

# I&L

## IDEOLOGIES & LITERATURE

Volume 1

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### Essays

**Jean Franco**

The Crisis of the Liberal Imagination

**Russell G. Hamilton**

Black from White and White on Black:

Contradictions of Language in the Angolan  
Novel

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### Clues and Sources

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Imperial Spain and the Secularization of the Picaresque  
Novel

**José Antonio Castro**

Modelos Sociales en la Evolución Literaria de Venezuela

**David Viñas**

El teatro Rioplatense (1880-1930): Un Circuito y  
Algunas Hipótesis

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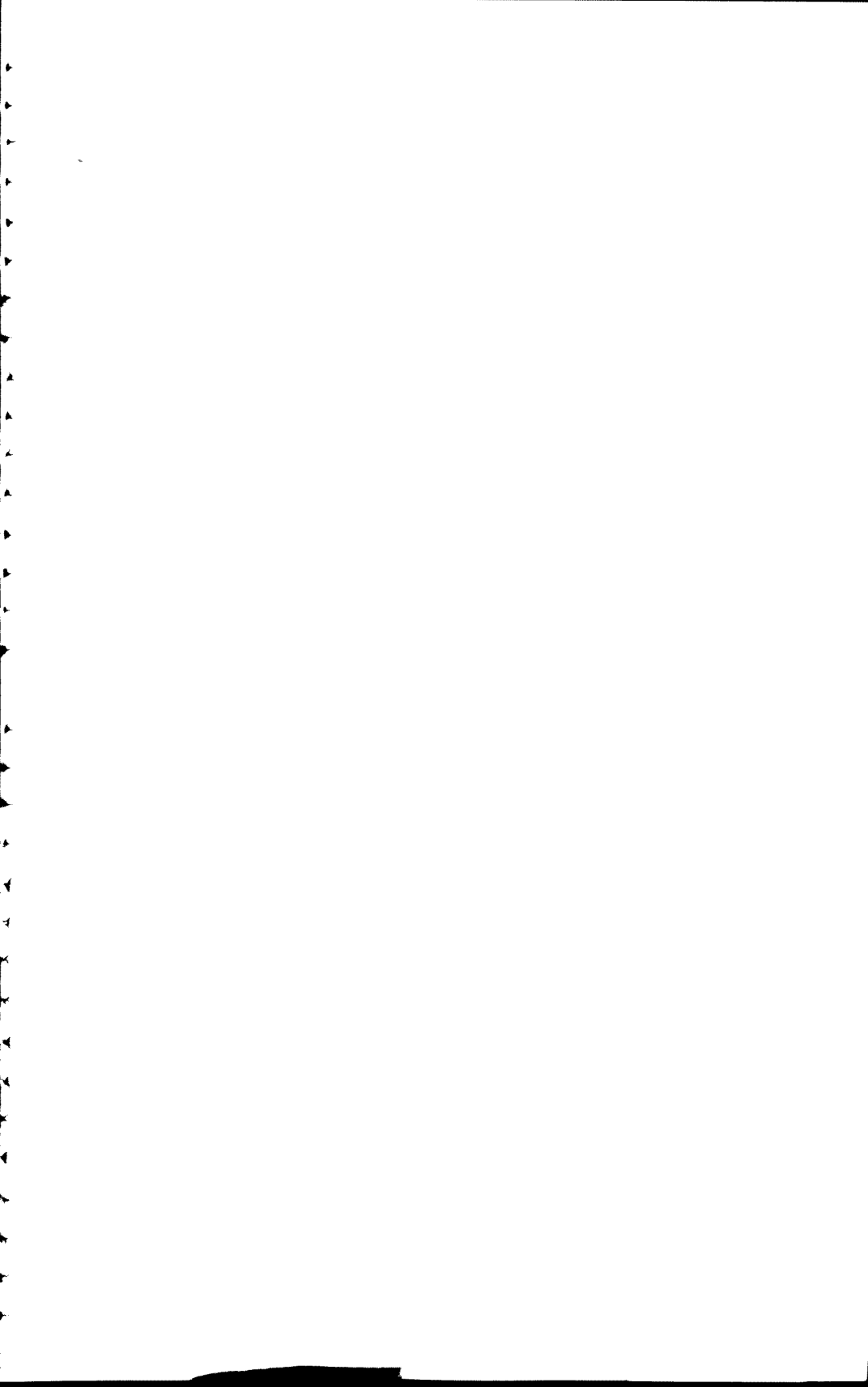
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## EDITORIAL

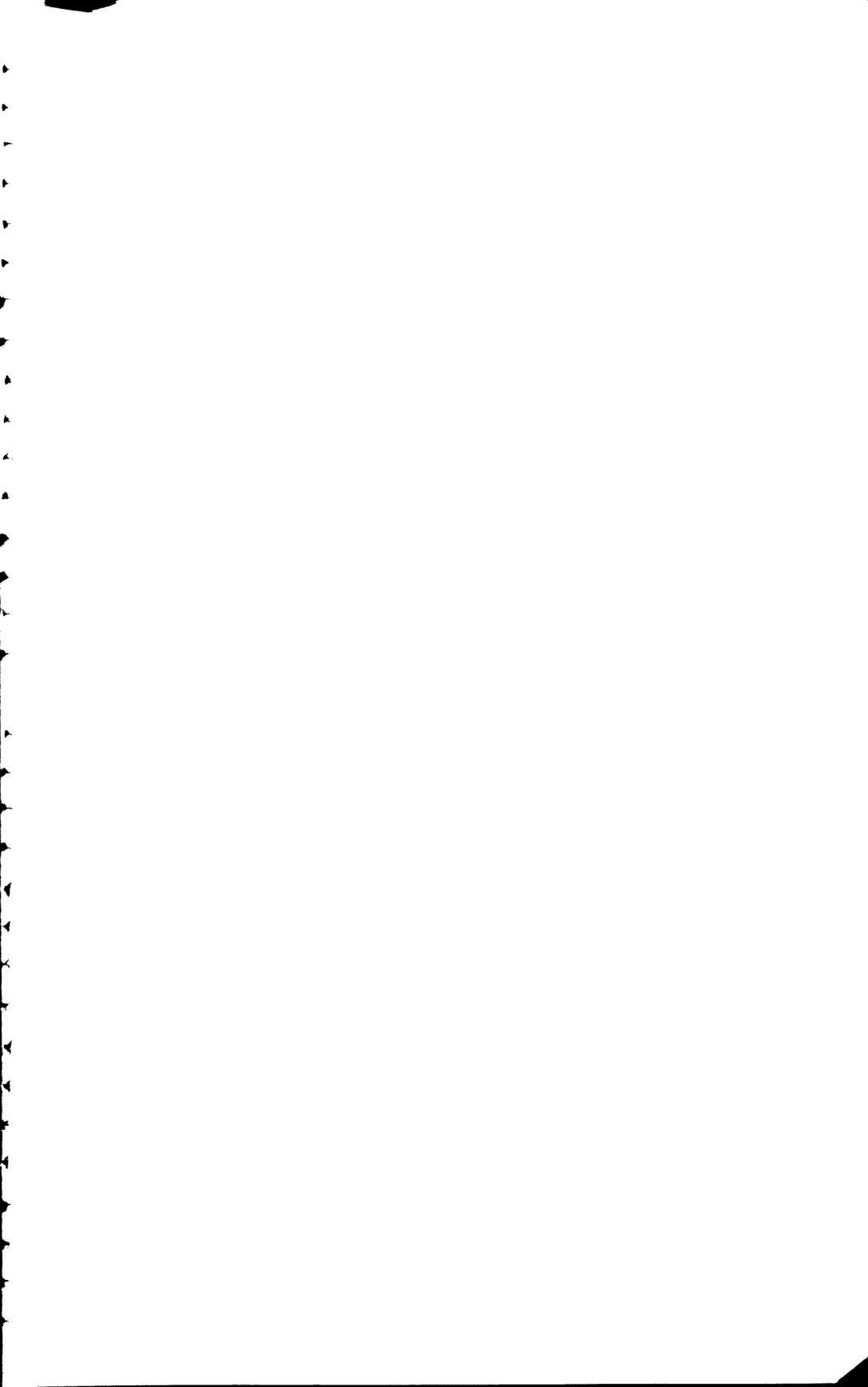
The political and socioeconomic realities which have long obtained in Spain and Portugal, in the Americas, and in Lusophone Africa oblige us, as Hispanists and Luso-Brazilianists, to develop a greater historical consciousness in our critical approach to the literatures of these areas. Specialists and teachers have often refrained from coming to terms with cultural and political ideologies in a sociohistorical context even though the literary works themselves are products of these conditions. Thus, a reading that does not question a work's ideological consensus neglects an important aspect of art's confrontation with human experience.

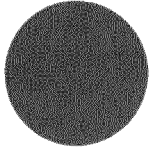
No serious student of literature would deny the important contributions of those critics and scholars who have insisted on the primacy of formalistic approaches whose principal aim is to reveal aesthetic structures. The problem is that these structures have been abstracted from social relations. During the 1920s and 1930s explication-oriented criticism began to raise the analysis and teaching of literature to new levels of respectability. Indeed, formalism's success in bestowing literature with autonomy resulted in excesses as explication became the end-all of criticism. To quote from Geoffrey H. Hartman's *Beyond Formalism*, "the domination of exegesis is great: she is our whore of Babylonsitting robed in academic black on the great dragon of criticism, and dispensing repetitive and soporific balm from her pedantic cup.... Explication is the end of criticism only if we succumb to what Trotsky called the formalist 'superstition of the word'."

The polemic begun before World War II on the relationship between ideology and art should be pursued in a new context. We no longer need ask whether literature and literary criticism respond to political contexts and social ideologies—but rather how they respond.

The end of long-standing dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, independence for Lusophone Africa, shifting political and socioeconomic patterns in Latin America, all contribute to the need for the development of a historical consciousness that extends to creative writing and thus to literary criticism. This sense of urgency applies equally to the rise of a bilingual literature in the Spanish-speaking communities of the United States. Although it behooves us to address ourselves to this immediacy, we must likewise reassess the past. Thus, the ideological forces that inform writing in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, for example, command as much attention within the orientation of this journal as does the contemporary crisis of capitalism reflected in poetry, prose fiction, and drama.

Whatever the period or genre, and while stressing the exigencies of literary scholarship and close reading, we adhere to a policy that calls for an explicit knowledge of sociohistorical context and a critical awareness of ideological tenets. Basically, with no preconceived notions as regards individual contributions, we, in this journal of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian studies, propose critical explorations leading to a holistic view of Spanish- and Portuguese-language writing.





# The Crisis of the Liberal Imagination and the Utopia of Writing\*

Jean Franco, *Stanford University*

It is as old a component of bourgeois ideology that each individual, in his particular interest, considers himself better than all others, as that he values the others, as the community of all customers, more highly than himself. Since the demise of the old bourgeois class, both ideas have led an after-life in the minds of intellectuals, who are at once the last enemies of the bourgeois and the last bourgeois. In still permitting themselves to think at all in the face of the naked reproduction of existence, they act as a privileged group; in letting matters rest there, they declare the nullity of their privilege. (Adorno)

## I

An ideological distinction is often made in contemporary criticism between literature in the established sense and *écriture*, between the text that reflects and the text that acts, between the mimetic and the non-mimetic, between the "readerly" and the "writerly."<sup>1</sup> These taxonomies are symptomatic of a crisis of the narrative in which the radical, and indeed revolutionary new criticism, challenges the very assumptions on which liberal humanistic criticism was based. The latter, now on the wane, though once dominant in Anglo-American criticism, had held literature to be a moral endeavor and the novel a genre to which "the emotions of understanding and forgiveness were indigenous, as if by the definition of the form itself."<sup>2</sup> In this vein, Lionel Trilling lamented in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) the contemporary novel's loss of power and energy. "No connection exists," he declared, "between our liberal educated class and the best of the literary minds of our time. And this is to say that there is no connection between the political ideas of our educated class and the

\*A version of this paper was presented at a conference on Ideology and Literature sponsored by the Department of Spanish & Portuguese, University of Minnesota; the Joint Committee on Latin American Studies (Social Science Research Council) and the American Council of Learned Societies, February, 1976.

deep places of the imagination.<sup>3</sup> The breakdown of connections between the social and the literary systems which the liberal humanist regarded as an apocalyptic prophesy of coming disaster was enthusiastically fostered by the avant-garde in its campaign against the reactionary canons of the past. The French new novelists, Structuralists, post-Structuralists and others deconstructed the novel, finding that its codes, the concept of character and even the tense in which it was generally written to have been so many devices which "naturalized" the bourgeois order and thus reproduced its ideology.<sup>4</sup> Character, for instance, reflected a concept of human nature, "essential to the ideological domination and smooth economic running of society." Hence it was urgent to produce a new writing which could constitute a kind of practice that could not be reduced to reproduction and could therefore stave off and avoid recuperation by bourgeois society.<sup>5</sup> *Écriture* thus became a modal concept, distinct from literature in the old sense, and used to designate a variety of subversive practices—activity over passive receptivity, play over productive labor, the open as against the closed text. Between the new and the old writing, there was, it was claimed, a fundamental cleavage which was more than a revolt of the new against outworn conventions. Indeed the claim was made that *écriture* constituted a revolutionary practice.<sup>6</sup>

Turning to Latin America, we find a similar war between the ancient and the modern. The new novelists of the late fifties and early sixties attacked the traditional Latin American novel as "primitive" and "provincial" and promoted the new novel both as technically advanced and as a universal form of writing. However, the way that some of these new novelists distinguish their writing from the social novel which had predominated in the thirties and forties is revealing. For they stress the individual diversity and the subjectivity of the new novel as against the socially-constructed view of reality which informs the primitive novel and gives it a certain sameness. The new novelists according to Mario Vargas Llosa "no se esfuerzan por expresar 'una' realidad," sino visiones y obsesiones personales: 'su' realidad."<sup>7</sup> The primitive novel, he implies, is simple and invariable because its raw material is presented in an unsophisticated manner whilst the new novel employs complex techniques and is diversified. There is no need to stress that a model of production underlies this criticism so that the description of the difference between the new and the old novel seems to be precisely that which differentiated the recently modernized economics of Latin America from the monoculture which had predominated in the past. Such a comparison might appear mechanistic, were it not for the fact that it is explicit in criticism itself. Mario Vargas Llosa, for example, asserts that the "novela de creación" (his term for the new novel) has not completely obliterated the primitive novel but that the two continue to coexist in the same culture, "como los rascacielos y las tribus, la miseria y la opulencia."<sup>8</sup> There could be no more patent association of the new novel with the ideology of



modernization, with its outward manifestations in the skyscrapers and the conspicuous consumption of the middle-classes; and the primitive novel which has its parallel in the backwardness of the marginalized sectors of the population. Just as, on the economic level, import substitution had diversified the economy, so in the novel, primitive production had been superseded by diversified and more complex techniques. "A diferencia de lo que pasaba con los primitivos, no hay un denominador común ni de asuntos ni de estilos ni de procedimientos entre los nuevos novelistas: su semejanza es su diversidad."<sup>9</sup>

This concept of diversification lends a spurious unity to writers who shared in the euphoria of the "boom." In effect, however, there were fundamental ideological differences between those liberal-existentialist writers who clung to a romantic conception of expressing their personal rebellion through their work; "revolutionary" writers who in the wake of Surrealism strove to bring about an alteration in the readers' perception of reality; and, on the extreme left (so to speak) those writers who believe that the old concepts of literature must be completely destroyed and a radically different practice which would eliminate the separation of reader from author and critic constituted. For these latter, the cultural revolution was to be inaugurated in writing itself. Such fundamental ideological differences scarcely surface openly during the sixties, perhaps because, in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, there was a certain group solidarity, in fact, almost a syndicalist spirit. This sense of solidarity (at any rate, up to the Padilla affair in 1968) tended to overlay the very considerable differences between the new novelists. Further, the success of the new novel tended to conceal the fact that there was a crisis in the market place since the novel reached new sectors of the population only to lose a potential readership to the newer mass media. These crises and contradictions are most clearly manifested in a number of texts which reflect on writing itself. For this reason, I shall concentrate, in the present discussion, on three such narratives—*Aura* by Carlos Fuentes, "Las babas del diablo" (from the collection, *Las armas secretas* (1959) by Cortázar and *Cobra* by Severo Sarduy. Though written at different periods, and though they are quite diverse they share a common problem—that of producing a text which transgresses bourgeois society. I shall argue that in each of them a Utopian space is suggested and determined by a negation of what they consider to be bourgeois but that in each case, such a concept is based on a now-archaic stereotype—that of the individual enslaved by the ethic of work and production. And because the stage of bourgeois society to which they stand in opposition is outmoded, the textual revolution they promote may in fact be a reproduction of the mobility, freedom, metamorphosis (in other words the dance of the signifier)—which is the essence of technological society itself.

## II

Notwithstanding his obsession with the modern and indeed with the modish, Carlos Fuentes is the most traditional of the three writers under discussion. Because his tendency is accumulative rather than dialectical, he piles new theoretical acquisitions onto old without laying bare or even recognizing the contradictions between them so that his initially mimetic view of the narrative has become overlaid by non-mimetic theories. "Myth," "imagination," "language," each in turn and sometimes together, are taken to be the positive dynamics of the new novel which sometimes is said to subvert society and sometimes is described as if it were a prediction or its shadow. These inconsistencies are particularly apparent in *La nueva narrativa latinoamericana* (1969) part of which was written as early as 1964.<sup>10</sup> Thus at one point, he has the contemporary novel of Europe and North America embodying the myths and prophesies of a new era characterized by the "end of ideology" and the brave new world of technology. The capitalist-socialist dichotomy, he declares, is not now the predominant factor; "sino una suma de hechos—fríos, maravillosos, contradictorios, ineluctables, nuevamente libertarios, nuevamente enajenantes—que realmente están transformando la vida en las sociedades industriales: automatización, electrónica, uso pacífico de la energía atómica."<sup>11</sup> It is not so much that the novel no longer reflects society but that it no longer reflects a "superseded" stage of the class struggle. When he turns to Latin America, however, Fuentes is concerned with modernity in another sense. As in the case of Mario Vargas Llosa, what is stressed as "modernity"—namely diversification and individualism—are the very qualities promoted by the technological-industrial era of dependency. He describes the new novel as "diversificada, crítica y ambigua," showing that, since the forties, it has progressed from "la tipicidad a la personalidad," from "las disyuntivas épicas a la complejidad del aislamiento frente a la comunidad." (pp. 26-27) This, it need hardly be stressed, is an individualistic vision with an emphasis on personality and on the isolation of the writer. It is therefore not surprising that, on the political plane, it should be translated into a plea for democratic pluralism and a belief that the monolithic Mexican political system would eventually be transformed by a more diversified economy. Thus he writes, "La diversificación económica, social y cultural de México acabará por imponer métodos y soluciones nuevas. El país no puede tener una sustancia moderna y una práctica anacrónica."<sup>12</sup> It is indeed curious that Fuentes, for all his modernity, should embrace beliefs that are not too different from the positivism of Herbert Spencer who had been convinced that with industrialization and trade, all countries would inevitably progress towards democratic pluralism.

