby communicating the entire cluster of musical associations from that lengthy scene—suspense, confrontation, fear, danger, death—in one brief flash of memory. Significantly, the music continues beyond the visual flashback, thereby indicating that Juan’s

[16] Sound bridges aurally link together the visual images in a film by either carrying over the sound from the end of one scene to the beginning of the next, or by sonically leading into the next scene before it is seen. See Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 373–74.

thoughts are still on the dream when he fails to respond to a workman from the library who is speaking to him. Taken down to the basement of the library by the workman, Juan examines the books that had been damaged by the rats, and the *La Amanecida* leitmotif begins to play while he recites from Borges' 'El guardián de los libros'. As always, only a portion of the text is cited, and the content—featuring a first-person poet 'Recordando los días que fueron de otros / Los ajenos y antiguos'—is suggestive of the unresolved relationship between Juan and his father. But this scene also includes a visual foreshadowing of how that relationship will be resolved. After picking up a book gnawed by the rats, several confetti-like pieces scatter on his arm. He brushes them away with the back of his hand in a gesture that will later be duplicated at the end of the film when he brushes away similarly-shaped pieces of bread from the table of the inn where he will eventually meet his destiny—and that of his father—in 'The South'. But it is not until the next musical scene that Juan will learn what that destiny entails.

Speaking with his sister about his depression over his father's death and his puzzlement concerning his father's sudden abandonment of the ancestral home where he and his sister had vacationed as children, Juan is told about the fateful incident in his father's past when 'trataron de acuchillarlo'. As his sister begins her explanation with the words 'un matón se encargó con él', the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif beings to play and gradually becomes louder. Immediately after she says 'papá no aceptó el reto, y el matón lo humilló', the cello leitmotif is superimposed over the sound of the *bombo* and *guiro*, while a flashback of the dream appears. Once again the music continues beyond the visual flashback as a lingering thought in Juan's mind when he asks his sister if she believes the story to be true. This is the pivotal moment in Juan's assumption of his father's identity. Henceforth he will cease to wear his own glasses and shoes, replacing them with those of his father. Indeed, the very next scene shows Juan putting on his father's glasses to jot down in his notebook lines from the epilogue to Borges' 'El Hacedor'. As expected, the *La Amanecida* leitmotif accompanies this quotation of Borges' work. However, the presence of the wire-rimmed glasses inserts the dual identity of Juan/his father into what had previously been the musical context for the dual identity of Juan/Borges, thereby forging all three identities into one.

But before Juan fully embraces the destiny that faces him, he seeks out the German side of his lineage by visiting the site of the church that his great-grandfather had founded. While there he hears a choir of children singing the German hymn *Wer nur den lieben Gott laßt walten* by Georg Neumark. This music differs from all other music used in the film, not only because it is nonrecurring, but also because it is diegetic and has lyrics. The language of the hymn, coupled with the location in which it is sung, associates it with Johannes Dahlmann. But Juan's predilection for the 'muerte romántica' of his 'antepasado romántico' Francisco Flores—as stated in the opening narration—prevents a strong connection from being formed with the peaceful heritage left by his evangelical ancestor. This is entirely implied by the culturally charged music. The German hymn is played throughout the church scene and it continues as a sound bridge to the shot showing Juan walking back to the library. This shot is identical to the earlier one in which *La Amanecida*—an Argentine *zamba*—had served as a sound bridge. But this time the music ends much earlier and it is never heard again. It is not the German, but rather the Argentine past to which Juan is being drawn.

Back at the library Juan picks up a book and begins to read aloud from Borges' poem 'El Sur' while the *La Amanecida* leitmotif plays in the background. The identification between Juan and Borges is visually reinforced by the book's cover, which prominently displays Borges' name and photograph. Both the angle of Juan's head and his combed back hair are identical to Borges' appearance in the photo. But unlike Borges, Juan is wearing glasses, and the fact that they are his father's glasses allows his father's identity to merge with that of Juan and Borges, thereby visually reaffirming Juan's three-fold nature that was established in the park scene.

