







## **Major Cuban Novelists**



# **Major Cuban Novelists**

**Innovation and Tradition**

**Raymond D. Souza**

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For my parents  
Joseph and Linda Souza  
who instilled a respect for knowledge.

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## Preface

The following chapters present a general survey of the development of the Cuban novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with specific and detailed studies of the works of Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. This study affords a review of how a novelistic tradition took form in Cuba and a more detailed appreciation of some recent outstanding achievements. The choice of the three writers whose works are studied in detail was based primarily on the artistic quality of their works. However, two other important considerations entered into the choice: (1) each of the three novelists has attracted an extensive and varied audience; and (2) the works of each one exemplify some important trend or tendency in the contemporary novel. Together their careers are witness to half a century of Cuban artistic expression, and their publications mark the advancement of the Cuban novel into the forefront of modern fiction.

Obviously, the choice of three writers for special attention must involve a number of doubts and difficult decisions. It should be noted that the works of Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Cabrera Infante all reveal some unusual relationship between innovation and tradition. Carpentier's work and his vision of reality are rooted in history; but history itself, for him and for his reader, takes on a transcendent quality that redefines the term *history*. Lezama Lima develops rather than invents a sensorial reality. In *Paradiso*, the author's own reality is sensorial and is a factor in his identity, his link with space and time. In the use of narrative technique, Cabrera Infante is obviously the most radical of the three; yet, his nostalgia for a particular time and place is as apparent as his technical innovation.

Given the richness of recent Cuban fiction, it is tempting to include other writers. A prime candidate is Severo Sarduy

who does take his place, of course, in the general discussion. A chapter on his work would show another interesting combination of tradition and innovation. His first two novels are centered in Cuba and are oriented toward identity. Unlike Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Cabrera Infante, whose works transcend a particular reality without negating it, Sarduy's artistic trajectory has a centrifugal effect. His work can be discussed more adequately in terms of Barthesian structuralism than within the frame of reference I use in this study. Another candidate would be Reynaldo Arenas, whose work qualifies him for a separate chapter, except for one consideration: he has not yet won the extensive and varied audience that characterizes the success of the three chosen novelists.

The novels of Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Cabrera Infante have been widely discussed, translated, and analyzed. The essays written about them cover a scale from dull commentary to brilliant criticism. I do not hope, in this study, to set forth even more sparkling criticism. Rather, I intend to create a setting or context—that is, a sense of the process and actuality of the novel in Cuba—then place three major figures in that setting so that they contribute to an understanding of the context, and, at the same time, the setting itself may cast a valuable light on each of the novelists. Using the interrelationship of overview and detailed criticism as a basis, my intention is to present an easily accessible introduction to an important body of contemporary literature.

The focus of the study is the novel; references to the short story appear only when that genre can be used to make a special point. I have used the general theme of order and chaos and a consideration of the relationships between innovation and tradition as the main frames of reference for this study. At times, I have dared to interpret as well as to analyze—an admittedly risky venture, but an important factor in the kind of introduction to Cuban fiction that I hope to produce. This study is not concerned with any novels published after 1971, although I refer to critical works published up to 1975.

Efforts to develop my knowledge of the subject have been supported—at different times and always with my thanks—

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R.D.S.  
Lawrence, Kansas  
December 1974



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# 1

## Introduction

In 1926 and 1927, the Cuban journal *Social* published two series of experiments in prose fiction. In the first, several leading writers and intellectuals contributed different chapters to the same work. The novel was entitled *Fantoches* and contained twelve chapters, which were published in monthly installments. Each succeeding writer attempted to resolve or develop situations presented by his predecessors.<sup>1</sup> Although this type of cooperative endeavor was not new to Cuban letters, such a venture had never before produced the enthusiastic reception that greeted *Social's* publications.<sup>2</sup> Encouraged by the success of this undertaking, the editorial staff of *Social* initiated another series in 1927, which was not as fruitful, and it soon came to a premature end. This experiment differed in that those who participated attempted to present individual solutions to one situation. The first installment presented a challenging problem, and the remaining writers resolved it in their own manner. Eleven solutions were planned, but only five were published.<sup>3</sup>

It would be easy to regard these ventures in narrative fiction merely as journalistic devices to increase circulation, for neither represented an outstanding literary accomplishment. However, it should be noted that *Social* played an important part in Cuban and Spanish-American intellectual

1. The twelve chapters appeared in sequence in the monthly issues of *Social* between January and December 1926. The participants include Alfonso Hernández Catá, Max Henríquez Ureña, Federico de Ibarzábal, Alberto Lamar Schweyer, Carlos Loveira, Jorge Mañach, Guillermo Martínez Márquez, Rubén Martínez Villena, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, and Arturo Alfonso Rosello. Loveira wrote the first and last chapters. I have not located the September issue, which contained Chapter 9.

2. Max Henríquez Ureña, *Panorama histórico de la literatura cubana*, vol. 2, p. 354.

3. The authors who participated are Loveira, Jesús J. López, Martínez Márquez, Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta, Roig de Leuchsenring, and Enrique Serpa. The series appeared monthly between January and June 1927. Martínez Márquez was the author of the initial installment.



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life. It made a concerted effort to inform its readers of cultural activities throughout the world, and many of the Hispanic world's leading writers appeared in its pages, including later Nobel prize winners Miguel Angel Asturias, Gabriela Mistral, and Pablo Neruda.

It is significant that the first series was much more successful, because it demanded a greater degree of collaboration. Several writers found themselves in a situation demanding cooperation. The second experiment, on the other hand, was an exercise in diversity and multiplicity, demonstrating how several individual writers could view differently the unfolding of one specific circumstance. The relative success of the first venture, with its emphasis on unity rather than diversity, indicates that it more adequately satisfied the interests of the time. The intensity of the search for new artistic orientations and the deep-rooted desire for cultural and national unity are the most impressive characteristics of literary journals of the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> There existed a sense of community among intellectuals and writers. They shared a feeling of obligation to their fellowmen, and they believed they could influence the course of national events. They examined their responsibilities to society and questioned the purposes of art. Their concerns were expressed in questionnaires and manifestos, as they examined their role in society and challenged practices and policies they deemed immoral.<sup>5</sup> An attitude of exhilarating optimism was in the air. It was a time of great agitation and excitement, which produced an unusual degree of unity among writers. These years were characterized by a search for cultural cohesion, and this quest prepared the way for greater artistic achievements in the novel. Alejo Carpentier, Cuba's most eminent novelist, is one of the many young men who participated in the important events of the twenties. He found in these activities the basis for a search for

4. For specific examinations of this period see Henríquez Ureña, *Panorama histórico*; Carlos Ripoll, "La Revista de Avance (1927-30), vocero de vanguardismo y pórtico de revolución," *Revista Iberoamericana*; and Raymond D. Souza, "Lino Novás Calvo and the *Revista de Avance*," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*.

5. See for example the "Declaración del Grupo Minorista." *Social* 12:26 (junio 1927):7, and "¿Qué debe ser el arte americano?" *Revista de Avance*, 3:26 (15 septiembre 1928): 235.

national identity and an appreciation of the forces that move men to act collectively during important periods of history.

Although the experiments in prose fiction that appeared in *Social* in 1926 and 1927 were not great literary achievements, they do exemplify contradictory forces that were operating in Cuban culture, and they point to certain problems with which Cuban novelistic expression was struggling. Very few outstanding novels were published in Cuba before or immediately following the experiments in *Social*, and there is little evidence that there existed prior to that period a tradition of excellence in the novel.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that there was an absence of a novelistic tradition or occasional good novels; the novel in Cuba simply had not reached the continuity of excellence it has achieved in the last two decades. It should be stressed that Cuba's situation is not unique in this regard, as the development of the novel in Spanish America lagged considerably behind the achievements in other genres until the twentieth century.

The absence of a tradition of excellence in the novel indicates more about the novel as a genre than it does about the quality of Cuban writers, for few small nations have contributed as much brilliant literature to the international community as Cuba. In the nineteenth century, for example, an international audience of readers was attracted by poets of the caliber of José María Heredia (1803–1839) and Julián del Casal (1863–1893). The same period also produced José Martí (1853–1895) whose works can be favorably compared with the best of any nation. Martí's fame as a writer rests mainly on his poetry and to some extent on his journalistic essays. It is significant that he wrote a novel that is remembered today not exclusively for its artistic merits, but because it was written by a man who produced great works in other genres. Martí led a hectic life and was constantly on the move from one place to another. His political activities in

6. Novás Calvo presents a Cuban writer's view of this matter in his essay "Novela por hacer." Among his conclusions, we find the following: "¿Qué hay, en particular, de nuestra novela? La respuesta es ésta: no hay apenas novela. Hay tres o cuatro escritores con aptitud novelística, y unas breves, esporádicas y desarticuladas muestras de esa aptitud. Nada más." *Revista Bimestral Cubana* 47 (1941): 349.

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favor of Cuban independence from Spain gave him little time for the continuity of effort that the novel demands.

The development of a novelistic tradition is closely related to the evolution of a national awareness and the creation of a sense of national identity. Heredia and Martí contributed greatly to the creation of a national spirit through their writings, but it is fair to observe that their national tendencies sometimes were more intense than those reflected by many of their contemporaries. Cuba was one of the last Spanish colonies to gain independence from Spain, achieving that goal in 1898 only to find itself falling under U.S. influence. This encroachment on Cuban national interests came to be questioned in the 1920s and 1930s. This challenge waned during World War II and then intensified in the fifties, finding major expression in the victory of Fidel Castro and his revolutionary government in 1959. A survey of novelistic production by Cuban writers between 1959 and 1971 is impressive, because more than seventy novels of considerable literary interest have been published during that period. The overall quality of the novels is as impressive as the marked increase in production, and several individual novels are imposing examples of fiction—in a word, masterpieces. No other period in the history of the Cuban novel has been as successful from the standpoint of either quality or quantity.

An examination of Cuban novelistic production prior to this period reveals that Cuban narrative expression developed within the traditions of the Hispanic and Western worlds, and individual novels reflect, more often than not, the artistic modes of their time. For example, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841) has many of the characteristics of a romantic novel. Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873) resided in Cuba and in Spain, and she enjoyed artistic success in both countries. Her most outstanding creations are in poetry and theatre, and they are generally considered to be of greater merit than her novels. Although she wrote several novels, her first, *Sab*, was undoubtedly the best.<sup>7</sup> It strikes the reader as being more authentic and less marred by

7. For a discussion of her other novels see Henríquez Ureña, *Panorama histórico*, vol. 1, pp. 223–25.

the use of narrative perspectives that seem artificial.

*Sab* depicts an unfortunate love story and centers on the issue of slavery. The novel's romantic elements include the theme of unrequited love, a protagonist of mysterious origin, and the important role played by chance or destiny. We have in *Sab* an idealized and elemental version of human nature and of what the authoress considers to be "superior souls."<sup>8</sup> The novel reads well and maintains the reader's interest, although Gómez de Avellaneda's repeated intrusions into the narrative fabric of her work to point out a lesson or moral observation strikes the contemporary reader as being heavy-handed. It should be pointed out that Gómez de Avellaneda's audience expected and probably welcomed such intrusions, for it reinforced their convictions that the world had unity and cohesiveness provided by an underlying moral order. Of particular interest to us today is the undertone of dissatisfaction that exists in *Sab*. It is mainly reflected in the antislavery stance the work assumes. This was a highly emotional and controversial issue in nineteenth-century Cuba, and the matter was complicated by a number of economic and political considerations.<sup>9</sup> Considering the temper of the times, we can only admire Gómez de Avellaneda's courage in dealing with a controversial subject in a society that was obsessed with the maintenance of social order. Whether or not *Sab* is a thesis or protest novel may be open to question, but it is clear that the author's intent was to represent Cuban life as she knew it within the general creative experience of her novel. The reader is left with a sense of loss caused by the misfortune of unfulfilled love. Although we see clearly the injustices of the social order that existed then, the novel's dynamism is generated by the tragedy of unrealized personal love rather than social protest.

Just the opposite is true of *Francisco, el ingenio o las delicias del campo* by Anselmo Suárez y Romero (1818–1878). Although this work was written during 1838 and 1839, it was not

8. She states at one time that "hay almas superiores sobre la tierra, privilegiadas para el sentimiento y desconocidas de las almas vulgares." *Sab* (La Habana: Editorial Nacional de Cultura, 1964), p. 50.

9. See Jaime Suchlicki, *Cuba from Columbus to Castro*, pp. 57–59, and Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 111.

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published until two years after his death. The novel was known, however, among a small circle of friends and intellectual acquaintances. A long lapse between a work's composition and its appearance in print is not uncommon in Spanish-American literary history.<sup>10</sup> These cases present a problem to literary historians and critics who are attempting to trace the development of a genre, because a work is not likely to have any influence on subsequent publications until it appears in published form. The same is often true for all practical purposes if a volume is published in a foreign journal and, as a result, is unknown or obscure. The date of composition is important, however, for it does reveal contemporary intellectual currents and prevalent artistic modes.

*Francisco* is a propagandistic work directed against the abuses and cruelties of slavery. The reader's involvement depends on the shock produced by the physical and moral brutality that is directed against the slave Francisco. The novel is a curious mixture of descriptive commentary and elemental narration, and the author moves from one to the other without preparing his reader for the brusque changes. It is doubtful that Suárez made a conscious distinction between the two techniques, for he was intent on presenting his case. It is obvious that the creation of this work was motivated by humanitarian concerns rather than artistic considerations.

Cirilo Villaverde (1812-1894) made every effort to portray as accurately as possible the Cuban society that he knew and was successful in his endeavor. He is generally credited along with Ramón de Palma y Romay (1812-1860) as being the initiator of the novel in Cuba. The first volume of his major work, *Cecilia Valdés*, was published in 1839 though the completed, two-volume novel did not appear until 1882. Villaverde was a man of many interests, and he was also active in the independence movement. He had to spend

10. An extreme example is the case of the Argentine Miguel de Learte whose work *Las aventuras de Learte* was written in 1788 but not published until 1927. Some writings have also appeared in foreign journals and were not presented in book form until years after their first appearance. Some examples of this type of occurrence are *La quena* (1845) by the Argentine Juana Manuela Gorriti, *Amistad funesta* (1885) by Cuba's José Martí, and *Los de abajo* (1915) by the Mexican Mariano Azuela.

many years outside of Cuba because of his political sympathies and, in fact, he died in New York just a few years before Cuba gained independence from Spain. *Cecilia Valdés* is an extensive novel of considerable artistic merit. It interests us today mainly as a portrait of its time and for its re-creation of the atmosphere of an era. The novel is filled with the tensions and frustrations of a colonial society in a period of transition—a society that is becoming aware of the fact that it perhaps has its own consciousness and identity. A predominant mood in the novel is one of unrest and discontentment, which is presented quite clearly in Villaverde's panorama of Cuban society.

The novel's tragic development is based on the life of Cecilia, who is the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy man and his mulatto mistress. She grows up knowing little of her family background and through a coincidence of fate becomes the lover of her half brother. Through it all we view a society that is very corrupt, materialistic, and in a state of decomposition. Villaverde's novel relies heavily on descriptive techniques. This realistic attention to detail is combined with thematic concerns that were very much a part of romanticism in Spanish America. We would include among these the unknowing involvement in incestuous love as a major thematic and structural device, the important role that chance or fate plays in the unfolding of individual destinies, and the emphasis on the national and particular as opposed to the universal and general. The characterization, however, is well balanced, and Villaverde's work does not contain the stereotyped characters that are typical of novels in the romantic period. Since forty-three years passed before the second volume of the book appeared, there are stylistic changes. The second half of the novel evidences more concentration on unpleasant detail than the first, and we find elaborate descriptions of many unsavory events. The novel's chief merit is that a contemporary reader will find himself emotionally involved in the epoch that Villaverde chose to re-create, and he gains in this novel an intimate understanding of Cuba in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The interest in depicting and examining society was a paramount concern in nineteenth-century Cuban prose

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fiction. There was a great stress on the use of local color and the meticulous presentation of customs and manners. Short essays and sketches devoted to the portrayal of the social milieu of the times were published, and anthologies such as *Los cubanos pintados por sí mismos* (1852) and *Tipos de costumbres de la vida de Cuba* (1881) appeared. This emphasis on the local and the particular was a salutary trend in a society, which was beginning to discover itself. In the novel these concerns are usually combined with thematic material that belonged to romanticism, and as the century closed these themes have given way to realistic and naturalistic modes. However, the general tone of all these works is subjective rather than objective; the portrayal of reality did not involve the deliberate removal of the author's presence from the scene.

An unusual exception to these general trends is José Martí's *Amistad funesta* (1885). Martí is one of the finest poets to write in the Spanish language, but his prose fiction is limited to one short novel. *Amistad funesta* appeared in New York in the journal *El Latino-Americano*, under the pseudonym Adelaida Ral, and the author's identity was known only by a few members of the Latin community until the work was published under his actual name in 1911. Manuel Pedro González recently edited the novel under the title *Lucía Jerez* and he presents in his Prologue some valuable information on the work's genesis.<sup>11</sup> Martí wrote the novel for a friend, Adelaida A. Baralt, who had been commissioned to write a novel for *El Latino-Americano*. Martí evidently turned out the novel in seven days, and he explained the restrictions placed on the work by the editors of the journal, "En la novela había de haber mucho amor; alguna muerte; muchas muchachas, ninguna pasión pecaminosa; y nada que fuese del mayor agrado de los padres de familia y de los señores sacerdotes. Y había de ser hispanoamericana."<sup>12</sup> Considering the conditions under which it was written, no one should be surprised

11. Martí planned to republish the work under the new title but died before the project could be completed. The editor of this edition chose to respect that intent.

12. As quoted by Manuel Pedro González in his Prologue to *Lucía Jerez* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1969), p. 37. Other quotations noted in text are from this edition.

to discover that *Amistad funesta* is not a masterpiece, although it is of great importance to literary history and criticism. It is a testimony to Martí's genius that he could have produced a work of literary merit within such confining limitations.

*Amistad funesta* is the first Cuban novel that can be identified with the modernist movement in Spanish America. Since it was published in 1885, it is an early manifestation of this artistic mode in prose fiction. In this case, it is the style more than any other element that causes one to associate Martí's creation with this trend. The language strives to achieve a beauty of expression in correspondence to the ideals the novel embodies. This aestheticism is evidenced in the elegance and sensual beauty evoked in many of the novel's passages. However, there is an affectation in the style and the portrayal of the characters that becomes somewhat tedious to the reader. When one of the characters states, "Mira que, como soy bueno, no voy a ser feliz" (143), he gives us a good example of the elemental stance the novel often assumes. The main value of Martí's work is its introduction of the ideal of beauty and innovative language into prose fiction. The quest for beauty is manifested as a thematic ideal in the presentation of some of the characters and as a technical device in the cultivation of elegant and exquisite language. However, since the novel was not well known until after 1911, it did little to counteract the realistic and naturalistic tendencies that were prominent in the Cuban novel at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Ramón Meza y Suárez Inclán (1861–1911) is a novelist whose works can be classified within the realistic trend, but they transcend its limitations by the use of caricature and a bitter but humorous irony. His most significant work, *Mi tío el empleado*, was published in 1887. He continued to write throughout his life but abandoned a promising career as a novelist and dedicated himself to academic publications. *Mi tío el empleado* narrates the adventures of a Spaniard, Vicente Cueva, and his nephew in Cuba. They have just arrived from Spain and seem misplaced in their newly chosen society. Vicente is a hapless and rather dense soul, who frequently finds himself the unwitting victim of ridicule and practical



jokes. He is a country bumpkin trying to make it big in the New World. Through it all, he maintains his determination to be somebody. About the only thing working in his favor is the fact that he is Spanish and, therefore, finds employment in a colonial bureaucracy rife with corruption and fraud. Vicente is adept, however, at adopting the pretentious attitudes and guile of those who manage colonial affairs. When a sudden administrative reorganization takes place due to a change in government, Vicente hastily departs for Mexico. He returns later to Havana but not as a humble clerk. Instead, we find that he has transformed himself into Count Coveo. He soon marries and leaves for Spain not any more intelligent but considerably wealthier than when he first arrived.

Part of the novel is narrated from the point of view of the nephew, and this accounts for a good deal of the novel's irony. He tells his story in a matter-of-fact style, and his naiveté intensifies the incongruity of many scenes. The style of a contemporary Cuban writer, Reynaldo Arenas, who was born in 1943, is reminiscent of Meza. One encounters in both authors an ironic distortion of reality, which is achieved in Arenas's case by the use of creative and imaginative exaggeration, and in Meza's by the juxtaposition of contradictory details. Meza's style is fairly lean and direct, but he succeeds admirably in exposing the foibles of his characters and a society in which influence and luck are more important than talent. Behind Meza's humor and his exposure of the hypocrisies and absurdities of a country suffocating under a colonial bureaucracy, there lurks the view that life is essentially a tragic affair. This pessimism becomes more predominant in subsequent works such as *Don Aniceto, el tendero* (1889) and *Últimas páginas* (1891).

The preoccupation with Cuban reality continued as a tendency in the novel during the first decades of the twentieth century. An exception to this general inclination is *A fuego lento* (1903) by Emilio Bobadilla (1862-1921). *A fuego lento* is a naturalistic novel of uneven quality, but it is significant that the author invents an imaginary location that serves as a synthesis of Spanish-American customs and ways. In a sense, it represents an early attempt to move the

novel to considerations beyond Cuba, a tendency also present in Martí's *Amistad funesta*. Although the concern with Cuban reality continued well into the twentieth century, for some writers the focus of attention shifted to the interaction between individuals and the society in which they lived. This is particularly true with Miguel de Carrión (1875–1929) and to some extent with Jesús Castellanos (1879–1912). The most important publications of his short career are *De tierra adentro* (1906) that portrays the rural scene in Cuba, the novel *La manigua sentimental* (1910) that concerns the wars for independence, and the short novel *La conjura* (1909).

*La conjura* presents the struggles of a young doctor against social conventions. The protagonist finds it impossible to conform to the expectations of society without compromising his own ideals, and he stubbornly pursues his right to live on his own terms. This conflict eventually results in the young doctor's complete disillusionment, and he abandons his personal beliefs and cynically accepts society's hypocrisies. The author makes it clear that it is society that is the real loser, since it has lost an idealist who wanted to make a positive contribution to social well-being. The protagonist's abrupt change is difficult to accept, and in this regard Castellano's terseness works against him because there is not sufficient character development to make the turnabout convincing. Up to this point, the novel is well done and believable, and Castellano's attention to the cultivation of an artistic style is particularly engaging. He is at his best when evoking or creating a mood and evidently had not worked through the narrative problems involved in dealing with dramatic psychological change. There is no doubt that an exceptional talent was removed from the Cuban scene by his premature death.

One of Miguel de Carrión's most outstanding qualities is his astute psychological portrayal of characters. He devoted a great deal of attention to the presentation of the internal conflicts and personal dramas that rage behind the calm exteriors that people present to the world. In an early work, *El milagro* (1903), he focuses his attention on a seminarian's unsuccessful struggles to suppress his need for love. The novel is a criticism of the negative effects that an absolute

moral system can have, and the work is marred somewhat by the author's insistence on making his point obvious. Carrión's most outstanding novel is *Las honradas*, which appeared in 1918. In this exceptional work a mature woman, Victoria, tells a reflective and intimate chronicle of her life. Victoria's first-person narrative engages the reader's interest throughout the novel, and her introspective observations are revealing. On one occasion she says that as a young person she suppressed any charitable inclinations she had toward a fallen woman and comments, "Hoy me explico que a la condición de mujer honesta va siempre aparejada cierta sequedad del alma."<sup>13</sup> This is typical of the author's ability to allow Victoria to reveal herself by her reactions to others. Carrión is also capable of changing the narrative tone to conform to a particular situation. In one part of the novel, Victoria presents some of her correspondence with her husband during the early years of their marriage. The reader is impressed by the difference between Victoria's mature review of her life and the immature and impetuous young wife revealed in the letters. *Las honradas* evidences a sophisticated use of narrative technique rarely seen in the Cuban novel prior to Carrión.