Behind such statements, there lies some kind of theory of reflection which would make politics and culture the mirrors of a stage of produc-

tion. Yet Fuentes would also have literature released from this reflective role, so that it becomes the "pure contrast" to bourgeois society. This explains why he describes Borges as the pioneer of the new narrative since he identified freedom with the imagination and "con ambas constituye un nuevo lenguaje latinoamericano, que, por puro contraste, revela la mentira, la sumisión y la falsedad de lo que tradicionalmente pasaba por 'lenguaje' entre nosotros." (p. 26) In the same, *La nueva narrativa*, he declares:

nuestra literatura es verdaderamente revolucionaria en cuanto le niega al orden establecido el léxico que éste quisiera y le opone el lenguaje de la alarma, la renovación, el desorden y el humor. El lenguaje, en suma, de la ambigüedad, de la pluralidad de significados, de la constelación de alusiones: de la apertura.  
(p.32)

This statement is extremely significant since it touches the description of the "subversive" language of the new novel in terms which reflect the politics of the Echeverría *sexenio*, namely *pluralidad* and *apertura*. What is represented as revolutionary is both a liberation from overt commitment and a value-free, open text which is freed from any possible anachronism of content. What had distinguished the old novel was its regional and social provincialism.

Form and technique are universal and therefore permit the writer to transcend, culturally at least, the "backwardness" of his native country. "Nuestra universalidad," he states, "nacerá de esta tensión entre el haber cultural y el deber tecnológico, de esta insoportable tensión entre las formas de nuestra literatura, nuestro arte, nuestro pensamiento, inseparables de la totalidad, y las de-formas de nuestra economía, nuestra dependencia, separables, fragmentadas." (p. 35) The clear implication here is that culture is one and indivisible whilst the economy is not. In fact, the reverse seems to be true. The economy is part of a global system in which countries like Mexico are dependent precisely because other countries are developed. Culture like technology seems universal but it is a mistake to believe that because writers or technocrats can acquire universal skills and even develop them creatively that they are acting in a neutral or unmotivated context.

In May 1968, Fuentes was in Paris during the student demonstrations. It happened that 1968 was also an important date in Mexico and that the difference between May 1968 in France and October 1968 in Mexico was to be instructive. In France one student was killed and the creative potential of the movement rapidly evaporated. In Mexico, hundreds of students were killed and imprisoned for demanding the most basic human rights. However, October 1968 produced a cultural response, in the writings of José Revueltas, Elena Poniatowska and many others. Yet it is

May 1968 in France which Fuentes celebrates as the vision of a Utopia, with the artist as the ideal type in the post-revolutionary society:

'L' Imagination au Pouvoir! ... Los estudiantes de Francia le dieron un contenido grave e inmediato a las palabras visionarias y rebeldes de los artistas: el hombre, cada hombre, es capaz de definir su propio destino como un artista define, creándola, su propia obra. Y como una obra de arte y responsabilidad individual es la instancia suprema de la responsabilidad colectiva y, simultáneamente, lo es ésta de aquella.<sup>13</sup>

This vision in which life becomes art and art life is not one that in Fuentes' novels, at least, emerges from a social movement or has any social outcome. On the contrary his literary Utopia turns out not to be in the future but in the past.

To find a more detailed discussion of what constitutes revolutionary art, we must turn to Cortázar who, in 1970 published his essay, "Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura" in reply to the Colombian critic, Oscar Collazos.<sup>14</sup> The position he defines here is the same as that of a much earlier essay, "Situación de la novela," written in 1954.<sup>15</sup> Published when the influence of existentialism was at its height, this early essay explains why Cortázar rejected the protest novel and socialist realism, which, he argues, are motivated by conscious design and therefore do not constitute explorations of the new. The realist novel reproduces language, feeling and passions "por medio de un cuidado método racional" whilst the new (existential) novel incorporates "su propia teoría, de alguna medida la crea y la anula a la vez porque sus intenciones son su acción y presentación puras." Between 1954 and 1970, in both his critical and literary texts, he was to emphasize the superiority of the open work and of the novel as a form of cognition and self exploration. "Literatura en la revolución y revolución" is, therefore, the coherent development of a theory of writing as self discovery and of the writer as exemplary. In 1970, he explicitly states that the writer himself, in order to create great literature, must have reached a high stage of development since it is this achievement alone which allows him to address those who have not yet embarked on the journey, "incitando con las armas que le son propias a acceder a esa libertad profunda que sólo puede nacer de la realización de los más altos valores de cada individuo."

By its very nature, Cortázar's path of liberation is only open to the few; and this minority, as he wrote in 1954, could not be incorporated in public life: "no estarán instalados en el poder, ni dictarán desde la cátedra las fórmulas de la salvación. Serán tan sólo individuos que, mostrarán sin docencia alguna una libertad humana alcanzada en la batalla personal." In 1970, his earlier elitism has been modified but the literary revolution—"la revolución total y profunda en todos los planos de la materia y de la psiquis"—is more than ever necessary if the material and social revolution

is to be completed. Nor surprisingly, the truly revolutionary writer devotes himself, not simply to protest but to the creation of "una literatura de fermento y contenido revolucionarios." Cortázar thus privileges literature beyond all other forms of human activity although his ultimate vision like that of many Utopian socialists is the fusion of art and life.

An even more extreme view of the revolutionary nature of writing has however, been suggested by another generation of writers<sup>16</sup> who, in the age of the mass media, see the supreme danger of making literature into something consumable. The most theoretical of these younger writers is Severo Sarduy, a Cuban living in Paris and associated with Roland Barthes, Phillippe Sollers and other contemporary French critics. His work, however, is not simply a translation of French critical theory but is profoundly marked by the influence of Bataille and Paz and by his own personal obsessions.

Sarduy adopts a view that bourgeois society is supported by a system of writing which, because it has structured people's whole perception of themselves and the world consolidates the status quo and ensures that even literature that is revolutionary in intention reproduces its subliminal order. Thus he declares:

I believe contrary to what many of my friends think that the real support of the bourgeoisie is not an economic system, that is, not solely an economic system. I'd like to propose the following thesis: the support of the petit bourgeoisie, is a pseudo-natural system of writing. Every regime rests on writing. A revolution that doesn't invent its own writing has failed. The role of the writer is so important that I would even ask: what can be more than a writer? What's the point of all those acts of "confrontation" except for writing, because writing is a force that demythologizes, corrupts, mines, cracks the foundation of any regime. The epistemological breakthrough that everyone talks about so much has not happened and cannot happen—we know that after all of *Tel Quel's* efforts among others—unless it begins with and is nurtured in a piece of writing.<sup>17</sup>

It is hardly necessary to comment on the idealistic nature of this statement which inverts the Marxist relationship between base and superstructure, nor to stress that, like Fuentes and Cortázar, Sarduy makes the writer into the modern hero. Yet he is more specific than they in suggesting that the transgression of bourgeois society is achieved by a self-referential form of writing:

Lo único que la burguesía no soporta, lo que la "saca de juicio" es la idea de que *el pensamiento pueda pensar sobre el pensamiento*, de que *el lenguaje pueda hablar del lenguaje*, de que *un autor no escriba sobre algo, sino escriba algo*. Frente a esta transgresión,

que era para Bataille el sentido del *despertar*, se encuentran repentina y definitivamente de acuerdo, creyentes y ateos, capitalistas y comunistas, aristócratas y proletarios, lectores de Mauriac y Sartre.<sup>18</sup>

What separates different members of society from the enlightened is here neither class nor religious or political convictions but the revolution of self-referentiality; only when thought and writing reflect on their own practices, and are therefore no longer instruments *for* something can the "awakening" take place. The question that now arises is whether self-referentiality can be regarded as a transgression or merely an activity which registers withdrawal and disapproval like the Medieval friars' vow of poverty. It also behooves us to enquire whether that bourgeois whose prejudices are transgressed is not a mythic creation, or at least a phantom of a repressive order whose character has, since the nineteenth century, radically changed. For in present-day society, it is not a *bourgeois individual* who counts but rather a global system which is kept stable by repressive tolerance in the metropolis and by direct violence in the periphery, especially where the dominant order has been directly challenged by political action.

The answer to this and to other questions raised by these writers can however best be answered by an examination of their creative writing. Fuentes' "pure contrast" to bourgeois society, Cortázar's "revolution in literature" and Sarduy's "transgression," after all, are theories which have emerged from the practice of writing itself.

### III

Carlos Fuentes' writing is of two distinct kinds; on the one hand, there are a number of tightly-constructed allegorical narratives such as *Aura*, *Zona sagrada* and *Cumpleaños*; which are relatively brief and whose action is spatially confined. On the other hand, there are those novels which cover a historical span and move in broader spaces in an attempt to totalize the historical experience of Mexico. On further inspection, however, the novels of this second kind also tend towards enclosure. What had appeared to be historical development turns out to be a journey of life which is brought to a halt in the cell-like space of a bedroom, a pyramid or a tent where the subject confronts his own mortality. Artemio Cruz's journey from Guadalajara ends in a hospital room: the protagonists of *Cambio de piel* end not in Veracruz but beneath the pyramid. In this respect, *Aura*, with its setting of the dark house on the Calle Donceles is the analogue of the Fuentes narrative, a micromodel of the basic and obsessive configuration of all his creative writing.

*Aura* crosses the threshold between reality and imagination to offer an allegory of art. Its form departs very little from that of the traditional

narrative, except for the authorial voice which addresses the protagonist, Felipe Montero, as "tú" throughout the course of the story. This was a device which had been used by Michel Butor in some of his novels and was employed by Fuentes himself in sections of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* which belongs to the same period as *Aura*.<sup>19</sup> The use of future tense in much of the narrative is also unusual. When the anonymous narrative voice warns, the protagonist, "Vivirás ese día, idéntico a los demás, ya no volverás a recordarlo sino el día siguiente," it situates the narrator in the position of Red Scharlach in Borges' "La muerte y la brújula" as the one who anticipates the protagonist's every move, and *who therefore has the power*. The journey that Felipe Montero takes from being a routine-bound petit bourgeois to becoming the willing prisoner of the darker forces is one that has already been traversed by the writer whose voice speaks through the text.

Far from taking the reader onto a voyage into the unknown, however, *Aura* discloses the familiar paraphernalia of the Gothic novel, a bricolage of romantic remnants and old Vincent Price movies. Descriptions insistently allude to the Gothic: "Todos los muros del salón están recubiertos de una madera oscura, labrada al estilo gótico, con ojivas y rosetones calados." The back of *Aura*'s chair is made of "madera de la silla gótica" (p. 26) and Consuelo is described as "delgada como una escultura medieval, amaciada." (p. 27) It would be a dull reader who failed to pick up and construe the clues of howling cats, drug-inducing plants that flourish in darkness, green-eyed women and sacrificed goats. And the very obtrusiveness of these clues suggests an allegorical reading.

The protagonist of *Aura*, Felipe Montero, initially leaves the "real" world and enters the magic house on the Calle Donceles because of a contractual agreement he makes with the widow of General Llorente to edit the General's memoirs. Montero belongs, by right, to the routine world of the petty bourgeois. He is "ordenado," "escrupuloso," a man for whom one day is the same as the other for he is caught in the repetitive cycle of bourgeois society. By profession he is a historian "cargado de datos inútiles, acostumbrado a exhumar papeles amarillentos, profesor auxiliar en escuelas particulares, novecientos pesos mensuales." The contract with society offers him the barest survival; his contract with Consuelo (the name is surely significant) offers him more than this for it gives him time to work on his own personal project, the description of which bears a strange resemblance to Fuentes' future novel, *Terra Nostra*:

Si logras ahorrar por lo menos doce mil pesos, podrías pasar cerca de un año dedicado a tu propia obra, aplazada, casi olvidada. Tu gran obra de conjunto sobre los descubrimientos y conquistas españolas en América. Una obra que resume todas las crónicas dispersas, las haga inteligibles, encuentre las correspondencias entre todas las empresas y aventuras del siglo de oro, entre los prototipos humanos y el hecho mayor del Renacimiento.

But the contract he makes in the house of Donceles Street has also brought him into the realm of imagination and desire which will use him as their instrument.

This allegorical reading is accentuated as I have pointed out, by the use of well-worn allusions and literary conventions. The very name of the desired woman, Aura, is a pun on a bird of prey and a gentle breeze and the use of pun for this all-important character draws attention to the device itself and ultimately to the ambiguity of desire. As allegory, *Aura* refers to the liberation of the petit bourgeois from the everyday world through his coupling with the darker forces of creation. The aged Consuelo uses Montero to recreate her own youth; their deathly nuptials, involve him in a confrontation with mortality and the immolation of self:

apartarás tus labios de los labios sin carne que has estado besando,  
de las encías sin dientes que se abren ante ti: verás bajo la luz de la  
luna el cuerpo desnudo de la vieja, de la señora Consuelo, flojo,  
rasgado, pequeño, y antiguo, temblando ligeramente porque tú lo  
tocas, tú lo amas, tú has regresado también.

What does this "también" signify if it is not the "author" situated where Eros and Thanatos are united? The witchcraft, the magic and the drugs bring about the alchemy of art and immolate Montero's ego in the work.

The division between the world of work and the world of desire and imagination corresponds, as is clear from the epigraph, to the division between male and female:

El hombre caza y lucha, la mujer intriga y sueña; es la madre de la  
fantasía, de los dioses. Posee la segunda visión, las alas que le  
permiten volar hacia el infinito del deseo y de la imaginación... Los  
dioses como los hombres nacen y mueren sobre el cuerpo de una  
mujer... (Jules Michelet)

The force represented by woman is atavistic, directed towards the past not to change. She is the instrument of darker forces, akin to the animal world, and yet removed from it. Her goal is not change but the reincarnation of General Llorente, Consuelo's dead husband.

It follows from this that Fuentes' view of the imagination is, like Plato's, associated with the past and not with the future. At the deepest level, therefore, he allegorizes art as *re*-production rather than an exploration of the unknown. Nor surprising, the next novel he wrote would be given the title, *Cambio de piel* and the constitutive image would be that of the snake sloughing off its old skin.<sup>20</sup> *Aura* indeed reveals the contradictions in Fuentes' writing; for this author who is obsessed by the modern cannot really conceive of a future that is not the reincarnation of the past. Unlike Cortázar's leap into space, Fuentes' allegory of art makes it a reliving of what others have done. And interestingly, this is the analogue (but not a critique or an overturning) of dependency itself.



## IV

Cortázar's "Las babas del diablo" is a critical and satirical confrontation with the absurdities of creation though altogether different in tone from his story, "El perseguidor" which appeared in the same collection, *Las armas secretas* (1959), and which he believed to be a turning point in his writing.<sup>21</sup>

The protagonist (or comic scapegoat) of "Las babas del diablo"<sup>22</sup> is Robert Michel, a photographer, writer, translator and complete bourgeois who though part Chilean lives and works in Paris. In his quest for something to be photographed, he stumbles inadvertently onto the very problem of attempting to turn reality into art and discovers that, like the cloud formations which can be called either "Las babas del diablo" or "Los hilos de la Virgen" (and which have nothing to do with good or evil), there is nothing behind the text beyond its own transient and insubstantial configuration. In the course of the story, Michel both tries to take a photograph and to tell the story of how he took the photograph. Photography is, in fact, a key metaphor since, of all the arts, it seems the most able to register momentary reality. As Michel soon discovers, however, all art mediates and invents more than it translates. There are thus, constant cross-references between photography and writing, both of which require a primal decision which is also a point of view. Thus the very choice of narrative voice involves Michel in an initial dilemma: "Nunca se sabrá cómo hay que contar eso, si en primera persona o en segunda, usando la tercera del plural o inventando continuamente formas que no servirán de nada." In fact, Michel never decisively makes the initial choice without which traditional narrative cannot begin. Though committed to the realist illusion, he constantly demonstrates its conventionality by slipping from first to third person narration and then back again.

Language and the camera, more than the artist or the subject, determine the configuration of the completed work. In "Las babas del diablo," elements which literary discourse had ordinarily concealed from the reader and those aspects of art normally hidden from the viewer jump to the foreground. When Michel confesses that he does not know how he is going to end the sentence he has just begun, it is grammar itself which resolves the problem rather than Michel. In fact, "Las babas del diablo" allows no device to appear as natural. For instance, when Michel uses the present tense to refer to events in the past, the reader is immediately aware that the present-of-the-writer is excluded. The birds and clouds which pass the window in front of which he is writing are not "present" in the text. Even translation (where there is an original text-to-be-translated) can never be faithful to an original.

"Las babas del diablo," then, opens up a gulf between the phenomenal and the conventional. When literature tries to translate reality, it simply deforms it. Thus when Michel describes a woman in the park as "delgada y esbelta," he is, at once, aware that these are not *mots justes*. On the other hand, when he inadvertently slips into the past tense and allows invention freer rein, he creates an original text. To write "sus ojos que caían sobre las cosas como dos águilas, dos saltos al vacío, dos ráfagas de fango verde" is to make that leap into space which is the function of art.

"Las babas del diablo" is, however, also a meditation on the instrumentality of art in capitalist society. For, on the one hand, Michel believes in the Utopian innocence of art, and art that is, as little as possible, different from life itself. Yet his own motives are far from pure. When he tries to take a photograph of a woman meeting an adolescent in the park, he not only reads his own moral judgments into the event but believes that he can alter reality and not simply reflect it by the mere act of photographing. Michel is thus able to rationalize his interference as a moral action which saves the innocence of adolescence from the schemes of a corrupt woman:

De puro entrometido le había dado oportunidad de aprovechar al fin su miedo para algo útil; ahora estaría arrepentido, menoscabado, sintiéndose poco hombre...Mejor era eso que la compañía de una mujer capaz de mirar como lo miraba en la isla: *Michel es puritano a ratos, cree que no se debe corromper por la fuerza.* En el fondo, aquella foto había sido una buena acción.  
(my italics)

The "entrometido" is, of course, not only Michel but Cortázar himself whose comments on Michel mirror Michel's judgments of the woman. The reader is thus put on guard against moral judgments passed off as art. Similarly the boy's flight with which Michel identifies himself is analogous to Michel's own flight when the woman and a "third-person" (a clown-like man sitting in a car out of camera focus) abruptly turn on him. The boy saves his innocence through the flight, Michel saves his photograph and Cortázar in turn uses both to create "Las babas del diablo." The act of liberation is thus turned into a commodity.