Having firmly established the complexity of his protagonist's identity, Saura now turns to the plot of Borges' story for his film's resolution. As in the story, Juan Dahlmann suffers a head injury while climbing stairs after having acquired a volume of Weil's *Thousand and One Nights*. However, in Saura's version the accident is caused by a misstep that makes Juan hit his head as he tumbles down the stairs. Sitting up after the fall, Juan opens his eyes, and the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif begins to play while a point-of-view shot reveals his vision to be severely blurred. Interestingly, the cello leitmotif is not heard, and

the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif stops at the moment when Juan's vision comes back into focus. This is the first time since its introduction during the initial dream that the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif is separated from the cello leitmotif, and it also is the first time that it recurs without a flashback to the knife fight. Here it signals to the viewer that the suspense and danger associated with the prelude to Juan's father's death in the dream has now become part of Juan's real-life situation. The *bombo/guiro* leitmotif appears alone again a few minutes later after Juan looks at his wound in the bathroom mirror and then stares down at his shoes—the ones that had been left to him by his father—which had caused the accident. The same music continues throughout this point-of-view shot, suggesting that the danger is a consequence of Juan having stepped into his father's shoes. When the cello finally reappears, it is superimposed over the *bombo/guiro* leitmotif and coincides with the moment that Juan collapses on his bedroom floor, thereby implying the life-threatening nature of Juan's injury. As Juan undergoes diagnostic testing, the cello momentarily fades away, leaving only the sound of the *bombo* and *guiro*, but it returns when the gravity of Juan's situation is revealed to his doctor and sister.

The following scene shows Juan being prepared for surgery. While sitting in his hospital bed in his undershirt, he has a white sheet draped around him. Without any glasses or tie present, the only distinguishing characteristic is his hair, which gradually is removed by the attendant shaving his head. Thus Juan is stripped of all recognizable identity markers. Similarly, the *La Amanecida* leitmotif accompanying this scene has also lost its most recognizable features. Only the rhythm and harmony are played, but the melody is absent. In addition, the instrumentation has been changed from piano to guitar.[17] This is Saura's most innovative use of music in the film, fully integrating the concept expressed in the image being seen on the screen with the new treatment of the music being heard. When the shaving is complete, Juan's individual appearance has been negated, and physically he could be either himself or his father. This lack of specific identity is the final step toward Juan's assumption of his father's unfulfilled

[17] I wish to thank Wayne C. Wentzel of the Jordan College of Fine Arts at Butler University for determining that the music in this scene is a version of *La Amanecida* that has been rendered nearly unrecognizable.

destiny. Significantly, it is at this point that Juan looks down at the razor left on his bed, and his flashback to the knife fight with its *bombo/guiro* and cello leitmotifs reconfirms the fate that awaits him.

When Juan is on the operating table, his loss of consciousness is indicated with a fade-to-white as the original version of the *La Amanecida* leitmotif begins to play. This music continues as Juan's anesthesia-induced dream shows his father entering a train station and boarding a southbound train. Although he is wearing the same vintage clothing as in his photograph, the setting is contemporary, with people around him dressed in 1990's apparel. The music briefly stops as the train departs the station, and it resumes as Juan's father looks out the window during the trip. Since the viewer has become accustomed to hearing this version of the *La Amanecida* leitmotif play during quotations from Borges' texts, expectations are raised that the book Juan's father picks up to read will be something by Borges. But it is not. Instead, it is Juan's volume of *Thousand and One Nights*. Why, then, is the *La Amanecida* leitmotif playing? Indeed, since we see Juan's father on the screen instead of Juan, why do we not hear the leitmotif associated with him—*Milonga Uruguaya*—instead? The answer can be found in the developmental potential of leitmotifs. While many leitmotifs remain stable throughout an entire work, others can acquire additional layers of meaning. The original version of *La Amanecida* exemplifies this layering process. Although it initially had suggested a dual connection (between Juan and Borges), its associative range was expanded over the course of its last two appearances by being linked to Juan's triple identity. That is, in those scenes Juan was simultaneously himself, his father, and Borges. Now the *La Amanecida* leitmotif is being played to signal once again that triple identity, but this time it is Juan's father who also is Juan and Borges. All three have become interchangeable. This concept, first presented musically, is then reinforced visually when Juan's father reads from *Thousand and One Nights*. Not only is this book Juan's, but the passage being read is the same one that Juan's mother had read aloud to Juan after his accident. Moreover, when Juan's father reaches the line about an enormous bird flying towards him in the darkness, he touches the spot on his forehead corresponding to Juan's injury. Each of these references directly join father and son into one being, but the literary quote also forms an indirect association with Borges because the description of the accident in Borges' short story alludes to a bird as