Victoria's story is that of a woman who grew up in comfortable circumstances in a family in which the parents never demonstrated their feelings for one another. Victoria develops a distaste for anything that relates to sexuality and is suspicious and mistrustful of her own feelings. She marries and attempts to be a good wife but is troubled by the dismay and resentment that her aloofness produces in her husband. She begins to have serious self-doubts, and a close friend's comments about Victoria's indifference and lack of spontaneity does little to calm her feelings of inadequacy. Victoria becomes involved with her husband's employer, and for the first time in her life she finds herself overwhelmed by passion. Victoria becomes pregnant and has an abortion that nearly causes her death. After this episode her lover drifts out of her life, and she remains with her husband. Their own relationship improves, and they settle into a peaceful and

13. *Las honradas* (La Habana: Librería Nueva, 1919), p. 113. Further quotations are listed in the text.

comfortable existence made possible partly by a lucrative position that her husband gains through the influence of her former paramour. Victoria's conscience is troubled by the knowledge that their financial good fortune is a result of her indiscretion, but she comes to accept her role in the matter and observes:

Los problemas morales que no tienen solución poseen la propiedad de acostumbrarnos pronto a la molestia de sus incógnitas, por una especie de adormecimiento de la conciencia, parecido al estado de insensibilidad que sigue a un dolor físico prolongado. Hay además en nosotros algo que inclina suavemente nuestras ideas hacia el lado que secretamente nos conviene, encargándonos de allanar cuantos obstáculos se opongan al equilibrio de la vida interna. (474-75)

She comes through this crisis in her life more in touch with her own emotions and with a mature but not cynical awareness of human weaknesses.

Victoria's narration is intimate and frank but is done in good taste. The presentation of the abortion from the point of view of the woman undergoing the operation is an episode a reader is not likely to forget. The artistic presentation of this episode allows the reader to experience the emotional trauma, and one is surprised to discover such a candid treatment of a subject that still provokes intense controversy. *Las honradas* carefully examines the role of women in Hispanic society, and the reader cannot help but be impressed by the inequities in the social order, but it is not strident or propagandistic; it is a dispassionate and direct presentation of Carrión's view of the way things were. A subsequent novel, *Las impuras* (1919), uses Victoria's sister-in-law Teresa as a major character. Teresa is a minor figure in *Las honradas*, and as a social outcast she mirrors the negative aspect of the image of woman as saint or sinner in Cuban society. The author uses the approach of an omniscient narrator in *Las impuras*, and it is not as successful a novel as *Las honradas*. The two works constitute a criticism of a social order that forces women into stereotyped roles.

Carlos Loveira (1882-1928) was very active between 1919

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and 1928, and during that period he published five works: *Los inmorales* (1919), *Generales y doctores* (1920), *Los ciegos* (1923), *La última lección* (1924), and *Juan Criollo* (1928). Most of his works were written with a didactic purpose in mind, and they are characterized by a morose, cultural self-contemplation that seldom goes beyond the presentation and criticism of problems.<sup>14</sup> His polemical stance tends to detract from the quality of his novels as in the case of *Los inmorales*, which concerns the struggles of two people whose love runs against society's conventions. The same can be said of his criticism of the negative roles of generals and politicians in *Generales y doctores* and of the clergy in *Los ciegos*. His best and most famous novel, *Juan Criollo*, captures the meanderings and purposelessness of a society that exists without any apparent dedication to clearly enunciated goals or values. His techniques are derived from the naturalistic novel and the novel of customs, and his works are detailed and astute evaluations of Cuban society and mores. His novels, however, are not of the caliber of those of Carrión.

The first Cuban writer of prose fiction to gain an international audience was Alfonso Hernández Catá (1885–1940). Although he cultivated several literary genres, his best work was in the short story, and his novels never achieved the quality that a literary critic would desire. One of his most outstanding prose pieces is the novelette "Los muertos," which was published in *Los frutos ácidos* (1919). The story portrays the daily lives and social isolation of a group of lepers in a hospital in Havana. The success of "Los muertos" depends on the pathos and tension created by two conflicting points of view. The reader sees the patients as human beings whose needs are the same as anyone else's, but this attitude is contrasted with that of the society as a whole, which views them as diseased animals. The reader identifies with the patients, and this viewpoint is predominant in the work, but the attitudes of the society are reflected by the administration and staff of the hospital, who determine the fate of the lepers. The patients become extremely excited when they

14. For other evaluations of Loveira see Miguel A. Martínez, "Causa, tesis y tema en la novela de Carlos Loveira," *Hispania*, and J. Riis Owre, "Juan Criollo After Forty Years," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*.

discover that a king is to visit Havana and that a parade in his honor is to pass directly in front of the hospital. Their preparations include decorating the ward; but the night before the grand event a barricade is erected to block out the sight of the lepers from the king. The inevitability of their permanent isolation from their fellowmen becomes all too evident, and a small group decides to take decisive action. The reader then discovers that they extinguished all the flames in the gas jets during the night, and all but a young boy perish. He is the only hope of a possible reconciliation between diseased outcasts and society.

Hernández Catá spent most of his life outside of Cuba and made his literary reputation in Spain. The pilgrimage to foreign countries is a frequent phenomenon in Spanish-American letters. It is an honored tradition and sometimes a necessary practice that is still with us today. Hernández Catá's intellectual formation was more Spanish than Cuban, and this orientation is often apparent in his works. However, the international recognition he gained must have been gratifying to many in Cuba, for he exemplified professional dedication and success. After his death in a plane accident in Rio de Janeiro in 1940, a short-story contest bearing his name was established in Cuba.

The 1920s marks the beginning of a fruitful period in the development of the Cuban novel, for it was during those years that we see the rapid development of an introspective attitude in Cuban intellectual circles. That decade is indicative of expressions of dissatisfaction with things as they were and of the movement toward self-examination. This combination of discontentment and introspection did much to stimulate the type of intellectual ferment that encourages the writing of novels. It was a period that also placed great faith on the value of literary experimentation and encouraged writers to seek out and create new themes and forms. Although an emphasis on experimentation can lead to an overestimation of the value of superficial works or the substitution of showmanship for creativity, the interest in experimentation did have the salutary effect of encouraging writers to devise unique artistic modes. The writers were very receptive to international literary achievements but be-

gan to recognize that they could look to foreign works as models of technique but not as sources of creative inspiration.

Alejo Carpentier (b. 1904) and Lino Novás Calvo (b. 1905) are two major figures who began their literary careers in the 1920s. Although they have worked in several genres, Carpentier's fame rests on his novelistic production, and Novás Calvo is known primarily as a writer of short stories. It is not my intention to trace the development of the short story in Cuba, but Novás Calvo is a unique case, for his writings have influenced the novel. In some respects, Cabrera Infante is indebted to many of the achievements of Novás Calvo. A Cuban critic recently termed Novás Calvo's first volume of short stories, *La luna nona y otros cuentos* (1942), "el libro más importante de nuestra cuentística," an indication of the respect his work commands in revolutionary Cuba despite the fact that he is in exile.<sup>15</sup> Carpentier's and Novás Calvo's works span nearly half a century of Cuban literature, and they are mainly responsible for the formation of a modern tradition in Cuban narrative fiction. They are both professional writers and meticulous craftsmen, who devote much attention to refining and polishing the language they use. Although they belong to the same literary generation and share some common concerns, the essential nature of their art is quite dissimilar, and in many respects it would be difficult to find two writers who are so different.

Novás Calvo's background is one of economic and social deprivation. He was born in Galicia, Spain, and when he was seven his mother sent him to Cuba with an uncle in the hopes that he would find a better future. His life has been a constant struggle against economic insecurity, as a list of the many diverse occupations he has held would indicate.<sup>16</sup> Despite many handicaps, his talent enabled him to gain recognition in Cuban literary circles in the twenties, and in 1931 he returned to Spain as a reporter for a Cuban journal. He remained in Spain until the last days of the Spanish civil war

15. Ambrosio Fornet, *Antología del cuento cubano contemporáneo*, p. 38.

16. For detailed biographical information see Salvador Bueno, "Semblanza biográfica y crítica de un narrador," *Medio siglo de literatura cubana*, pp. 211-34.

and participated in the mass exodus to France when the Republic collapsed. His friends gathered enough money to pay his passage back to Cuba, and on his return he fashioned a successful career as a writer and teacher. All of these gains were lost, however, when he felt compelled to leave Cuba in 1960. He has lived in the United States since that time and taught for some years at Syracuse University in New York.

Novás Calvo is the first Cuban writer to incorporate successfully popular language into his works. In his hands everyday language achieves a creative dimension that transcends any regionalistic peculiarities. Many of his stories are first-person narrations by individuals who often do not comprehend the significance of what is happening to them. His stories frequently portray individuals trapped by circumstances they cannot control, and they resort to all types of mental distortions in attempting to deal with the terror in their lives. Novás Calvo's characters are often reduced to the most primitive and elemental aspects of their being as they struggle to overcome adverse circumstances. His stories explore the fringes of irrationality, and this fact explains the numerous fantastic occurrences that take place in his works. The language of his stories has a spontaneous and natural quality, which captivates the reader.

Carpentier's language is more erudite and calculated. He studiously minimizes the use of dialogue in his works in contrast to Novás Calvo's conversational quality. Carpentier is at his best when portraying characters who belong to society's upper classes. Novás Calvo is more effective when dealing with members of the lower class, and his works tend more toward the presentation of personal problems and human relationships. Carpentier, on the other hand, is more interested in the general than the particular and is more concerned with the movement of history. He is a painter of panoramic scenes, who attempts to fathom the forces that operate in human history. It would be fair to say that he is more concerned with the destiny of mankind than with the fortunes of individuals. Carpentier eschews the personal in his quest to capture the essence of the drama of human existence. Novás Calvo's works have a confessional quality, which intensifies the intimacy they convey.



Despite these many differences, there are fundamental characteristics that are common to both their works. Although their language is quite different, each gives great attention to the rhythmic quality of his creations. Carpentier's erudition and Novás Calvo's mastery of vernacular are both directed at achieving an attractive fluidity that enchants the readers. They are dedicated craftsmen who realize that the effective use of language is the basis of their art. It is also important to recognize that these two writers were attempting to transcend the limitations of regionalism in the first years of the 1930s. Novás Calvo worked toward the achievement of this goal in stories such as "La luna de los ñañigos" (1932), and Carpentier in his novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933).<sup>17</sup> These works reflect the desire to reveal the universal characteristics that exist behind the masks of regionalistic peculiarities. In this respect, they remind us of the works that Faulkner was writing in the United States during the same period.

Artistically, Novás Calvo's stories were more successful than Carpentier's first novel. It was not until the forties that Carpentier began to produce mature works, an indication perhaps of the formidable challenge that the novel represents as a genre. Carpentier also had to work his way through the considerable problems involved in moving the Cuban novel from regionalistic to universal concerns. It was not so much a thematic problem as a technical one. As soon as this gap was bridged, Carpentier produced great works that received international acclaim. Carpentier's novels are very carefully researched and reveal an attention to detail worthy of Villaverde or Loveira. He uses the particular, however, as a springboard to universal considerations in order to give his conclusions more validity. His consideration of the specific is a means rather than an end.

An unusual and unique case in Cuban fiction is that of Enrique Labrador Ruiz (b. 1902). In addition to some essays and poetry, he has published four novels and three volumes of short stories. His works are highly experimental and represent a revolt against conventionality in narrative fiction.

17. *Revista de Occidente* 35 (January 1932): 83-105.

His first novel, *El laberinto de sí mismo* (1933), is a collection of diverse parts that are not necessarily related to one another. One of the novel's unusual characteristics is the fragmentation of the narration and the characters. The distinctions between fantasy, memory, and reality are not always clear to the reader, who is left with the impression that he knows a lot of details but none of the essential facts. Labrador Ruiz's narrative technique is to mix specific information with vague suggestion, and this perplexes his reader. He frequently narrates around a situation or character, focusing on the peripheral factors without revealing the central situation. This procedure requires the reader to use a great deal of imagination.

In the introduction to his second novel, *Cresival* (1936), Labrador Ruiz defines his works as being "de la novela gaseiforme, de la novela que se halla en estado de gas, de un gas de novela. . . ."<sup>18</sup> In the course of explaining his concepts of the novel, he points out that "mi lector resulta, en último extremo, tan autor de la obra como yo."<sup>19</sup> This is extremely important, for it discloses the view that the reader must participate in the creative process of the novel. This concept was to become a virtual assumption in the Spanish-American novel in the 1960s. His second novel is less experimental than his first. *El laberinto de sí mismo* received a great deal of negative criticism, and the introduction of *Cresival* is in part a response to those adverse reactions. The introduction reveals an experimental and sensitive writer who must have felt somewhat isolated and alone. His third novel, *Anteo* (1940), returns to some of the innovations of the first. His last novel, *La sangre hambrienta* (1950), is more traditional.

A great deal of Labrador Ruiz's works concerns solitude and individuals who become extremely introverted in their struggles against loneliness. His characters see reality in a perspective that is distorted by their own psychological disorientation. His best work, the short story "Conejito Ulán," is a convincing excursion into the personal world of such a protagonist. In this story a woman is overwhelmed by her need to experience and express love after years of loneliness and isolation. A psychological deformation of the world she

18. *Cresival* (La Habana: Carasa, 1936), in introductory note.

19. *Ibid.*

lives in becomes her way of attempting to escape from her tragic fate. Labrador Ruiz's writings are of uneven quality, and he is at his best in the short story, where he is not required to sustain an extended narrative. Some pages and sections in his novels are brilliantly written, but he frequently loses his reader by allowing his works to become too fragmented or bogged down in nonessentials. His novels are important, however, for they introduce the fragmentation that was to become part of the later experimental novel in Cuba, and he was among the first to insist that the reader participate in the creative process of his works. His most experimental publications also diminished the importance of plot, a tendency that has become a significant factor of many contemporary novels.

Carpentier, Labrador Ruiz, and Novás Calvo are the most significant writers who published in the 1930s. Their works introduced innovative techniques or attempted to overcome the limitations of regionalism. Three other writers worthy of mention are Carlos Montenegro (b. 1900), Luis Felipe Rodríguez (1888–1947), and Enrique Serpa (b. 1899). Rodríguez's most important novel is *Ciénaga* (1937), which is a revision of his *La conjura de la Ciénaga* published in 1924. *Ciénaga* deals with the struggles and passions of rural life in Cuba, and it captures the customs of that sector of Cuban society. Since Montenegro spent time in jail for killing a man during a fight, his *Hombres sin mujer* (1938) presents the sordidness of prison life and the aberrations it produces in the human spirit. He literally wrote his way out of prison by having his short stories published in Cuban journals. His publications attracted considerable attention, and a group of intellectuals successfully gained a pardon for him. One finds in Montenegro's works a strong identification with the outcasts of society. Serpa's *Contrabando* (1938) deals with those who live on the margins of society and are engaged in smuggling. His techniques and focus are derived from the naturalistic novel. Although the works of Serpa, Rodríguez, and Montenegro have admirable qualities, they do not represent the breakthroughs achieved by Carpentier, Labrador Ruiz, and Novás Calvo.

With the publication of *El reino de este mundo* in 1949 and

*Los pasos perdidos* in 1953, Carpentier established himself as one of Spanish America's major writers and as the leading novelist in Cuba. He was the nation's most outstanding international literary success in the fifties, and he maintained a prominent position in the sixties with the appearance of *El siglo de las luces* (1962). The 1960s marks the arrival of the novel as a major genre in Cuba. In part, this manifestation is an outgrowth of the general "boom" that took place throughout Spanish America in the novel during that decade. It is also a result of the Cuban Revolution, which has actively sponsored the publication of literary works and has stimulated the growth of national consciousness. Carpentier is now sharing the stage with a number of writers, many of whom have just begun to make their mark. An exception to this general statement is José Lezama Lima (b. 1912) who had a long and distinguished career as a poet before publishing his first novel in 1966. *Paradiso* is a monumental work, a vast and complex artistic creation that critics will be analyzing and deciphering for generations to come. Segments of the initial part of the novel appeared in the literary journal *Orígenes* between 1949 and 1955, an indication that *Paradiso* is the product of many years of careful effort. It is a unique work, which in many respects stands alone, but it does share some characteristics with other contemporary Cuban novels. Among these are the subordination of form to language, an interest in the dynamics of the creative process, a preoccupation with time, and a desire to examine the roles of chaos and order in existence.

Virgilio Piñera (b. 1914) belongs to the same generation as Lezama Lima and also has established a literary reputation for accomplishments in other genres. He is a versatile writer, particularly known for his short stories and dramatic works. Piñera has published three novels, *La carne de René* (1952), *Pequeñas maniobras* (1963), and *Presiones y diamantes* (1967). These works are characterized by a bizarre cynicism and a macabre humor, and in them existence is presented as an absurdity. In his first novel, the protagonist, René, appears to be the only character approaching normality in a world populated by demented people. The limitations imposed on human existence by the body and flesh become an obsession

that drives some to extremes. It is a very disturbing work, which has a disquieting effect on the reader.

Piñera's second novel, *Pequeñas maniobras*, is a more rewarding creation. Most of the book is a first-person narration by Sebastián, a man who is incapable of making any permanent commitments. He has little ambition and is most content when simply allowed to drift through life. Sebastián's only apparent goal is to find an innocuous niche in society and to be left alone. When the novel opens, he is a schoolteacher, but he loses this position when he is jailed as a suspected murderer. Although he is proven innocent and released, Sebastián has no interest in reclaiming his teaching post, and he gladly accepts work as a servant in the home of the school's director. The fourth chapter of the novel is narrated by Teresa, a woman with whom Sebastián occasionally lives. This is the only chapter of the nine in the novel that is not presented from Sebastián's point of view. In this section we are particularly impressed by the oddity of Sebastián's personality and his way of seeing the world. Sebastián is devoid of sentiment and never becomes emotionally attached to anyone. For him, other individuals are merely additional objects in the panorama of existence. This detachment is a predominant characteristic of the narrative tone of *Pequeñas maniobras*, and it serves to increase the feeling of absurdity that the novel creates.

Piñera's predilection for the bizarre found further expression in *Presiones y diamantes* (1967), a work that approaches the realm of science fiction if the reader chooses to accept the veracity of the narration. The novel is a retrospective, first-person account of the unusual circumstances that take place prior to the disappearance of eight million people from an urban center in a highly developed society. It is suggested that the disappearance may be the result of a conspiracy, but we never know if the people who vanish are victims of a plot or willing members of a plan to abandon earth. Prior to the disappearance many strange things begin to happen. In one event, a fabulous diamond is auctioned off for the ridiculous sum of one-hundred dollars when no one except the narrator-protagonist bids at the sale. Another unusual revelation is the discovery that many individuals who are excruciat-

ingly bored with themselves are electing to go into hibernation in blocks of ice. The narrator-protagonist's direct and matter-of-fact narration of strange occurrences leaves the reader wondering if the narrator is mad or if the world has gone completely awry. There is enough dialogue and supposed documentation in the work to make the narrator's version acceptable to the reader, although he is never fully convinced. Like many of Piñera's works, *Presiones y diamantes* uses distortion as a major technique, but it is not as convincing a novel as *Pequeñas maniobras*. It is worth noting that there are episodes in Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* that are reminiscent of Piñera's whimsical use of the bizarre.

During the first years of the revolutionary government, several literary magazines and journals began publication, and among these new periodicals was *Lunes de Revolución* (1959-1961), which was edited by Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Cabrera Infante (b. 1929) is an innovative writer whose novel, *Tres tristes tigres* (1967), has been internationally acclaimed and translated into several languages including English. *Tres tristes tigres* is an experimental work that draws from the past as it ventures into new and unexplored components of artistic expression. Labrador Ruiz's fragmentation of form and Novás Calvo's extensive and creative use of popular language are among the many elements found in this unusual book. *Tres tristes tigres* opens a new period in Cuban narrative fiction in which all of the creative potentialities of language are explored. It effectively parodies the styles of many Cuban authors and utilizes an extremely inventive and playful humor to propel language into new manners of creative expression. The novel contains a striking number of narrative techniques that successfully convey a mood of nostalgia. The elusive and ephemeral nature of time is one of the novel's main concerns, a preoccupation that is disclosed by the nostalgia that permeates the lives of many of its characters. The search for permanence in a world of constant change is a thematic consideration that *Tres tristes tigres* shares with Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* and Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*.

Many of the novels that were published in Cuba in the 1960s deal directly or indirectly with the Cuban Revolution, a cataclysmic event that has profoundly changed Cuban so-

ciety and has touched the personal life of every Cuban. Most of these works examine the conditions that led to the revolution or present different stages of the struggle as attempts are made to understand or justify the course that history has taken.<sup>20</sup> Two good examples of the type of novels being written about Cuba by novelists in Cuba are *La situación* (1963) by Lisandro Otero (b. 1932) and *Los niños se despiden* (1968) by Pablo Armando Fernández (b. 1930).

Both of these novels received awards in the *Casa de las Américas* annual literary contest. *La situación* takes place immediately before Fulgencio Batista's return to power in 1952. The work is reminiscent of a historical novel in that it delves into the past in an attempt to explain the present. *La situación* is a study of people in a society that somehow kept finding itself being governed by men such as Batista. The main character, Luis Dascal, despises the world he lives in but does not openly break with it. The message is clear; we are witnessing the workings of a society that recognizes its defects but doesn't have the willpower to rebel against them. *La situación* is one of the better novels of its type to appear during the first years of the revolutionary government. Many similar novels have been published, and generally they lack a command of technique and are characterized by disorganization and the superficial treatment of serious and profound problems.<sup>21</sup>

*Los niños se despiden* operates on a more extensive scale than *La situación*. It is an allegory of Pablo Armando Fernández's view of Cuban experience and deals with the journey of an ideal toward realization. The goal of the movement in the novel is the establishment of a utopian society. Cuban history becomes a labyrinth through which Cuban society moves accumulating the liabilities and hopes of the past. The establishment of a new society is not accepted by all, and many sacrifices are made as a struggle is waged against inter-

20. Those interested in examining the role of the writer in revolutionary Cuba can consult the documents and bibliography in *El Caso Padilla: Literatura y Revolución en Cuba*, ed. Lourdes Casal; David Gallagher, "The Literary Life in Cuba," *New York Review of Books*; and Seymour Menton, *Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution*.

21. Luis Agüero, "La novela," *Casa de las Américas*. See also Seymour Menton, "La novela de la revolución cubana," *Cuadernos Americanos*.

nal and external forces. The author mixes his narrative techniques to such an extent that he often confuses his reader. He moves from description to direct dialogue, from reality to fantasy, and from the past to the present without disclosing the meaning of the changes. In addition, the distinction between personal and collective experience is not always clear, and all of this makes the novel confusing. The reader is left with the impression that history is a disorganized mass of human experiences, and this seems to reflect Armando Fernández's poetic vision of reality. Despite these difficulties, the book is enjoyable reading as long as the reader does not allow himself to be trapped by any compulsion for neatness or order.

Severo Sarduy is a young writer who has recently attracted a considerable amount of international attention. He was born in Camagüey in 1937 and lived there until he moved to Havana in the late 1950s.<sup>22</sup> His first publications appeared in the Cuban journal *Ciclón* (1955-1957, 1959), and his presence in the capital enabled him to widen his literary contacts and to experience the excitement of the first year of the revolution.<sup>23</sup> Shortly after the revolutionary government came into power, he travelled to Paris as a recipient of a Cuban government scholarship. After the grant from the award expired, he remained in France to continue his studies and established permanent residence. In Paris he has been associated with journals such as *Mundo Nuevo* and has met many intellectuals and critics. These contacts have done much to further his career and have exposed him to a number of influences and literary theories.

Sarduy is a very experimental writer whose works tend to be creative extensions of theoretical premises. His novels avoid specific categorization as to plot or meaning and are directed toward the creation of suggestive multiplicities rather than concrete and specific interpretation. His first

22. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Las estructuras de la narración: diálogo con Severo Sarduy," *Mundo Nuevo*, and Roberto González Echevarría, "Son de la Habana: La ruta de Severo Sarduy," *Revista Iberoamericana*.