But his is by no means the final outcome. As Michel enlarges the photograph and produces the blown-up print, a new element comes into play, namely the reading of the text (whether photograph or story). For the second time Michel is forced to interfere for when the photograph comes to life, the boy is once again menaced by the woman and by a new actor—the man who he had originally excluded from the camera eye and who now becomes the real mover of events. It is this man who grows in importance until he begins not only to blot out the subject but also to erase the author himself. This pimp, clown or death's head whose face has holes in place of eyes like a photographic negative is, in fact, negation itself, the

"nothing" behind "las babas del diablo." The second salvation of the adolescent not only obliterates the author, however, but also the subject of the photograph leaving only a space, like a windowframe, looking out onto the passing clouds and the birds:

a veces, en cambio todo se pone gris, todo es una enorme nube y de pronto restallan las salpicaduras de la lluvia, largo rato se ve llover sobre la imagen, como un llanto al revés, y poco a poco el cuadro se aclara, quizá sale el sol, y otra vez entran las nubes, de a dos, de a tres. Y las palomas, a veces, uno que otro gorrión.

This is the final paradoxical innocence of art, to become indistinguishable from nature. Cortázar's irony and self-criticism ensure, however, that this is not seen as a Utopian possibility, but rather as a project fraught with contradiction. What the story does is to destroy the support on which an older form of literature has been based but it does not yet envisage anything to replace this.

Though "Las babas del diablo" is only a minor work, it can be considered representative of Cortázar's early problematic. To put the practice of writing into a critical perspective as Cortázar does, to show the conventionality of what appears natural creates a healthy disrespect for bourgeois society. On the other hand to set up this critical distance while making the reader aware of the way art "naturalizes" its conventions may not necessarily result in a revolutionary change or in the creation of the new man. In fact, at this stage of his writing, Cortázar can only conceive change on an individual basis. In "Situación de la novela," he wrote:

No en vano el mejor individualismo de nuestro tiempo entraña una aguda conciencia de los restantes individualismos, y se quiere libre de todo egoísmo y de toda insularidad. René Daumann escribió esta frase maravillosa: "Sólos, después de acabar con la ilusión de no estar sólos, no somos los únicos que estamos sólos." (p. 242-3).

Cortázar's explorations did not, of course, stop at this point. He went on to write *Rayuela* and *Libro de Manuel* (1973)<sup>23</sup> in which there are structural incompatibilities between individual exploration and the oppressive social order. Even so, revolutionary action is still conceived on an individual basis. The "club de serpientes" of *Rayuela* and the guerrilla group of *Libro de Manuel* are individuals bound by friendship not by the social practice of the workplace; and revolution is the combination of a series of individual decisions. The very fact, however, that in these later works Cortázar increasingly has to include the raw data of political and sociological information—the testimony of torture victims and data of U.S. military missions in *Libro de Manuel*, data from the Russell Tribunal in *Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales* (1975) seems to suggest that the concept of the novel as an individual exploration of being has its limits since society has long since left behind the stage of the liberal summer (to

use George Steiner's expression) when, at least, there was a certain space for individuals to work for the realization of Utopia. But in the 1960's even the liberal facade of governments like those of Britain and France had been torn away to reveal state-condoned repression and torture. Cortázar's esthetic demands as its precondition a liberal society which no longer exists.

## V

Of the three works under discussion, Severo Sarduy's *Cobra* represents the most extreme break with traditional fiction. Indeed, it has been hailed both as a quite new kind of writing as well as a destruction of the concept of authorship itself. The translator of the English version declares:

he...creates *Cobra* on the basis of mutilated quotations from *Cobra*, again and again breaking down the old discourse, the old concept of authorship and of fidelity to authorship, erasing the difference between the original and the plagiarized, to indicate perhaps that all texts are one: *l'écriture*. Writing that is never finished: a book that is incessantly written.<sup>24</sup>

Roland Barthes, on the other hand, is not so much interested in *Cobra* as a destruction of the concept of authorship so much as the realization of the Utopia of the "rapture text." Indeed he puts *Cobra* outside any possibility of recuperation by institutionalized language and criticism, exclaiming:

encore, encore, encore plus! encore un autre mot, encore une autre fête. La langue se reconstruit *ailleurs* par le flux pressé de tous les plaisirs de langage. Où, ailleurs? au paradis des mots. C'est là, véritablement une texte paradisiaque, utopique (sans lieu), une hétéroglogie par plénitude: tous signifiants son là et chacun fait mouche: l'auteur (le lecteur) semble leur dire: je vous aime tous (mots, tours, phrases, adjectifs, ruptures) pêle-mêle: les signes et les mirages d'objets qu'ils représentent: une sorte de franciscanisme appelle tous les mots à se poser, à se pressée, à repartir; texte jaséé, chiné, nous sommes comblés par le langage tels de jeunes enfants à qui rien ne serait jamais refusé, reproché, ou, pire encore, "permis." C'est la gageure d'une jubilation continue, le moment où par son excès les plaisir verbal suffoque et buscule dans la jouissance.<sup>25</sup>

Here I shall merely note in passing that the Utopia which Barthes reads in *Cobra* is a plénitude in which there is never determination or selection; in which one choice does not cancel another. In a similarly rapturous accolade, Hélène Cixous writes:

Impossible to hold it still—what? where?, which way?—this text is on the run, slipping out the back way, swerving out of line with any

conceivable edge of text, of land, or of water—impossible to catch hold of any thread in this flying carpet slip—stitched in gold zig-zag.

What hand, what memory, what master, what law would dare boast of being able to regulate its course for an instant? *Cobra* forgets herself somewhere at the outer limits objectively and subjectively, with the unrestrained boldness of beings to come.<sup>26</sup>

*Cobra* is here placed outside the scope of criticism because of its futuristic mobility. The reader is in Utopia and must not ask how he got there.

One of Sarduy's models for the revolutionary text is, in fact, the baroque: "Barroco que recusa toda instauración, que metaforiza el orden discutido, al dios juzgado, a la ley transgredida. Barroco de la Revolución."<sup>27</sup> In its break with denotation (or the referential), baroque is analogue to the erotic:

Como la retórica barroca, el erotismo se presenta como la ruptura total del nivel denotativo, directo y natural del lenguaje-somático-, como la perversión que implica toda metáfora, toda figura.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the erotic like the language of the baroque seeks nothing beyond pleasure. The way in which the writer might break away from denotative language is best illustrated through poetry. Writing of the Surrealists, Sarduy speaks of producing a *secousse*:

A través de ese sacudimiento del signo que lo vacía de significado el poeta restituye el mundo a su puro espectáculo, lo convierte en un catálogo de significantes.<sup>29</sup>

We recognize both in Severo Sarduy's own version of *écriture* and in the reception of *Cobra*, a recurrent contemporary obsession with mobility, metamorphosis, play and enjoyment as against the supposedly bourgeois values of organization, work and deferment of pleasure. However, it is possible that those values which appeared revolutionary in contrast to the nineteenth-century bourgeois are, in fact, reflections of a new stage of capitalism itself. For the moment, however, I wish to leave this problem aside and address myself to the manner in which mobility and metamorphosis are embodied in the text. For in one respect (and notwithstanding the supposed destruction of the concept of authorship), there is a curious and quite distinctive feature of Sarduy's style which deserves notice. *Cobra* is for the most part, written in a series of simple sentences with a minimum of subordinate clauses. For example:

Pactaron no pensar en la cita. Escondidas tomaban librium. Para que durmiera todo el día en el caldo, le dieron a Pup una pastilla. Tejían. Hablaban de las inclemencias del tiempo. Confesaron desgano. A las seis de la tarde Cobra empezó a pintarse. A las ocho, frente al espejo, aguardaba en el camarín. A las diez sonó el timbre para el primer espectáculo.

The staccato effect of the short sentences produces the impression of constant but unrelated and discontinuous activities. The metamorphosis is suggested primarily by word play, particularly punning, paronomasia and anagrams. The title of the book itself is an anagram of Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. Cobra is also the third person of the present indicative of *cobrar*, and is replete with anagrammatic formations—"obrar," "boca," "barroco," some of which refer to an Octavio Paz poem "La boca habla" which Sarduy quotes. This kind of textual production eschews the referential in order to display the power of words to create new configurations. It was a procedure much favored by the Surrealists and is common in Latin American poetry.<sup>30</sup> In *Cobra*, this verbal play is used to create characters and situations. Cobra is a transvestite from the Lyric Theatre of the Dolls who under the egis of a Señora/Buscona (mediator) prepares for a role as "queen;" but she is also a woman with a strangely-marked face seen on the streets of Paris and in a reduced form is a dwarf castrated by Dr. Katzbob. The "white dwarf" is also an astronomical term for a dead star. Characters are, then, not separate identities but signifiers. For instance, a group of motorcyclists, are also hippies or Tibetan lamas. Thus character, like the verbal pun becomes a kind of splitting *apart* of an apparent identity to show the disparate possibilities of the signified.

It might be argued that, by removing language from denotation and instrumentalality, Sarduy creates a text that stands in opposition to the rigidity of institutionalized speech and the preconceived habits of the bourgeois order. Indeed, as critics have pointed out, the text parodies traditional narrative, reveals the syntactic model of textual production and, in general, criticizes its own practice. Moreover it constantly draws attention to fictionality. The basic set of contrasts around which *Cobra* gyrates is the East/West polarity. We are never allowed to believe, however, that we are dealing with a real opposition but rather with a *bricolage* of rituals, beliefs, landscapes, and representations, including the mistaken Indies of Columbus' log book. At this point, we begin to wonder what is served by this continual foregrounding of the "arbitrary" nature of the sign since the suppression of history, the visual pun and the abstraction of sign from their original context are precisely the features that also characterize the mass media.

Before dealing with this problem, however, it is useful to remind ourselves of the close relations between the East/West polarity in *Cobra* and Octavio Paz's *Conjunciones y disyunciones*. The Spanish edition of *Cobra* indeed has, on its jacket, the very picture of the yogin whose body is a mandala which had also appeared in Paz's book. This latter is a learned disquisition on the contrast between Eastern and Western notions of the body, particularly as seen in the extremes of Western puritanism and Tantric orgy. Paz abstracts these beliefs from any historical context to present them as a pure opposition between a civilization which sublimates

the excremental and represses the body; and a civilization which worships the body and indeed, reads it as a kind of writing. In the West, the repressed body, "martirizada por el sentimiento de culpa y la ironía" took refuge in art. The supreme task of the modern artists is to recover the physicality of experience: "el poeta y el novelista construyen objetos simbólicos, organismos que emiten imágenes. Hacen lo que hace el salvaje, convierten el lenguaje en cuerpo. Las palabras ya no son cosas y, sin cesar de ser signos, se animan, *cobran* cuerpo" (my italics).<sup>31</sup> The healing of the breach between words and the body may be said to represent the Utopian aspect of *Cobra*.

Is *Cobra* an unmotivated text, a freeplay of the sign? The important East/West dichotomy suggests motivation; and there are, in fact, a number of situations which support this view. I refer here to the preparation of *Cobra* for the transvestite festival in which she is to become queen of the dolls; the "reduction" of *Cobra* who is also *Pup*, the dwarf, whose name, in turn, suggests *poupée* (doll) and the puppae of insect metamorphosis. In another "situation," *Pup* is castrated by Dr. *Katzbob* (to bob means to cut). There are also allusions to a journey through Spain (Córdoba-*Cobra*), and to *Tangier*. Now *Tangier* is a place that pioneered sex-change operations and one of the "transgressions" committed by the text is that against the institutionalization of sex roles in Western society.

Of course it can be effectively argued that this is simply one of many possible readings of the text but it is a reading encouraged by the word-play, by names and situations. In fact, the central metaphor of *Cobra* is the body as sign but a body that can be converted into spectacle. What *Hélène Cixous* describes as the movement of the text is, in reality, a dance of signs, the constant metamorphoses which allow no fixed point of reference and which invite enjoyment and not use.

Now although this may transgress the rigidity and institutionization of older forms of society, this is also very much akin to that "emptying of reality" which *Barthes* called "myth." To be sure he is talking of representation not language, a representation in which things "appear to mean something by themselves." But this is what *Sarduy* attempts with language. Further the promotion of gratuitousness in opposition to the instrumentality of bourgeois society is not in itself revolutionary. It is perhaps Utopian but, as is evident, private Utopias are permissible within the world system. What is now taboo is social action.

## VI

The problem that *Sarduy*, *Cortázar* and *Fuentes* share is that of converting individual statement into social practice. The realist novel had an appearance of being a reflection of society. The avant-garde exposed its rhetoric and showed that even when an author appeared to be holding

society up to criticism, the very structures of the narrative reproduced its assumptions. In the attempt, however, to find new and unrecoverable forms, the new novelists value the mobile, the gratuitousness, the infinitely changeable, which are the very values promoted by a new stage of capitalism. In the case of contemporary Latin American writers, this is particularly striking and particularly contradictory. As we have seen, one of the ideals of both Fuentes and Cortázar is to create a space for individualism and implicitly Sarduy also glimpses the Utopia of this private world. The novel, once the privileged place for the exploration of the individual is, however, increasingly irrelevant on the social level. It is, in fact, the global system which has changed character leaving the avant-garde novelist tilting at the windmills of an old bourgeois stereotype who institutionalized literature and converted language into his instrument, who deferred pleasure and embraced the work ethic. To attack such an individual is anachronistic at the present time when the global system has taken on quite different characteristics. The dominant ideology is now reproduced in every facet of daily life, in the very pursuit of pleasure. It encourages the setting up of private worlds but sets taboos around politics, compartmentalizes information and, in general, flourishes on the suppression of history. Thus Fuentes, Sarduy and Cortázar embrace a dangerous kind of modernity. In the case of *Aura*, this is particularly fascinating because as an allegory for art it clearly reveals the conversion of Montero's *social* vision (his project to synthesize the history of the Renaissance) into a private dream which is a *reproduction*. In *Cobra*, the attempt is made both to attack convention and to produce a pure, unmotivated pleasure text and again this reproduces rather than revolutionizes the values of mobility and metamorphosis whilst placing a taboo on the political and the historical. Of the three writers only Cortázar attempts to convert the individual exploration into a social one, though not in "Las babas del diablo" which is a devastating *reductio ad absurdum* of art's pretense to reflect reality. Not until his latest writing would he face the incongruity of a Utopian vision of life converted into art and art into life when set beside the information produced by tribunals on torture and repression. This dichotomy in Cortázar's later writing is indeed a significant symptom, showing as it does the difficulties of converting the individual life-style into a revolutionary movement or even into a significant transgression of the present system.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I refer particularly to Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris, 1970); Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris, 1974). See also Jonathan Cullen, *Structuralist Poetics* (London, 1975).



- 2 Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals and the Novel," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Anchor Books, 1953), p. 215.
- 3 "The function of the little magazine," *The Liberal Imagination*, pp. 94-5.
- 4 For a discussion of "naturalization," see Jonathan Culler, *op. cit.* pp. 134-60.
- 5 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ecriture, Fiction, Idéologie," *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris, 1968), pp. 127-47.
- 6 This is the claim made by Phillippe Sollers, *Logiques* (Paris, 1968), and Julia Kristeva, *op. cit.*
- 7 Mario Vargas Llosa, "Novela primitiva y novela de creación en América Latina," *Revista de la Universidad de México* (México), vol. xxiii, 10 (junio de 1969), p. 31.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 The first chapter, later revised, first appeared as "La nueva novela latinoamericana" in *Siempre*, 579 (29 de julio, 1965).
- 11 *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (Mexico, 1969), p. 18.
- 12 Alberto Díaz Lastra, "La Definición Literaria, Política y Moral de Carlos Fuentes," *Siempre*, 718 (29 marzo, 1967).
- 13 *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, pp. 90-1.
- 14 Julio Cortázar, "Literatura en la Revolución y Revolución en la Literatura: Algunos Malentendidos a Liquidar," *Marcha* (Montevideo, 9-16 de enero, 1970) and in Oscar Collazos, Julio Cortázar y Mario Vargas Llosa, *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura* (Mexico, 1970).
- 15 Julio Cortázar, "Situación de la novela," *Cuadernos americanos*, año IX, vol. III, no. 4 (julio-agosto, 1950), pp. 294-297.
- 16 I refer particularly to Salvador Elizondo (Mexico), Néstor Sánchez (Argentina) and Severo Sarduy (Cuba).
- 17 Interview with Jean Michel Fossey, "From Boom to Big Bang," in *Review 74* (New York: Winter, 1974), p. 12.
- 18 Severo Sarduy, "Del Yin al Yang (Sobre Sade, Bataille, Marmori, Cortázar y Elizondo)," *Mundo Nuevo* 13 (Paris: Julio, 1967), p. 8.
- 19 Richard M. Reeve, "Carlos Fuentes y el desarrollo del narrador en segunda persona: un ensayo exploratorio," in *Homenaje a Carlos Fuentes* (New York, 1971), p. 77-87. Butor's *Degrés* (1960), however, used the first person narrator with the narrator addressing himself to a "tú" who is his own nephew and a student in his class at the *lycée*.
- 20 The novel was originally given the title, "El sueño," *Siempre* (29 de septiembre, 1965).
- 21 Luis Harss, *Los nuestros*, 5 ed. (Buenos Aires, 1973), p. 273. For a discussion of "El perseguidor," see Saul Sosnowski, "Conocimiento poético y aprehensión racional de la realidad." Un estudio de "El perseguidor" de Julio Cortázar," *Homenaje a Cortázar* (New York, 1972), pp. 429-444.
- 22 For a discussion of the scapegoat character in Cortázar's work, see Alfred MacAdam, *El individuo y el otro (Crítica a los cuentos de Julio Cortázar)*, (Buenos Aires-New York, 1971).
- 23 I omit *62 modelo para armar* which he himself described as a "laboratorio" in his reply to Oscar Collazos, *op. cit.*
- 24 Suzanne Jill Levine, "Discourse as Bricolage," *Review 74*, p. 35.
- 25 Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris, 1975), p. 17.
- 26 Hélène Cixous, "'Ocobrabaroco.' A Text-Twister," *Review 74*, p. 26.
- 27 Severo Sarduy, "El barroco y el neobarroco," *América Latina en su literatura* (second edition, México, 1974), p. 184.

<sup>28</sup> "El barroco y el neobarroco," p. 182.

<sup>29</sup> Dialogue with Tomás Segovia and Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Nuestro Rubén Darío," in *Mundo Nuevo* (7 de enero, 1967), p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Octavio Paz, *Conjunciones y disyunciones* (Mexico, 1969), p. 84.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, tr. Annetee Lavers (New York, 1972), p. 143.

<sup>32</sup> A detailed study of Cortázar's later work is outside the scope of this article. I am at present at work on a more extended discussion of the point I make here. For a historical survey of theories of revolutionary literature which envisage a Utopia in which art becomes life, see Robert C. Elliott, "The Costs of Utopia," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, CLI-CLV (Oxford, 1976).