the possible cause of the injury: ‘algo en la oscuridad le rozó la frente ¿un murciélago, un pájaro?’. Thus, Borges is once again quoted, but it is done visually rather than verbally.

During the train ride Borges’ protagonist felt that ‘viajaba al pasado y no so´lo al Sur’, and this is precisely what Saura’s protagonist is doing. He is giving himself the chance to rewrite history. Stepping off the train, he enters the world of his past, where the owner of the inn knows him, and the challenge of the knife fight is restaged. But this time he picks up the knife. As he walks toward the doors, they magically open, not only reminding the viewer of the oneiric origin of the scene, but also suggesting a supernatural quality to the entire event. The cello leitmotif sounds to announce the fatal combat that will follow, but throughout the fight itself, the *Milonga Uruguaya* leitmotif is heard. Its last appearance had been while Juan was examining the dagger his father had never used. Here the visual and the musical narratives have come full circle, and together the father and the son have fulfilled a destiny left undone. The voice-over repeating the closing quote from the ‘El Sur’ short story affirms the closure achieved through this revisiting of the past, while also confirming Borges’ place in this triad of identities. *Milonga Uruguaya* begins to play, and unlike its initial appearance, it now continues through to its final chord, fully resolved and complete.

Anyone who watches Saura’s *El Sur* in order to see a faithful adaptation of Borges’ short story will be disappointed. In this respect, its inclusion in a Films for the Humanities series marketed to educators for use in their classrooms is problematic because it raises expectations that the film will be just such a rendering. But as Karen E. Kline’s examination of normative theories about film adaptation has shown, fidelity to its literary source is only one criterion for judging the quality of a text-based movie, and its exclusive privileging of the literary source provides the least richly nuanced manner of transferring a narrative from a written to a visual medium. Saura’s own approach falls under the category of what Kline calls the ‘transformational paradigm’ of film adaptation, wherein the literary source is regarded as ‘raw material which the film alters significantly, so that the film becomes an artistic work in its own right’.[18]

[18] Karen E. Kline, ‘The Accidental Tourist on Page and on Screen: Interrogating Normative Theories About Film Adaptations’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 24 (1996), 70–75 (p. 72).

As such, transformational adaptations are autonomous and original entities that are new and different from their literary sources. Indeed, in Saura's 'ensayo cinematográfico' on Borges, the fictional elements of Borges' short story combine with biographical elements and interpolated writings from Borges' real life to create a film that is both an adaptation of a literary work and a metaphorical representation of that work's author. This is accomplished by the fusing of fictional and real identities and conveyed through a level of integration between the screen image and the soundtrack that surpasses the standard use of movie music as a secondary supportive element. As in opera, the music that is heard works in tandem with the action that is seen to provide two equally important sources of information to the viewer, neither of which is complete in itself. 'La música es una tirana', Saura once stated. 'Te puede destruir una cosa o darte una potencia tremenda'.[19] *El Sur* is a testament to the cinematic complexity he has been able to achieve with that power.

[19] Castro, 'Entrevista: Carlos Saura', 62; reprinted in translation as 'Interview: Carlos Saura', in *Carlos Saura Interviews*, ed. Willem, 133.