23. For more information on this journal see Gary Brower and Raymond D. Souza, "Ciclón: índice e introducción," *Et Caetera*. A detailed bibliography of Sarduy's works is contained in Roberto González Echevarría's "Para una bibliografía de y sobre Severo Sarduy (1955-1971)," *Revista Iberoamericana*.



novel, *Gestos* (1963), takes place in Havana during the last period of the Batista dictatorship. It is a collection of objectivistic impressions centered around the existence of a woman who participates in terrorist activities. However, she is seen more as a victim of circumstances than as a perpetrator of destruction. She moves in a world in which it is difficult to distinguish the difference between the hunters and their prey. It is a nightmarish existence of great tension and fear. Sarduy's technique of assembling bits and fragments of reality captures the essence of a society involved in the process of a complete breakdown, and the reader experiences the emotional drama and terror of the period.<sup>24</sup>

His second novel, *De donde son los cantantes* (1967), is a more abstract and experimental piece of writing. At the end of the novel, there is a note in which the author purports to clarify some of the elements of his work. The comments contain his explanation that Cuban culture is a mixture of Spanish, African, and Chinese influences, and he points out that the three "ficciones" in the novel allude to this cultural heritage. One can debate the accuracy of Sarduy's declaration or question his intent at offering the definition, but the statement does reveal the novel's interest in origins. The search for fulfillment underlines much of the novel's movement, and frustrated desire is a predominant emotional tone in the work. The main anecdotal narrations that occur in the novel concern a general's frenzied search for a Cuban-Chinese transvestite, the spiritual legacy of Dolores Rondón as evoked by her epitaph, and the pursuit through the centuries of a redemptive figure by Socorro and Auxilio.

The novel conveys a constantly changing reality. The identities of the protagonists shift, and the manner of narration constantly varies. In Sarduy's hands the word becomes part of the enigma of existence, another mask in a realm of continually varying appearances. Reality tends to be reduced to the word as essence rather than the word as testimony or symbol. It is a challenging novel, and Sarduy's manipulation

24. For a study of the techniques in this work see Ivan A. Schulman, "La situación y *Gestos*: dos técnicas y dos visiones de la realidad cubana," *Duquesne Hispanic Review*. A fine study of Sarduy's works is David R. Johndrow's "Total Reality in Severo Sarduy's Search for 'Lo Cubano,'" *Romance Notes*.

of language is reminiscent of Argentina's Julio Cortázar and his search for new modes of expression. *De donde son los cantantes* can become a labyrinth of language for the reader, and he may find himself pondering whether linguistic virtuosity has diminished or enhanced creativity.

Reynaldo Arenas (b. 1943) is a talented writer who has published two remarkable novels, *Celestino antes del alba* (1967) and *El mundo alucinante* (1969). His first novel is a first-person narration by a protagonist who has a limited and distorted understanding of the world in which he lives. The narrator-protagonist seldom distinguishes between fantasy and reality, and the reader must discern the difference and decide when the narrator is misinterpreting what he is reporting. Arenas handles the narration well, and the reader recognizes that any difficulties he has with the text are due to the peculiarities of the point of view rather than to any desire on the part of the author to confuse the reader.

The narrative perspective that Arenas uses is the most important technique in the novel. There are two other notable narrative devices in the work. Some sections are theatrical in technique and effect, a similarity shared by some of Sarduy's and Cabrera Infante's works. There also exists a tendency to experiment with language, which is partially reflected in the usage of the repetition of sounds. This impulse is very much a part of the contemporary novel. A coherent and poignant view emerges from *Celestino antes del alba*—we see resilient individuals in a rural setting who are slowly defeated by poverty, failure, and their own defects and shortcomings. A feeling of unfulfillment dominates the lives of all the characters in the work, and the narrator-protagonist's frustration is heightened by his sense of isolation. He lives with his mother and her parents, and for them he is a symbol of his mother's failure in love and the family's collective inability to better their existence. Arenas gives us in his first book a remarkable view of some of society's most unfortunate members.

*El mundo alucinante* is an exceptional novel that is based on the life of the Mexican Fray Servando Teresa de Mier (1765–1827). Fray Servando was in constant conflict with authority as he was more dedicated to telling the truth as he saw it than

pleasing those in power. As a result, he offended many influential people and spent a good deal of his life languishing in the best prisons of the Spanish empire. He was singularly adept at escaping from custody and stubbornly maintained any view he held. He must have been regarded with some awe by his contemporaries for his escapades and his persistence in the face of overwhelming odds and difficulties. Arenas uses magical events to convey this impression and moves the characterization of Fray Servando into the realm of myth.

There are three narrative voices in *El mundo alucinante*. Fray Servando narrates the story of his life in the first person. A second-person narrator addresses Fray Servando directly, and a third-person voice completes the depiction of the man and the world he lived in. There is an ironic and wry humor in the novel that is very characteristic of the Cuban view of reality. Arenas has the ability to spot the ludicrous in any situation, and he often resorts to exaggeration to create a comic effect. Fray Servando is depicted as being singularly unimpressed by all representations of worldly power and status. He is the perpetual rebel, continually struggling against the restraints of custom, conventionality, and pompous stupidity. The novel is a skillful blending of innovative technical devices with some of the ideals admired by a revolutionary society. However, Arenas moves us into the past without the propagandistic baggage that often accompanies such works.

*El mundo alucinante* shares some characteristics with Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*. Both novels focus on the period surrounding the movement for independence from Spain at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was a time in which an old order was coming to an end and a new one was emerging, a strange mixture of decay and birth. The two works probe man's yearning for a better and more enlightened existence, as idealism struggles against the sordid realities of existence and the foibles of human nature. Arenas centers his attention on a multiple presentation of one character in contrast to Carpentier's more general view of the course of events. Carpentier is more concerned with the changes that history exercises

over individuals, whereas Arenas directs his attention toward one man's unyielding resistance to the injustices that surround him. However, they both suggest that there exists in the human species an indomitable desire for a more perfect society. Man's eternal search for a utopian existence and his efforts to transcend the limitations of his own time are central concerns of both works. It is significant that they use historical personages as a springboard for their excursions into narrative fiction. However, it should be pointed out that Arenas's novel is not as closely linked to historical authenticity as Carpentier's, for he allows his imagination to project the characterization of Fray Servando into the realm of the supernatural. In this respect, *El mundo alucinante* is similar to Carpentier's second novel, *El reino de este mundo* (1949), because both works present a reality that is viewed in magical terms. Carpentier's and Arenas's novels constitute a remarkable connection between two literary generations, and they are subtle expressions of the aspirations of Cuban society. Their works are indicative of the recent continuity of excellence that has appeared in the Cuban novel, and they are examples of the outstanding achievements that have taken place since the literary experiments in prose fiction appeared in *Social* in the 1920s. It was during that period that Carpentier began his long and steady journey toward international fame.

## Alejo Carpentier's Timeless History

Alejo Carpentier is the dean of Cuban novelists. A man of cosmopolitan background and tastes, he has travelled extensively and has resided many years outside of Cuba.<sup>1</sup> Carpentier began his literary career in the 1920s when vanguardism was in vogue, with its marked interest in experimentation and new methods of artistic expression. His first novel, *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*, was published in 1933, the year of Labrador Ruiz's experimental novel *El laberinto de sí mismo* and Novás Calvo's novelized biography of a Spanish slave trader, *Pedro Blanco, el negrero*. In 1932, Novás Calvo also published three major short stories, "La luna de los ñáñigos," "En el cayo," and "Aquella noche salieron los muertos." The first years of the 1930s marked a turning point in the artistic development of Cuban narrative fiction.

Carpentier's first novel contains elements that he would expand, refine, and use as the basis of his major works. *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* reveals his interest in the documentation of his novels, a technique that he would combine with an appraisal of an individual's subjective way of viewing the reality of his personal existence. Carpentier's novels present an interpenetration of the subjective and objective, of the temporal and the eternal, of man as an individual and man as a member of the species. He accomplishes this coordination by the skillful use of archetypal patterns and structural devices.<sup>2</sup> *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* marks the beginning of Carpentier's novelistic efforts to capture the marvellous elements of Latin-American reality.

Labrador Ruiz's *El laberinto de sí mismo*, on the other hand, is an innovative work characterized by extreme fragmentation. It is almost impossible to gain a coherent view of the

1. Additional biographical data can be found in Salvador Bueno, *La letra como testigo*, pp. 153-79.

2. For an examination of the archetypal patterns in Carpentier's novels see Eugene R. Skinner, "Archetypal Patterns in Four Novels of Alejo Carpentier," *Graduate Studies on Latin America*.

novel, since the narration, characters, and time are fragmented into a maze of disparate pieces. Novás Calvo's stories appeared in José Ortega y Gasset's prestigious Spanish journal *La Revista de Occidente*.<sup>3</sup> They are stories that utilize a first-person narration, which successfully captures the essence of popular language. The language conveys and creates a magical world that emotionally telescopes the reader back in time, so that he views and experiences the cosmos as man did before the dawn of history. Artistically, Novás Calvo's stories are the most successful creations of Cuban prose fiction during 1932 and 1933. They are indicative of a new awareness of the creative power that language can have, whereas Labrador Ruiz's novel is an early manifestation of the fragmentation that the novel as an artistic form would be undergoing. All of these works foreshadow future accomplishments in Cuban narration.

Novás Calvo's "La luna de los ñañigos" and Carpentier's *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* are narrative manifestations of the growing interest in the Negro, which occurred in Cuba during the late 1920s. In part, this concern was an outgrowth of the rapid development of anthropological data on the African in the Western world. Within Cuba, such folklorists as Fernando Ortiz were largely responsible for the development and dissemination of this information.<sup>4</sup> The blossoming of these interests coincided with the cultural and intellectual turmoil that was occurring in Cuba. The *Revista de Avance* (1927-1930), an important Cuban journal, became one of the focal points of this intellectual ferment that was characterized by a search for a new cultural orientation and a reappraisal of national values. At times these preoccupations centered on

3. Lino Novás Calvo published three stories in the *Revista de Occidente* in 1932: "La luna de los ñañigos," "En el cayo," and "Aquella noche salieron los muertos," in the January, May, and December issues, respectively. It is my opinion that the first two stories are greatly superior to "Aquella noche salieron los muertos," and our comments are directed toward them. The title of "La luna de los ñañigos" was later changed to "En las afueras" when published in the volume *La luna nona y otros cuentos* (1942) and the title of "En el cayo" to "El otro cayo" when it appeared in *Cayo Canas* (1946).

4. Alejo Carpentier, "Este gran Don Fernando." *Repertorio Americano* 47:15 (15 marzo 1952): 227-28. Lino Novás Calvo, "Cuba literaria II," *Gaceta Literaria*, p. 2. Also see Gabriel R. Coulthard, *Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature*.

the identification of the most autochthonous elements in Cuban culture—an undertaking that also took place in many other Spanish-American countries. In some nations, the Indian became the object of this search for roots; in Cuba it was the Negro. Carpentier has admitted that these ventures were often superficial and tended to center on the picturesque, but he also feels they were a necessary step in the development of a new sense of awareness:

La posibilidad de expresar lo criollo con una nueva noción de sus valores se impuso a las mentes. . . . Súbitamente, el negro se hizo el eje de todas las miradas. Por lo mismo que con ellos se disgustaba a los intelectuales de viejo cuño, se iba con unción a los *juramientos ñáñigos*, haciéndose el elogio de la danza del *diablito*. Así nació la tendencia afrocubanista, que durante más de diez años alimentaría poemas, novelas, estudios folklóricos y sociológicos. Tendencia que en muchos casos, sólo llegó a lo superficial y periférico, al “negro bajo palmas ebrias de sol,” pero que constituía un paso necesario para comprender mejor ciertos factores poéticos, musicales, étnicos y sociales, que habían contribuido a dar una fisonomía propia a lo criollo.<sup>5</sup>

*¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* and “La luna de los ñáñigos” go beyond a mere portrayal of the Negro as a picturesque part of Cuban culture. These works deal with the process that individuals pass through in order to become a member of a group, and in both cases the groups are ñáñigo sects. These sects are secret organizations of African origin, a type of mutual protection society based on religious concepts. Novás Calvo’s story is remarkable in that it deals with a white woman’s attempts and her success at crossing the invisible boundary of membership in the face of severe opposition. She is accepted into the sect in spite of its opposition, because spiritually and emotionally she becomes one and the same as the group. The delineation between blacks and whites in the story is not based on sociological factors, but on emotional ones. The story captures the aura of the unknown, and the protagonists become linked with the mysteries of the world

5. *La música en Cuba* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946), p. 236.

that surrounds them. Rather than being in opposition to the environment, they become a part of it.

Since Carpentier's work is a novel, it is a more extensive treatment of this theme. It covers the complete life of a single protagonist, Menegildo, a Negro. The novel is divided into three major parts that separate Menegildo's life into three distinct phases. In the first, we view his birth and childhood and the beginning of his movements out of this stage. The second section presents Menegildo's experience as an adolescent with its attendant awakening of powerful emotions and ends when he departs to live in the city. In the third part of the novel, Menegildo becomes an adult and a member of a ñáñigo sect. The individual cycle of existence closes with Menegildo's death, but life goes on in the presence of his son who will bear his name.

*¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* is only partially successful. The contents of the novel indicate that the author did extensive research before writing. It contains, for example, a lengthy glossary and even has photographs to introduce the reader to the realm of the ñáñigo sects. Although these elements contribute to the novel's authenticity, they give it a documentary quality that appeals purely to the reader's intellect rather than his emotions. We observe ritual, for example, but we do not experience it and, therefore, gain no emotional appreciation of what it means to its participants. Novás Calvo's story, "La luna de los ñáñigos," is more successful in this respect: the first-person narration and the conversational quality of the story create an intimacy that involves the reader, drawing him into events until he finds himself believing the impossible is true. In *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*, rational observation fails to capture the irrational realities of the ñáñigo world.

Carpentier himself has recognized some of the limitations of his first novel. "Esta primera novela mía es tal vez un intento fallido por el abuso de metáforas, de símiles mecánicos, de imágenes de un aborrecible mal gusto futurista y por esa falsa concepción de lo nacional que teníamos entonces los hombres de mi generación."<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that his comments are directed at some of the concepts on which the

6. César Leante, "Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco," *Cuba*.



novel is based and the language that is employed. His observations on language are perhaps the most significant, since the author uses this medium to create a credible world for his reader. If an author is skillful enough in his usage of language, he is apt to convince his reader of the plausibility of what he is relating even when his observations miss the mark. The major thrust of Carpentier's career has been toward making the unbelievable believable. In his view, Latin-American reality is so contradictory and awe inspiring that real events seem bigger than life. He has stated, "For me the American continent is the most extraordinary world of the century, because of its all-embracing cultural scope. Our view of it must be ecumenic."<sup>7</sup> He has attempted to convey these convictions by painstakingly researching his novels and by developing a rich and flowing language. The writing of *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* marks the beginning of the movement toward this goal, and it was an experience that would serve Carpentier well in the composition of future novels.

*¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* was written in an early period in Carpentier's career as a novelist. At that time, he was involved in the "vanguardista" movements that swept Cuba in the 1920s. In 1928, searching a more favorable political climate, he left for France, his base of operations until 1939. It was a spiritual pilgrimage that enabled him to learn more about Latin America. It is one of the paradoxes of human existence that geographical separation often heightens our ability to perceive the inner workings of our own society. His stay in France added greatly to his intellectual and artistic formation, for he had direct contact with many groups including the surrealists. He continued to broaden many of his interests such as music that he had cultivated in Cuba. Carpentier is a perceptive critic, and this ability was fully exercised in Europe. In an article he had published in the Cuban journal *Social* in 1932, he identified three of the cultural leaders of arts in the twentieth century when he stated, "Tres creadores de nuestro tiempo se sustraerán, tal vez por mucho tiempo todavía, a los efectos de una reacción de la juventud: Stravinsky, Picasso y James

7. Luis Harss and Barbara Dohman, *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin American Writers*, p. 47.

Joyce."<sup>8</sup> This is the type of observation that can establish a critic's career.

Sixteen years elapsed between the appearance of Carpentier's first novel and his second. He returned to Cuba in the late thirties after his stay in France. During his sojourn in Europe, he experienced the Spanish civil war, a tragic and compelling event that attracted and touched the lives of many of the world's writers and intellectuals. In 1943, Carpentier visited Haiti, and this trip provided the impetus for his second novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949). In Haiti there are impressive ruins of Henri Christophe's regal palace Sans-Souci and the mountain fortress he constructed. Christophe is an imposing figure in Haitian history. Born a slave he used the Wars of Independence as a means to fulfill his wildest dreams. He seized power in 1806, and in 1811 he had himself crowned king and ruled with an iron and cruel hand until his death in 1820. His is the classical tale of the revolutionary hero turned tyrant, and he is one of the historical figures that appear in Carpentier's novel.

*El reino de este mundo* takes place in Hispaniola and relates different phases of the Haitian Wars of Independence. The novel is divided into four main sections, and each chronicles an important stage of the independence movement. The first part narrates the exploits of Mackandal, a Negro rebel who led an early slave uprising that used the poisoning of livestock and people as a major tactic. Terror gripped those in power as the island became filled with the stench of death, but Mackandal was finally captured and executed in 1758. The second part deals with the outbreak of a rebellion led by Bouckman in 1791. Bouckman suffered the same fate as Mackandal, but the organized Negro forces prevailed and defeated the French in 1803. The third division deals with Henri Christophe, the hero who became a tyrant. Under his stern rule, the country became more prosperous, but many of the abuses the Negroes had struggled against were reinstated. This section ends with the demise of Christophe's reign and his suicide. The final part occurs during the period of the government of the mulatto Boyer (1820-1843), a time

8. Alejo Carpentier, "Los artistas nuevos y los estabilizados," *Social*.

of reunification after the collapse of Christophe's government. During Boyer's rule, many of the old abuses are still perpetuated, and there is a definite need for a renewed struggle against tyranny. Ti Noel, a slave who witnessed and at times participated in many of the events in the other sections, is faced with the problem of deciding whether he should use the knowledge he has acquired during the course of many years to answer the needs of his people.

Carpentier uses Ti Noel to bridge the gap between the objective truths of history and the subjective beliefs of the slaves, who fought for their freedom. He spans this dichotomy in order to present his reader with the extraordinary nature of the events that took place in Hispaniola. It was a period that saw black slaves rebelling against and defeating their French masters despite the formidable odds. Even Napoleon Bonaparte's brother-in-law, General Leclerc, was defeated. A slave later became a king and ruled over a royal court of formal and majestic splendor only to succumb to the wrath of his own people. It was a time of bizarre events, when the extraordinary seemed natural and the miraculous appeared normal. One of Carpentier's descriptions of the struggle against the French captures the essence of the times:

Ahora los Grandes Loas favorecían las armas negras. Ganaban batallas quienes tuvieran dioses guerreros que invocar. Ogún Badagrí guiaba las cargas al arma blanca contra las últimas trincheras de la Diosa Razón. Y, como en todos los combates que realmente merecen ser recordados porque alguien detuviera el sol o derribara murallas con una trompeta, hubo, en aquellos días, hombres que cerraron con el pecho desnudo las bocas de cañones enemigos y hombres que tuvieron poderes para apartar de su cuerpo el plomo de los fusiles. <sup>9</sup>

In the first section of the novel, the rebel leader Mackandal is put to death at the stake in an elaborate ceremony properly designed to impress the Negro slaves. The execution, however, does not have the desired effect, for the slaves believe Mackandal has acquired the power of metamorphosis and

9. *El reino de este mundo* (México: Ibero-Americana de Publicaciones, 1949), pp. 115-16. All further quotations are from this edition.

that he changed into an insect to escape his executioners. In the last part of the novel, Ti Noel is pictured as having this power. At first he attempts to use it for his own personal use to escape from difficult circumstances, but his search for peace in another realm is thwarted. He then realizes that any powers he possesses must not be used to escape from man but to better man's condition. He is seized by a "cosmic fatigue" and is aware that

el hombre nunca sabe para quién padece y espera. Padece y espera y trabaja para gentes que nunca conocerá, y que a su vez padecerán y esperarán y trabajarán para otros que tampoco serán felices, pues el hombre ansía siempre una felicidad situada más allá de la porción que le es otorgada. Pero la grandeza del hombre está precisamente en querer mejorar lo que es. (197)

After this illumination, Ti Noel raises a call to battle and then disappears like so many heroic figures before him. He has unleashed another rebellion in the struggle for a better existence, and another cycle is about to run its course.

The development of *El reino de este mundo* is chronological, but the four sections repeat the story of the transformative role of the hero. We have a presentation of the forward movement of history, but within this chronological progression there are patterns that repeat themselves in an endless process of renewal. Carpentier takes the long view of history, for him an individual lifetime is like a second in a century of time. It is man's continual quest to better his condition that concerns him, a preoccupation that would be further explored in *El siglo de las luces*.

*El reino de este mundo*, as *¡Écúe-Yamba-Ó!*, reflects Carpentier's interest in the documentation of his works. The author points out in the introduction to his second novel that his book

ha sido establecido sobre una documentación extremadamente rigurosa que no solamente respeta la verdad histórica de los acontecimientos, los nombres de personajes—incluso secundarios—, de lugares y hasta de calles, sino que oculta, bajo su aparente intemporalidad, un minucioso cotejo de fechas y de cronologías. (16)

He seems to be stressing that in America reality is more marvellous than the world of the imagination. His works are narrations of the fantastic within the contexts of reality, artistic creations that attempt to unravel the contradictory paradoxes of existence.

*El reino de este mundo* is greatly superior to Carpentier's first novel, and the reader is more apt to find himself involved in this work than in *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*. The language is more authentic, and one feels a movement on the part of the author toward a recognition of the subjective dimensions of his characters. However, the reader senses that Carpentier's emphasis on the verisimilar aspects of this novel caused him to eschew imaginative narration to some extent. The result is that we have an outline of what might have been a major novel. The characters are not well developed; they are really caricatures. There is a multitude of historical events that are only briefly covered in the novel, and this combination of great breadth with little depth precludes the development one would like to see. *El reino de este mundo* does represent a considerably expanded view of Latin-American reality, when contrasted with *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*, and this new undertaking must have presented a number of technical difficulties to its author. A few years after the publication of *El reino de este mundo*, the first of Carpentier's two major works appeared, suggesting that the preparation of his chronicle of the Haitian Wars of Independence helped him to deal with and resolve many technical considerations.

In his first two novels, Carpentier deals mainly with characters who do not share his cultural or social background. The appearance of *Los pasos perdidos* in 1953 marks a change in this procedure, for the main protagonist in this novel is a man who shares Carpentier's cultural formation. This would also be true of his portrayal of Esteban in *El siglo de las luces* (1962). Esteban is depicted as an intellectual who questions and sees the flaws in all schemes. Both of these novels evidence an all-encompassing view of mankind. In this respect, they could have been more abstract and removed from the reader than his first two novels. Such is not the case, however, for Carpentier solved the difficulties of presenting an interpenetration of the subjective and objective by allowing

his protagonists to be more intimate reflections of a reality he personally knows. This does not mean that his later novels are intimate writings, for Carpentier always maintains a fairly objective stance, but they do reflect more comprehension and understanding of the inner motivations of their characters. Carpentier is a detached writer, and one does not find in his novels the type of examination of the dark recesses of the human soul that a Carlos Fuentes or Ernesto Sábato demonstrates. The novels of Fuentes and Sábato tend to overwhelm the reader with their stark intimacy, as their characters pursue the answers to moral dilemmas. Carpentier's approach is calmer, more detached and ideological, and he is at his best when he is portraying men whose intellectualism or personality keeps them somewhat removed from their own passions. This ability was not used to the best advantage in the first two novels. In fact, it was a decided liability, for he achieved detachment when passionate commitment was required. Fortunately, this distance, which proved to be a weakness in Carpentier's first two novels, became a distinct strength in *Los pasos perdidos* and *El siglo de las luces*.