# Black from White and White on Black: Contradictions of Language in the Angolan Novel

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Outrora, vias coqueiros e escrevias:  
"Pinhos." Hoje, sob os pinhais, um  
vento corre de Africa sobre o teu  
pensamiento.

M. António

O meu poema sou eu-branco  
montado em mim-preto  
a cavalgar pela vida

António Jacinto

## *African literature and the question of language*

Angola became independent on November 11, 1975, and citizens of that new African country immediately began to obliterate the most visible signs of nearly five hundred years of colonial rule. Statues of Portuguese heroes toppled as Angolans experienced the euphoria of nationhood. The city of Nova Lisboa became Huambo, but even as European place names gave way to African ones it was obvious that for the foreseeable future Portuguese would continue to be the official language in a nation of ethnolinguistic diversity.

The reasons for the retention of colonial languages by independent African countries will be assessed in the next section of this essay; for the time being, we might note that language is a people's most fundamental vehicle of cultural, philosophical, and spiritual beliefs. Thus, when speaking of imaginative writing, which is an intimate manifestation of cultural expression and of a people's world view, we must remember that the language of poetry and prose fiction carries as much practical importance as, and more emotive significance than, the language of government, technology, and commerce.

Most critical works on African writing do take into account the perennial question: can there be an authentic African literature written in a European language? A perusal of any representative bibliography of critical works on African literature reveals that a significant number of books and articles focuses on the problem of language. The majority of these critics, especially Africans themselves, recognize the contradictions inherent in the question of language. Nevertheless, they accept, in principle, the validity of an African literature of European expression.

The novelist and playwright Chinua Achebe, speaking of his own

country, says: "if you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature, as I see it, is the literature written in English;..."<sup>1</sup> So much attention has been given to the matter that some African critics have displayed no little annoyance with those who insist on pursuing the question of African literatures written in the languages of other cultures. The above-quoted Chinua Achebe, on another occasion, when invited to participate in a conference in Canada on the African writer and the English language, "fired back a flat *No!*", presumably because he was put off by the constant rehashing of the issue, particularly by, or under the sponsorship of, non-Africans.<sup>2</sup> Understandable annoyance--yet language continues to be of fundamental importance; and the sensitivity of some African writers and critics toward this issue is no less compelling in its cultural, ideological, and aesthetic implications.

Naturally, in commenting on a literary work, be it African or otherwise, a critic can hardly avoid referring to words, syntax, and grammatical structures. When Africans refuse to participate in further debates on the language question they are most often saying, and with good reason, that a viable African literature of European expression already exists. At the same time, the undercurrent of annoyance flows from an ambivalence that goes from pride to resentment. There is pride in belonging to a privileged group and a nagging resentment at being literate and educated in a colonial language. Sometimes resentment surfaces as defensiveness, particularly toward the intrusive non-African critic.

The South African writer J. P. Clark derisively characterized the British critic Gerald M. Moore as "Old John Bull...alias Mr. I-know-my-Africa."<sup>3</sup> Moore, of course, has a deservedly good reputation as an Africanist. Still, Clark's judgement, despite its sardonic harshness, has some validity if we consider that Moore, for all his understanding of Africa, harbors a discernible, imperial pride in "English writing in the tropical world." And the foregoing words serve as the subtitle of Moore's *The Chosen Tongue*, a book which, in the author's words, is "concerned with writers who... are themselves of non-English stock, for many of whom this language is not the obvious or the imperative choice."<sup>4</sup> Echoing Chinua Achebe, Moore states that the language was given to these people of non-European stock, and he devotes his book to an attitude that can perhaps be expressed, with his somewhat paternalistic pride, as "and look how beautifully they use it." Moore stops short of the notion that non-Europeans *chose* English, just as he mitigates the bitter idea that the language was imposed on them. English was *given* to the African writer, and as a language that is used so widely "to define cultures not English, or no longer English," it is indeed the *chosen* tongue in a Biblical sense that smacks of awesome responsibility, if not burden, for the English themselves. That Moore has this sense of responsibility and greater nationalistic pride can be seen in these words from the conclusion of his book: "the present shows us a continent [Africa] which can bend and

shape this chosen tongue so that it becomes once more the vehicle through which a young nation can explore the limits of its strength, heal its wounds and grope painfully for the real bases of its unity;" and further, "...the best of the work explored here shows that English, whether in Africa or the Caribbean, has not yet lost its capacity to enshrine the hopes as well as the fears of men;" and finally, "for those of us who also use that tongue, nothing protects us from the responsibility of knowing what these men are saying to us, and to each other."<sup>5</sup> What Moore says does not bother me as much as how he says it; the tone of his statement has all the earmarks of cultural neocolonialism.

Writers, like Achebe, seem to be saying that although European languages were imposed on the continent, Africans themselves were born to these languages and they have no recourse but to use that which was *given*. There is a subtle, but important, distinction between this notion and that stated by Moore when he affirms the chosen tongue's capacity to express other cultures not English. In essence, Moore is saying that English continues to demonstrate its flexibility and adaptability as it comes to the aid of young nations in search of a vehicle of cultural expression. Again, I do not argue with Moore's basic point, for it is an incontrovertible fact that English, as well as other European languages, does serve as an important cultural vehicle in Africa and the Caribbean. Unfortunately, the ideological slant of Moore's statements glosses over the real sociocultural contradictions that Africans and West Indians must face in accepting that European languages are something other than borrowed.

For the sake of comparison, let us consider how Achebe approaches the issue. In "English and the African Writer" he gives, as an example of his use of English in creative writing, a short passage from his own novel *Arrow of God*; he then offers, by way of contrast, the same passage written in a style more consistent with that of British prose fiction. The Chief Priest speaks the following words in the original version: "The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place."<sup>6</sup> The same content, presented in standard colloquial English, reads thusly; "One has to move with the times or else one is left behind."<sup>7</sup> In the original version Achebe exhibits no exoticisms or orthographic deformation to capture the flavor of the Priest's speech; and what he says about his approach is quite significant in that he attributes his shaping and bending of English to *judgment* and *instinct*. Judgment and instinct are abstract terms that point up, in this context, a distinctly African ideological stance. Along the same lines, Achebe wrote in another article that "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak (language here does not mean simply words but a man's world-view)."<sup>8</sup> Chinua Achebe is not one to strike out with black rage or Negritudinous affirmations of the African's supposed "emotive sensitivity," to use Senghor's term. Thus, Achebe's statements have to be taken as defensive rebuffs of those who presume to know what Africans are saying to each

other. Once we understand the sensitivities and defensiveness of African writers and critics we can proceed to read and analyze their writings, not with deference or proprietorial attitudes, but with an awareness of the psychological, philosophical, and political complexities that make for contradictions which serve to enhance the sociocultural significance and the aesthetic value of the literary work.

The question of for whom does the African write is no less an intriguing topic than the issue of language, and in a sense the two problems are one. The fact that the African writer may feel bothered by his reliance on a European language reflects, to a greater or lesser degree, alienation from roots which, along with other factors--the illiteracy of the masses being one--shuts the novelist or poet off from a potential audience. The question of language really constitutes a dilemma of varied dimensions, not the least of which is moral.

An American critic, Lloyd W. Brown, wrote an article entitled "The Moral Significance of European Languages in African Literature." The moral dilemma stems from having to use languages that represent the cornerstone of a civilization that has denied and helped to suppress African humanity. Brown calls on the well-known Caliban-Prospero myth in which the slave learns his master's language, distorts it, and hurls it back in his tormentor's teeth. To quote Brown; "European languages represent a moral, and perceptual, ambiguity in African literature: Prospero's language is still the emblem of the old relationship, but it is also the tool with which 'new' Calibans define cultural identities that contradict the old European myths."<sup>9</sup> This goes beyond the position that English, for example, by virtue of its flexibility, can adapt to other cultures. No doubt, English does demonstrate amazing flexibility, not exclusively because it is inherently or originally so but also because it has been made flexible by those who have accommodated it to their world view. As an international language English constantly feeds on and enriches itself with non-standard forms and foreign borrowings; and this, perhaps to a somewhat lesser extent, also applies to French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

#### *Nationality, nation-building, and language*

Thus far we have approached our subject from the point of view of literary language. In order to bring this problem into sharper focus, and as a means of establishing a theoretical base for our considerations of certain Angolan novels, it behooves us to review some pertinent factors relating to nationality, nationalism, and sociolinguistics.

The question of Western languages in Africa, as well as in other developing areas of the world, has much to do with such concerns as multilingualism, literacy, and national language policy. On the purely practical level, when we speak of a developing nation we are referring to technological and socioeconomic change based on more or less

supranational tenets. As countries like Angola embark on the task of nation-building they necessarily have in sight some economic and technological systems that have little or nothing to do with traditional African societies. Angola's fledgling, socialist government must seek the means of developing its resources through the investment of capital and with Western technical expertise.

For the time being, Angola's language policy, whether just *de facto* or also officially, is based on Portuguese. As stated at the beginning of this essay, Portuguese is, in effect, the national language of Angola, a country that encompasses some eleven language groups which can be further broken down into approximately ninety smaller units. Many of the languages within a main linguistic group are dialects, and thus mutually intelligible to members of the diverse, smaller units. Nearly seventy percent of the approximately 5,000,000 African peoples in Angola speak one of four main languages. Umbundu is spoken by the Ovimbundu (1,500,000) who inhabit central Angola. The Bakongo people (500,000) of extreme northern Angola speak Kikongo, and Chokwe-Lunda, or or Kioko-Lunda (300,000), refers both to the languages and the people of the northeastern region. Kimbundu is the language of four major, closely related groups, the Mbundu, Mbaka, Ndongo, and Mbondo totaling about 1,100,000 who occupy the area from the coast around the capital Luanda and the Kwanza River Valley.<sup>10</sup> All of these groups have played an important role in Angola's history, and the Bakongo, Ovimbundu, and Kimbundu have been key in the liberation struggle that began in the early 1960s.

Portuguese has long served as a *lingua franca* in Angola, and, in fact, it has tended to develop into variants of the standard language in some urban and semi-rural areas. Creolized variations spoken by semiassimilated Africans have come to be known as *pequeno portugues*, or, more pejoratively, as *pretogues*. More importantly, in all the Lusophone territories of Africa, except for the Cape Verde Islands, there existed an official colonial policy of *assimiliação* similar to French African *assimilation*; acquisition of the language of the metropole, both in its spoken and written form, was the principal requisite for acceptance into the broad socioeconomic order. About this policy we shall have more to say presently. At the same time, and on an ever-increasing level since the latter part of the nineteenth century, the three main indigenous languages, Umbundu, Kimbundu, and Kikongo, have played an important part in Angolan regionalism and nationalism. By regionalism I mean here a sense of pan-Angolan identity molded by notions of Portuguese multiracialism, and only peripherally, or inconsistently, in line with such purely African ideologies as Negritude, Pan-Africanism, and African personality.

Before pursuing some of the particulars of nationalism, nation-building, and language in Angola, we need consider some general implications regarding these terms. Joshua A. Fishman, in his article

"Nationality-Nationalism and Nation-Nationism," offers some definitions and differentiations of terms worth considering here. He redefines *nation* as a "politico-geographic entity (otherwise referred to as a country, polity, state) such as might qualify for membership in the United Nations."<sup>12</sup> This definition differs from the traditional meaning of nation as a people of common origins and values, usually speaking one language, under a single government. Fishman reconsiders *nationality* as a "sociocultural entity that may have no corresponding politico-geographic realization."<sup>13</sup> Obviously, this definition comes close to the traditional meaning of nation in that it encompasses, as Fishman puts it, "solidarity of group behaviors and group values."<sup>14</sup> Having established this distinction between the politico-geographic entity (nation) and the sociocultural entity (nationality) Fishman then elaborates on "why social solidarity is not a precondition for the existence of a national political community and (...) how a national political community can attain such solidarity in successive steps."<sup>15</sup>

*Nationalism* can quite simply be called the emotional-ideological component of the sociocultural entity; and, as Fishman observes, the term presents some definitional confusion in that in the West nationalism has referred to the "driving or organizing dynamic" present as nationality becomes the foundation of a nation. This process of nationality leading to nationalism and then to nation has validity in the case of countries that began as, or continued to be based on, a single nationality. Nationalism has also applied to politico-geographical territories that contain diverse nationalities. Fishman notes further that the "processes by which nationalities *themselves* were formed, out of prior (indeed primordial) tradition-bound ethnic groups, has also been referred to as *nationalism*."<sup>16</sup> Nationalism, then, can refer to that period during which a single nationality is going through the formative process of becoming a politico-geographic entity and also to the period after geopolitical boundaries are secured and a country is going through the action-building process. In the latter situation, which applies precisely to most newly independent, multiethnolinguistic territories of Africa, diverse groups must go about formulating, through nationalism, a sense of sociocultural unity. They transcend what is popularly and, I might add, Eurocentrically, called "tribalism."

Finally, Fishman prefers *nationism*, rather than nationalism, "when-ever politico-geographic momentum and consolidation are in advance of sociocultural momentum."<sup>17</sup> Nationism is the process of political integration.

We can relate Fishman's assessments of nation, nationality, and nationism to the problem of a Western language superposed, and superimposed, on a developing African society, one in which nationism per force outstrips nationality. About this relationship between language and nationhood Fishman talks in terms of efficiency, or the governmental,



technological, and pedagogical practicality of a Western language for a multilingual, African country. Fishman is sensitive to the sociocultural and emotional-ideological links between an indigenous language, as a symbol of national unity, and a people's need to build identity. On the other hand, his discussion of the predominance of nationalism over nationality, and an efficient language over one of self and group identity, tends to tone down the very real issue of superimposed language and moral dilemma. For better or for worse, the ideologizing symbols are there even when a new country has its national priorities of efficiency and economic development in order as it goes about the arduous task of political and territorial unification.

In the case of many developing African countries diglossia means a European language--English, French, or Portuguese--used on official and formal occasions, coexisting with one or more indigenous tongues used in informal encounter. Fishman, along with others, sees diglossia as a viable alternative to the dominance of a single, indigenous language or to the official acceptance of several "native" tongues. In Nigeria, for example, English is the official, widely used language, but such tongues as Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo are very much alive. There are even "ethnic" literatures written in these languages. For a case of bilingual diglossia we might mention the case of French and Flemish in Belgium or we might turn to the New World where in Paraguay most citizens know Spanish and Guarani; or we might consider Haiti where a creole permeates all socioeconomic levels of that Francophone country.

Fishman entertains the possibility that as large, indigenous populations, hitherto not involved in the broader socioeconomic order of the nation, begin to enter into the competitive sphere dominated by an "elite" that has mastered and sought to maintain the superposed language, linguistic conflicts might occur.<sup>18</sup> For several reasons Fishman doubts that the total displacement of diglossia will result even in the face of such linguistic confrontations. These reasons are summed up in the following words from Fishman's essay: "Technology is basically nonethnic and uniformizing throughout the world. It leads linguistically to but one, two, or three world 'technology' languages and to essentially similar life-styles regardless of language. This is in sharp contrast to the basically heterogeneous and diversifying role of the languages of belletristics prior to World War I. The purpose and the function of these languages was to render their speakers maximally different in terms of cultural values and world views."<sup>19</sup> To suggest that group identity and world view through language have become less apparent in the face of a no-nonsense, technological world seems to me to ignore the far-reaching implications of cultural and political ideologies. Furthermore, we perhaps should not diminish the importance of literature and literary movements by regulating all to "belletristics", as if imaginative writing somehow existed in an effete, purely aesthetic domain detached from sociohistorical context.

Belleslettres may well have assured the prestige of French as a world language of culture and diplomacy, but in the so-called Third World, literary groups and their artistic and critical production have often been central to national revolutionary movements and not to a cosmopolitan sense of art for art's sake.

Fishman ends his essay with the forthright statement that "neither Pan-Africanism nor Negritude nor communism nor Islam nor democracy nor Christianity is likely soon to replace the nation as the unit of efficient, rational management of administrative affairs, or the nationality as the unit of authenticity toward which nations and subnations will be attracted. The language problem of each stage and kind of national integration (i.e. of nationalism) will be a reflection of the unfinished business of each."<sup>20</sup> Although Fishman recognizes a language problem as an unavoidable byproduct of the painful process of nation-building in the Third World, he implicitly exhorts these new countries to get down to the business of geopolitical integration in order that they be equipped to compete in a world order that has little patience with irrational symbols and emotional-ideological self-indulgence. This may be sound advice, but the fact still remains that sociocultural integration is not just an obstacle to progress, it is also a real and not easily dismissed emotional reality for those emerging nations that must contend on all levels with the legacy of colonialism.

For those members of the relatively small elites that presently guide the destinies of Lusophone Africa, sociocultural unity as it relates to language and language policy, will remain an important issue. There are, in effect, various phases of national integration at work, and as Fishman notes, these stages are not always in step with each other. On the other hand, these stages, although not in pace with each other, do exist in a reciprocal relationship with one another, which means that there are stresses and tensions that often seem blatantly contradictory. Mozambique, for example, in the interest of nationalism, can negotiate with the Pretoria government on matters of mutual economic benefit while, at the same time, the avowedly Marxist regime of that black nation can use its territory and resources to train guerrillas whose ultimate goal is to end white minority rule in all of southern Africa.

In both Mozambique and Angola, not to mention Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde archipelago, and the islands of São Tomé-Príncipe, language maintenance and literacy programs involve the propagation of Portuguese. However, just as in the geopolitical and economic spheres, all manner of contradictions and maladjustments attends this transitional period in terms of language of efficiency and language of cultural and literary expression.

*Language, culture, and Angolan literature*

Supported by several theoretical notions we now turn to some historical considerations of the question of language and its relationship to creative writing in Angola. At the beginning of the foregoing section I

identify three main language groups in Angola. With Kikongo we encounter the classic case of the result of the arbitrary partitioning of Africa by European nations. The Bakongo, as an ethnic group, overlap the border dividing northern Angola and southern Congo Brazzaville and Zaire.<sup>21</sup> The links with Zaire and the conflicts between the Kikongo-speaking Bakongowho make up the Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (FNLA) and the Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola (MPLA), composed mainly of Kimbundu speakers, particularly Mbundu, during the 1975-76 "civil war" in Angola have some relevance to the problems between ethnolinguistic groups; and we should mention that the third nationalist group, União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), also pitted against the MPLA, is dominated by the Umbundu-speaking Ovimbundu.<sup>22</sup>

What role, then, have indigenous languages played in the period leading to Angolan independence? To answer this question, and without going into all the historical particulars, we must take into account the extent to which the African peoples had early and more or less continuous contact with the Portuguese. The Ovimbundu are of great importance in this respect, but we have to concentrate on the Kimbundu, the second most populous ethnolinguistic group, who inhabit the western area of Angola in and around the capital of Luanda and east to the city of Malange, and whose members have comprised the majority of a Western-oriented intelligentsia since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> From this intelligentsia, made up of *assimilados* and mulattoes, has come much of the leadership of the MPLA, and it should be noted that this independence movement has its roots in cultural-literary groups dating back to the 1920s with antecedents in the nineteenth century. Needless to say, members of the intelligentsia are Westernized, some educated in Europe, which means, of course, that for many, especially the mixed bloods, Portuguese is their first or only language. Precisely because of their exposure to ideas from Portugal and the world at large, they could gain a perspective on their own situation as Angolans and as Africans.