*Los pasos perdidos* is Carpentier's most personal book. The novel is presented in the form of a diary, and this first-person narration helps to create a greater sense of intimacy than one is accustomed to finding in Carpentier's works. It should be pointed out, however, that the novel is a narration controlled by the intellect, told by a man whose emotions are subordinate to his thoughts. Carpentier demonstrates a complete command of the language, and the novel is a fully developed, mature work. In *Los pasos perdidos*, he found a way to capture the temporal dimensions of Latin-American reality.

The novel is a journey back through time, a return to the world of Genesis when vital forces were engaged in a struggle against formlessness, imposing order on the chaos of existence during the dawn of creation. The journey is made by a man from the contemporary period, whose life has become an existence without any permanent value. His potentials in music are not being used creatively, and he finds himself debasing his talents to the interests of the commercial world in order to earn a living. His life is a series of

unfulfilled promises, dull, and deadening routines. His wife's main interest is her theatrical career, and when she is not involved in professional activities, their sexual life has been reduced to a Sunday ritual. He lives without purpose and is overwhelmed by the urban environment in which he dwells. He seeks solace in a mistress, Mouche, a pseudo-intellectual who earns a living as an astrologer. She is a false solution to a difficult problem. His relationships with Mouche and his wife, Ruth, are indicative of the life he is living. In fact, throughout the novel the quality of his life is revealed by the women with whom he is involved. Ruth's life is a series of theatrical pretenses, and Mouche is as authentic as the astrology she practices. They both exemplify the superficial glamour to which the protagonist is very much attracted.

An opportunity to renew his life comes from an unexpected source. He has a chance meeting with a former mentor, the curator of a museum. During an earlier period of study, the protagonist had developed a theory on the origin of music, and recent findings indicate that he may be correct. The curator offers him the opportunity to organize an expedition to search for musical instruments that would confirm his theory. At first, he declines the offer, but Mouche's interest in a free trip to the tropics and the prospect of an empty three week vacation that is approaching convince him to accept. Mouche has a friend who is capable of fabricating primitive musical instruments, so the search will be no problem. The protagonist's journey into authenticity begins with deceit and deception.

Once they embark on their trip, the beginnings of a new realm slowly begin to unfold. They first travel to a Latin-American city, and, while there, a revolution breaks out. They leave the city and proceed into the interior, and at each stage of the journey further elements of civilization are left behind. The protagonist becomes increasingly interested in the search for the musical instruments and finds himself gradually being rejuvenated. Just the opposite transpires with Mouche whose personality becomes diminished by each step into the past. She becomes less attractive to the protagonist, as the qualities of the seductive world of illusion she represents are revealed.

It is at this point that Rosario, the third woman in the protagonist's life, appears. Rosario is completely different from Ruth and Mouche. She is free of the superficiality and deception that are apparent in the protagonist's wife and mistress. Rosario belongs to the world of primitive man, and her life is rooted in primordial realities. She is identified with telluric forces, and her elemental beauty attracts the protagonist. Rosario and Mouche have a physical confrontation, and shortly after this episode Mouche returns to civilization. Rosario then becomes the protagonist's companion in his voyage to the beginning of time.

As he and the group penetrate and are engulfed by the jungle, the protagonist frequently finds himself overwhelmed by fear. For him the jungle is "el mundo de la mentira, de la trampa y del falso semblante; allí todo era disfraz, estratagema, juego de apariencias, metamorfosis."<sup>10</sup> It is a place of constant change that threatens him with the specter of formlessness. He is awed by this world that would devour him, and he experiences anew the primordial fear of darkness and the chaos it represents. While in this maze, his attention is drawn to a succession of vertical images that suggest that another realm exists. He notices the upward extension of the trees, the apparent freedom of movement of the birds, and he discovers

un nuevo mundo de nubes: esas nubes tan distintas, tan propias, tan olvidadas por los hombres, que todavía se amasan sobre la humedad de las inmensas selvas, ricas en agua como los primeros capítulos del Génesis. . . . Esas nubes, rara vez enlazadas entre sí, estaban detenidas en el espacio, como edificadas en el cielo, semejantes a sí mismas, desde los tiempos inmemoriales en que presidieran la separación de las aguas y el misterio de las primeras confluencias. (174)

This vertical fixation of images progresses to the appearance of a massive meseta that rises above the jungle. For two days they climb its slopes, leaving behind the devouring jungle as they enter into the barren world of rock. The

10. *Los pasos perdidos* (México: Compañía General de Ediciones, 1959), p. 173. All further quotations are from this edition.



meseta unlike the jungle is a place of permanence, and the protagonist terms it the "Capital de las Formas." The stark contrasts between the jungle and the meseta cause him to recognize that he has entered a realm that existed prior to man:

Lo que se abre ante nuestros ojos es el mundo anterior al hombre. . . . Estamos en el mundo del Génesis, al fin del Cuarto Día de la Creación. Si retrocediéramos un poco más, llegaríamos adonde comenzara la terrible soledad del Creador—la tristeza sideral de los tiempos sin incienso y sin alabanzas, cuando la tierra era desordenada y vacía, y las tinieblas estaban sobre la haz del abismo. (193)

It would seem that the protagonist has returned to paradise. He is rejuvenated in this world of elemental forms, and his creative energies are rekindled. He decides to forget and abandon his past in order to remain in the "Valle del Tiempo Detenido." The people who brought him to this place, which is far removed from the contemporary world, are constantly struggling against the forces of chaos as they establish settlements and begin to give form to existence. The exertion is a collective struggle against primal realities, but the protagonist is a musician, the practitioner of an individual art that does not belong to this time. A sequence of events indicates that the protagonist is an alien in this land of Genesis and that to fulfill his ambitions he must return to his own time.

Despite his general satisfaction with life in primitive society, the protagonist never becomes a complete part of this existence. There is one event in the novel that clearly delineates this separation. At one point Narciso, a leper who lives near the settlement, attempts to violate a young Indian girl. When she appears, running through the village, screaming, and bleeding from the attempted assault, the men immediately search for Narciso. The protagonist accompanies one of the men and carries an old rifle. They discover Narciso kneeling in a clearing, and Marcos, the protagonist's companion, orders the immediate execution of the leper. As he gazes at Narciso, the protagonist finds himself unable to pull the

trigger. Marcos brusquely takes the rifle from him and shoots the hapless leper.

Narciso represents the forces of death, and, therefore, he must be instinctively battled and destroyed. However, the protagonist is a man with a civilized concept of morality, and he does not form a part of the collective consciousness of this primitive society. Marcos acts without hesitation or reflection, because he belongs to this world of primal realities. The protagonist's reluctance in taking this decisive act signals his separation from this realm and the fact that Marcos will eventually be with Rosario. As a representative of the telluric forces of life, Rosario is the antithesis of Narciso.

Shortly after this event, a search party sent by the curator arrives in a plane. They locate the protagonist, and he is confronted by a dilemma as to what he should do. He is unwilling to leave, but to create music he needs adequate quantities of elemental materials such as paper, which the settlement cannot supply. More importantly, he needs an audience that can participate in the creative act and by doing so complete it. He decides to return to civilization to accomplish these goals and to deliver to the curator the musical instruments he has discovered. He also plans to ask Ruth for a divorce. Once these ends are accomplished, he will return to Santa Mónica and Rosario.

The protagonist's reappearance in the civilized world is not a happy one. After a series of confused events, he finds himself disassociated from Ruth and slowly sinking into an aimless existence. By chance he comes across a newspaper article about a friar he had known in the jungle. He discovers that Fray Pedro had ventured into a region of hostile Indians and had been executed. The protagonist perceives that behind this tragic death there exists a commitment to permanent values that he does not have. He decides to return to Santa Mónica and to live again with Rosario. It is a journey that is initiated but is never completed.

The protagonist retraces his former journey only to discover that flood waters block the way to Santa Mónica. He also is informed that Rosario is now living with Marcos and is pregnant. He decides to abandon his attempts to return and begins to understand that he ardently desires to live in

another period of human history, but it is a time and place that do not correspond to his own destiny. He does not belong to the age of Genesis for "los mundos nuevos tienen que ser vividos, antes que explicados. Quienes aquí viven no lo hacen por convicción intelectual; creen, simplemente, que la vida llevadera es ésta y no la otra. Prefieren este presente al presente de los hacedores de Apocalipsis" (285).

His intellectuality separates him from the realm of Genesis, but he also feels emotionally alienated from the apocalyptic nature of the contemporary world, for it offers no transpersonal values he can cling to. He speculates that if he had not been a composer, he might have been fully incorporated into Rosario's world. The conclusion suggested by the protagonist's observation is that as a creative artist his task is to reveal to his contemporaries locked within an apocalyptic age the primal truths of the world of Genesis. He then becomes a mediator between the two realms, drawing from one to rejuvenate the other. In this sense, creative works can be regarded as tangible manifestations of the eternal elements of existence, for they bring together the marvellous and the real. They make us aware of the forces that transcend the limits of our personal existence.

*Los pasos perdidos* allows its reader to consider different types of disorder and formlessness. In its presentation of the contemporary world, we view a civilization that has lost its possibilities and seems on the verge of dissolution. Human existence has become petrified into sets of hollow patterns devoid of vitality, and one senses that all forms will soon crumble into dust. In his journey into the past, the protagonist encounters a reality that is in the process of forming, where vital forces have not yet imposed order on existence. It is a realm of pure potentiality bursting with chaotic energy. The novel moves from a chaos generated by the destructive forces of dissolution to the chaos that precedes the creation of new forms. It should be pointed out that the protagonist's ordeal, as he moves between these two domains, is the main concern of the novel. His voyage and quest occupy center stage in *Los pasos perdidos*. The processes of chaos and the transition from form to formlessness, however, would become major considerations in Car-

pentier's next novel, *El siglo de las luces* (1962).

The protagonist-narrator in *Los pasos perdidos* is a product of the modern world, a civilized man who has been trained to think and ponder to the extent that his intellectualism almost paralyzes any ability to act. He is swept up into a great adventure more by the forces of circumstance than by the efforts of his own will. In contrast, the main character in *El siglo de las luces*, Victor Hugues, is a man of action who subordinates philosophical and intellectual considerations to deeds. He is a man of great vigor and will, who greatly influences all those who come in contact with him. In many respects, he is the exact opposite of the protagonist in *Los pasos perdidos*. Despite these essential differences, they do hold one thing in common. They both attempt to overcome the limitations of the present, hoping to bring into being a better and more complete existence. Indeed, this is a quality common to most of the main characters in Carpentier's novels. They are motivated by the desire and conviction that the creation of a better world is within man's grasp, and Carpentier's novels constitute an examination of the many roads taken to realize this goal.

At times this nostalgia and longing for a "Lost Paradise" leads Carpentier's characters into major undertakings.<sup>11</sup> In *El siglo de las luces*, Carpentier examines the revolutionary process as a means to attain this end. The characters in this novel participate in a mass movement, attempting to realize their goals in contrast to the highly individual search conducted by the protagonist in *Los pasos perdidos*. Carpentier returns in *El siglo de las luces* to the collective approach utilized in *El reino de este mundo* but with much greater success. He avoids the fragmentary structure of his second novel by narrating the personal destinies of three main characters during the entire course of *El siglo de las luces*. Their lives span the temporal limits of the work, and this gives it great cohesiveness despite the broad historical context covered.

*El siglo de las luces* deals with the arrival and spread of the French Revolution throughout the Antilles between 1790 and 1809. The novel is anchored in historical events, and its

11. *El siglo de las luces* (México: Compañía General de Ediciones, 1966), p. 151. All further quotations are from this edition.

most important figure, Víctor Hugues, actually existed. Carpentier first learned of Víctor and his role in history during a forced stop in Guadalupe, an island that Víctor governed during a part of the French Revolution.<sup>12</sup> Carpentier found in this remarkable man who had been neglected by history the perfect vehicle for the development and expression of his most consuming concerns. He has stated, "Amo los grandes temas, los grandes movimientos colectivos. Ellos dan la más alta riqueza a los personajes y a la trama."<sup>13</sup> The unusual but forgotten Víctor must have appeared to be an excellent example of the marvellous reality of the New World, which could seemingly swallow and hide in the records of its past such an imposing figure. He exemplifies the incongruities of Latin-American reality and human existence and serves as the embodiment of a collective movement in Carpentier's novel. The writing of this work must have been an exciting and exhilarating experience for Carpentier.

*El siglo de las luces* opens in Cuba in 1790, as Carlos, a minor character in the novel, is returning from his family's country estate. He discovers that his father has recently died, leaving him, his sister, Sofía, and their cousin, Esteban, alone in the world. They have been left a comfortable estate, however, and this allows them to lapse into a lax and disorganized existence. Their lives become carefree and chaotic, and they even fall into the habit of sleeping during the day and staying awake through the night. The absence of any adult authority or tradition in their lives seems to reflect the spirit of an age that is groping for a new direction and is about to experience great change.

This state of affairs begins to change shortly after Víctor appears at their home on a business matter. He befriends them and begins to introduce order and direction into their lives. Although he is engaged in commerce, he is also a Freemason, and his ideas are extremely contagious to Sofía and Esteban, who are just emerging from adolescence. For them it is the beginning of a great adventure that will parallel the fortunes of the French Revolution, particularly in the New World. However, it should be pointed out that Carpen-

12. César Leante, "Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco," p. 33.

13. Ibid.

tier's primary concern in this novel is not to chronicle the course of a particular revolution but to examine and capture the very essence of the revolutionary process. Thus, the novel attempts to fathom man's continual search for a complete existence and the extremes he resorts to in attempting to create it.

After several events, Esteban goes to Europe with Víctor, where they both participate in the French Revolution from 1791 to 1794. Although they keep in contact, their activities separate them a great deal of the time, and this enables Esteban to acquire an objective view of Víctor. In 1794, Víctor returns to the New World and leads an expedition, which Esteban joins, to the Antilles. As their ship plows its way through the open sea during the journey to Guadalupe, Víctor has a guillotine assembled on the deck. Those who would bring equality to all men arrive in the New World with an awe-inspiring instrument of death. Dreams are to be made into reality by nightmarish means.

Víctor reaches Guadalupe, successfully defends it against the British and governs the island for a few years. Esteban's slowly developing disenchantment with the revolution that had begun in Europe continues until he finds himself completely disillusioned with it and Víctor. Esteban is emotionally persecuted on the paradoxes of the revolutionary process. Víctor has decisively influenced his life, but as the revolution wears on and he answers the political needs of the times, Esteban feels that his morality is lost in a maze of political maneuvers. Víctor's consuming dedication to the wielding of power without recourse to moral considerations perplexes Esteban. Víctor's reasoning is coldly impersonal. His devotion to the functional and the practical blinds him to the psychological needs of his fellowmen, and he never fully comprehends their spiritual and emotional demands. This detachment proves to be his ruin as he is swept along by the contradictory currents of the French Revolution. He himself becomes a contradiction, alternately supporting and suppressing the same things according to the political dictates of the day. Víctor is a perverse force, a distortion that will be annihilated by the dialectical process of history.

Esteban accepts a mission that allows him to return to

Cuba, and he arrives at Sofía's home after a long and complicated trip, defeated and disillusioned by the failure of the revolution. It is 1799 and Sofía has been married for a year. He tells Sofía:

Esta vez la revolución ha fracasado. Acaso la próxima sea la buena. Pero, para agarrarme cuando estalle, tendrán que buscarme con linternas a mediodía. Cuidémonos de las palabras demasiado hermosas; de los Mundos Mejores creados por las palabras. Nuestra época sucumbe por un exceso de palabras. No hay más Tierra Prometida que la que el hombre puede encontrar en sí mismo. (223)

Sofía refuses to accept this view, although she acknowledges the excesses of the revolution. It is her conviction that great suffering is an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice to be made in order to transform the world.

When Esteban returned to Cuba, he gave Sofía a personal letter from Víctor. Later they learn that Víctor has survived another political crisis and has been assigned to govern Cayenne. When Sofía's husband becomes ill and dies, she immediately seizes the opportunity to join Víctor. Although Esteban personally deplores this action, he finally accedes to her wishes and foils an attempt by the colonial police to arrest her. Sofía's revolutionary activities have been discovered, and Esteban takes evasive action that saves her but dooms him to prison. Sofía succeeds in rejoining Víctor, but she soon discovers that he no longer is the revolutionary hero he once was. He has changed from a man who challenged unjust authority to one who will take any action to maintain power. Sofía finally leaves him and plans to rejoin Esteban. She has lost her respect for Víctor but not her faith in the capacity of a revolution to transform human existence. Sofía is as unyielding in her belief as Víctor is stubborn in his fanatical clinging to power. They are both overwhelming personalities who are not subject to the vacillation that characterizes Esteban.

At this point in the novel, we lose direct contact with Sofía and learn of her fate only through the investigation of her brother, Carlos. He appears in Spain where Sofía had worked

to obtain Esteban's release from prison. She was successful and they lived together "como hermanos" (295) for some years in Madrid. Carlos discovers that they both were killed when they participated in a spontaneous uprising of the Spanish people against forces of Napoleon. It strikes the reader as being a futile effort conducted against hopeless odds, and we are reminded of the reaction of the protagonist in *Los pasos perdidos* when he learned of the death of Fray Pedro. We are puzzled by the depth of the commitment to transpersonal values. In both novels, a level is reached where individual needs are subordinated to a cause that transcends the individual's life, and this attainment seems to be beyond rational understanding.

Carpentier opens and closes *El siglo de las luces* with Carlos. Through this narrative device, the reader is exposed to an objective view of what happens. Since the reader hardly knows Carlos, there is little identification with him, and this makes it possible to have an emotionally detached presentation of events. This distance is further heightened, because the events are presented in retrospect. Carlos discovers that it was Sofía who insisted on participating in the demonstrations against the French. Esteban had attempted to resist Sofía's spontaneous impulse to action, but he joined her when he saw she was determined to leave without him. It is significant that Sofía overcomes Esteban's resistance. He represents, as much as any character in the novel, the individual who attempts to understand the world in rational terms. Sofía's passionate and uncompromising commitment to the improvement of man's social condition is an instinctive force that overcomes Esteban's intellectual reservations. Instinct overcomes rational judgment as individuals are swept along by the forces of history. The reader is left with little faith in the individual's capacity to control the forces that operate on him. Carpentier's use of a particularly objective presentation at the end of the novel intensifies the emotional impact that this revelation has on the reader. It is one of the novel's paradoxes that those who most employ reason—Víctor and Esteban—should become embodiments of subjectivism, while the impetuous Sofía becomes a representative of an objective truth that operates in history. In this



respect, Sofia's idealism reflects a wisdom that transcends our understanding of existence.

Some critics feel that Carpentier evidences in his novels an ambivalent attitude toward revolution. Harss points out that "revolutions, in Carpentier's books, are always short-term failures but, as he goes to great pains to assure us, harbingers of greater things to come."<sup>14</sup> Reaction within revolutionary Cuba to *El siglo de las luces* was, as one might suspect, mixed.<sup>15</sup> It is not difficult to make the transition from the guillotine to the firing squad. A thorough study of *El siglo de las luces* will produce contradictory evidences in favor of and opposing revolution. Actually, it is doubtful that Carpentier had any intention of espousing a moral or utilitarian view of revolution. The presence of contradictory positions toward revolution in the novel is due to the interpenetration of subjective and objective views.

From an individual's subjective outlook, a particular revolution is either good or bad. Seen from a historical perspective, a revolution is simply an agent of change, one of many patterns within a cyclic evolutionary process. One finds in Carpentier's works the conviction that there is a progression of meaning and order in history, and he conveys this by the way he organizes his novels. The impression that existence is chaotic and without meaning emanates from the individual's subjective view with its temporal limits. Within a historical context, chaos is often presented as a stage in the process of dissolution, a process which simultaneously signals the death of one order and the birth of another. Carpentier tends to emphasize the objective by avoiding as much as possible the personal aspects of his characters. We all have ideas and attitudes that do not belong to us as individuals but to the age we live in. They originate in the world that is exterior to us and form part of the collective experience of our times. It is this part of the individual that Carpentier stresses in his works.

Carpentier's career marks the international acceptance of

14. Harss and Dohman, *Into the Mainstream*, pp. 48-49.

15. Interesting observations on this matter are made by Gabriel R. Coulthard in his study "The Situation of the Writer in Contemporary Cuba," *Caribbean Studies*.

the Cuban novel. He is the most consistently successful Cuban novelist, and his work has won him an enviable international reputation. His achievements have given the Cuban novel a degree of prestige as never before, and in many respects he helped prepare the way for novelists such as Cabrera Infante, Lezama Lima, and Severo Sarduy, by establishing a record and tradition of excellence. Mexico's distinguished novelist Carlos Fuentes has stated that Carpentier is "uno de nuestros primeros novelistas profesionales."<sup>16</sup> His assertion is an eloquent testimony of the esteem that Carpentier has attained and the influence he has had outside of Cuba on the development of the Spanish-American novel.

Carpentier shows in his novels a dedicated sense of discipline and rigorous intellectual control. They are thoroughly researched and minutely planned before they are written, and his books rely greatly on the presentation of visual reality. This results in the creation of well-structured works deftly directed and controlled by the author, but it also reduces their spontaneity. Although Carpentier is interested in the process of dissolution and the role of disorder and chaos in human existence, these concerns are largely treated thematically and never become technically incorporated into his novels. It should be noted that he has been much more experimental in some of his short stories such as "Semejante a la noche" and "Viaje a la semilla." In the first work, he presents a juxtaposition of events greatly separated in time and space, and in the second he reverses the direction of the flow of time, going backward in the narration of a character's life.<sup>17</sup> Until the appearance of *El siglo de las luces*, however, his novels have tended to be more innovative thematically than technically.

If one wished to single out the most outstanding faction of Carpentier's art, careful consideration would have to be given to his style. His language is elegant, polished, and a testimony of his knowledge. He is a consummate craftsman and the very essence of his work is reflected in his style.

16. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 49.

17. A similar technique is used with comical effects by F. Scott Fitzgerald in his short story "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," which was first published in *Colliers* in 1922.

Fernando Alegría observes on Carpentier's use of language in *Los pasos perdidos*, "El idioma de Carpentier se levanta como una catedral en la selva, se asienta o vuela, se ilumina o se ensombrece, se enoja hasta cegarnos, se retuerce o se estiliza, resuena en infinitas cadencias, estalla en colores, o se afirma en pátina de pintura antigua."<sup>18</sup> It is a language that charms and inspires as it flows on, bringing into the world of reality the marvellous and incredible. It beguiles us into accepting a realm in which the particular illustrates the general, and permanent values are discovered in the midst of disorder and chaos. For Carpentier there is much comfort in regarding the tribulations of human existence from the long view of extended time. It is a lofty perspective that few can achieve let alone convey, and the skill with which it is presented in Carpentier's novels testifies to the unifying forces operating in his work. Carpentier searches for the absolute without falling into the trap of offering absolute certainties, for he is aware that human existence will always be tempered by limitations. His is a dispassionate voice in a time of extremes, and in his search for permanence Carpentier has created novels that will be with us for a long time.

18. Fernando Alegría, *Historia de la novela hispanoamericana*, segunda edición, pp. 279-80.

## The Sensorial World of Lezama Lima

Carpentier's and José Lezama Lima's works are often considered by critics as baroque, that is, complex and ornate. When used in this general sense, particularly with Lezama Lima, the term is an appropriate one, for *Paradiso* is the most complex novel ever published in Cuba. Indeed, it is perhaps the most intricate novel in Spanish America, and the author's imaginative genius both attracts and baffles the readers. This explains in part the mistaken proclivity of some to consider Lezama Lima as the Cuban answer to James Joyce. The works of both authors are complex, and Lezama Lima and Joyce reflect an amazing ability to use language in unusual and unexpected manners, but the essence of their art is different. Lezama Lima's work is as much an affirmation of one cultural context as Joyce's is a denial of another.

Lezama Lima was relatively unknown in Spanish America before the publication of *Paradiso* in 1966. As with Carpentier, international fame and recognition came to him late in his career. Prior to the appearance of *Paradiso*, Lezama Lima was mainly known to those interested in Cuban literature for his poetry and to those outside of Cuba for his distinguished editorship of the literary journal *Orígenes* (1944–1956). *Paradiso* won quick acclaim, for it gained the praise and support of writers such as Julio Cortázar, one of Argentina's and South America's most eminent and internationally accepted writers. The novel also received a great deal of notoriety for its frank and explicit exploration of homosexuality, a theme practically unheard of in Spanish-American letters. However, the homosexual theme has been greatly overemphasized, for it is not the most important motif in the novel. Rather, it is only one of the many ways the author explores an adolescent's movement from multiplicity to unity.

Lezama Lima narrates in *Paradiso* the fortunes and destiny of the Cemí family, a process that examines several branches of the family tree. In this respect, the novel represents a

search for meaning in the past and a quest for significance in origins. The main events in the work take place between the waning years of the nineteenth century and the third decade of the present. A series of characters occupies central stage in *Paradiso*, but José Cemí, who is only five years old when the work opens, emerges as the main subject in the novel. Many of the excursions into the past that transpire in *Paradiso* investigate the origins of people who greatly influence José's life. His parents, important relatives, and intimate friends inspire or govern decisive phases of his development, and by the end of the novel José is ready to enter into the world alone and to embark on adventures of his own. Thus, *Paradiso* can be considered as a compendium of forces that move through time and space to converge on the living entity formed by José. Like Carpentier, Lezama Lima deeply respects the influence that the past has on the present and the future.

*Paradiso* opens with José desperately struggling for air as he experiences a severe attack of asthma. His frantic efforts to breathe attract the attention of Baldovina, a servant who has been left to care for him while his parents attend an opera. Terrified and uncertain of how to cope with the situation, Baldovina seeks the help of two other servants. They respond to Baldovina's plea by performing a ritual that involves the formation of crosses on the sufferer's body. When they complete this strange ceremony, they suddenly and without explanation depart, leaving Baldovina to handle the situation as best as she can. She rubs José with alcohol and pours hot drops of wax on the welts that have appeared on his entire body. When José's parents arrive later, the attack has subsided, and after being informed as to what has happened, they conclude that their son "estaba vivo por puro y sencillo milagro."<sup>1</sup>

There is much in the content and presentation of the introduction to Lezama Lima's novel and the way he creates and moves through it. After presenting the reader with José's critical situation, he gives an elaborate and poetic description of the Cemí family's home. It is not a description that is

1. *Paradiso* (México: Biblioteca Era, 1968), p. 14. All further quotations are from this edition.

designed merely to give an objective picture of a certain material reality, but one that also captures the essence of the people who live there and their relations to one another. Baldovina, for example, is fearful of the consequences of her responsibility to care for José, and in her mind she has already suffered through the questioning that experience tells her she will be submitted to once again. Her feelings on the matter and her relationship to José's father, an army Colonel, are conveyed in a striking passage that uses sound and space as the basis of most of its images:

Después llegaba el Coronel y era ella la que tenía que sufrir una ringlera de preguntas, a la que respondía con nerviosa inadvertencia, quedándole un contrapunto con tantos altibajos, sobresaltos y mentiras, que mientras el Coronel baritonizaba sus carcajadas, Baldovina se hacía leve, desaparecía, desaparecía, y cuando se la llamaba de nuevo hacía que la voz atravesase una selva oscura, tales imposibilidades, que había que nutrir ese eco de voz con tantas voces, que ya era toda la casa la que parecía haber sido llamada, y que a Baldovina, que era sólo un fragmento de ella, le tocaba una partícula tan pequeña que había que reforzarla con sus nuevos perentorios, cargando más el potencial de la onda sonora. (8)

We are left with an impression of a timid and almost mute Baldovina, contrasted with the strength and loquacity of the Colonel and his authority. She is like a small echo of an autumn leaf whose destiny is controlled and ordained by the capricious nature of the wind.

As noted, the author opens the first chapter with José's attack of asthma and then pauses in the midst of it to describe the home. The description does not close in on itself but proceeds from a specific reality and then moves outward in a continual movement of expansion. For example, the author goes beyond merely enumerating the books in the Colonel's study, he evokes all the mystery and excitement of their contents. When his attention falls on some papers on the Colonel's desk, a whole new world is created. The Colonel is an engineer who uses his mathematical skills in the practice of artillery, a complex manipulation of time and space that the men under his command do not understand.

They are simply mystified by his ability, and their attitude toward the Colonel's domination of this enigma is captured in a masterful exercise of the imagination. "Sobre el pupitre, cogidos con alcayatas ya oxidadas, papeles donde se diseñaban desembarcos en países no situados en el tiempo ni en el espacio, como un desfile de banda militar china situado entre la eternidad y la nada" (9). In one brilliantly structured sentence, Lezama Lima has humorously synthesized the preciseness of the Colonel's knowledge with the mystification that his ability produces in the soldiers under his command.

After such digressions, the author returns to the narration of José's attack of asthma. He has moved his reader's attention from a specific occurrence to the totality of the world of his characters. This is a creative process that he uses continually throughout the novel. It is something like circles that emanate when an object is dropped into a pool of water—a specific occurrence can open up one's awareness to a much greater area of reality. Lezama Lima continually moves in concentric circles, both in the process of exteriorization and interiorization, and once the reader has grasped this fact, his participation in the novel becomes more meaningful. Lezama Lima creates an entire world, and he does so, in part, by his attempts to portray the total essence of his characters and their surroundings. The reader feels somewhat as if he were blindfolded and on a snap-the-whip at an amusement park. He never knows when the movement will suddenly throw him outward from the center, or when it will cease and bring him back. But the experience is an exciting and stimulating one, as it is a creative process that continually challenges and expands the reader's awareness of the world in which he lives.

José's suffering and the symbolism of the crosses that are placed on his body are significant, for they set the stage for much of the novel's meaning. *Paradiso* can be taken as the narration of José's search for a basic understanding of the world and the universe. The association of his difficulty breathing during the attack of asthma with the application of the symbol of the cross to his body reveals human existence as a painful struggle, a struggle in which a search is made for a conjunction or synthesis of opposites. The ser-

vant's use of the cross represents an appeal to the spiritual world that contrasts vividly with the world of phenomena of José's illness. The crosses can be taken as a symbol of the conjunction of life and death and of the earthly and celestial worlds, a symbol of the mystery and suffering of existence. José's recovery is regarded as a miracle, and no explanation is ever given of his sudden and spontaneous recovery from his bout with death. The setting for José's attempts to penetrate the mystery of life in the novel is really the narration of his process of becoming, his slow movement from a self-awareness that closes in on itself, to an appreciation of all that is exterior. It is a movement from unawareness to awareness, from multiplicity to unity, from chaos to form and order, and its narration is as fascinating to watch as a slow motion film of a blossoming flower. The act of creation mystifies and enchants and fills us with a sense of awe and appreciation for life that is difficult to convey except by means of art. The creative process of the novel is as important as the end result, and Lezama Lima constantly delights his reader with his startling and imaginative images.

The Colonel emerges in Chapter 1 as the center around which all the other members of his family revolve. He is a picture of strength and vitality, a man who knows how to enjoy life to its fullest. He fills the house with sound, and his jovial and forceful loquaciousness is only matched by his gastronomical feats. As the novel progresses, the sickly José, much to his dismay, discovers he cannot live up to his father's expectations. The Colonel finds it difficult to accept that his only son is asthmatic and not athletically inclined.

During the First World War, the Cemí family departs for Jacksonville, Florida, where the Colonel receives advanced military training. While there the Colonel is weakened by a virulent influenza and is hospitalized. His wife Rialta becomes terror stricken as the possibility of his death enters her mind:

Había cobrado pavorosa conciencia de la magnitud del hecho familiar que se avecinaba. Empezaba a comprender lo que para ella resultaba incomprensible, la desaparición, el ocultamiento del fuerte, del alegre, del



solucionador, del que había reunido dos familias detenidas por el cansancio de los tejidos minuciosos, comunicándoles una síntesis de *allegreto*, de cantante alegre paseo matinal. (165)

The Colonel slips into an indescribable loneliness that he associates with death. "Estoy entrando en una soledad, por primera vez en mi vida, que sé es la de la muerte" (166). Although afraid of his approaching death, he dominates his fear and refuses to have his family called to his side, as he does not wish to frighten them. As a result, he dies alone in the most abject loneliness, and Rialta is notified of his death by telephone. "De pronto, como una campanilla que se dilata el rocío de las hojas nocturnas, el teléfono pinchado desde el hospital, pareció querer hablar como un estrangulado" (167). The news of his death and her loneliness remain in her memory and are associated with the sound of the windblown pine trees outside their Florida home. "Así como el coronel José Eugenio Cemí había muerto en la soledad sin término del hospital, Rialta recibía la más sombría noticia de su vida rodeada de extraños, alejada de su madre doña Augusta, oyendo como un hacha el viento lento del enero americano recorrer los pinares" (168).

Rialta returns to Havana with her children and begins to reconstruct their lives, and she finds that she must now take the place of her dead husband. The image of the center and circle is often employed by Lezama Lima in *Paradiso*. It is perhaps the most significant image in the novel, and he uses this imagery in various ways. Often it is used to connote an individual who is the most important figure in another person's life, and during the novel we see the process of time and change at work, as we witness the dissolution of one circle and the emanation of another. This is the case when the Colonel dies and Rialta is forced to take his place. In another episode when doña Augusta, José's maternal grandmother, feels that she may die, she advises her children that "cada uno de aquellos fragmentos, de los que ella ocupaba el centro, tendría que comenzar en un nuevo centro con nuevas irradiaciones" (200). In a sense, *Paradiso* can be considered as a set of spirals converging in a circle. Reading the novel is like

tracing the course of several spirals, as they move through time and space and slowly come together.

The wedding of Rialta and the Colonel represents the circle image of the formation of an everlasting unified entity:

José Eugenio Cemí y Rialta atolondrados por la gravedad baritonal de los símbolos, después de haber cambiado los anillos, como si la vida de uno se abalanzase sobre la del otro a través de la eternidad del círculo, sintieron por la proliferación de los rostros de familiares y amigos, el rumor de la convergencia en la unidad de la imagen que se iniciaba. (133)

Rialta is pictured as the person who will form the center of a "trenzado laberíntico" during a period of fifty years, in a reference the reader does not fully understand until the Colonel dies. "Comenzaba un extenso trenzado laberíntico, del cual durante cincuenta años, ella sería el centro, la justificación y la fertilidad" (132).

At other times rather than being a symbol of unity, the circle is used as a means of conveying the search for meaning that each individual must experience in his life, with its attendant confusion and chaos. In a fit of rage against a worthless son, Abuela Munda, José's paternal grandmother, states, "Eres un viejo accidente ya entre nosotros, y eso quiere decir que debes ir a buscar tu centro al extranjero" (84). In a more complex manifestation of the circle image, we see José at the age of ten leaving school with a piece of chalk. As he walks he drags the chalk on a wall, and as he does this someone attempts to grab the chalk. Behind the wall there is a large circular patio partially surrounded by small dwellings, and as José nears the end of the wall he is greeted by the shouts and taunts of a child who wants to harass him and to take the chalk from him. The sudden appearance of his tormentor startles him, and the transition is described as if the wall had disappeared and a circle had emerged. "Le parecía a Cemí aquello un remolino de voces y colores, como si el paredón se hubiese derrumbado e instantáneamente se hubiese reconstruido en un patio circular" (25-26). The taunts of the child continue until an elderly woman recognizes José as the Colonel's son and rescues him. The associa-

tion of the wall, a straight line, with the circular shape of the patio can be interpreted as a process of interiorization or search that José is to experience in the future. The shouting child could represent the confusion of the exterior world through which José must move; and the chalk, a writing instrument, his means to impose order on chaos—the written word.

The circle image also can represent a momentary escape from time and a return to unity. It is usually presented as a geometrical progression that begins with a square that changes to a circle. Thus, the multilateral shape of the square becomes a unified circle, an image of the movement from multiplicity to unity, from space to spacelessness, from time to timelessness. This progression is skillfully handled in an episode that evokes the memory of the dead Colonel. Rialta is watching her three children playing with a ball. They have formed a circle, and as they play the element of time is introduced:

Los tres niños estaban tan abstraídos que el ascender de la pelota se cristalizaba como una fuente, y la fijeza de la mirada en el esparcimiento de los yaquis, los extasiaba como cuando se contemplan, en demorados trechos de la noche, las constelaciones. Estaban en ese momento de éxtasis coral que los niños alcanzan con facilidad. Hacer que su tiempo, el tiempo de las personas que los rodean, y el tiempo de la situación exterior, coincidan en una especie de abandono del tiempo, donde las semillas del alcanfor o de las amapolas, el silencioso crecer nocturno de los vegetales, preparan una identidad oval y cristalina, donde un grupo al aislarse logra una comunicación semejante a un espejo universal. (173)

Rialta joins her children in the game, and the four figures form a square that begins to change into a circle. "El cuadrado formado por Rialta y sus tres hijos, se iba trocando en un círculo" (174). The movement of the ball, the spontaneous mood of happiness the game produces, and the unity the formation of the circle gives them, produce an almost hypnotic state that momentarily erases time, and the memory of the Colonel becomes a living entity:

El contorno del círculo se iba endureciendo, hasta parecer de un metal que se tornaba incandescente. De pronto, en una fulguración, como si una nube se rompiera para dar paso a una nueva visión, apareció en las losas apesadas por el círculo la guerrera completa del Coronel. . . . Y sobre el cuello endurecido, el rostro del ausente, tal vez sonriéndose dentro de su lejanía, como si le alegrase, en un indescifrable contento que no podía ser compartido, ver a su esposa y a sus hijos dentro de aquel círculo que los unía en un espacio y en un tiempo coincidentes para su mirada. Penetrando en esa visión, como dejada caer por la fulguración previa, los cuatro que estaban dentro del círculo iluminado, tuvieron la sensación de que penetraban en un túnel; en realidad, era una sensación entrecortada, pues se abría dentro de un instante, pero donde los fragmentos y la totalidad coincidían en ese pestañeo de la visión cortada por una espada. (174-75)

The momentary spell makes Rialta feel her solitude even more intensely than usual, and she buries her face in her arms and cries. The spell is broken and the children scurry off.

The geometric progression from a square to a circle also appears during the sexual encounters of some of the other characters in the novel. It is used to convey the attempted movement from inner confusion to inner unity, or the movement from a pluralistic to a unified state. The sexual act becomes then one of many manifestations of the search for meaning in life and the control over chaos. Its appearance in the novel is mainly associated with friends and acquaintances of José during their adolescence. Two of José's closest friends during this period of his life are Fronesis and Foción, and the circle image appears in their lives as they struggle to free themselves from some fear or obsession.

Fronesis has difficulty having sexual intercourse with a young girl during one of his first exposures to sex. His inability to function adequately is related to some vague and illogical fear that he cannot express, or even bring to the awareness of his conscious mind. He resorts to a tactic that restores his virility. He cuts a circle of cloth from his undershirt; then,

in this round piece of material he cuts a hole large enough for his penis and uses the piece of undershirt as an intermediary between his body and his partner's. When Fronesis leaves, he takes the shirt with him, and its presence constitutes a heavy psychological burden for him. He walks down to the sea wall that surrounds Havana, throws the undershirt into the sea, and watches it slowly disappear:

La camiseta misma antes de anegarse, se fue circulizando como una serpiente a la que alguien ha transmitido la inmortalidad, pero al mismo tiempo en las concavidades gorduzuelas del cuerpo del hombre fue apareciendo la serpiente fálica, era necesario crear al perder precisamente la inmortalidad. Así el hombre fue mortal, pero creador y la serpiente fálica se convirtió en un fragmento que debe resurgir. Fronesis sentía que los dos círculos de la camiseta al desaparecer en el oleaje, desaparecerían también de sus terrores para dar paso a la serpiente circuncidada. Desaparecían las dos abstracciones circulares, también desaparecían los yerbazales, las escoriaciones, los brotes musgosos, donde el nuevo serpiente del octavo día se trocaba en un honguillo con una pequeña corona planetaria en torno al glande de un marfil coloidal. (317-18)

Fronesis has used the circle as a means of dominating and bringing under control psychic forces that threatened to destroy his masculinity. He experiences a fear of losing his identity by associating the sexual act, which can lead to a momentary loss of identity, with death. He successfully dominated these fears and is now ready to sublimate and direct them toward creative ends. He has imposed form on psychic chaos and has brought negative forces under control by the image of the circle. This enables him to begin the transition from adolescence to manhood and from potentiality to creativity.

Foción, José's other friend, is confronted with a problem similar to Fronesis's, but in his case it occurs after he has married. Foción proves impotent, and his father's ill-directed efforts to help him cause him to be influenced by a homosexual. As a result, Foción becomes a participant and exponent of this sexual practice. Fronesis explains much of Foción's

background to José, "Foción tenía, por el abstracto desarrollo de su niñez y adolescencia, el complejo de la vagina dentada, veía la vulva de la mujer como una inmensa boca que le devoraba el falo" (340). Foción's sexual orientation is presented as a chaos that he cannot dominate, "pues la naturaleza le regaló un caos pero no le dio la fuerza suficiente para luchar contra él. Se siente destruido, pero no tiene fuerza destructora" (341).

Foción becomes, in effect, a symbol of primordial chaos, and his bisexual activities reveal the anarchy that precedes the organization of all creative forces. This is the basic meaning of the homosexual theme in *Paradiso*, for Foción's activities are a symbol of all the forces of the creative process. His anguish conveys the turmoil and confusion of formlessness, and his struggle to move from this state represents the movement from anarchy to order. Therefore, the treatment of sexuality in *Paradiso* is not an affirmation or denial of any particular sexual activity. Rather, sexual acts are exterior manifestations of inner conflicts or goals and the means by which the characters resolve their problems. Lezama Lima employs the homosexual theme as another way of dealing with the creative process.

Foción is greatly attracted to Fronesis to the extent of obsession. "Fronesis era para él un arquetipo de lo inalcanzable, cosa que sólo existía porque comenzaba por ponerlo a horcajadas en un punto errante que oscilaba en un claroscuro inmenso" (286). His attraction toward Fronesis eventually allows him to escape from his inner chaos. José recognizes that the friendship between Foción and Fronesis is related to Foción's attempts to escape from his state of confusion and tells Fronesis, "Es un caos, el de Foción, que tú dominas, ordenas, distribuyes. Es un caos que tú necesitas para las hogueras de tu cosmos" (333). Cemí's statements reveal that Fronesis has gained control over his own chaos, whereas Foción has not. Yet, Fronesis needs Foción in the sense that his own creative acts represent his imposition of form over the chaos that Foción represents.

Fronesis's father attempts to terminate his son's relationship with Foción. It is an effort that nearly provokes a rebellion in Fronesis, but his stepmother resolves the conflict be-

tween father and son. For the first time in her life, Fronesis's stepmother speaks freely of Fronesis's mother, who was her sister. This frank appraisal of origins restores harmony to the family, and Fronesis agrees to take a trip abroad.

This episode is followed immediately by one in which José visits a clinic where his grandmother, doña Augusta, is dying. While at the clinic, he discovers that Foción is a patient there:

Al lado del álamo, en el jardín del pabellón de los desrazonados, vio un hombre joven con su uniforme blanco, describiendo incesantes círculos alrededor del álamo agrandado por una raíz cuidada. Era Foción. Volvía en sus círculos una y otra vez como si el álamo fuera su Dios y su destino. . . . La enorme cuantía de círculos que sumaba durante el día, la abría en espirales, tan sumergidos como silenciosos, mientras la nocturna lo acogía. (393)

José concludes that the tree represents Fronesis. The next time he returns to the clinic, he discovers that a bolt of lightning has destroyed the tree and that Foción has disappeared. "El rayo que había destruido el árbol había liberado a Foción de la adoración de su eternidad circular" (394).

The tree is a dual image. On the one hand, it represents Foción's obsession with Fronesis, and, on the other, it could represent the tree of life that embodies all the positive and negative aspects of existence. Foción's incessant circling of the tree reveals his attempts to control the chaos in his life and, by extension, to resolve the enigma of existence. It is significant that the circle image is combined with the spiral, for the spiral indicates evolution, growth, and the movement from multiplicity to unity. Foción's motion is circular and spiral, suggesting a progression toward a solution to his problems. The bolt of lightning that releases Foción indicates the sudden gaining of an illumination and insight that frees him from his obsessive anguish.

Of all the characters in the novel, Foción represents, more than any other, multiplicity and chaos. His sexual activities are indicative of the disunity and formlessness that precede ordered creativity. His tumultuous emotions are like a pri-

mordial chaos, the earliest stage of disorganized creation. There is much in the novel to suggest that Lezama Lima regards the creative impulse as one of the underlying principles of existence.

The friendship that exists between Foción, Fronesis, and José is related in many ways to creativity. To a certain extent, it is possible to regard each one as a separate phase of the creative process. Foción represents primordial chaos, Fronesis the most elemental imposition of order on formlessness, and José the observation and refinement of the first two phases. When José visits his dying grandmother in the clinic, she comments on his ability to observe and remember "impresiones":

Tu memoria les da una substancia como el limo de los comienzos, como una piedra que recogiese la imagen de la sombra del pez. Tú hablas del ritmo de crecimiento de la naturaleza, pero hay que tener mucha humildad para poder observarlo, seguirlo y reverenciarlo . . . la mayoría de las personas interrumpen, favorecen el vacío, hacen exclamaciones, torpes exigencias o declaman arias fantasmales, pero tú observas ese ritmo que hace el cumplimiento, el cumplimiento de lo que desconocemos. . . . (392-93)

This conversation takes place immediately after Fronesis's decision to terminate his relationship with Foción and just prior to Foción's liberation from his obsession with Fronesis. After these events, Fronesis and Foción no longer appear in the novel, and José moves toward a fuller comprehension of his direction in life. A particular phase in José's development has ended, and he moves to another. Fronesis and Foción, having served as points of reference on his journey, now fade into the past as José's life embarks on a new path.

There are two other characters in *Paradiso* who have a decisive influence on José and his commitment to creativity. They are his Uncle Alberto and the shadowy and mysterious Oppiano Licario. Alberto resembles the Colonel, in that he is a strong-willed and assertive individual who is a picture of strength. On one occasion, he sends a letter to the family, and one of José's relatives invites José to listen to it, "acércate



más para que puedas oír bien la carta de tu tío Alberto, para que lo conozcas más y le adivines la alegría que tiene. Por primera vez vas a oír el idioma hecho naturaleza, con todo su artificio de alusiones y cariñosas pedanterías" (183). Although José does not display any reaction, the letter greatly impresses him and introduces him to the potentialities of language.

Alberto dies suddenly in an automobile accident, and his death, like the Colonel's, causes shock and consternation. It is hard for those who are left behind to comprehend why such young and active individuals should die suddenly. However, although the significance of death is not revealed, there are suggestions that it has meaning within a larger context that is unknown to the participants. In the last two chapters of the novel (13 and 14), Licario emerges as the central figure in José's reasoning of the enigma of death, for Licario knew Alberto and witnessed the death of the Colonel.

Death and time are the central concerns of the chapter that immediately precedes the reappearance of Licario. Chapter 12 represents an unusual flight of the imagination, for its contents are bizarre and, at first reading, much removed from the main content of the novel. There are four separate stories in the chapter, and they are presented in alternating segments that make it difficult for the reader to follow the sequence of events. The reader goes through the first segment of each story, and then the sequence repeats itself as the reader moves through the second part. The last three stories take place in Havana, but the first narration goes back to the exploits of the Roman general, Atrio Flaminio, in the second century B.C. The chapter begins with a specific historical orientation and moves to a highly imaginative realm. At the same time, however, the author moves his reader toward a consideration of time and eternity, and the separate stories converge on one point. Therefore, on one level he expands his reader's awareness, and, on the other, he focuses the attention on a certain problem of existence. In one of the stories, there is a vase that is broken into many fragments, reassembled, and later replaced. To a great extent, the vase parallels with what the author is doing in the chapter. He takes a subject, in this case, which is time, and breaks it down

into several components or fragments and then rearranges them into a new form. Again, it is the process that is emphasized rather than the end result.