The usual process in nation-building is from ethnic group to nationality. Under Portuguese colonialism, nationality was attenuated by the idea of Angola as a unique region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several significant factors contributed to the rise of an intelligentsia composed of blacks, whites, and mulattoes, imbued with a consciousness of Angolan identity, during the first decades of this century. First of all, Portuguese colonial policy and the myths that supported a peculiar brand of Lusitanian greater nationality made for a special kind of intellectual and emotional ambiance in which the multiracial elite functioned. The Portuguese prided themselves on their five centuries in Africa, on their civilizing efforts, and on their lack of racism. They went so far, under Salazar's New State policies, as to refer officially to their colonies as overseas provinces. The ideological concept of the "Por-

tuguese space" encompassed widely scattered territories and a number of myths aimed at a single, acculturated, multiracial family.<sup>24</sup>

Despite high-sounding pronouncements of the national unity of a broad geopolitical space, Portugal never had the human and economic resources to maintain her far-flung empire. Thus, the goal of civilizing and acculturating untutored "natives" followed three general paths. In parts of Mozambique and Angola there were sporadic periods of Africanization of white settlers and adventurers who, in relatively small numbers, went to Africa to seek their fortunes. There are documented cases of traders and other whites living in the "bush" who wore African robes, ate local foods, spoke indigenous languages, and cohabitated with "native" women.<sup>25</sup> More far-reaching than the Africanization of Europeans were the processes of creolization whereby in certain regions, particularly around Malange, but even in Luanda, which maintained constant contact with Portugal, the beginnings of true acculturation took place, to the extent of incipient diglossia: Portuguese, the official language, and Kimbundu as the every-day tongue. The Angolan writer Mário António Fernandes de Oliveira, in his book *Luanda, "Ilha" Crioula*, documents aspects of creolization in the capital city during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first four decades of the twentieth. Blacks, whites, and mulattoes lived side by side and participated in a strongly African-flavored life style. The third, and by far the most dramatic, result of Portuguese policies in Angola was the partial or complete destruction of traditional African societies by means of acculturation (which really meant deculturation) and through the work ethic. Only slavery itself has been more destructive of African societies and African psyches than the nineteenth century policies of forced and contract labor predicated on the attitude of civilization through work.<sup>26</sup> Historically, then, the majority of Africans under Portuguese dominion have been "pacified" by force of arms, ignored, or "civilized" through labor.

The already mentioned policy of assimilation, instituted in the nineteenth-century and brought dramatically to an end in 1961 by the outbreak of warfare, has a direct and, in some ways, curious bearing on Angola as a region of the Portuguese space, nationalism, and the language of literary expression. This policy essentially divided Angola's population into the categories of indigenous ("uncivilized" African) and non-indigenous (whites and assimilated blacks and mulattoes). James Duffy rightly observes that the assimilated Africans constituted, in truth, a third category, without all of the opportunities of the whites, which gives the lie to the Portuguese's much touted color blindness.

We can see, then, that the numerically tiny African elites emerged from a paradoxical set of historical circumstances. On the one hand these groups existed on the periphery of an inept native policy; while on the other hand they, as *assimilados*, enjoyed certain privileges conferred on them by their official status as Portuguese citizens. These

members of a black and mulatto bourgeoisie embraced or otherwise absorbed certain aspects of Portugal's cultural mythology. Even black intellectuals fell under the influence of whatever truths lay beyond the myths.

Of great significance is the presence of whites in these groups of intellectuals (while Portuguese policy has been essentially racist there has never been an officially sanctioned separation of the races). This in itself makes for a uniqueness that separates the Afro-Portuguese experience from that of French- and English-speaking Africa. Although in the nineteenth century whites, like the Kimbunduist and Swiss Protestant missionary Heli Chatelain, acted more as mentors than equals to the African, in the 1940s and 1950s, with the increased immigration from Portugal and the rise of nationalist sentiments elsewhere in the world, some native-born Angolan whites entered into a more balanced coalition with black and mulatto compatriots.<sup>27</sup> White Angolans, because of cultural background and economics, or just because they were identified by color with those in power, could, and often did, take the initiative in these multiracial coalitions. The early founding of black and mulatto cultural-literary organizations and an incipiently nationalist, bilingual (Portuguese-Kimbundu) press did give the African a base for ethnic pride and continuity on which to meet with whites in an atmosphere of equality. Significantly, they met on the common ground of Angola as a unique Afro-Portuguese region (the myths of Lusotropicology had their positive aspects) which had as its primary aim an identity predicated on the resuscitation of creolized African customs and a reversal of the processes of deculturation. Multiracialism and Lusotropicology may have mitigated black rage, but protest against social injustices that had been perpetrated on the masses of people, planted the seed which blossomed into nationalism and gave flower in the independence movement.

The initial context for protest in the 1950s and 1960s was the search for cultural identity, often from an ethnological and folkloric standpoint. Literature, however, became the primary vehicle of the emotional-ideological search for authenticity. Poetry, because of its emotive capacity, dominated the literary scene in the 1950s and 1960s. Such themes as evocation of childhood and a creole past, lyrical exhortation, doleful laments of alienation from roots, solidarity, and ancestralism, frequently expressed in rhythms that approached those of Negritude, accommodated black, white, and mulatto poets, alike. Agostinho Neto, who presently heads his country's government, emerged in the 1950s as one of Angola's major poets. Other poets, destined to become principals in the independence movement, were the mulatto Viriato da Cruz and the white António Jacinto. Most of these poets struggled with the problem of language, and some attempted to lend an Angolan authenticity to their art through the use of African words and phrases, or they cultivated a creolized Portuguese. However, our best insights into the contradictions

of language come in the relatively few novels produced by Angolans during the crucial, pre-independence period.

*Angolan prose fiction and the contradictions of language*

Poetry's emotive force may, in some ways, be a distraction in a consideration of literary language within a sociohistorical context. This does not mean to say that poetry is not of utmost importance to the thrust of protest and combative literature, but the short story and particularly the novel are by their very nature inclined to conceptualized views of reality and a discursiveness that permits the reader to observe language in its ideologizing process. Fiction writers most often wear several faces in a given work, and in changing masks the novelist usually modifies his language posture thus allowing the reader to see the mechanisms at work. In most poetry words are their own end, whereas the language of prose fiction allows for the abstracting of ideas and values. The novel as a genre is, like English, French, and Portuguese, a European import. Moreover, the novel is a modern bourgeois form, cultivated, in Africa, by a new intelligentsia of basically middle and upper class origins.

The short story in Angola has varied from the stylized re-working of traditional African tales to chronicle-like, neo-realistic portrayals of urban life. In line with the writer's propensity to get outside of language, the short story and the novel, especially the novel, tend to "explain" as much as to "express." At times the narrator appears to be telling who he is in order to explain his subject. In this regard, the American critic James Olney, author of *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature*, says of his book that "it considers autobiography from Africa less as an individual phenomenon than as a social one." He continues by stating that "the life that provides the subject for African autobiography is much less individually determined, much more socially oriented, than life recounted in Western (European and American) autobiography; and, second, whether or not people from various cultural backgrounds differ basically as individual human beings, societies certainly differ."<sup>28</sup> Olney uses autobiography as a *modus operandi* in establishing his approach to the African novel. He makes a good point in adopting an autobiographical approach with an insistence on the more communal than individual aspects, for in the two contemporary novels we discuss shortly, the third person narrator of one and the first person narrator of the other tell about themselves, either implicitly or explicitly, as members of a social and cultural community. Furthermore, the idea of autobiography helps underline the apparent self-consciousness of the Angolan novelist.

In line with the autobiographical we observe in the short history of the Angolan novel, and the novel in Angola, that both white and black writers manifest an inexorable desire to reveal and/or explain a perceived African

reality from a communal viewpoint. Colonial novels, authored mainly by non-Angolan whites, abound in exotic revelations of the "dark continent" and its "savage" inhabitants as if to give credence to a collective European perception of Africa. Many of these colonial writers were military expeditionaries or Portuguese administrators who drew on their own experience in the Angolan backlands, and, in effect, produced in their generally artistically inept, and always culturally biased novels, amateur ethnological documentaries overlying philosophical-psychological portraits of self.<sup>29</sup>

We encounter such works as Luis Figueira's *Princesa Negra* (1932), which bears the subtitle *O Preço da Civilização em Africa*, and whose prologue praises the pioneers and fearless settlers who most contributed to the pacification of savage peoples.<sup>30</sup> Two currents in the Angolan novel sometimes converge and frequently reflect ideological contradictions, particularly during the period of regionalism and growing nationalism. Colonial writing is peripheral to an authentic Angolan literature even though metropolitan Portuguese continued to produce these novels up to the recent past, often under the guise of patriotic proclamations of Lusitanian unity. After the outbreak of guerrilla fighting in 1961 war stories began to appear as the natural heirs to the colonial novel.<sup>31</sup>

What about early novels written by black and mulatto Angolans? To the extent that assimilated Africans comprised a woefully small group is the extent to which there are few novels authored by blacks and mulattoes. Although we might reasonably expect those few writers to see the land and its people from a different perspective than that of the white revealer, blacks and mulattoes, influenced by their own Westernization, were at best ambivalent, and often blatantly contradictory, about their place in a society that equated civilization with whites and barbarism with blacks or mulattoes during the nineteenth century; and only one of these novels, Pedro Machado's *Scenas d'Africa* (1892), has come down to us.

A valid starting point for the Angolan novel that seeks to explain from a black perspective, ambivalent though it may be, is Assis Júnior's *O Segredo da Morta*. Although published in 1934, the story deals with events occurring in the 1890s, during a period of incipient creolization in the area around the towns of Sengue, Malange, and Dondo. Assis Júnior, who was born in 1887 and died in 1960, calls his book a *Romance de Costumes Angolenses*, a subtitle that stands in marked contrast to Figueira's *Princesa Negra: O Preço de Civilização em Africa*, published two years earlier. Figueira's flagrantly exotic title contrasts with Assis Júnior's mildly mysterious title which makes no allusion to race or Africa. The Portuguese writer exoticizes the African and aggrandizes the white pioneer. Assis Júnior's subtitle suggests that he desires, within the Western disciplines of ethnology and folklore studies, to explain and, indeed, to defend. The novel's banal plot is no more than a pretext for the author's discursive and apologetic descriptions of creolisms in a region of Angola at the turn of the century.

In keeping with the novel as an imported genre, Assis Júnior acknowledges the influence on his style by Victor Hugo and Anatole France. Certainly the romantic intrigues of *O Segredo da Morta* reflect the author's debt to the two French writers; and we might note in passing that the belletristic hegemony of French imprints itself, by extension, on the lesser prestige of the Portuguese language as a vehicle of Western culture. Significantly, the bombast of Assis Júnior's language seems a parody of the high-flown style of Hugo and other nineteenth-century European writers.

With respect to the acquisition and use of languages and literary styles, Ali A. Mazrui has commented on how Africans often indulged in flamboyant copying of European customs.<sup>32</sup> This can be explained by the fact that in a multilingual situation, within a dependent society, a common, albeit borrowed, language served as an important indication of solidarity among black intellectuals and semi-assimilated Africans desirous of distinguishing themselves from the "uncivilized" masses. To be able to speak the white man's language as well as the European himself did, not only meant prestige and acceptance for the members of a small, black minority, it also served as the source of a pride predicated on the diminution of the dominant group's foreignness. Furthermore, acquisition of the white man's language demonstrated the African's intellectual capacity in that he could manipulate that which conveyed the concepts of a supposedly superior race. Mazrui notes how in an earlier period some educated Africans reveled unabashedly in their Westernization. Writers and orators went out of their way to use the most uncommon, polysyllabic words and to quote long passages from Shakespeare and other European authors. It seems to me, however, that while this flamboyantly imitative phase may have reflected a pattern of self-hate, the black orator and writer was also giving proof, even if unconsciously, of a traditional African reliance on the power of the word.<sup>33</sup>

Mazrui observes that there is a distinction between "taking pride in a language and taking pride in one's own command of a language."<sup>34</sup> According to Mazrui, the African who masters a Western tongue can be compared to the European administrator or missionary who feels an inner satisfaction at having learned the obscure dialect of his African wards. I suspect, however, that there are some psychological and ideological differences to be made between the learning of a local language by the colonizer and the acquisition of the imperial language by the colonized. In a large measure their pride in, and perhaps even their love for French, led the Negritude poets to dare shape and sometimes to distort the language; after all, it was as much theirs as it was Breton's or Sartre's. The Caliban-Prospero metaphor no doubt accompanies very real nationalist and Pan-Africanist sentiments, but hurling the colonizer's language back at him is not necessarily to deny that language; it is, instead, to serve notice that the African and the West Indian have made that language their own. This, of course, brings the Negritude poets and their Anglophone detractors,



Chinua Achebe and the South African writer Ezequiel Mphahlele, for example, closer together than perhaps the latter would care to admit.

Assis Júnior was a long way from a Negritude ideology; although he was, as founder of the Liga Nacional Africana, an important predecessor of Angolan nationalists. He also seemed to take pride in his command of Portuguese--it was, in truth, an imperfect command--, and he attempted to apply the language to an Angolan reality as he perceived it. His shaping and bending of the European language was not so much intended, in the conscious manner of the Negritude writers, as it was a reflection of the intrusion of Kimbundu, which he probably knew better than Portuguese. He cultivated an anachronistic literary style as exaggerated tribute to what he took to be a Western mode of writing. On the other hand, he contradicted the Western language's cultural and aesthetic hegemony by his discernible dependency on some traditional African, story-telling techniques and through his use of Kimbundu words and phrases. Often, throughout the novel, the narrator interrupts the story with Kimbundu proverbs and passages of local color. Some of these asides are sententious chidings to criticize those Angolans who deny African customs. Assis Júnior directs his ideological message to a dual society. He describes, for example, a social gathering during which blacks and whites dance to both African and European music. Duality also extends to the characters' life style; for example, Elmira, a white Angolan, also goes by the African name of Kapaxi, and she prays to her Christian God while enjoying the protection of the African god of the Kwanza River. Elsewhere I wrote of this fictional occurrence as religious syncretism; I would now prefer to call it a duality that contains only a wishful desire for the twain to meet and to merge into a viable, creole structure.<sup>35</sup> The duality of literary language in *O Segredo da Morta* likewise does not mean a merging on the dialectical level that the implied author seems to want. The Kimbundu proverbs and descriptions of local customs stand out like museum pieces in the context of the author's contrived and flamboyant Portuguese. As an example of Angolan regionalism within the mythic Portuguese space, *O Segredo* represents an attempt to ward off a creeping deculturation that would destroy what Assis Júnior saw as the beginnings of a propitious creolization, and deculturation would escalate with an influx of white settlers—this time, whole families—in ensuing decades.

Inherent in the contradictions of language is the clash of cultures, a subject which has received the attention of one of Angola's best known writers. Fernando Monteiro de Castro Soromenho, most commonly referred to by his last two names, is the writer in question, and he himself is something of a contradiction. As a white Angolan (he was born in Mozambique but taken to Angola at the age of one) who began his writing career in the 1930s, Soromenho shares in some of the Eurocentric and racist distortions of Africa displayed by more obvious colonial novelists. Because of his literary talents and his fundamental sympathy for the black

man, I prefer to call Soromenho an "enlightened" colonial writer. Indeed, contradictions have dogged him in his career as an observer of Africa. Like most of his fellow colonial writers he did intend to reveal an Africa that he at least believed he understood. As an agent who recruited Africans for work in Angola's diamond mines, and later as a district chief in the eastern zones of the colony, Soromenho took advantage of his access to local populations to learn to speak Kioko and to gather samples of oral tradition.

In the first phase of his writing career Soromenho converted African legends and myths into sympathetic stories based on the African's humanity vitiated by his own "prelogical" state. In Soromenho's view African societies were victimized by their own static tribalism. His depiction of the superstition-bound, poverty-stricken "natives" gives evidence of his European prejudices toward Africa. Yet, his sense of the universal bonds of humankind and his attempts to capture cultural authenticity earned Soromenho the reputation, which spread beyond the borders of the Portuguese-speaking world, of a white man who understood the black man's soul. For all his understanding of and sympathy for the black subjects of his stories Soromenho did cultivate the picturesque and the exotic, especially in his descriptions of traditional African customs. Thus, African dances were "barbaric" and "delirious": naked black men and sensuous black women whirled about in a "frenzy."

Soromenho tried to exteriorize the African psyche, and he did bring to black societies the prejudiced cultural force of his European language. In other words, he, unlike those African writers of whom Gerald Moore wrote, did not bend and shape his language to an African world view. We might say that he descended on an African reality with all of the cultural baggage of his language intact.<sup>36</sup> When, however, in the early 1960s Soromenho entered decisively into his second literary phase, he himself admitted that it was necessary to purge his language of certain terms, like *selvagem* and *simiesco*, used to describe the African. Since 1942, when he published *Homens sem Caminho*, Soromenho had turned to the clash of cultures as his preferred theme. Even before modifying his language he had gained a new level of authenticity by treating his subject from within. In obvious reference to the rise of a new black consciousness, he told an interviewer that because of the contradictions of different realities he saw the necessity of adopting a new technique and style.<sup>37</sup>

*Homens sem Caminho*, *Terra Morta* (1949), *Viragem* (1957), and *A Chaga* (written in 1964 and published posthumously in 1970) all deal with the contradictions of Lisbon's colonial policy. Lourenço, an old settler in *A Chaga*, sums up the failure of the encounter of African and Portuguese in the following terms: "Negamos ao negro o homem que ele é, sem sequer pensarmos que ao negá-lo também nos negávamos como homens."<sup>38</sup> The voice of the implied author--meaning the novel's ideological norms--comes through frequently in *A Chaga* in pronouncements of protest that contrast

with the pious, condescending language of Soromenho's first phase. By 1965 Soromenho had settled in Brazil where he died in 1968. Since 1960 he had lived between Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, with a brief stay in the United States in 1961. An exile, more sad than bitter, Soromenho openly opposed the Salazar regime which had once hailed him as one of its distinguished colonial writers. If there is one principal message that Soromenho left for those who lived under this government, it was that Portugal's glorious adventure in Africa was largely a sham.

In Paris Soromenho wrote for such journals as *Présence Africaine*, and he aligned himself philosophically, if not actively, with the cause of African independence. His novelistic language only implicitly reached the level of Angolan nationalism, for his role was to dramatize that historical moment when exploitation had begun to reveal the emptiness of the adventure about which he had once written so grandiloquently: "Sôbre a barbárie dos sertões africanos, umas escassas dezenas de aventureiros ergueram a bandeira de seu país como símbolo de ocupação. São conhecidos por pombeiros a funantes, êsses sertanejos de Africa. A sua história está por escrever. Aqui se encontram alguns dos seus aspectos e poucos nomes."<sup>39</sup> A decade after he wrote those words, a character in *A Chaga* would say: "E rio-me comigo próprio com as histórias dêstes sertanejos manhosos, que procuram justificar tudo o que fizeram, e muitas vêzes o que não fizeram, com atos de heroísmos na descoberta destas terras, fazendo sempre do negro um selvagem e da Africa um mistério." (italics mine).<sup>40</sup> The disintegration of the myths of manifest destiny and civilizing mission toned down Soromenho's language and put his narrators into a frame of reference designed to jog a collective, Western conscience.

Even in Soromenho's attempts to simulate the non-standard Portuguese of the settlers' mulatto offspring there is no trace of exoticism. His intent is to capture the essence of the conflict of cultures through the social problem of language acquisition by those who are caught between two worlds. The *colono* Paulino chides his mulatto son Domingos in this exchange between the two:

Paulino: Nunca mais aprendes a falar. Falas português de prêto.

Domingos: Ê! Onde foi na escola? Escola siô Fio durou quê? Nem fêz dois mes.

Paulino: A escola não é pra aprender a falar, seu burro. Escola é pra contas e escrita, percebe?

Domingos: Na casa a gente fala quioco com mãe, com pai, com os irmão  
Pai fala português bocadinho só na veranda. Com os brancos é que fala.<sup>41</sup>

With patriotic pride and homesickness the settlers hang on to their peasant speech, and they hold the vague hope that their offspring will absorb it somehow, along with an entire culture, even though these "Portuguese" usually receive no formal schooling and the language of the land is the Kioko spoken by the "uncivilized" African women who keep house for the whites and bear them children. In a way, Domingos' "sub-standard"

Portuguese represents the cultural stagnation that exists in that area where black and white meet in unequal attempts at familial continuity.

Castro Soromenho presents a dilemma of compelling sociolinguistic dimensions, and it is these dimensions that demand our attention in the works of two contemporary Angolan novelists.

*Black from white, and white on black: Santos Lima and Luandino Vieira*

Manuel dos Santos Lima, virtually Angola's only pre-independence, black novelist, began his career as a writer of prose fiction (he has also written poetry) with *As Sementes da Liberdade* (1965). Under this rather provocative title Santos Lima tells a rambling story that revolves around Ricardo, a black man, born on the Guinea Gulf island of São Tomé, who returns to Angola, the land of his forebears. There, as an educated, lower-level administrator in an isolated outpost near the Congo border, Ricardo goes through a process of re-Africanization. He marries an unassimilated woman, significantly named Ginga, after the powerful, seventeenth-century queen of the Mbundus who resisted Portuguese domination. Progressively, Ricardo returns to the land in both the literal and figurative sense. Curiously, Ricardo, who ostensibly denies Western values by living off the land as a farmer, sends his and Ginga's son, Almi, to study in Portugal. The apparent explanation for this act, which controverts Ricardo's own earlier decision not to follow this customary route of the aspiring black bourgeoisie, is that while formal education means advancement for the African, he must first be in touch with his roots. The combination of Western education and a sense of knowing who you are fits a pattern of the black Angolan's growing consciousness of people-building (nationality) and nation-building (nationalism). The son's success is a matter of efficiency, which, coupled with his nationalistic commitment, will help to plant the seeds of freedom. This appears to be the author's ideological message.

*As Sementes da Liberdade* has sociolinguistic significance in terms of both the author's and his black characters' use of Portuguese, but Santos Lima's most recent novel, *As Lagrimas e o Vento* (1975), offers greater possibilities for commentary in that realm. Ricardo's son, Almi Boaventura, who, in an epilogue to *As Sementes*, reveals himself to be the narrator of that story, appears as the protagonist of *As Lagrimas e o Vento*.

For this novel the author obviously drew on his own experiences as an officer who deserted from the Portuguese army while serving in Angola to join the nationalist guerrillas. Basically, the story recounts those first months of the war in which Africans and Portuguese floundered in a sea of often senseless violence and uncertain goals. Almi emerges amidst ideological confusion as the voice of national self-determination and humane cause. The tone of the narrative voice resembles that which in an earlier period inspired Africans to master the European language in order to affirm their intellectual equality with whites. In the case of Santos

Lima's narrator there is an interesting parallel between the European who "knows his Africa" and the African who brings about a measure of leveling vis-à-vis his colonial masters by demonstrating an awareness of his own acculturation and by displaying his knowledge of language. Assis Júnior flaunted his Portuguese to the point of flamboyancy; with Santos Lima it is more a case of a controlled and even casual display of Western cultural-linguistic knowledge. At times it seems a case of "over-knowing" the language that results, not in bombast, but in something akin to parody and caricature. Certain European characters in the novel are such repositories of the author's knowledge of Portuguese culture and traditions that they are "over-delineated."

The novel's opening paragraph sets the tone for a narrative carried along, at times, by overly precise language:

"O vento empurrava-o para trás, mas, obstinado, ele tentava prosseguir o seu caminho, surdo aos gritos do vento. Não podendo suportá-lo de frente, voltou-lhe as costas e quis continuar, as cegas, carregando com aquele velho padrão. Era uma relíquia de família e por isso queria guardá-lo a todo o custo. Não sabia, porém, onde pousá-lo. Cada vez que o assentava no chão, via-o enterrar-se e apressadamente, voltava a carregá-lo às costas."<sup>42</sup>

The subject of this grammatically precise, and slightly over-written, passage is General José Cabarrão de Boavida y Colaço, who, it turns out, is having a nightmare. The general's absurdly aristocratic name (Cabarrão suggests *cabrão*, which, colloquially identifies a cuckold or, at best, a fool), right down to the Spanish conjunction *y*, aids the narrator in his apparent design to prick the balloon of pomposity in a passage of sociological suggestibility--the family relic represents jealousy guarded, outmoded tradition in danger of being buried in Angolan soil. The narrator then reduces the general to his most visceral self, in his underwear, tormented by his thoughts and a persistent flea whose actions are described with humorous preciousness: "A pulga eclipsara-se deixando-lhe nas cuecas os vestígios da sua passagem."<sup>43</sup>

The language of Lima's narrative carries authority by virtue of its correctness, cultural scope, and assuredness. The tone is one that suggests "I know whereof I speak." The fact that the narrator expresses himself with facility lends credence to his pronouncements on Portuguese society and Western mentality. With perhaps more sophistication than colonial writers who characterized Africans, the author delineates stereotyped Europeans who, however, display their humanity through a revelation of their most fundamental fears and aspirations. If Soromenho can be said to know the black man's soul, Santos Lima can be credited with understanding the white man's mentality. Almi Boaventura, the black second lieutenant, educated as a lawyer in Portugal, is thus familiar with European values. Almi's advantage over his white counterparts parallels the author's advantage as a novelist using an imported language and genre and writing

about blacks and whites in Africa. Both the author and his protagonist presumably know who they are as Africans, and they know the Portuguese on a linguistic, cultural, and philosophical level. Most of the Portuguese characters in the novel have little understanding of the black man outside of a Western context; and within that context they seem unsure of what they see and hear even when they deal with the "educated" African. Thus, most of Almi's fellow officers treat him both as a comrade who shares their values and as something of an enigma. At the beginning of the novel Almi's regiment has been recently mobilized and shipped to Angola, and the confusion as to why they are there makes for some dialogue that has significant socio-linguistic implications. Use of dialogue demonstrates the author's familiarity with colloquial Portuguese and with how informal banter reveals ideological curiosities. The typical mode of expression of young *metropolitanos* can be glimpsed in this exchange between Almi and a certain Gonçalves, who asks his black comrade-in-arms:

--Tu não conheces por aí umas gajas boas para apresentares à malta?

--Não!--respondeu Almi. De resto não sou de Luanda.

--Mas tu aqui safas-te mais do que nós.

--E' um privilégio, estou na minha terra.

--O pá, não te chateies, olha que eu disse isso a brincar.<sup>44</sup>

On one level Gonçalves treats Almi with easy camaraderie and the intimacy of post-adolescent males; but on the other level, captured in the slangy language of "safas-te mais do que nós," he establishes the distance that separates black from white, and he puts Almi into the role of "native" procurer of carnal pleasure for the occupying army. On both levels Gonçalves depends on Almi's knowledge of certain Western cultural-linguistic formulas.

Santos Lima introduces an array of characters who are stock in many Euro-American war stories: One character, nicknamed Gaja-boa, is a ladykiller, another is the group wisecracker and practical joker. Among the recruits we meet Serafim, a simple peasant boy who wanted to bring his pet goat with him and who, unable to bear the homesickness, hangs himself in the barrack. The conventional war story generally makes use of stock characters--the innocent hometown kid, the hardnosed sergeant with the big heart--to play on patriotic sentiment. More serious novelists, like Norman Mailer in *The Naked and the Dead* or earlier Erich Maria von Remarque in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, created three-dimensional characters who stand as poignant testimony to the horrors of war. Santos Lima obviously has the latter in mind with his depiction of Veríssimo, a Portuguese officer who makes sensitive but doctrinaire entries condemning the war in a diary he keeps for his wife. *As Lágrimas e o Vento* is no hackneyed war story in that it struggles with conflicting notions of nationality, nation, and greater nationalism. The European characters, functioning within their own context superimposed on one into which they

have suddenly been thrust, afford the author the opportunity to exercise his cultural-linguistic virtuosity. And the parallel of implied author and semi-autobiographical protagonist brings the social contradictions of language into focus.

Early in the novel we read Almi's thoughts expressed frequently in high-rhetorical, sometimes angry language. Past and present injustices against the Angolan people, the memory of the slave ships, realistic accounts of recent atrocities all figure in this language. The sense of a people wronged leads to such posturing as this rapid image of the black shanty towns that ring the essentially white city of Luanda: "casas cobertas de feridas e roidas de ódio."<sup>45</sup>

Although the first part of the novel has more to do with Almi's relationship with his Portuguese companions, we do see him in occasional contact with certain black residents of Luanda. When we encounter Africans, we see them on various planes of reaction to a social and economic situation made precarious by the war. Some of Luanda's black residents collaborate with the occupying army and the secret police (PIDE), some form cells of saboteurs or slip away to join the guerrillas in the bush, most are merely unpoliticized, hapless victims.

The language of the whites varies from the official rhetoric of *Angola é nossa* and *somos todos portugueses* (including, of course, black Angolans) to the unofficial *os pretos são ignorantes, ingénuos e selvagens* to an "in-group" banter that reveals false bravado, anger mixed with compassion, confusion, and cultural alienation. We have, in fact, language as a mirror of nationalist ideologies. Nationalism based on greater nationality becomes confused, in the minds of some Portuguese soldiers, with nationism. An excellent example of this confusion occurs during a conversation between Almi and a first lieutenant named Negreiros. The latter asks Almi's opinion of this war that has been imposed on them. Almi calmly replies: "Penso que só a História poderá responder a sua pergunta, meu tenente, sobretudo tendo em conta que estamos em presença de uma guerra civil."<sup>46</sup> Shocked, Negreiros retorts with a conventional dodge: "Oh messa! Então o nosso alferes chama guerra civil a uma guerra subversiva em que os comunistas puxam os cordelinhos."<sup>47</sup> By now the author's purposes are fairly transparent. The black second lieutenant, by simply repeating platitudes based on greater nationality (the myth of the Portuguese space), throws his colleague into ideological confusion and verbal contradictions. Almi explains "se pela Constituição portuguesa, os Angolanos são considerados portugueses e se Angola é igual ao Minho ou ao Algarve [provinces of continental Portugal], esta insurreição, de um ponto de vista jurídico, só pode ser, logicamente, uma guerra civil."<sup>48</sup> Almi, of course, coolly interjects the concept of geo-political unity into the argument in order to separate ideology from external social reality.<sup>49</sup>

We could easily apply the notions of cultural behavior and ethnic group identity to the casual conversation of the junior officers as a means of shedding further light on ideological confusions and rhetorical contradictions. Turning, however, to the language of the novel's black characters, we note certain parallels between the rhetoric of Portuguese greater nationality and black Angolan nationalism. The difference has to do with the embryonic stage of the latter and difficulties in establishing a concept of nationality as a necessary step to nation-building.

With respect to the question of multilingualism among urbanized, black Angolans, we see very few references to the problem of a national language or languages. Portuguese is the *lingua franca*, and Santos Lima makes only very subtle modifications in his black characters' speech as a means of ethnocultural delineation. In the *musseque* home of a relative the latter asks Almi "és doutor de doença ou doutor de leis?" Almi corrects with his reply: "Sou Licenciado em Direito."<sup>50</sup> We cannot necessarily attribute this usage on the part of Almi's cousin to an African linguistic substratum, but it does serve to suggest the degree of Westernization that separates the two relatives. We might note, however, that *primo*, as a form of address, does not necessarily mean that the two individuals are cousins; in some African languages the word translates as a general term for kin.

It would be wrong to say that Santos Lima does not have an ear for an African linguistic substratum. He uses this knowledge judiciously, however, on widely scattered occasions. On one such occasion the narrator describes a black man as opening his vowels too much. Another fleeting reference to an African phonetic substratum comes in a semi-assimilated African's pronunciation of his borrowed Portuguese name: Goncalves, with an *l* sound, becomes Goncarves, with an *r*. In the section of the novel entitled "Os Pretogueses," the author endeavors to capture phonetic distortions in order to ridicule and pity those semi-assimilated blacks who imitate with a fawning desire to ingratiate themselves to their white masters. One hapless man automatically mouths patriotic pledges of filial devotion to "siô Salazar;" and when ordered to greet a visiting Portuguese woman, he obediently proffers a "bom dia, miá siora."<sup>51</sup> Orthographic distortions of standard Portuguese, like *miá siora* for *minha senhora*, stand out all the more ludicrously in the novel because Santos Lima generally avoids exoticisms in his characterizations of blacks. When he does introduce a note of the exotic he does so for other than picturesque effect. For example, Almi finds himself among villagers at a traditional celebration, described in the following terms: "E o povo cantando e batucando, as marimbas contentes, o ritmo delirante, os corpos frementes no frenesim das pernas e dos braços na cadência das cabeças."<sup>52</sup> Santos Lima approximates the externalization of African customs frequently seen in the writings of non-Africans. *O ritmo delirante, os corpos frementes, and no frenesim das pernas* would serve well the descriptions of colonial writers.<sup>53</sup> Santos Lima has other purposes in mind,



however, for Almi becomes politically and sociologically reflective as he continues to watch the spectacle: "O terreiro paracia uma feira, um estúdio de cinema ou uma gigantesca mudança com grupos de mascarados que parodiavam os brancos, os contadores de histórias e adivinhas e, sobretudo, os súbitos herdeiros de bugingangas e ninharias."<sup>54</sup> The comparison with a fair and a movie set, the references to a mammoth substitution, the masquerade and parody, and finally the allusion to a people who have become, under colonialism, the heirs to glass beads and worthless trinkets, constitute, in the mind of the politicized Almi, an ambivalent condemnation of revisionist, cultural nationalism. Yet, Almi, in all his melancholy of a Westernized African, feels a sense of cultural deprivation, his own and that of a people deprived of the authenticity that comes through continuity and tradition. When urged to join in the dancing, Almi refuses: "Não sei dançar assim, sentir-me-ia ridículo. E' certamente uma inibição, sou um mutilado cultural."<sup>55</sup>

The idea of "cultural disability" brings us again to the issue of contradiction. Both Almi and the implied author stand in somewhat similar positions; the author because of the genre and its language of composition, the protagonist because of his Westernization as an aid to, but in conflict with, his sense of Angolan nationality and nationism. In reality, the contradictions of the implied author merge with those of the protagonist to the degree that the narrative voice cannot be separated from Almi's thoughts. With regard to language, we see a process of broad conceptualization in Almi's speech, both in dialogue and the indirect free style, contrasted with the common-sensical, but ideologically circular limitations of his uneducated compatriots. Their language, as a manifestation of their conceptualizations, does not meet the exigencies of a new nationalist immediacy. In effect, Almi's return to Angola is not to a static, fragmented multiethnicity but to a land whose future depends on a leveling that will lead to a unified resolve en-route to one nationality and one nation. This is not inconsistent with the course followed by Ricardo, Almi's father, in *As Sementes da Liberdade*.

As we have noted, with reference to the first part of the novel set in Luanda, Santos Lima makes economical use of orthographic distortions to identify the speech of his black characters. He does not depend solely on context to characterize African characters, however. Often they speak in an elliptical, slightly lyrical, but never stilted, manner. Furthermore, the villagers' speech contrasts with the colloquialisms of the Portuguese soldiers and the discursiveness of Almi's intellectualizations.

The author intersperses Almi's ruminations on the need for unity with an occasional reference to the problems of multilingualism and a national, indigenous language. One such reference occurs when Edmundo, a light-skinned mulatto, who had led a playboy's life before being drafted into the Portuguese army, appears in the guerrilla camp on his way to the Congo. Like Almi, he is a deserter, and when the two old acquaintances meet,

Edmundo declares: "Quando Angola se tornar uma república democrática e socialista, havemos de adoptar o quimbundo como língua nacional e os panos como traje da nossa terra."<sup>56</sup> When Almi appears doubtful, Edmundo exclaims: "Por que não? Não se pode traduzir 'república democrática e socialista,' em quimbundo, mas os panos o povo conhece..."<sup>57</sup> Almi scoffs at the idea of nationalist symbols; for him, Kimbundu in the mouths of Westernized blacks and mulattoes is as much a matter of posturing as the use of traditional African robes is a form of masquerading.<sup>58</sup> Besides, Kimbundu is only one of several indigenous languages.

The protagonist plays a dual role of didactic voice and model of tactical activism. Almi's insistence on efficiency reflects his idea of national development based on breaking the patterns of the past: "Antes a vida fora monotonia, repetição, círculo fechado."<sup>59</sup> Breaking the closed circle means, among other social programs, the elimination of illiteracy: "Aqueles crianças que o cercavam iam aprender a ler como os brancos."<sup>60</sup> Like the whites, the black children will learn to read and write Portuguese, which, on the heels of the war, will suppress multiethnicity: "Isso nunca aconteceria se a guerra não tivesse trazido esses angolanos de outras terras, Bienos, Ngolas, Lundas, até havia o mecânico Benigno, um mulato da Baía dos Tigres, e todos se designavam por 'angolanos'."<sup>61</sup> The word *terra* has interesting politico-geographic connotations. When Almi tells his fellow officer at the beginning of the novel that he is in his *terra*, he of course means he is in his homeland of Angola. But in the above quote "esses angolanos de outras terras" refers to diverse ethnolinguistic groups from different regions of Angola whose members are in the process of grasping the concept of nation. The author illustrates this problem of geographical space and nationhood when the old chief Massemba sits in amazement before a map of Angola on which his *terra* represents a tiny area.