The first story narrates the exploits of Flaminio and his struggle and conquest over rational and irrational forces. His bearing depicts an open disdain for death. At one time, he announces to his troops, "Nada más que sabemos vencer, desconocemos a la muerte, que tendrá que esforzarse hasta cansarse para reconocer a uno solo de nosotros" (400). And his troops reply, "si se acerca la muerte la decapitaremos" (400). Flaminio is the astute and courageous conqueror who lives so close to death that he seems to defeat it. His fondest wish is to die in battle, but he succumbs to an illness and loses the opportunity to die on his own terms.

In the second story, a small child breaks a large vase while he is cared for by his grandmother. The broken vase produces a great deal of concern, and the grandmother picks up the fragments and carefully puts them aside. The event is significant, and it is apparent that the vase is a symbol of wholeness and the integration of the morning of life (the child) with its evening (the grandmother). After the vase is broken, the child and the grandmother feel vaguely threatened, as if a unifying force in their lives has been destroyed. The child reappears in the third and fourth stories and serves as one of the several bridges that connect the four sections.

In the third story, an anonymous narrator relates his encounters with invisible forces in his home and the things he sees as he wanders through Havana. This section of the chapter conveys, better than any of the others, the mystery of existence and the secret working of forces that are only vaguely recognized. During one of his walks, he sees a man on a bench sewing. The man extracts an ivory egg from a stocking he is using, and he holds it up so it can be seen better. Soon after this, the narrator observes a sailor with a knife in his chest being removed from a bar.

The act of sewing could symbolize creation, as it is a process of accumulation and growth; and the egg, the mystery of life or the egg of the world. They are symbols of positive forces that are under control. The egg is contained in a stocking, and sewing requires the mastery of the materials being

used. The shape of the egg suggests an organized reality that can be grasped and understood, and, therefore, one that has established limits. The dying sailor, however, is the victim of a knife wound, indicating the unleashing of primary and instinctive forces that are destructive and not under control.

Although the phenomena observed are open to interpretation, it is clear that the narrator has come in contact with forces or laws that govern existence, and that a definite organization and order exist. The geometrical progression from a square to a circle is also present in this section and attests to the narrator's movement toward an apprehension of the keys of existence. During one of his walks, he sees a child within a circle, and he attempts to approach him, as he wishes to see his face. He fails and the child disappears. We later discover that this child, and the one that appears in the second story, are the same.

The fourth story concerns an aging music critic, Juan Longo, whose young wife tries to impede the effects the ravages of time have on her aged husband by putting him into a cataleptic trance. His wife places him in a glass urn and carefully watches over him. As the years pass, she slowly becomes insane and is obsessed with the preservation of her husband's body. Longo's colleagues become curious about what happened to him, and they visit his home. His wife partially revives him, enough so that he can babble some nonsense that is taken as profound pronouncements. The delegation of music critics leaves, and Longo's wife dispatches him back to the world of dreams. The delegation unexpectedly returns and becomes fully aware of what is transpiring, and a decision is made to place Longo on public display. He is regarded as the "gran vencedor del temporal" and "el burlador del tiempo." Sensational statements are made about his unusual feat, and people flock to see him.

At this point, the four stories begin to merge, for among those who come to see Longo is the anonymous narrator of the third story. When he peers into the crystal urn, however, he does not see Longo but the child in the second story. And when Longo's wife glances into the urn, she is shocked to see a Roman warrior who is, in effect, the Atrio Flaminio in the first story:

Al poner su rostro en la urna, se oyó tal chillido, que bastó también para astillar la noche y hacer que la cuidadora del sueño infinitamente extensivo descendiese al tenebroso Erebo. ¿Qué vio al asomarse a la urna? El rostro de un guerrero romano, crispado en un gesto de infinita desesperación, tratando de alcanzar con sus manos la capa, las botas, la espada de los legionarios que pasaban para combatir en lejanas tierras. El rostro revelaba una acometividad gimiente e impotente, lloraba por la desesperación de no poder sumergirse en el fuego de la batalla. En su lecho de paja, el rostro encendido por la piedra, cuando había jurado el devenir y las alas de las tropas transportadas hacia las pruebas de la lejanía, sentía que la sangre se negaba a obedecerle y se le enredaba en el rostro, formando falsos círculos negados a la movilidad. En lugar de un crítico musical, rendido al sueño para vencer el tiempo, el rostro de un general romano que gemía inmovilizado al borrarse para él la posibilidad de alcanzar la muerte en el remolino de las batallas. (427)

Longo's wife begins to scream and disturbs him in his trance, causing him to die. "Ya el crítico percibe las gotas de lo temporal, pero no como el resto de los mortales, pues la muerte, no el sueño, comienza a regalarle, ahora sí de verdad, lo eterno, donde ya el tiempo no se deja vencer, ha comenzado por no existir ese pecado" (427).

Atrio Flaminio, Juan Longo, and the child represent different aspects of time. Flaminio is the past; Longo is the present; and the child is the future. They all die, but it is important to realize that death is presented as a means of passing from the realm of the temporal to the realm of the eternal. The temporal is an imperfect world ruled by change or time. Flaminio and Longo's wife attempt to control time by either suspending it or dictating how it should flow. Their error is in trying to control a realm ruled by change, and their attempts only result in the perpetuation of imperfection. Flaminio becomes a victim of suspended imperfection, encased in a moment that can only produce frustration. And Longo's victory over time is only an illusion that is easily destroyed by the disharmonic intrusion of reality. Their attempts to attain perfection in a realm of imperfection are doomed to

failure, for they mistakenly regard death as their enemy, when in reality it is their passport to eternity. And eternity represents a realm in which time and imperfection do not exist. They have wronged in attempting to suspend the process of becoming, for it is a course that must be experienced on the road to being.

Chapter 12 ends with a vignette that is not directly related to any of the prior content in the chapter. The sketch is open to interpretation, but it is related to the creative process. Two centurions arrive at the ruins of a Christian temple, which was built over the remnants of an academy for pagan philosophers. They plan to entertain themselves with a game of dice. As they prepare to play, a bust of a geometrician holding a compass falls from one of the decaying walls. They pick up the bust and casually throw it aside, and it becomes wedged in an iron support that holds up the railing of a cupola. They begin to play with the dice, and the first numbers that appear are a two and a three. At this point, the bust of the geometrician falls again, and the point of the compass strikes a die showing the number three, causing the die to tumble over by the other one and both now show the number two. "El cuatro aportado por los dos dados, uno al lado del otro, como si las dos superficies hubiesen unido sus aguas" (428). The two centurions cover themselves with a single cape, leave, and the sketch ends.

The numbers used in the vignette have symbolic meaning and most likely refer to the artistic organization of reality. The compass itself is symbolic of the creative process because it is the instrument with which circles are drawn. The number two most likely stands for duality or separateness, whereas the three denotes synthesis and unity. The creative act breaks down an image into its diverse parts and rearranges the different components into a new form. The unity symbolized by three is destroyed by the compass, and the formation of the four indicates the orderly arrangement of a new form.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, a chapter that deals with man's war against time and his thirst for eternity ends with affirmation

2. It is possible also to interpret the mathematician's rearrangement of the dice into a pair of twos as a manifestation of a tradition dedicated to logic and symmetry.

of the creative process. It can be surmised that daily and continual change is related to an overall process of creation. Birth and death, growth and decay are only aspects of this process, and man can live his life to its fullest by his own creativity. The essence of life then is to create rather than to preserve what was.

Chapter 12 brings into consideration questions concerning the structure of *Paradiso*, for the contents in this chapter are well removed from the main development of the novel. For the most part, *Paradiso* follows a traditional chronological approach and demonstrates great cohesiveness as it explores the Cemí's family tree. However, José's life has little to do with Atrio Flaminio or any of the other characters who appear in Chapter 12. Nevertheless, the chapter's theme can be related to the development of José's appreciation of time and death and his concern with creativity. These matters are presented as being common to all men at all times, and Lezama Lima succeeds in presenting a universal view that is valid in any setting. The chapter also serves as a good example of a technique used throughout the novel. The author begins with widely dispersed factors and unites them into a cohesive whole. He takes characters and events that are separated in time and space and telescopes them into a unified view of reality. As a result, the reader experiences a movement from multiplicity to unity as the fragments of the mosaic swirl into place.

The same technique is used in the presentation of Chapter 13. A disabled bus in Havana is the setting for the introduction of a number of people of diverse interests and backgrounds, and it serves as an ideal site for chance encounters. One of the persons that boards the bus is an old coin collector who turns out to be Licario. During a conversation in the bus, Licario states, "la vida es una red de situaciones indeterminadas, cada coincidencia es algo que quiere hablar a nuestro lado, si la interpretamos incorporamos una forma, dominamos una transparencia" (442). Although life is viewed as a series of chance occurrences, it is asserted that it has form and can be understood. There is system and order in the apparent chaos of life that is accessible to those who will observe and reflect on what they see.

Shortly after the above statement is made, José boards the bus, and Licario notices the initials "J.C." on his wrist. Licario recognizes José as a descendant of the Colonel and concludes that he "ya no se moriría intranquilo, incompleto. Se había verificado el signo que le permitiría recorrer su último camino, con expresión para su pasado y con esclarecimiento para su futuridad" (443). José, of course, does not know Licario, but fate brings them into contact. One of the passengers, Martincillo, picks Licario's pocket only to discover that he has stolen some ancient coins. Not knowing what to do with them, he decides to put them in another passenger's pocket. José witnesses the whole operation, takes the coins from the passenger, and returns them to Licario.

The following day José notices a note in his pocket from Licario. Licario thanks José for returning the coins, invites him to visit, and explains past events that link Licario to José's family:

Conocí a su tío Alberto, vi morir a su padre. Hace veinte años del primer encuentro, diez del segundo, tiempo de ambos sucedidos importantísimos para usted y para mí, en que se engendró la causal de las variaciones que terminan en el infierno de un ómnibus, con su gesto que cierra un círculo. En la sombra de ese círculo ya yo me puedo morir. (445)

The purpose of Licario's life is closely linked to the destiny of the Cemí family. Having witnessed the death of the Colonel, he now has the opportunity to participate in José's development from adolescence to manhood. Since he knew Alberto, he is also aware of the great talent that was lost to the family by Alberto's untimely death, and he is greatly relieved to be in a position to preside over José's emergence into a full awareness of creativity. Vital creative forces that have been momentarily suspended by death are about to surface, and Licario feels that his destiny is to be fulfilled.

José enters Licario's apartment building and is "mistakenly" taken to the seventh floor by an elevator operator. As he is walking down the corridor, he runs his hand along the wall, an act that reminds the reader of José's episode with a piece of chalk in Chapter 2. He stops and looks out of a

window and sees Licario several floors below. Licario is with some of the people who were on the bus, and they are involved in a strange game involving many of the arts. It is a scene of great diversity and confusion. For example, Martinillo, the pickpocket of the earlier part of the chapter, is present and is using a piccolo to poke a crab that is howling like a dog. Licario is presiding over the whole affair as he strikes a bronze triangle and exclaims "estilo sistáltico" (446). The elevator operator says he has made a mistake and that Licario lives downstairs. They descend to the lowest floor, and Licario opens his door before José has a chance to ring and gives the impression he has been waiting for him. None of the individuals José had seen from the seventh floor are there, and, except for a table and the triangle Licario had been striking, everything is different. "Oppiano Licario presentaba un pantaleón negro y una camisa muy blanca. Mientras se prolongaba la vibración exclamó:—Estilo hesicástico." Cemí replies, "Veo, señor . . . que usted mantiene la tradición del *ethos* musical de los pitagóricos, los acompañamientos musicales del culto de Dionisos." Licario immediately comments, "Veo . . . que ha pasado del estilo sistáltico, o de las pasiones tumultuosas, al estilo hesicástico, o del equilibrio anímico, en muy breve tiempo" (447).

The episode conveys a movement from chaos to order and from diversity to unity. The reference to Dionysos is significant, as it is a deity that represents the unleashing of uncontrollable and immense creative energy. This explains Licario's use of the term "estilo sistáltico" during the ritual and his later reference to it as a symbol of "las pasiones tumultuosas." His "estilo hesicástico" refers to order and psychic equilibrium. José has gained control over his inner passions and is now capable of imposing order on chaos. He has, therefore, escaped from the dangers of self-annihilation and dissolution and can now affirm life and existence. This is the symbolism of the white shirt and black trousers, for they are symbols of the positive and negative. Black represents the chaos that precedes organized creativity, that is, the initial stage of the creative process. And white can be the purification of these forces through the imposition of guidance and form. The two colors form a duality in which white (the



shirt) is the upper and superior force. Now that this equilibrium has been attained, José is ready to embark on his own career, and Licario ends the chapter with the comment "Entonces, podemos ya empezar" (447).

Licario is a very important factor in José's development, as he connects both José's past and future. His acquaintance with the Colonel and Alberto represents an appreciation of the past that operates as a kind of self-knowledge for José, and his understanding of the creative process helps José to become more fully aware of the potentialities that the future can hold for him. A section of the last chapter in *Paradiso* is devoted to Licario's past, once again reflecting Lezama Lima's approach to the novel by examining the past so that an appreciation of the present can be gained. Reading *Paradiso* is like tracing the paths left by several spirals as they wander and swirl through space and slowly converge to form a circle. To a certain extent, Licario represents knowledge of the past in a cultural and historical sense and, therefore, is endowed with the aura of mystery and authority that such wisdom imparts.

Near the end of the novel, José takes a nocturnal walk. His strolling in the night is an allegory of his attempts to penetrate the mysteries of life. The enigmas of existence are presented as a challenge that must be answered and struggled against, for they are riddles that can only be unraveled by great effort. Much of what happens to José during his walk parallels the call to adventure, which is an integral part of the presentation of the hero archetype.<sup>3</sup> José feels that some strange force is compelling him to struggle against the night, and he senses that he is being called to accomplish some feat:

Cemí siguió avanzando en la noche que se espesa, sintiendo que tenía que hacer cada vez más esfuerzo para penetrarla. Cada vez que daba un paso le parecía que tenía que extraer los pies de una tembladera. La noche se hacía cada vez más resistente, como si desconfiase del gran bloque de luz y de la musiquilla del ti vivo. Le pareció ver un bosque, donde los árboles trepaban unos sobre otros, como el elefante apoyando las dos patas

3. For a comprehensive treatment of the hero archetype see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

delanteras sobre una banqueta, y sobre el lomo del elefante perros y monos danzando, persiguiendo una pelota, o saltando sobre un ramaje, para caer de nuevo sobre el elefante. La transición de un parque infantil a un bosque era invisiblemente asimilado por Cemí, pues su estado de alucinación mantenía en pie todas las posibilidades de la imagen. No obstante sintió como un llamado, como si alguien hubiese comenzado a cantar, o un nadador que después de unir sus brazos en un triángulo isósceles se lanza a la piscina, más allá de la empalizada. Era un ruido inaudible, la parábola de una pistola de agua, una gaviota que se duerme mecida por el oleaje, algo que separa la noche del resto de una inmensa tela, o algo que prolonga la noche en una tela agujereada por donde asoman su cabeza de clavo unos carretes de ebonita. Era un pie de buey lo que pisaba a la noche. (484)

The ox is usually a symbol of cosmic forces, and apparently it is used in this context in the above quotation. José is moving into a state in which his awareness of these entities is expanding. The process of becoming is greatly accelerated, and an apprehension of being is more accessible to him. The reference to "todas las posibilidades de la imagen" is important, because it indicates that the poetic image can become a challenge that must be approached with a keen sense of intuition combined with the force and strength of intellectual discipline. Lezama Lima gives the impression that these are the implements that are necessary to gain insight into existence, and that this process is re-created every time one approaches a poetic image. The poet then becomes a leading exponent and glorifier of life, continually challenging his listeners to participate fully in it by increasing and expanding their own awareness.

José continues to move through the night, and among the many things he sees is a mosaic of the Holy Grail located in the center of a circle formed by King Arthur's knights. This is another example of the circle image in the novel, for the quest for the Grail represents the search for the mystic center. José's wanderings finally lead him into a room where a wake is in progress and Licario's sister is waiting for him.

Licario has died and as José contemplates the significance of this event, memories of his father and other members of the family come to him. Licario's sister hands him a poem that Licario wrote shortly before dying.

The poem concerns Licario's impending death and its significance to José. It expresses belief in an existence after death and affirms the importance of the spiritual in man's life. The last line reads, "Vi morir a tu padre; ahora, Cemí, tropieza" (489). José is confronted by life's greatest enigma—death—with a poem written by Licario. The word re-creates the enigma of life and also indicates that José's time of trial and tribulation is at hand. Both his father and Licario are dead, and he must now make his own way in the world. However, he is armed with a basic understanding of life's challenges and a definite sense of belonging as he feels that he is part of a tradition formed by those who came before him. José has been bequeathed the most precious of gifts, a spiritual inheritance.

José leaves the wake and stops for a drink in a coffee shop. He begins to idly tap his glass with a spoon, and the sound reminds him of Licario saying "ritmo hesicástico, podemos empezar" (490). With these words the novel ends, marking José's emergence from adolescence and his readiness to venture into the world. One cycle has drawn to a close and another begins.

*Paradiso* is a remarkable novel, complex, and difficult but extremely rewarding to the reader who expends the effort the novel demands. The world that Lezama Lima creates and his unique way of viewing it leaves an impression that lingers indefinitely, and with the passage of time the novel's magneticism has a persuasive influence on the reader. The world is not quite as terrifying after having read *Paradiso*, for the novel encourages its reader to see life in its totality. And the view that emerges from this perspective is one of cohesiveness in which there is meaning and purpose. In this respect, Lezama Lima's outlook is not unlike Carpentier's, as both present a panorama that captures essential truths of human existence. Both are very much aware of the vast cultural currents that are operating in human society and of the debt that each individual owes to the past. And both tend

to view history as a struggle against formlessness in which man continually battles to impose order on chaos.

However, their emphasis is quite different, for Lezama Lima considers how all these forces focus on the individual, whereas Carpentier's concern is to integrate the individual into the currents that engulf him. The individual is much more a master of his fate in Lezama Lima's view than in Carpentier's. All of the characters in *El siglo de las luces*, even the formidable Víctor Hugues, are dominated and swept along by the forces operating around them. The characters in *Paradiso*, on the other hand, discover that true freedom involves the control of one's own inner passions, and that they are victims of themselves as much as by exterior forces. Carpentier's characters struggle to transcend themselves by attempting to create a more perfect social order and world. Lezama Lima's search for an adequate expression of their creative impulse and their integration with life is seen as a celebration of the creative act. Creativity and its relation to time and eternity is a main theme of *Paradiso*.

The two writers show intellectual discipline in their writings and control their creations. Lezama Lima is more imaginative, and his language is more suggestive than Carpentier's. Conversely, Carpentier's control of form is more polished than Lezama Lima's, and it is unlikely that Carpentier would ever have included a chapter such as *Paradiso's* Chapter 12 into his works.

Lezama Lima's imagery tends to weaken the structure of his novel at times and would involve him in difficulties were it not for his remarkable control. *Paradiso* contains indications, however, of a development toward a free use of creative language at the expense of novelistic structure. The control he exercises over the creative process enables him to present his reader with a fairly uniform creation. It is not as cohesive a product as Carpentier's, but it is considerably more structured than Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, which was published one year later in 1967.

*Paradiso* and *El siglo de las luces* explore the workings of time in the historical process and the human psyche, and both works consider chaos to be a definite threat to human existence. It is fair to surmise that both authors are fascinated

with, yet somewhat threatened by, the diffusion that chaos represents. Carpentier sees this breakdown of order as part of a cyclical pattern that creates and destroys a countless number of social forms. For Lezama Lima, the process is related to the creative impulse, but one senses a resistance to the destruction of a creative entity once it has come into being. In some respects, the baroque nature of their art seems to be a way of resisting the destructive diffusion caused by the flow of time, an intricate series of bulwarks that guard against the penetration of time's erosive forces. Carpentier finds solace in man's collective unconscious and Lezama Lima in the hermetic image. They both look to the past with nostalgia, when there existed a freshness of spiritual and psychic energy that has become more diffuse and weakened with time.

Although *El siglo de las luces* and *Paradiso* do not focus on the contemporary period, their struggles against formlessness reflect some of the basic dilemmas of the present, an era haunted by the specter of complete and total disintegration. It remains to be seen whether man's need for constraints can be balanced with his desire for complete freedom and self-expression. A degree of control is necessary for the orderly progress of humanity and the conservation of a sense of decency, but it can easily degenerate into cruel and stifling repression as in the case of Víctor Hugues. Personal and collective freedom are desirable goals, but it is difficult to ascertain where freedom ends and chaos begins. Foción's avowals of sexual freedom bring him to the brink of chaos and self-destruction, and Sofía's unrestrained desire to transcend the inequities of a social order results in the senseless deaths of Esteban and herself.

There has been a gradual breakdown of form in all the arts in the twentieth century, and in the novel the constraints of structure are weakened by the impulse of creative language. Signs of the beginning of this transition are seen in the novels under discussion in the movement from the presentation of chaos merely as the thematic content of a work to its incorporation into the artistic fabric of a novel. Carpentier considers the problems of formlessness by using them as a major part of the content of his work in his study of the

revolutionary process. Formlessness is also a topic in Lezama Lima's novel, but in addition it finds expression in images and becomes partially incorporated into the novel's form.

Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* represents an almost complete embodiment of formlessness into the very language and structure of the novel. This novel creates a world that seems chaotic and without any apparent form, a universe ruled by chance. I will attempt to ascertain whether its chaos is absolute or if there is a new order being created from the ashes of the old.

## Cabrera Infante: Creation in Progress

In *Paradiso*, the universe is viewed as an enigma but with a definite design and form, but in *Tres tristes tigres* it is presented as a realm of chance. Chaos is not a frightening condition for Guillermo Cabrera Infante; and one could almost say that he finds it extremely fascinating and with endless possibilities. He regards the universe more as a creative explosion of a continual process of appearance and dissipation. There is a great sense of movement in *Tres tristes tigres*, created by the author's experimentation with language and his radical approach to structure. This movement is enhanced by his humor that delights his readers even though they sometimes suspect that the author's wit is directed at them. As the reader proceeds through *Tres tristes tigres*, he sometimes feels that there is a whimsical imp peering at him from the letters of the text. The universe is presented as a huge comedy rather than an enigma, a gigantic folly perpetrated by some unknown being.

Cabrera Infante won the coveted literary prize "Biblioteca Breve" in 1964 for a novel entitled *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*. The contest is sponsored by the publishing firm Seix Barral of Barcelona, an enterprise that has done much to promote and publish the works of Spanish-American writers. Cabrera Infante's work was published three years later, after it was revised, when the title was changed to *Tres tristes tigres*. It was an immediate success and quickly gained international attention and praise.<sup>1</sup> Cabrera Infante, a young writer who began his career in the 1950s, was a relative newcomer to the international literary scene when *Tres tristes tigres* appeared in 1967. It was not until the early 1960s, however, that he began to attract attention for his editorship of the cultural supplement to the Cuban newspaper *Revolución* and for the publication of a volume of short stories, *Así en la paz como en la guerra* (1960). Shortly after the cultural supplement of

1. See Esteban del Monte, "Trotos tras *Tres tristes tigres*," *Mundo Nuevo*.

*Revolución* was suspended in 1961, he began serving as cultural attaché for the Cuban government in Belgium. He resigned from this position in 1965 and since then has resided in Europe, one of the many people who have chosen to leave Cuba during the last decade.