As a concluding comment on Santos Lima's work, I should say that the sociological and ideological significance of novelistic language illustrates what I metaphorically refer to as "black from white." Santos Lima both flaunts and defies his Europeanization through the cultivation of language as a means of expressing a communal sense of African identity, his and that of a hoped for new Angolan, who is conscious of nation-building and a tempered nationalism.

For a cogent example of what I call "white on black," I turn to a novel by José Luandino Vieira, easily Angola's best-known living writer of prose fiction. Luandino Vieira is a white Angolan, born in Portugal, but taken as a small child to Luanda. His *nom de plume, and guerre*, Luandino, suggests to what measure he identifies with that contradictory city. I say contradictory city because Luanda was the seat of the Portuguese colonial government in Angola at the same time that it was the intellectual and cultural center of Angolan nationalism; now, of course, it is the capital of that newly independent African nation.

Luandino became a controversial figure when in 1965 the Portuguese Writers Society conferred its first prize for prose fiction on his collection of long short stories, *Luuanda* (1964). At the time of the award the author was serving the first years of a protracted sentence for his political activities as a member of the MPLA. The Lisbon authorities moved to have Luandino stripped of his prize by means of subterfuge. On the advice of a panel of critics and writers they alleged that his work was of dubious literary value. One major allegation was that he delineated his African characters in an offensive way; after all, some critics claimed, whites only think they know how black people talk. This is a reference to Luandino's attempts to capture the flavor of black Portuguese. I do not propose to go into that issue as it pertains to *Luuanda*, but I will say that the charge has very little to do with the reality of Luandino's literary language. Luandino, in these stories, uses Kimbundu words and phrases as well as syntactical modifications, but so subtly that he neither caricatures nor distracts with exotic distortions.

By Angolan standards Luandino is a prolific writer with some seven books, including two novels, to his credit. He participated actively in the founding of Angola's contemporary literary movement, and he has to be considered one of the movement's principal innovators, particularly with regard to language. Because Luandino, like the Brazilian modernists of the 1920s and 1930s, sees language as a prime factor in a declaration of cultural and artistic autochthony, his writing is often experimental and iconoclastic. The Brazilians incorporated "primitive" and atavistic elements into their works by cultivating an Amerindian and African substratum. Luandino's use of Kimbundu has even greater sociolinguistic significance because of the immediacy of problems surrounding Angolan nationalism.

Luandino's novel *Nós, os do Makulusu* (1974) makes very pointed statements on the sociology of language within the contradictory context of the rise of black self-determination juxtaposed with the fears and aspirations of white settlers in Angola. Briefly, the novel's first person narrator tells of events revolving around his soldier brother Maninho who dies of a guerrilla's bullet several months into the third year of the war of independence. In a way the novel parallels *As Lagrimas e o Vento*, except that *Nós, os do Makulusu* is more introspective, almost to the point of being esoteric. In line with this hermeticism is the fact that Angola is seen through the eyes of Mais-Velho, a first generation, white Angolan caught in the middle of a conflict between various modalities of a colonial mentality and the prospect of a unified, multiracial Angola under black majority rule.

We might recall that Santos Lima's novel begins with a display of the author's knowledge of Portuguese and Western narrative techniques. Luandino prefaces his novel with a Kimbundu phrase from a traditional legend and he begins the story itself with imagistically expressive language:

"Simples, simples como assim um tiro: era alferes, levou um balázio, andava na guerra a deitou a vida no chão, o sangue bebeu."<sup>62</sup> We do not need to tax our imaginations to see a relationship between the above-quoted sentence and the representational style of traditional African story-telling technique, particularly in the poetically phrased imagery expressed in "he laid his life on the ground, it drank his blood," to give an English rendition of the last part of the quote. Throughout the novel we can observe a shaping and bending of language that approaches, on its technical-narrative surface, a tension between the indigenous tongue, black Portuguese, and the standard language. Having made note of the surface tension, which also encompasses iconoclastic stylizations ("e a suave tão carapinha de Kibiaka," p. 32), including neologisms, that combine Kimbundu with Portuguese ("*aquimbundamento* p. 59) or two Portuguese words (*resplandidecentes* p. 89), we can proceed to a consideration of sociolinguistic contradictions. What we see in terms of conflicts involves racial, generational, cultural, and ideological clashes, all with a superabundance of paradoxes. The narrator, nicknamed Mais-Velho, oldest child of Portuguese peasants settled in Angola, recounts the nature of these clashes in a more often than not fragmented, semisurrealistic, memorialistic manner. On occasion, however, his voice hits a rhetorical pitch charged with rage and frustration. In the midst of a series of the narrator's flashbacks to his childhood, his mother clucks her disbelief at the violence and atrocities of the war. Mais-Velho replies with the vehemence of the son who understands the historical role played by his settler parents in the Angolan dilemma: "Mãe: tu és uma colona, ouviste? Uma colona, é assim que tu és. Colonialista, colono. Como é te vou poder fazer aceitar a verdade e a mentira que não podem se separar assim a toa enquanto a gente não soubermos tudo, como vou te explicar que a verdade é mentira aqui, hoje, nossa terra de Luanda, 1961, ... que sim, matar-te-ão, matar-me-ão e vão dizer com justiça: era uma boa branca, era um bom branco?"<sup>63</sup> Settler (*colono*) can be equated with colonialist who even when perceived as one of the "good whites," will not be spared in the conflagration because, as Mais-Velho continues: "O bem que tu fazes, mãe, as sopas que dás, as esmolas que dás, os serviços que dás, os matabichos que dás, é o mal, é o pior mal: fazer bem sem olhar quem, tu vives de frases feitas no teu bom senso de camponesa que és ainda e esse bom senso é muito perigoso."<sup>64</sup> Patterns of paternalism and cultural racism transform peasants into riders of black mounts who treat their inferiors with the condescending kindness of ingrained charity: "Fazer o bem sem olhar a quem é diminuir, é insultar--primeiro é preciso que reconheças esse a quem como alguém que não quer o teu bem, quer outro bem então, sim!: faze o bem e não olhes a quem, ama o próximo como a ti mesmo, assim como fizeres assim acharás não o saiba a esquerda o que a direita faz, então sim, isso será bom e justo, minha triste e desiludida mãe que me olhas e ouves o hino final da emmissora estrangeira e estás pensando,..."<sup>65</sup> The son adopts the oratorical style of a parish priest but his convoluted reasoning

eludes the common-sensical mother who wholeheartedly accepts, as somehow divinely ordained, the racial hierarchy that governs her life in Angola.

Beyond that which can be laid to generational differences in the same family, we see ideological distinctions predicated on a "new" colonialist mentality. The father, who represents the old, like the settlers in Soromenho's *A Chaga*, has slept with "native" women and has fathered a mulatto child, Paizinho, whom he recognizes as his godson. He despises blacks as a group and emphatically insists they are inferior to whites. Maninho, the youngest son, who represents the new, marries Rute, a *mulata*, but he willingly takes up arms to fight the "terroristas," and he attacks his brother's altruistic and Marxist ideas:

"E então, Mais-Velho? Les Marx e comes bacalhau assado, mão é? Não te deitas com negras nem mulatas--a tua cunhada é mulata, fico descansado... --por respeito lhe recusas a humanidade dessa coisa simples, onde que só o humano se revela, onde só se pode aí comunicar, saber, aprender... Rio, sabes, mas me dói muito no coração, fica pesado de amargura. Espalha os teus panfletos, que eu vou matar negros, Mais-Velho! E sei que eles te dirão o mesmo: 'espalha os teus panfletos, vou matar nos brancos!'"<sup>66</sup>

Maninho follows the path of continued white domination even though he, paradoxically, has undergone his measure of creolization--he relishes certain African foods--and integration--he sleeps with black women and he takes a *mulata* as his wife. Yet, Maninho goes off to kill blacks in order to end a war that he did not want but whose political ends divide along lines that he has no difficulty in identifying. Mais-Velho does not sleep with black or mulatto women as a political act, as a rejection of the Lusitanian myth of miscegenation, and he chokes on such traditional dishes as *funje* and *moamba* because, as his brother says, recalling a childhood incident, "já fazia política naquela idade, vomitava o funje todo, não o aceitava, 'respeitava-o.' não o consumia, como mais tarde, com as meninas."<sup>67</sup> Through Mais-Velho Luandino Vieira controverts time-honored, national traditions in a pattern of artistically and sociologically conceived contradictions. Mais-Velho, who recognizes the basic humanity of black Africans, maintains, in effect, a physical and cultural distance from them. Maninho, on the other hand, meets the black woman on a basic level of humanity while denying the African's fundamental political rights. Maninho and his father easily adjust their palates to exotic food and their tastes to black and mulatto women, but without a sensitivity toward the ethnic and cultural infrastructure of Angola.

The "we" of *Nós, os do Makulusu* includes, in the narrator's flashbacks, himself, his brother Maninho, his mulatto half-brother Paizinho, and a black playmate, Kibiaka. Makulusu is a lower middle-class neighborhood where black, white, and *mestiço* meet, not always on equal terms, but in an atmosphere of a certain cultural leveling. Here language takes on

its most contradictory, sociological cast as Kimbundu erodes and enriches the speech patterns of all. Language, that cornerstone of a people's world view, sums up all of the ideological confusion of a provincial city in a transitional territory. A type of Luanda Portuguese, *pretogues* for some, a more potent and symbolic force than African foods or inter-racial sexual encounter, distinguishes Maninho and his older brother from their intransigent parents who, with their hearts back in Portugal, exercise their old-fashioned colonial prerogatives. Luandino's novelistic language forms a tension with Kimbundu, as if to say that the African language is a symbolic expression of an omnipresent black reality that will not be denied in Angola. With refrain-like regularity the author intersperses his narrative with Kimbundu phrases and proverbs acquired naturally by children and later reflected upon by the adult narrator. Four separate paragraphs in the novel begin in similar fashion: "Bilingues quase que a gente éramos,..."<sup>68</sup>; "Bilingues começávamos a querer ser,..."<sup>69</sup>; "Bilingues quase que somos..."<sup>70</sup>; "Bilingues que somos, quase,..."<sup>71</sup>. The adverb *quase* strengthens the tension of reverse acculturation always repressed by the force of cultural racism. Maninho tells his brother, in an ideological dissertation, that "enquanto não podemos nos entender porque só um lado de nós cresceu, temos de nos matar uns aos outros: é a razão de nossa vida, a única forma que lhe posso dar, fraternalmente, de assumir a sua dignidade, a razão de viver--matar ou ser morto, de pé."<sup>72</sup> Language, the Kimbundu they *almost* knew, did not grow equally as whites and blacks entered into adulthood, eventually to confront and perhaps kill each other.

The hermetic, pre-adolescent world of Makulusu is their corner of Luanda: "Luanda, nossa senhora de amor, a morte."<sup>73</sup> In what can be considered a love-death poem to Angola, Luandino metaphorically expresses the reality of the province-colony-nation's destiny in the death of Maninho: "capitão-morto [a play on capitão-mor] das mortes nas matas da nossa terra de Angola."<sup>74</sup>

The reader of this novel might well ask, for whom does Luandino Vieira write? We might look for an answer in the last line of the novel: "Nós, os do Makulusu." The novel ends with its title, and the idea of a closed circle suggests a narrative that excludes those not part of *Nós*. However, we might also consider under what conditions, when, and where Luandino wrote the novel: clandestinely; April 16th to 23rd, 1967; Tarrafal, the infamous prisoner camp at the northern tip of the Cape Verde island of Santiago. At the time Luandino had no choice but to write for the desk drawer, as it were, or, on a more abstract level, for those companions who would perhaps never read his words. We might further speculate that he wrote out of a sense of evocative nostalgia, which is altogether consistent with the thrust of Angolan cultural regionalism and with other of Luandino's works, specifically *A Cidade e a Infancia* (1959), *Velhas Estórias* (1964), and *No Antigamente, na Vida* (1969). On the other hand, with the award-winning *Luuanda*, he began to gain recognition in literary

circles in Portugal and beyond. His style, characterized by linguistic virtuosity and experimentation, reflects his place in the broader spectrum of lusophone letters. The contemporary Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa had an obvious influence on Luandino's later works. Thus, when *Nós, os do Makulusu* appeared in print in Portugal, after the coup of April 1974, the novel attracted the attention of those who fall well outside of that closed circle for whom the Angolan author presumably wrote.

*Nós, os do Makulusu* is unique among Luandino's works in that it is a first-person narrative, and the narrator tells his memorialist story from the point of view of a second generation, white Angolan. He may direct himself to all Angolans, and despite the closed nature of the novel it certainly has universal appeal as a work of art, but the message it contains is for the *colonos* and their heirs who, as Angolans, have to decide on their future in a territory with a past of racial and socioeconomic inequality and a future of political change. That future has already arrived, and as we know most *colonos* chose to leave Angola.

In no other contemporary Angolan work do we get a more immediate sense of the contradictions of language. With reference again to the use of Kimbundu, Luandino himself offers no translation of the novel's epigram; the editors do, however, supply the following Portuguese rendition of the quotation: "...porque de onde vimos já nada há a ver. O que procuramos está para onde vamos." The quotation has a prophetic ring to it with obvious implications for settler and black Angolan alike. Still, there is something cryptic about Luandino's use of Kimbundu, for along with language there are many allusions to places, things, and events that will elude those who are not in some degree familiar with Luanda and certain historical data.<sup>75</sup>

In reality, the novel directs itself to several audiences at the same time. We read, for example, pointed statements to be understood by all those who inhabit the "Portuguese space." The language of the following fragment parodies a report filed by a foreign cultural attache: "um belo relatório de etnossociologia do espaço Lusoassalaristado."<sup>76</sup> At intervals in the novel the narrator plays sarcastically on platitudes of Lusitanian nationalism. More importantly, Luandino uses language to defy on an aesthetic and ideological level as well as to communicate with those of his inner circle. He hurls his Kimbunduized Portuguese and his quasi-bilingualism into the teeth of settlers and metropolitans, and then he retreats into a kind of code to talk with those Angolans who share his perceptions. We cannot assume that Luandino supports diglossia for Angola, and clearly he intends no statement on national language policy. We can be sure, however, that he does seek a mode of artistic expression that reflects an important aspect of Angola's sociocultural reality.

Finally, during one of the several exchanges between Maninho and Mais-Velho, another character, Dino, makes the observation that "esta realidade complexa enriquecerá a literatura, temas, vivências."<sup>77</sup> Indeed,

the complexities of Angola's realities, expressed by means of linguistic tensions and contradictions have enriched a young literature.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

The problem of African literature in European languages, with the attendant question of moral dilemma, arises from the stigma of a colonial legacy. Nation-building and nationality underlie the issues of language practicality vs. sociocultural symbolism, and in creative writing this juxtaposition often makes for tensions that lend themselves to artistic effect.

Much of what can be said about Anglophone and Francophone African writing also applies to African literature of Portuguese expression. What makes Angolan literature unique is the peculiar form of Lusitanian ideologies as well as the anachronistic longevity of the Portuguese colonial empire. The birth of Angolan nationalism and the war that helped overthrow the regime in Portugal and bring about an independent Angola are unprecedented events in present day Africa. These events, set against Lusotropicology, the multiracial composition of the cultural-literary-nationalist groups, and the period in which all of this occurred, likewise have had a bearing on the unique nature of Angolan literature.

By applying a method based on sociolinguistic notions I have attempted to show how novelistic language offers an insight into Angola's transitional period of nation-building and sociocultural identity seeking. The novel, as a genre, is as much a European import--and a relatively recent one at that--as the Portuguese language in Angola. Thus from two principal approaches I have dealt with contradictions on a sociocultural and politico-geographic level within a framework of literary considerations.

Assis Júnior exemplifies the assimilated African's propensity to flaunt his knowledge of the acquired language and his desire to imitate Western literary techniques even while seeking to maintain his Angolan identity. The "enlightened" colonial writer Castro Soromenho applied his considerable talent to an externalization of black society and the African mentality. In his second phase, however, he succeeded in internalizing his perceptions of the confrontation of African and European by depicting the dehumanizing results of the clash of cultures. In more contemporary times Manuel dos Santos Lima manipulates Western literary techniques and molds Portuguese so that the psychological and sociological contradictions of the educated African appear interwoven with literary language. Paralleling Santos Lima's derivation of "black from white," José Luandino Vieira, the most ambitious of contemporary Angolan novelists, imposes "white on black" and thus literally epitomizes the contradictions of language in the Angolan novel.



## NOTES

- 1 Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer," *Transition* 18, IV, No. 18 (1965), 27.
- 2 Chinua Achebe, "Thoughts on the African Novel," *The Dalhousie Review*, 53(1973-74), 631.
- 3 Quoted in D. Ibe Nwoga, "The Limitations of Universal Criteria," *The Dalhousie Review*, 53(1973-74), 610.
- 4 Gerald Moore, *The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969), p. ix.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- 6 "English and the African Writer," p. 18.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 8 Chinua Achebe, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 75 (December 1962), pp. 61-62.
- 9 Lloyd W. Brown, "The Moral Significance of European Languages in African Literature," *Today's Speech*, XIX, No. 2 (1971), p. 6.
- 10 These figures are given in D. D. Abshire and M. A. Samuels, *Portuguese Africa: A Handbook* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969), pp. 112-115.
- 11 See Edris Makward, "Literature and Ideology in Africa," *Pan African Journal*, 5(1972), 81-94.
- 12 Joshua A. Fishman, "Nationality-Nationalism and Nation-Nationism," in *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, eds. Joshua A. Fishman, Charles A. Ferguson, and Jyotarindra Das Gupta (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968), p. 39. Fishman points out that "the traditional distinction drawn between nation and state in political science is not unrelated to the distinction I seek to make, but it fails to reflect in the labels selected the developmental relationship between the two entities." p. 39.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 21 Holden Roberto, the leader of the Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (FNLA), is a Bakongo and the son-in-law of Mobutu, who is the president of Zaire and himself a Bakongo.
- 22 The history of the rise of Angolan nationalism and independence groups is much too lengthy and involved to be dealt with here. Briefly stated, however, the post-coup conflict that saw the MPLA opposed to FNLA and UNITA can be explained by two main factors. First of all, both the FNLA, which developed from the União das Populações de Angola (UPA), and UNITA are basically cultural-nationalist or ethno-nationalist in philosophy as opposed to the pan-Angolan MPLA. Armed confrontations between the FNLA and MPLA

had occurred long before 1974 when the Caetano-Salazar regime was overthrown in Portugal. After that year, however, the stakes (i.e. who was to rule Angola after independence) increased in magnitude and the ideological differences that separated the three groups became more apparent. The intervention of Western and Communist nations (The United States, The Soviet Union, People's Republic of China, Cuba, and South Africa) tended to obscure the picture and give the impression in the world at large that FNLA, UNITA, and MPLA were creations or puppets of foreign geopolitical and ideological interests, and there is some evidence to support this contention in the case of FNLA.