The setting in *Tres tristes tigres* takes place in Havana in the summer of 1958, that is, just a few months before the revolutionary government came into power in January of 1959. However, the work is not a political one, although it does capture an era that is coming to an end and the feeling of disintegration that characterizes an apocalyptic period. The novel opens with the English word Showtime!, and we are exposed to the inane chatter of the master of ceremonies in one of Havana's leading nightclubs. We are immediately thrust into the nocturnal setting that constitutes a major part of the novel, and we are left with the impression of a superficial and casual world that is in a chaotic state. Before the main show begins, the MC introduces several people who are in the audience, and many of them reappear in the novel. After these introductions are made and the MC has had the opportunity to tell several absurd jokes in English and Spanish, the section closes with the words Curtains up!. The reader has been introduced to an artificial situation that exists in a real world and yet exercises a strange attraction over him. It is a place where reality and illusion blend and the show is about to begin.

In addition to a Prologue and Epilogue, the novel is divided into eight sections. The novel contains a mixture of several separate story lines, and there are narrators or voices that are not always identified. As a result, the reader gets the impression that the novel has little structure, and the emphasis placed on creative language enhances this sensation. In many respects, *Tres tristes tigres* represents an attempt to capture essence in language itself, and the language of the work is freed from the authority of logic. This freedom gives the novel spontaneity, which is one of the novel's greatest assets, but it also creates a sense of disorder in the reader. The structure of *Tres tristes tigres* is a problem for the critic who tries to be consistent in his traditional methods of analysis, because the different sections in the novel demand diverse



approaches. *Tres tristes tigres* is a good example of the difficulties that criticism can have in keeping up with innovative works.

Cabrera Infante's work is a novel to which neither the reader nor the critic can bring traditional concepts of form or structure. The novel, for example, is plotless and could be considered as a collection of many stories or narrations. One critic has classified *Tres tristes tigres* as an open novel, that is, one that the reader can organize or rearrange to his own liking.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not this is the case, the critic's opinion does emphasize the extent to which the novel's structure is experimental and helps to explain why the novel confounds the reader. We have already mentioned that several sections of the work are narrated by unidentified voices. For example, there are eleven consecutively numbered narrations that are scattered throughout the novel. They resemble vignettes, and in each one an unidentified woman is talking to her psychiatrist. The psychiatrist never utters a word, and we are uncertain how many different women are involved in the meetings. The eleventh of these sessions is placed immediately before the Epilogue, and a woman tells the story of a young girl who is sexually exploited by a baker. He places bread in her mouth so she will not scream. The symbol of the bread becomes twisted and deformed. Rather than sustaining life, it becomes an instrument that cloaks a perverse and aggressive act. It is but one of many examples of a world in disarray in which most human relations are not functioning properly or are perverted. These psychiatric sessions and many of the dreams in the novel reveal the unconscious side of Cuban reality.

This particular story is but one element of the novel's organizational configuration and can be considered individually or as part of the whole. *Tres tristes tigres* demands that the reader be extremely flexible in his approach to the novel, and that he judge it as an artistic creation that has both particular and total effects. The novel's organization causes the reader to confront, as the characters do, the chaos of existence. In this sense, he becomes a participant in the novel's organiza-

2. Luis Gregorich, "Tres tristes tigres, obra abierta," in *Nueva novela latinoamericana I*, pp. 241-61, ed. Jorge Lafforgue.

tional process, imposing order on a fragmented reality.

The best way to approach *Tres tristes tigres* is to appreciate each section for its own merits without attempting to relate it to an overall logical order. The novel is much more rewarding to the reader once he perceives that it is better not to categorize and organize reality. Organization, of course, gives us security and protects us, at least psychologically, from change. *Tres tristes tigres* defies these tendencies and overwhelms us with explosive bursts of creativity. These bursts expand themselves soon after coming into being and fall back into a formless void, victims of death "la gran niveladora: la buldozer de Dios."<sup>3</sup> Herein lies the ecstasy and tragedy of human existence, and the only salvation is to sustain the continuity of the creative process that allows man to rediscover and redefine himself constantly.

The author's use of language accentuates the creativity in *Tres tristes tigres*. The emphasis on language is so pronounced that one critic has gone to the extreme of calling it the novel's only real protagonist, pointing out the importance and experimental quality of the language used in the novel.<sup>4</sup> This explains, in part, the author's constant wordplay and his mixture of many languages. At times, this results in a good deal of humor, especially when he exposes the foibles of our customs and beliefs or ridicules our idols. For example, "matrimonio" becomes "mártirmonio," and there are others such as "Fordnicando" and "masturhablarme." Names of respectable persons are contorted, and we have "William Shakeprick o Shapescare o Chaseapear y Fuckner y Scotch Fitzgerald y Somersault Mom" (220). Although the novel captures the essence of an impending tragedy, we approach it laughingly.

Bustrófedon, a character in the novel, embodies language and its creative potential. He delights in playing with words and frequently extends a part of his own name to everything he sees. On one occasion, he, his friend Códac, and others go to a restaurant (bustrofonda), and Bustrófedon's antics with a waiter (Bustrómozo) result in a loud argument:

3. *Tres tristes tigres* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1967), p. 334. All other quotations are from this edition.

4. Esdras Parra, "Cabrerá Infante: *Tres tristes tigres*," *Imagen*.

y nosotros en el más acá muertos de risa en la orilla del mantel, con este pregonero increíble, el heraldo, Bustrófono, éste, gritando, BustrofenóNemo chico eres un Bustrófonbraun, gritando, Bustrómba marina, gritando, Bustifón, Bustrosimún, Busmonzón, gritando, Viento Bustrófenomenal, gritando a diestro y siniestro y ambidiestro. Tuvo que venir el dueño que era un gallego calvo y chiquito y gordo, más bajito que el camarero, que al ponerse de pie al fondo no daba pie y parecía que se puso de rodillas, un Busto que anda. (208)

In many respects, Bustrófedon represents the incarnation of the word into a living reality. His name is of Greek origin, and it means to write alternately from right to left and left to right. Bustrófedon expresses the desire to see a book, "escrito todo al revés, donde la última palabra fuera la primera y a la inversa . . ." (264). After his death, it is commented that he has travelled "al otro mundo, a su viceversa, al negativo, a la sombra, del otro lado del espejo . . ." (264). His death is presented as a movement from life in time to an existence in eternity. During his life, Bustrófedon had been fascinated with anything that was reversible—words, numbers, or concepts. He represents a combination of physical and metaphysical forces and attempts to operate on both sides of existence. Although he dies, he lives in the minds of many of the novel's characters, and the reader is aware of his presence.

Cabrera Infante is not presenting us with a treatise on existence after death, but he does explore the relationship between man's creative impulse and his desire to achieve immortality or permanence. He views life as being a delicate, ephemeral affair. Change is customary, and nothing is permanent. Actions and gestures are forgotten with time, and once something has passed, its essence can never be recaptured. The characters in *Tres tristes tigres* search for order and permanence in a constantly changing world. They are at times comical and tragic, and the reader laughs at their ludicrous actions and sympathizes with their melancholy condition.

The creative impulse is closely related to a sense of childish play in Bustrófedon. He delights in the diversity and

similarity of sounds he can create with words. Many of his verbal creations sound nonsensical in that they depend solely on rhyme or rhythm and are not necessarily related to any meaning. In this respect, Bustrófedon represents an appreciation of the potentiality of language and the sheer joy of spontaneous and uninhibited creation. In a sense, he is a character in the process of discovering himself through language, creating himself as he goes along. This process of discovery through the creative use of language applies to many of the characters in the novel, but Bustrófedon is the most striking practitioner. He brings a spiritual freshness to the characters in the work who are weighed down by the cynicism and broken illusions of a dying age. Bustrófedon lives in a society that is seriously straying from what is right and is slipping down the road to dissolution. He offers the key to a method of building a new society.

The reader is impressed by the number of characters in *Tres tristes tigres* who engage or attempt to engage in creative activity. In addition to Bustrófedon, there is Eribó, a musician, Silvestre, a would-be writer; Arsenio Cué, an actor; and Códac, a photographer. There is also the unforgettable and marvellous La Estrella, one of the most remarkable creations of the novel. La Estrella is "una mulata enorme, gorda gorda, de brazos como muslos y de muslos que parecían dos troncos sosteniendo el tanque del agua que era su cuerpo" (63). Although she is obese and generally unattractive, she is an outstanding singer, capable of creating a purity of sound that moves everyone who hears her. She refuses to be accompanied by any instrument, and her voice represents the freshness of primordial sound. La Estrella is a combination of the ugly and the beautiful, a sort of symbol of life itself. Her body is almost repulsive, an entity it is pointed out, that the worms will fully enjoy when she dies. But this ugliness is capable of producing incredible beauty. Códac remarks that the total effect "era de una belleza tan distinta, tan horrible, tan nueva que lamenté no haber llevado la cámara para haber retratado aquel elefante que bailaba ballet, aquel hipopótamo en punta, aquel edificio movido por la música . . ." (64). At first we are puzzled by the fact that it is Códac, a photographer who is sensitive to visual reality, who

becomes so fascinated by Estrella's beauty. But on second thought, we realize that Códac's role as a photographer of social functions exposes him to many superficial beauties. Despite her exterior ugliness, La Estrella's voice represents an authenticity and a potentiality that has not been fully realized.

La Estrella and Bustrófedon represent, more than any of the other characters in the novel, the creative impulse in its purest form. They are very spontaneous creatures, and there is little calculation or forethought to what they do. In fact, they impress the reader as being rather mindless and completely devoid of any practical sense. Despite the fears of her doctor, La Estrella goes to Mexico City on a singing tour. Too much altitude and eating prove to be more than her heart can withstand, and she dies suddenly. She becomes a victim of her enormous vitality and appetite for food and fame. There is some confusion as to what should be done with her body, but she is finally buried in Mexico. Códac, who is the narrator of much of La Estrella's story, laments her death and fears she will soon be forgotten. Despite her formidable size and her creative accomplishments, she is in the end just another fragment of life, passed on to eternity. As he considers this lamentable circumstance, Códac states, "en dos años ella estará olvidada y eso es lo más terrible, porque la única cosa por que siento un odio mortal es el olvido" (287).

It is significant that La Estrella and Bustrófedon, who represent spontaneous creativity, are the only main characters who die in the novel. Their demise seems to emphasize the fragile quality of the individual's existence and creativity. Their influence is felt, however, throughout the novel as they haunt the minds and spirits of those who knew them. Although La Estrella and Bustrófedon as physical entities no longer exist, their styles of life and attitudes survive them. The author suggests in the novel that this is the only quality that outlasts the temporal limitations of human life. This is a way of saying that essence is found in attitudes, or that permanence, if it exists at all, is more dependent on the way a fact or object is perceived rather than any innate quality the fact or object may possess. Indeed, the concept denies the possibility of permanence as we tend to regard it, for it

accentuates a dynamic process instead of a static state. Significance is not found in the permanence of being but in the process of becoming. This is why creativity and playful discovery are such important elements in *Tres tristes tigres*. It also explains in part the restlessness and constant movement—mental and physical—of the novel's characters.

There is an autopsy performed on Bustrófedon's body. A lesion is found when his brain is removed and is diagnosed as the cause of his prodigious ability with words. For Códac, the doctor who makes the diagnosis is nothing but a pedantic fool. He asserts that "todos los técnicos son mentirosos pero siendo creído siempre como siempre lo son los grandes mentirosos . . ." (222). His protest is against those who would attempt to explain all of reality by reducing it to a materialistic study of cause and effect. Absolute knowledge is an elusive commodity in *Tres tristes tigres*, and those who think they have access to it are often chided.

There is a primordial quality to Bustrófedon and La Estrella's creativity that has very positive connotations. Their unique usage of language and sound represents an attempt to return to origins in order to capture the freshness of a new beginning. Their efforts in this respect can almost be termed an anomaly, for they move within a society that is decidedly committed to artificiality and illusion. The Prologue, which takes place in a nightclub, underscores this situation. The master of ceremonies' trivial chatter is a parody of this false condition. Much of what he says is exaggerated, but in a social order divorced from reality—another falsehood or illusion does no harm.

Many of the characters' views of reality are based on concepts gleaned from the cinema and television, the modern day producers of illusions and myths.<sup>5</sup> During one episode, Silvestre explains that he was kissing a girl's neck "dráculamente" (396). In another, he tells Cué a friend's dream in which the world is being consumed by fires set off by an "estallido apocalíptico." Among the ruins, a woman mounted on a galloping horse appears, untouched by the

5. Cabrera Infante has worked as a movie critic, and a collection of reviews that previously appeared in Cuban magazines has been republished in *Un oficio del siglo veinte* (La Habana: Ediciones R, 1963).

destruction that is occurring all around her. She appears to be a redemptive figure, but as it turns out, she is Marilyn Monroe. The message seems clear enough—in an apocalyptic age superficial glamour is mistakenly regarded as salvation.

Many of the characters in *Tres tristes tigres* dwell within a world of fantasy and illusion. Arsenio Cué, Silvestre, and Códac, the three tigers of the novel's title, drift in and out of a world of superficial glamour and make-believe during their nocturnal wanderings. Cué is a professional actor, and he and the photographer Códac form a synthesis of illusion. Cué's personal and professional lives blend together to the point that they seem one and the same. He is constantly playing a role to the extent that it is difficult to know who he is. At one point, an exasperated Silvestre admonishes Cué because he thought Cué was talking seriously for a change, and Cué replies, "En serio dentro del juego" (443). His humor, his continual role playing, and his dark sunglasses protect him from a prying world. As he himself states, "Soy el rey del disimulo. Actor at large" (348). Cué has an aversion to anything in its natural state. At one point he declares, "En todo caso ya ves que ni a mí ni a mi subconsciente ni a mis miedos atávicos nos gusta el mar. Ni el mar ni la naturaleza ni los abismos estelares" (314). Nature in general and the sea in particular represent formlessness, and, therefore, the void into which he must pass. It is an issue he would prefer to avoid.

Despite these characteristics, there are indications that Cué is striving to move toward a more authentic state. At one point, he objects to a church that uses a recording and loudspeakers in place of real bells. He is well aware of the deceptive attractiveness of artificiality and the falseness of imitations. Cué's constant role playing is a process that alternately moves him toward self-discovery or self-deception. Cué, by staging his pretenses, tries to become what he is not, and in the process he often conjures up a new being. In one instance early in the novel, he narrates an episode in which he dies. The reader does not discover what actually happens until the last section of the novel. The death turns out to be a symbolic one, and Silvestre refers to it as Cué's "nuevo nacimiento: su resurrección metafísica" (431). It represents his rebirth into a

new life upon arriving in Havana, and it is a process that Cué acts out. In a sense, he determines his own destiny. Cué's playful excursions into the world of make-believe have a serious purpose. He lives within a society that is wasting its energies in useless dissipation, and his antics represent an effort to channel these activities into creative forces. In this respect, Cué fulfills the necessities of a future that is not realized within the temporal limitations of the novel.

Silvestre is Cué's closest friend, and they spend a great deal of time together wandering restlessly through the labyrinths of Havana. Silvestre comments that his companion is obsessed with time and that Cué "buscaba el tiempo en el espacio y no otra cosa que una búsqueda era nuestros viajes continuos, interminables, un solo viaje infinito . . ." (296). Cué is continually attempting to transcend the limits of the present, propelling himself toward the future in a search for permanence. Silvestre, on the other hand, is obsessed with the past to the extent that he prefers to remember things rather than live them. Both of them are estranged from the present, as they attempt to gain some understanding of a reality fragmented by time. Silvestre is particularly concerned with organizing the chaos of existence, and Cué chides him for attempting to accomplish this by means of the written word. "Hay quienes ven la vida lógica y ordenada, otros la sabemos absurda y confusa. El arte (como la religión o como la ciencia o como la filosofía) es otro intento de imponer la luz del orden a la (sic) tinieblas del caos. Feliz tú, Silvestre, que puedes o crees que puedes hacerlo por el verbo" (334). One of the central preoccupations of *Tres tristes tigres* is man's attempts to fathom the implications of formlessness. In fact, the novel is organized so that the reader himself is forced to grapple with this question.

Some of the characters reveal different concepts of existence in their attitudes toward literature. For Bustrófedon, the only possible literature of any consequence would be an oral one, another indication of the primordial aspect of his creative impulse. Silvestre prefers the written word, which Cué ridicules, claiming that numbers represent the only possibility of permanence. In fact, Cué, in a whimsical mood, proposes that the only authentic literature would be one



based exclusively on chance. Words would be assigned numbers, and the reader would simply use a pair of dice to determine their order of presentation. Despite the comical aspects of some of their proposals, they are all wrestling with the elusiveness of reality and are trying to fathom the basic principles that govern existence. Cué's view, that the universe is dominated by chance rather than order, is the most persuasive concept that *Tres tristes tigres* presents. In the first part of the Bachata section of the novel, Cué and Silvestre are driving around Havana and are listening to classical music on the radio. Cué identifies Bach as being the composer of the composition that is being played. This observation leads them into a series of comments and a discussion evolves. Then the announcer identifies the composer as Vivaldi, and Silvestre laughs. They have mistaken one stimulus for another, but it really makes no difference, for it is just another random reaction within a series of chance occurrences. This situation is similar to an observation that Cué makes at another time when he states, "Vivo entre lo provisorio y el desorden, en la anarquía. Este caos tiene que ser de todas-todas otra metáfora de la vida" (326). There is reason to believe that even Cué's faith in numbers is a passing fancy, another temporary source of security.

There is a section of *Tres tristes tigres* in which Cabrera Infante effectively uses language to parody the style of some of Cuba's most distinguished writers. The section is entitled "La muerte de Trotsky referida por varios escritores cubanos, años después—o antes." The parodies are effected by Bustrófedon and Cué and are made orally and recorded on tapes. The seven writers who are privileged this recognition are Martí, Lezama Lima, Piñera, Lydia Cabrera, Novás Calvo, Carpentier, and Nicolás Guillén. The assassination of Trotsky is presented as if these writers were relating it, and the result is an amusing burlesque of their styles. Lezama Lima's indirect and complicated way of writing is effectively mimicked, and his erudition mocked by the inclusion of "sic" beside misspelled names. Piñera's recently developed concern for moral and ethical questions is brought into focus as they become more important than what is happening in his section. Carpentier's cultural pretenses and his predilec-

tion for avoiding dialogues in his novels are given special attention, along with his tendency to examine actions in a way that almost stops time.

The parodies mimic the styles of the seven writers and draw freely from the contents of their works. They generally reveal an intimate understanding of the writers' literary creations and, in some instances, convey some affection for the author being joshed. The inclusion of this section, which is approximately in the middle of the novel, is one of the organizational devices used by Cabrera Infante that minimizes the importance of structure and emphasizes the role of language. In this section, we have a parody of the styles, personalities and preferences of different writers, and a multi-viewed version of a historical fact. Some of these writers died before the act occurred, but their re-created style is what is used to capture the event. This can be another manifestation of the belief that it is one's style rather than ideology that has a chance of surviving for any length of time.

If one wishes, he may read some political significance into "La muerte de Trotsky," since it presents stylized Cuban views of an important event in the Communist world. Any such interpretation must be approached with extreme care and should take into account Cabrera Infante's tendency to mock everything. For example, he collaborated on the English translation of *Tres tristes tigres* that added to "La muerte de Trotsky" section the dates of the lives of the authors being parodied. Lezama Lima's and Piñera's dates of death are listed as 1965 and 1966, respectively, although they are alive at the time of this writing. For one reason or another, they have chosen to remain in Cuba, and Cabrera Infante is perhaps saying that for artistic purposes they are dead. In another reference to a political situation, an intoxicated Cué announces to Silvestre that he is leaving to join Fidel Castro in his mountain stronghold. Silvestre brushes it off as another passing fancy and tells Cué that if he goes "terminarás como Ronald Colman. Primero mucho Beau Geste y después creyéndote Otelo y al final muerto en el cine y muerto en la vida y muerto total" (347). After this statement, Cué and Silvestre launch into one of their sessions of wordplay, and Cué's would-be commitment is forgotten. Neither Cué nor

Silvestre is the material of which fanatics are made.

There are other political barbs such as "fidel fiasco" and "psicocastro," and Cué at one point claims that "el español al revés es ruso" (360), but it is all done within the general scope of the novel and Cabrera Infante's tendency to ridicule everything. During one conversation, Cué states, "Dice Chesterton que el té, como todo lo que viene de Oriente, es veneno cuando se hace fuerte." And Silvestre immediately asks, "¿Se refería a nuestra provincia?" (425). This is an oblique reference to Oriente, Cuba's easternmost province, the birthplace of Fidel Castro and Batista, the dictator against whom he fought. It is worth noting that it is also Cabrera Infante's home territory, for it points to the fact that his humor also closes in on itself as well as being directed against others. There is no doubt that he was aware that some of the things said in the novel would provoke angry reactions in Cuba, but in all fairness it should be noted that some outside of Cuba, such as Lino Novás Calvo, responded with equal pique to his barbs. The important thing, of course, is that *Tres tristes tigres* captures the essence of a social order that senses a drastic change is coming, and some of its members are searching for the means to continue once that change has happened. They are searching for order in chaos, permanence in a realm of change, infinity in a world of limitations. Figures such as Batista, his henchman Ventura, and Fidel Castro are mentioned in the novel, but they are fragments within the totality of Cuban reality and are not the object of the novel's movement.

The technique of combining several versions of the same event for comic purposes is also used in the section of the novel entitled "Los visitantes." In this case, we see Havana through the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, American tourists who spend only a few days in Cuba. The reader's first contact is with Mr. Campbell's account of what happens, which is then followed by corrections presented by Mrs. Campbell. She contradicts almost everything in Mr. Campbell's version, and both narrators reveal the human proclivity to present themselves in the best light possible. Mr. Campbell, for example, skillfully conceals his interest in pornography under moral platitudes, and each intimates that the

other is responsible for their presence at a live performance of sexual acts. The two versions form a caricature of the superficiality of a tourist's view of a culture.

The entire story is then repeated. The repetition contains a number of attempted corrections and many footnotes that deal with problems of translation. The language is very awkward and clumsy, even ludicrous. The whole matter is then dropped, and the reader is not cognizant of what is really going on and why this episode is even included in the novel. He only knows that Mr. Campbell appeared briefly in the nightclub scene of the Prologue, when he was incorrectly introduced as the heir to the Campbell Soup Company. Near the end of the novel, we discover that Silvestre is in possession of the manuscript, and that the story was originally written in English by a Mr. Campbell who is a professor of Spanish from the States. The story is to be published in a popular Cuban journal, and Silvestre has been asked to revise a terrible translation made by Rine. Earlier we had seen Silvestre's and Rine's translations but were given no introduction to the material.

Within the context of the novel, the reader's first contact with "Los visitantes" gives him the impression that he is dealing with a fragment of reality that does not fit into the overall scheme of things. "Los visitantes" is one of the many examples of fragmented reality presented in *Tres tristes tigres*. Its location in the novel puzzles the reader, and if he is not careful, he will find himself interpreting it before he is fully aware of what is happening, just as Cué and Silvestre have done when they mistake a Vivaldi composition for one by Bach in the beginning of the Bachata section. The point is to be aware that one is dealing with an arbitrary occurrence, and that any interpretation may be a risky undertaking.

Many of the secondary characters and unidentified voices in *Tres tristes tigres* reflect different aspects of the decadence of a society in which something is seriously wrong. There is much activity that leads nowhere, as energies are dissipated in meaningless undertakings. Cuba Venegas, a singer, is a good example of these tendencies, as she is very much involved in superficialities and casual relationships. She is described as "una mulata alta, de pelo bueno, india . . ." (91),

a synthesis of the racial composition of her country. Silvestre calls her "La Puta Nacional," and Códac explains that "es mejor, mucho mejor ver a Cuba que oírla y es mejor porque quien la ve la ama, pero quien la oye y la escucha y la conoce ya no puede amarla, nunca" (278). A superficial acquaintance based on external appearances is preferable to an intimate knowledge of what she is like, for Cuba Venegas is essentially empty and unattractive. Her voice is a manifestation of her authentic being, and in this respect she forms an interesting contrast to La Estrella who is ugly in appearance but creates beautiful sound. When La Estrella is just beginning her career, she parodies Cuba Venegas. Significantly, La Estrella moves from parody to genuineness, from an activity twice removed from reality to one that becomes a symbol of authenticity. La Estrella, like Bustrófedon and Cué, propels herself into an authentic state by the sheer force of her creativity, and she succeeds through mimicry. The propensity for playfulness of Bustrófedon and of the other characters is an integral part of a process that uses mimicry and parody as a starting point. La Estrella also demonstrates a tendency to live in a world of fantasy. She frequently speaks of a son, but those who know her well say he is only a fanciful creation. At one point, she claims he has died, and immediately after this her career rises rapidly. It would seem that her pretense helps her to create a new dimension in sound.

The dichotomy between artificiality and authenticity in *Tres tristes tigres* often turns out to be the distinction between creativity and sterility. The implication of this view is that everyone lives in a world of illusion, but that there is a great difference between living out the illusions one creates himself and existing within those perpetuated by others. For these reasons, the novel's movement is toward re-creation instead of duplication, creation rather than sterility, change in place of permanence. At times, the characters struggle against these dynamic forces. Cué often reveals a longing to remain as he is, but he seems to perceive that even to achieve this, he must continually change with the world around him. In a dynamic world of constant change, stagnation means death.

There are characters in *Tres tristes tigres* who seem to be reproductions of some assembly line. In a few cases, even their names are suggestive of a mass-produced product. For example, we have the homosexual Alex Bayer, Irenita who is termed a miniature Marilyn Monroe, and Vivian Smith Corona. Vivian is a spoiled and immature member of the upper class who attempts to copy the social games of her elders. Eribó, the lonely drummer, becomes emotionally involved with her, but the relationship leads nowhere. Eribó recognizes the pathos of the situation and views it in ironical terms. Once when Vivian is staging a good cry, Eribó lends her his handkerchief:

Se lo presté y se limpió las lágrimas y la saliva y hasta se sonó en él. Mi único pañuelo. Quiero decir, de la noche: tengo más en mi casa. No me lo devolvió. Quiero decir, que no me lo devolvió nunca: todavía debe tenerlo en la casa o en la cartera. o el camarero debe estarlo usando, porque era un pañuelo fino de una caja de seis, carísima dijo ella, que me regaló Cuba. (116-17)

Eribó's lamentation for the lost handkerchief places their whole relationship in proper perspective. Eribó's association with Vivian is typical of most of the relationships that exist between men and women in the novel. They are essentially sterile and self-defeating, another indication that all is not well in the social order they live in.

By the time we reach "Bachata," the last major section in the novel, we realize that the personal fortunes of the main characters have been declining. Bustrófedon and La Estrella are shadows of the past, although their influence lingers on, preoccupying the thoughts of those who knew them. Eribó's many ambitions have not been satisfied, and he is playing in a nightclub of little importance. Códac has been transferred in his journalistic work from covering the social scene to the more realistic and distasteful duties of photographing political reality. It is unattractive work exercised during the last months of the Batista dictatorship, and he explains, "me paso la vida retratando detenidos y bombas y petardos y muertos que dejan por ahí para escarmiento . . . y hago guardia de nuevo pero es una guardia triste" (281). Cué has had difficul-

ties in his work, and there are signs that Silvestre may be going blind. Códac's new assignment and the references to Silvestre's possible blindness are indicative of the general gloom that is seeping its way into the lives of the characters.

"Bachata" is the narration of one long night that Silvestre and Cué spend together, and as it draws to a close, Cué drops Silvestre off at his home. Silvestre is then alone and as he prepares to retire amid "el silencio de la última noche" (444), his thoughts wander to considerations of Bustrófedon and infinity:

miraba allá al otro lado del heaviside a la gran pradera oscura de los cielos y más allá y más allá de más allá y más allá todavía donde allá es acá y todas las direcciones y ningún lugar o un lugar sin lugar sin arriba ni abajo ni este ni oeste, nunca-nunca, y pude ver con estos ojos que se comerán los gusanos, sabidureza de las nociones, vi, de nuevo las estrellas, unas pocas: siete granos de arena en una playa: playa que es un grano de arena en otra playa: playa que es un grano de arena de una playa que está en un grano de arena en otra playa, pequeña, de una rada o estanque o charca que forma uno de los muchos mares que están dentro de una burbuja de un océano fenomenal donde ya no hay estrellas porque las estrellas perdieron el nombre: el colmos (sic), y preguntándome si Bustrófedon estaría igualmente en expansión con las señales de su espectro corriéndose hacia el rojo, rosado en mi memoria y pensando que un año-luz también convierte el espacio en un tiempo limitado mientras hace del tiempo un espacio infinito, una velocidad. . . . (444-45)

Somehow the contemplation of ultimates is always associated with Bustrófedon, whose linguistic games offer the possibility of the creation of a new order. Silvestre's thoughts then move to events in his past, and he drifts off into the realm of reveries.

This episode is followed by the eleventh psychiatric session and the Epilogue. The eleventh vignette is the story of a girl who is sexually exploited by a baker who stuffs her mouth with bread so she will not scream. His crime is discovered, producing a reaction of righteous indignation in the

village. There is a tragic aftermath for the young victim, however, as she becomes the object of ridicule and gross insults. In the popular imagination, the victim becomes party to the crime.

This episode parallels in many respects a narration that appears immediately after the Prologue. In this instance, a young girl who is never identified relates how she and a girl friend engaged in sexual activities under a parked truck. Their unique perspective allows them to witness occasionally the heavy petting that Petra and her suitor engage in. One day, the girls are nearly run over when the truck is unexpectedly started, and to hide their own activities, they claim they were under the truck so they could watch Petra. The unfortunate Petra becomes the object of a scandalous uproar that forces her and her mother to move to another town. The young girls, however, escape from the episode unscathed, and their sexual activities go undetected. Both this event and the eleventh vignette disturb the reader's sense of justice, leaving him once again with the perception of a universe ordered by mere chance.

It is significant that these episodes are paired with the Prologue and Epilogue. The Prologue's nightclub scene and the anonymous voice in the Epilogue respectively portray and project unnatural situations. The Prologue and Petra's episode are more humorous than their counterparts at the end of the novel, but all four sections create uneasiness or dissatisfaction. Much of the restlessness is disguised in humor in the first half of the work, but as the novel comes to an end, a melancholy despair predominates. Cabrera Infante has stated that the Epilogue is "spoken by a mad woman sitting on a seat in the park beside the Malecón in Havana. This crazy speech is literally taken from real life, since it is virtually a shorthand record of the senselessly repetitive speech of a mad woman actually sitting in that park on a sunny day many years ago."<sup>6</sup> The Epilogue closes on a note of incoherence born of frustration and despair.

*Tres tristes tigres* opens and closes with sections that capture or suggest rebellion against a society that has lost its way. It

6. Rita Guibert, "The Tongue-Twisted Tiger: an Interview with Cabrera Infante," *Review* 72.



is a society devoid of any sense of purpose and is seriously committed to error. Energies are not released the way they should be, and, as a result, we have substitutes and perversions rather than creativity and genuineness. Like a rudderless ship that is guided by nonexistent lighthouses, its random motion produces a sense of giddiness even as it glides inexorably toward disaster. Cabrera Infante has described the nocturnal festival that his characters engage in as a "communion with deadly night sin."<sup>7</sup> His description explains the attractions and pitfalls of the existence the novel portrays. His work also explores the possibilities of escape offered to the individual by the creative process, and this search is centered on sound and language.

The language of *Tres tristes tigres* is the most authentic that any Cuban writer has ever produced. Only the short-story writer Novás Calvo approaches Cabrera Infante's ability to capture the essence of his characters in the language they use. His language is authentic yet creative. Cabrera Infante accomplishes this without falling into the pitfalls that captured so many of the writers who preceded him, especially those who employed realistic and naturalistic techniques. Those writers were so intent on reproducing the language of their characters that creativity was suffocated. Words for them were individual symbols that defined their characters. They confused duplication with creativity and failed to see that words should not be regarded merely as symbols but as part of a symbolic process. Cabrera Infante succeeds where many did not, because he recognizes that he is capturing a process rather than an end result. Consequently, we see the world as his characters perceive it, as a place of dynamic change rather than static definition.

Cabrera Infante's interest in change is an all-encompassing one, to the extent that there are variations in his novel between some editions. There are minor textual differences and occasionally even a name is changed. The English version, on which he collaborated, has a considerable amount of text added to it. One can regard this as a sign of a writer who cannot resist experimenting with his creation, or it could be

7. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

an outward manifestation of his recognition of the role that change plays in existence. Whatever the case may be, *Tres tristes tigres* is a world of variable and deceptive phenomena, a world constantly moving, continually creating, and discovering itself. In many respects, the novel defies interpretation or definition. I recall a discussion I had with another reader of *Tres tristes tigres*. We were puzzled by a difference in interpretation, and to clarify the matter, we consulted our copies, only to discover that our texts differed. We were both right or wrong, depending on the point of view. It was somewhat like Silvestre and Cué's mistaken discussion of Bach in "Bachata," the degree of confusion being directly related to erudition rather than ignorance. The novel suggests that if a little knowledge can be regarded as dangerous, a great deal can be an absolute disaster. Cué remarks, "& Los franceses hacen de la lucidez una virtud, cuando no es más que un vicio: la visión ideal de la vida, que en realidad es confusa" (333-34). In this view, knowledge can work to the detriment of those who possess it, since it is never complete. The acquisition of absolute knowledge is an unattainable goal in *Tres tristes tigres*.

Cabrera Infante has given us one of Spanish America's most stimulating and creative novels. In terms of sheer enjoyment, it would be difficult to name a work that surpasses *Tres tristes tigres*. It is an easy book to read because of its fresh humor and the continual sense of discovery it imparts. *Tres tristes tigres* contains a unique and successful combination of tragedy and comedy, contributing greatly to the novel's artistic success. This combination appeals directly to our emotions and intellect. However, it is not easy to understand the novel's meaning and significance. The novel's structure is particularly baffling and challenges the reader's concepts of form and order.

The characters in *Tres tristes tigres* search for order in a chaotic world and for meaning in a confused society. The creative force of the language contributes to the fragmentation of the work's structure, and the novel's arrangement is such that the reader experiences this process. There are contradictory forces operating in the novel that are moving the characters simultaneously toward death and rebirth. The

fragmentation of form captures the essence of a social order in the process of dissolution, well on the way to destruction. On the other hand, the fragmentation of language can be regarded as the first stage of a new creative art. It is the force that is conjuring up new beings within a waning social order. Destructive and creative forces are operating at the same time, and the vehicle of these processes is language. It creates as it destroys, offers doom and hope, conveys inspiration as it defeats.

Language is man's greatest and most abused creation. It offers a constant testimony of his fondest hopes and outstanding follies, an exterior manifestation of his inner condition. Words can beguile and charm, deceive and destroy, instruct or confuse. We both reveal and hide ourselves in words and use them to sustain and abuse our fellowmen. For these reasons, Bustrófedon, that incredible incarnation of language in *Tres tristes tigres*, is called "el Gran Totonán Totó, Dalai, The Mostest . . ." (269). He is an example of the creative power that language can have, a way of struggling against the void that surrounds us, our sound of protest against the winds of time.

## Summary and Conclusions

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the works of Villaverde, Gómez de Avellaneda, and Suárez y Romero established a tradition of social criticism that usually centered on issues such as slavery and corruption. This movement toward self-awareness would be considered superficial by contemporary standards, since it concentrated on exterior reality and evidenced little introspection, but it nevertheless marked the inception of the long road toward self-discovery. The search for identity was particularly complicated, because Cuba remained a Spanish colony until 1898 and experienced a great deal of patronizing interference in its internal affairs by the U.S. government during the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the early Cuban novels used techniques that were part of the literary trends in vogue in the Western world at the time of their publication, in Villaverde's major novel, *Cecilia Valdés*, we see the beginnings of a definition of the Cuban national character. The process of self-definition through criticism would remain a major trend in the Cuban novel until the 1920s, when it found maximum expression in the works of Loveira. Loveira's novels are not works of great technical innovation, but they do represent an honest attempt to examine the defects of Cuban society.

During the intervening period between Villaverde and Loveira, several writers made significant contributions to the development of the novel. Martí and Castellanos published works in which aesthetic considerations related to style were given more attention. Artistically speaking, Ramón Meza y Suárez Inclán's *Mi tío el empleado* is probably the most significant work of the nineteenth century. He successfully combined criticism of the colonial society with astute irony that was often humorous. This ironical humor is particularly evident in the novels of Arenas and to a certain extent of Cabrera Infante. During the second decade of the twentieth cen-

tury, Carrión published novels that contain penetrating psychological portrayals of their characters. His best work, *Las honradas*, evidences a subtle use of narrative tone equal to that of Meza and an ability for psychological characterization never seen before in the Cuban novel. Carrión's preoccupation with the inequities suffered by women is just now beginning to be a major concern of contemporary society.

The year 1933 was a turning point in the development of the Cuban novel, for it marks the appearance of Carpentier's first novel, *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*, and Labrador Ruiz's highly experimental *El laberinto de sí mismo*. Labrador Ruiz's novel introduces the fragmentation of form that is one of the characteristics of the contemporary experimental novel. *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* is the first attempt at developing a transcendent regionalism—that is, a portrayal of regionalistic circumstance that amounts to more than sketches of local customs. Carpentier's works, which span four decades of Cuban narrative expression, have brought the Cuban novel international fame and recognition by their expression of universal concerns and their probing of the importance of time and place in human destiny. Carpentier successfully overcame the limitations of regionalism and established continuity and excellence in the novel. Hernández Catá is one of the few who showed a similar dedication before the 1920s.

Although written late in his career, the publication of Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* in 1966 marked the appearance of a unique masterpiece. Carpentier and Lezama Lima's novels represent a search for order in human experience and history by interpreting the present in relation to the past and the particular in connection with the general. In their works, individual acts are usually related to the larger forces of which they are a part, and this identification of relationships can be regarded as a search for unity and coherence. Both authors look for meaning and permanence in the disorder of existence—Lezama Lima in the destinies of a family and its individual members and Carpentier in his protagonists' roles in historic events or excursions into the past. In this respect, they both search for truth in history. Their works also are characterized by the erudite and sophisticated language, which is rich in imagery and suggestion, complex and ornate,

and in Lezama Lima's case, frequently enigmatic. Their language has great sensorial appeal that moves their readers into realms of fabulous speculation.

There is a sense of incompleteness in Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* and *El siglo de las luces*, which is revealed in the main characters' attitudes toward or perception of time. In a sense, many of the important figures in both novels feel alienated from the present and attempt to escape its limitations by seeking refuge in the past or future. The narrator-protagonist in *Los pasos perdidos* is haunted by a feeling that something fundamental is missing from his existence, and that this lost essence can be found in the past. The novel is a chronicle of his attempts to incorporate aspects of the past into the present, so that the challenges and dangers of contemporary life can be confronted and conquered. The characters in *El siglo de las luces* project their hopes for a better existence into the future. They believe that human salvation can be accomplished by carrying out fundamental changes in social organization, and this faith is put into action by their participation in a revolutionary process. Some, of course, become cynical about this possibility after suffering a number of bitter experiences and seeing firsthand the paradoxes of a revolution, but others never waver in their belief that a better society can be created. One of the characters who once shared this revolutionary ideal and faith in man's capacity to better his condition subordinates his revolutionary fervor to the needs of the present and reduces his quest to the personal exercise and maintenance of power. In this regard, any movement toward a stance that stresses personal rather than collective needs is viewed with negative connotations. However, the novel never resolves the contradictions inherent in attempts to satisfy personal and collective necessities and concerns, and much of the tension generated in *El siglo de las luces* is related to this conflict. Indeed, Carpentier suggests that this is one of the fundamental problems of civilization.

Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* represents a magnificent attempt to integrate the past and the present into a cohesive whole, and this goal is a necessary preparation for the future. Cultural and family traditions are important components of this movement toward unity, and the security and sense of pur-

pose provided by tradition are combined with individual creativity, enabling the main protagonist to face the future. In *Tres tristes tigres*, the characters' attitudes toward time are fragmented into a number of individual views, but there exist in the novel a nostalgia for the past and a dread of the future that intensify the characters' attempts to cling to the present. In this regard, man's inability to preserve the present or stop time's flow is lamented, and Cabrera Infante's characters are haunted by the ephemeral nature of existence. *Tres tristes tigres* implies that creativity is the best means we have to counter the corrosive influence of time.

The view that man is fragmented by time is a central concern in contemporary literature, and time, of course, is a major preoccupation of our century. Within Cuban literature, the major writers we have studied reflect this concern, and in Spanish-American letters one need only look at the stories of Jorge Luis Borges, the novels of Gabriel García Márquez, or the poetry of Octavio Paz to see manifestations of this interest. All of these writers stimulate our creative imagination in their efforts to transcend the limits of time and space and through their attempts to locate the individual's finite existence within a continuum of infinite proportions. They are all concerned with the individual's need to relate his short existence in a realm dominated by change to values that offer the possibility of permanence.

Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* and Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* make the small occurrences of everyday life dramatic and theatrical, unlike Carpentier's broad panoramas that search for drama in the transcendent events of history. Whether it is the pomp and ceremony of a family feast or the pleasure derived from loquacious speech, we see in both a great appreciation of exaggeration and pretense. This tendency is comically captured in the gestures, poses, and speech of the characters. The technique of using exaggeration with humorous intent is also present in the works of Meza and Arenas. In Lezama Lima and Cabrera Infante, however, it is particularly linked to their characters' view that the world is a stage and that their actions are meant to be seen and appreciated.

The language of *Tres tristes tigres* is quite different from that

used by either Lezama Lima or Carpentier. Cabrera Infante's language has a conversational quality and appeals to the ear as much as to the eye. In this respect, he continues a tradition established by Novás Calvo except that he extends it to appeal to our sense of play. *Tres tristes tigres* is an explosively creative novel, and the spontaneous force of the language, which is rarely achieved by any writer, fragments the structure of the novel, because the requirements of novelistic form are subordinate to those of language. *Tres tristes tigres* is a work that places a high value on improvisation, levity, and fantasy, and it implies that human dignity and freedom can be found in imaginative playfulness.

*Tres tristes tigres*, *Paradiso*, and *El siglo de las luces* share a common concern: all three works reveal a preoccupation with the roles that chaos and order play in human existence. The main characters in *El siglo de las luces* become part of a revolutionary process that destroys an old order and then become involved with the problems of imposing order and justice on the chaos they have helped create. Throughout the novel, Carpentier uses a painting that shows a cathedral exploding as a symbol of the great eruptive powers that are operating in history and of the destructive forces that precede the creation of a new order. Carpentier never resolves the problem of balancing the extreme movements of the pendulum that swings man back and forth between order and disorder, but his work suggests that this is a fundamental problem of human existence.

Lezama Lima sees this enigma in more personal terms and presents it in relation to the individual's need for equilibrium and order. In his view, one must bring order to chaos, and the attainment of human decency is related to reaching this goal. The movement from chaos to order can be successful when connected to the creative imposition of form, but it also can have negative value and lead to psychic disequilibrium and destruction. This struggle is particularly evident in the personal fortunes of Foción, Fronesis, and José; and Lezama Lima uses the images of the circle and spiral to artistically convey this meaning. The authors of *Paradiso* and *El siglo de las luces* hint that chaos can overwhelm culture, and it is clearly a human responsibility to bring order into the world. The central problem in Carpentier's novel is how to achieve order



without imposing tyranny and in Lezama Lima's work without suffocating creativity.

We see social and political chaos in *El siglo de las luces* as part of the revolutionary process, that is, as a major thematic concern of the novel. We are perplexed in *Paradiso* by the inclusion of what appears to be extraneous material in the narrative fabric of the novel, but we never doubt that there is meaning and order behind the puzzling reality. We confront the specter of chaos in *Tres tristes tigres* not only as a thematic concern but as a major technical device of the novel. *Tres tristes tigres* makes us experience disorder and therein lies its value, challenge, and fascinating appeal. Cabrera Infante's creation does not attempt to impose order on chaos, instead it accepts it as a primal fact and attempts to fathom how to adapt to continual change and disorder.

One can speculate that *Tres tristes tigres* is indicative of a fundamental shift in cultural values that may be taking place in the Western world. There has been a steady diminishing of the importance of form and structure in the arts in the twentieth century to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between literary genres. What we identify as being poetry, for example, is much more flexible than the classifications used in previous times. The novel also has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for change and the tendency to incorporate aspects of other literary genres into its own realm. In part, these tendencies are probably due to the great value and stress placed on experimentation and innovation in contemporary life. It is also possible that the weakening of form could be a result of a general disillusionment with the requirements of rational organizations of reality and a challenge to the authority of logic and reason. There is evidence suggesting that some of the attitudes found in *Tres tristes tigres* toward chaos are shared by writers in other countries. For example, *Breakfast of Champions* by the North American writer Kurt Vonnegut Jr. contains the following statement:

Once I understood what was making America such a dangerous, unhappy nation of people who had nothing to do with real life, I resolved to shun storytelling. I

would write about life. Every person would be exactly as important as any other. All facts would also be given equal weightiness. Nothing would be left out. Let others bring order to chaos. I would bring chaos to order, instead, which I think I have done.

If all writers would do that, then perhaps citizens not in the literary trades will understand that there is no order in the world around us, that we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos instead.

It is hard to adapt to chaos, but it can be done. I am living proof of that: It can be done.<sup>1</sup>

Both novels seem to suggest that there is a fundamental flaw in our attempts to impose order on existence. In this light, it is difficult for the critic to apply the usual criteria of unity, symmetry, and form to these types of works, since they constitute a challenge to such traditional premises. It remains to be seen whether these novels mark a change in artistic expression that will be sustained for a significant length of time.

Cabrera Infante has been unusually successful in maintaining a large audience despite the high degree of innovation in *Tres tristes tigres*, and this is a remarkable accomplishment. Major breakthroughs in artistic expression usually have small audiences initially, but *Tres tristes tigres* is an exception to this general rule. It is an engaging novel that exhibits an exceptional sense of humor, and it encourages its readers to see and experience language in a new way. The work shares the ability of Carpentier and Lezama Lima to cause its readers to view reality and existence in unique and different ways. The innovative and dynamic qualities of their works greatly depend on their capacity to cause us to perceive and experience the world in a new light, and their success at achieving this makes them leaders in the contemporary Cuban novel.

Several tendencies can be identified in the Cuban novel of the last decade: (1) There is an accentuated introspection and criticism of Cuban society as it existed prior to the revolution of 1959. In part, this is due to a desire to understand the reasons for the revolution and to justify or criticize the sac-

1. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Breakfast of Champions*, p. 210.

rifices demanded. (2) There has been an increased interest in literary experimentation, particularly, although not exclusively, among writers currently living outside of Cuba. (3) The experimental impulse is mainly reflected in the emphasis on language as the primary medium of artistic expression. The stress on language has resulted in the fragmentation of form in novels such as *Tres tristes tigres*. (4) Many novels demand the participation or collaboration of the reader in the creative process to an extent never seen before except in the case of Labrador Ruiz. (5) The novel has been directed toward and has achieved an international audience. This internationalization of the novel has occurred without sacrificing national characteristics, but the limitations of regionalism have been overcome. (6) The fragmentation of form and the transcendence of regionalism have created contradictory tendencies in the novel. The identification of relationships between national distinctions and universal characteristics has given cohesiveness to the novel, but the emphasis on experimentation has led to the decline of the importance of plot, thematic development, and sequential narration. The weakening of form has brought into focus questions concerning the limitations of experimentation and artistic expression. The result has been a probing of the delicate balance that exists between creativity and control, communication and confusion, chaos and order. The concern with disorder has become a major technical as well as thematic concern and appears to be questioning any doctrine or attitude that claims existence can be understood in scientific and rational terms.

There are variations within and exceptions to these general tendencies, but in the final analysis the most important consideration is the outstanding quality of many contemporary Cuban novels. The accomplishments of Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Cabrera Infante have placed the Cuban novel in the forefront of Western narrative fiction, and the recent appearance of young writers of the caliber of Arenas and Sarduy augurs well for the future. One can rest assured that the tradition of excellence established in the novel in the last few decades will be maintained as Cuban writers seek to equal or surpass the accomplishments of the past.

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