Paradoxically, the least cultural-nationalist, most cosmopolitan group, the MPLA, is associated with the indigenous language, Kimbundu, that has had the greatest symbolic impact on Angolan nationalism. Kimbundu, and not tribalism, did indeed become one of the important symbolic rallying points in the cultural-literary movement that formed the emotional-ideological component of the MPLA.

<sup>23</sup>The Ovimbundu also had long and continuous contact with Europeans, but the Kimbundu, because of their presence in urban areas, particularly in and around Luanda, have been most exposed to Westernization. See my book *Voices From an Empire: A History of Afro-Portuguese Literature* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp. 26-29, for an account of nineteenth-century, black intellectuals in Luanda.

<sup>24</sup>See *Voices From an Empire*, pp. 10-17, for a discussion of Lusotropicology and its influences on Afro-Portuguese literature.

<sup>25</sup>James Duffy, in *Portugal in Africa* (London: Penguin Books, 1962) states that "survival resulted more from the ability of the white inhabitants to maintain an uncertain *modus vivendi* with the Africans than it did from any of Lisbon's efforts to transplant European cultural values." And, "the history of the interior in both territories [Angola and Mozambique] is as much the assimilation of the Portuguese by the Africans as it is the reverse." p. 161.

<sup>26</sup>See Duffy, *Portugal in Africa*, pp. 129-139 and pp. 184-190, for accounts of forced and contract labor.

<sup>27</sup>See *Voices From an Empire*, pp. 61-68, for a discussion of literary-cultural groups in Angola.

<sup>28</sup>James Olney, *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1973), p. viii.

<sup>29</sup>Olney uses this language in his definitions of autobiographical literature, pp. vii-viii.

Olney's approach differs markedly from the traditional biographical method that sends the critic to the work of art to learn something about the author's life. Although we do not adopt Olney's approach we share in his desire to interpret the author's norms as shared by other members of his extended community.

<sup>30</sup>Luis Figueira, *Princesa Negra* (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1932), p. 7.

<sup>31</sup>See, for example, Artur Maciel, *Angola Heroica--120 Dias com os Nossos Soldados* (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1964).

<sup>32</sup>Ali A. Mazrui, "Some Sociopolitical Functions of English Literature in Africa," *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, p. 184, et passim.

<sup>33</sup>See Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: The New African Culture*. Trans. Marjorie Grene (New York: Grove Press, 1961), particularly chapter 5, for a discussion of the power of the word.

<sup>34</sup>Narzui, p. 185.

<sup>35</sup>See *Voices From an Empire*, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Gerald Moser refers to the fact that Soromenho's collection of stories, *Nhari* (1938) earned him the Portuguese government's Prize for colonial literature, "Castro Soromenho, an Angolan Realist." *Essays in Portuguese-African Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1967) p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> See *Cultura*, no. 11 (May 1960), p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Castro Soromenho, *A Chaga* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970), p. 111.

<sup>39</sup> This appears as an introduction to his volume *Sertanejos de Angola* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colônias, 1943).

<sup>40</sup> Soromenho, *A Chaga*, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>42</sup> Manuel dos Santos Lima, *As Lagrimas e o Vento* (Lisbon: Africa Editora, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> Later, Lieutenant Negreiros uses this logic on the general, whereupon the latter scoffs with the retort: "Deixe-se de fantasias, nosso tenente. Isto é uma guerra colonial, uma guerra entre pretos e brancos." p. 81.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103. Later, Almi is vindicated in his implicit condemnation when a Portuguese jet decimates the villagers as they dance in celebration of a minor victory.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86

<sup>58</sup> Another Angolan writer, Arnaldo Santos, in his short story "Bessa-Nganas de Mentira," *Tempo de Munhungo* (Luanda: Editorial Nós, 1968) describes a social gathering of bourgeois mulattoes in a Luanda apartment. Some young women don African robes and pose for photographs as a guest sardonically observes that "fazemos exotismo com a nossa raça." p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> *As Lagrimas e o Vento*, p. 185.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>62</sup> José Luandino Vieira, *Nós, os do Makulusu* (Lisbon: Sá da Costa Editora, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>75</sup> We read, for example, "Paizinho nos espera no baile do Ngola Ritimo...." p.136. The non-Angolan reader will rightfully assume that Ngola Ritmos refers to a musical group of some kind. Ngola Ritmos, a vocal and instrumental group, was founded in the late 1950s by politically committed Angolans anxious to reverse the processes of acculturation that were eradicating popular, Kimbundu-language songs in the musseques.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

# CLUES AND SOURCES

## Imperial Spain and the Secularization of the Picaresque Novel

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Despite all that has been said and written recently on the picaresque, the last authentic novel of that genre in Spain's Golden Age continues to be read in an historical vacuum. With the exception of some of the debatable assessments of A. A. Parker or the impressionistic, yet equally useful, comments of Juan Goytisolo<sup>1</sup> there has been a general unwillingness to study its place in the history of picaresque narratives or to discover an anonymous author's handling of the problems of reality and history.<sup>2</sup> That is a pity, for *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González, hombre de buen humor* (Antwerp, 1646), not only sums up the poetics of an entire genre (1554-1646), but offers as well a pointed correlation between a *picaro's* own story and the history of the times. The debacle of Spain and the Hapsburg Empire during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) is experienced, witnessed, and recounted by a soldier of fortune who hides his mercenary identity behind the mask of a lowly laughter-maker—a common jester who, through the use of his *buen humor*, is made to question the dominant ideologies of the time. Similarly, no less a matter than the trajectory of the picaresque genre in Spain (a topic that has occupied some of the best Hispanists) is reviewed with a critical eye while many of its features and positions are challenged, on aesthetic and social grounds.

It is not my intention to review here all the issues—social as well as literary—raised by picaresque narratives during some one hundred years, nor to tackle all the problems raised by *Estebanillo González*. My main concern in this note is to offer clues that might serve a dual purpose: to reevaluate the last representative picaresque narrative in seventeenth-century Spain and to help us reconsider the history of the genre. Briefly, then, as I see it, one of those important clues (which has been passed over by ahistorical studies) is revealed by the anonymous author at a key moment of the narrative, precisely when the protagonist is forced to abandon the unattached life of a *picaro* to become a paid buffoon.

Having deserted his comrades at Nordlingen and having subsequently been taken prisoner at Maastricht (Holland) by the French Duke of Buillon, Estebanillo finds himself totally destitute upon his release from captivity. His only asset is his *buen humor*, i.e., a disposition and ability to make people laugh, which he seeks to peddle for food and drink. Thus, when he is presented with the opportunity of joining General Ottavio Piccolomini's household as clown he accepts that lowly position despite his protest about being subjugated to a master. While he was fully conscious that a servant's costume [*librea*] was nothing but a symbol of bondage, a garment of slavery ("...que aunque su nombre [*librea*] empieza en libertad es vestido de esclavitud")<sup>3</sup>, he believed then, and continues to hold now, at the moment of narration, that he had no alternative but to accept the uniform: "me fue fuerza el encajármelo, por no contradecirle en su gusto y por remediar mi desnudez" (p. 295). The *picaro's* social situation is thus expressed unequivocally: any type of employment was preferable to idleness, which often meant starvation or, at best, being forced to join an army. Playing the role of a clown, however humiliating or degrading, was a way of surviving the hardships of war, especially those inflicted on the common soldier who was often tricked or bullied into joining infantry regiments.<sup>4</sup>

As a mercenary Estebanillo had already deserted the Spanish and Imperial armies on two separate occasions: first during the Mantuan War (1628-1631) and, later, in the heat of battle at Nordlingen (September, 1634). During the Mantuan conflict he had turned his back on Catholic Spain to join forces with "el Cristianismo Rey de Francia" (p. 220)<sup>5</sup>, while at Nordlingen he had playfully shunned his captain's orders that he lay down his life for Catholicism and the Crown: "mi capitán me dijo que por qué no me iba a la infantería española a tomar una pica para morir defendiendo la fe o para darle al Rey una victoria. Yo le respondí: si Su Majestad aguarda a que yo se la dé, negociada tiene su partida (p. 259). The mercenary is reluctant to rally on behalf of traditional causes for, clearly, he has no faith in his undertakings. As an "humilde sabandija" i.e., a worthless worm, he is a mere instrument of an aristocratic oligarchy that wields its economic, political, and military power while pretending to fight unselfishly, for religious beliefs. Estebanillo's shameless conduct at Nordlingen is a protest against the propagation of national and religious myths: unwilling to die for the official ideology of conquest and expansion he opts for cowardice and retreat, spending the eve of the Imperial armies' victory against the Swedes in a trench, hiding underneath the decomposed remnant of a fallen horse. This is how the humorous narrator recalls those experiences:

me retiré a un derrotado foso...pequeño albergue de un esqueleto rocin....Y viendo que avivaban las cargas de la mosquetería, que rimbombaban las cajas y resonaban las trompetas, me uní de tal fuerza con él, habiéndome tendido en tierra por el mal olor, que parecíamos dos águilas imperiales sin pluma (pp. 257-258; *my italics*).

The sound of drums, trumpets and musket shots prompted Estebanillo to join the smelly carcass. In the narrator's own words, that grotesque fusion made them appear like "two featherless imperial eagles".

As a prelude to an interpretation of this passage, it is important to keep in mind that the professional clown turned "writer" for a purpose: to entertain with his "Book" ("el libro de mi vida" [p. 55]) the same select audience that had witnessed his antics in "life"—General Piccolomini and the nobility of Flanders (pp. 56-57). In return for those efforts he expects to be rewarded with money. Yet, it is apparent that the narrator's preoccupation with the commercial value of his funny "book" does not preclude the "writer's" concern for the communication of a serious message, perhaps to a larger reading public. It is that potential public, as well as the closed circle of nobles, that is addressed in Estebanillo's verse prologue "Al Lector", where the reader is asked to review the "text" thoroughly on the premise that, amidst the pranks of a subservient clown, there appear weighty commentaries on contemporary history and social life: "De parte de Dios te pido, / Amigo lector, que leas / Hasta el fin aquestas burlas, / Pues van mezcladas con veras" (p. 64).

I submit that the literal sense of the text shows conclusively that, beyond the obligatory jests (*burlas*) imposed on the clown by his role as laughter-maker, his account is laden deliberately with surprising truths (*veras*). The reference to the "featherless imperial eagles" is a case in point. The choice of image—of a decomposed bird of prey that is a mere specter of a once powerful eagle characterized by the forceful strokes of its wings—is not accidental. Keeping in mind that the eagle is also the symbol of the Hapsburg Empire, the grotesque imagery assumes much deeper implications: more than just a playful, burlesque, allusion to a fool's cowardly conduct in war, it is the demythification of Imperial power. For just as the featherless eagle is helpless and impotent, so too is a country that tries to manipulate the course of European politics in the seventeenth century while seeking, unrealistically, to revive the idea of an Empire. Implicitly, then, even the battle of Nordlingen—which was won handily by the combined forces of the Infante-Cardenal of Spain and the King of Hungary—is seen retrospectively as a pyrrhic victory by an author (most likely an officer on Piccolomini's staff) who was well aware, in 1646, that the Spanish and German wings of the Hapsburg Empire were no longer the dominant forces, i.e., the powerful eagles, they once were.<sup>6</sup>

A careful reading of the novel (the type hitherto accorded only to *Lazarillo* and, perhaps, to *Buscón*) underscores what the Russian post-formalists—notably M. Bakhtine—have argued so well in warning against the pitfalls of formalism: that language is not ideologically neutral.<sup>7</sup> That is not to say that *Estebanillo* is the mouthpiece of a single

ideology. Serious practitioners of sociology of literature remind us that a text has a "plurality of discourses (of its time, of past history, of the period that is being announced)" and, further, that since "texts are poliphonic [they]...cannot be reduced to the class participation of the authors" (*my translation*).<sup>8</sup> Of Estebanillo's *Vida y hechos* it can be said that it portrays in earnest and in jest the painful misadventures of a self-proclaimed outsider who writes his own story to entertain those in position of power. His ostensible purpose for doing so is to earn money to retire from the practice of buffoonery—an occupation which, as we have seen, he had accepted reluctantly—and spend the remaining days of his life in Naples, at the helm of a gambling establishment and house of pleasure. That resolution, of course, is hardly revolutionary and it must be said that nowhere in the novel is radical social change advocated. Yet, it is also clear that the jester's account depicts a society in crisis: a world in the midst of an historic transformation that was beginning to shape modern Europe through the secularization of politics and the final defeat of the notion of a united Christendom.<sup>9</sup>

*Estebanillo* dramatizes some of the contradictions inherent in the dominant ideology of Imperial Spain. Through a *pícaro*-buffoon's mask the anonymous author portrays the common man's anguish, the result of the latter's inability to influence the course of politics and social life. Hence Estebanillo's refusal to die at Nordlingen and his subsequent melancholy comments about the *librea*. If Estebanillo is alienated from Spain's causes it is because he has no faith in its institutions—especially the Church and the Monarchy—and he is skeptical of its highly stratified social system. Having become totally aware of his marginality, struggling to keep alive, he decides to fend for himself. That is why he becomes a clown and adopts the common sense ethic of self-preservation. "Religion", "country", "Empire" are, for him, empty words. Operating on the premise that honor is whatever suits him ("mi gusto es mi honra" [P. 290]) he never questions his belief that the world is governed by economic, not religious factors. As a result of his circumstances, he acquires a preoccupation with money and food above all else. Those worries become a constant of his materialistic philosophy, touching even the most delicate moments of his emotional life. Once, for example, while awaiting execution in Barcelona he refuses to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. Instead, he clamors for food and drink, telling the attending priest: "vuestra paternidad trate de que se me dé de comer y beber, y después trataremos de lo que nos está bien a los dos" (p. 232). On another occasion the narrator readily admits that, if he had to re-live the parasitic, but profitable, life of a sutler and pimp, he would do exactly the same thing: "volví a mi cuartel, planté el bodega y empecé a hacer lo que siempre había hecho, y lo mismo que hiciera ahora si volviera a tal oficio" (p. 277, *my italics*).

If this type of evidence is glossed over by studies on the picaresque it is because they tend to analyze crucial textual questions such as "point of view" and "structure" in an isolated fashion, as if they were totally unrelated to contextual matters, i.e., the history of a genre and the history of the times. The fact is, however, that Estebanillo's thoughts on the *librea*, and his vision of the present in view of his past, are both literary and social statements. They not only provide a clear answer to those *pícaros*, such as Guzmán de Alfarache and Pablos de Segovia, who reject their past delinquent acts, thus admitting the individual's responsibility for his own failures instead of society's. They also serve as an indictment of a socio-economic system that provides only misery for most of its members while pretending to stand for ancient ideals.

Clearly, *Estebanillo* can be understood better if one views the micro-structure of the work against the macro-structure of the society where it was written and read: the Europe of the Thirty Years War and, more specifically, the Europe of the Hapsburgs. Similarly, it is time that the novel be seen in its proper chronological perspective, for the end of a genre need not necessarily spell a decline but could—as I believe is the case with *Estebanillo*—imply a re-orientation of its themes and conventions and, ultimately, of its poetics. Certainly from the standpoint of "literary history" or the history of a particular genre, the last representative work of a kind is as important as the first. So that in an authentic history of picaresque novels in Spain (1554-1646) *Estebanillo* is as indispensable as *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*, not to mention *Buscón*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, respectively, *Literature and the Delinquent. The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe, 1599-1753* (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 76: "Apart from the interest of *Estebanillo's* historical background, the only significance the work has is the significance of decadent literature"; and Goytisolo's "Prólogo," to *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González, hombre de buen humor*. Ed. Antonio Carreira y Jesús A. Cid (Madrid: Narcea, 1971), p. 19: "*Estebanillo* representa no sólo la culminación del género desde el punto de vista de su primitivo designio...; es, asimismo, la mejor novela española escrita en el siglo XVII—si exceptuamos, claro está, el *Quijote*"; adding, "El escepticismo ante el futuro de España...se manifiesta en él [*Estebanillo*] con virulencia y alacridad" (p. 23).

<sup>2</sup> For a reevaluation of this important novel see Nicholas Spadaccini and Anthony N. Zahareas, "Introducción" *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González, hombre de buen humor* (Madrid: Castalia, In Press). See also my forthcoming articles, "History and Fiction: The Thirty Years War in *Estebanillo González*" to be published by *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*; and, "Estebanillo González and the Nature of Picaresque Lives" to appear in *Comparative Literature*.

<sup>3</sup> *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González*. Ed. Antonio Carreira y Jesús A. Cid, p. 295. Textual references are to this edition and are noted parenthetically by page number.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Duché, *Historia de la humanidad* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1964), IV, p. 264, says: "Los soldados eran o voluntarios mercenarios o involuntarios forzados—las levas se hacían bajo la alternativa: 'o el ejército o la horca': soldados merced a la desesperación, cuya fatalidad no les dejaba más recursos que 'aullar como lobos' o 'hacer como todos': o robar o ser robado, o violar o ser violado."

<sup>5</sup> Significantly, the Manuan War—which was fought over the succession of the Bourbon Duke of Nevers to the Duchy of Mantua and Monferrat—produced an alliance between Catholic France and Protestant Sweden, thus unmasking the myth that the Thirty Years War was essentially a religious struggle between two Christian antagonists, i.e., Catholics and Protestants. Richelieu granted financial support to King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden for fear of Spanish aggression, while the latter's reasons for entering the conflict were economic rather than religious. Duché, "Historia" IV, p. 268, says: "Suecia está entonces en plena expansión económica. Sus fábricas de vidrio, de papel, de azúcar, de almidón, creadas por los holandeses; sus explotaciones mineras de azufre, cobre, y sobre todo hierro, que por varios decenios van a poner en sus manos un cuasi monopolio de acero, le impulsan hacia el comercio, hacia el Báltico, hacia la guerra." It may be argued, therefore, that *Estebanillo's* misalliance during the Mantuan War reflects similar historical shifts among nations.

<sup>6</sup> The victory of the Imperial armies at Nordlingen encouraged the entrance of France into the War on May 21, 1635. That development was to tip the balance against the Hapsburg allies. See A. Domínguez Ortiz, *Historia de España, vol 4: desde Carlos V a la paz de los Pirineos, 1517-1660* (Barcelona: Ed. Grijalbo, 1974), pp. 107-109. Cf. C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1961), esp. pp. 380-381.

<sup>7</sup> M. Bakhtine, *L'oeuvre de Francois Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance*. Trans. A. Robel (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> Noël Salomon, "Algunos problemas de sociología de las literaturas de lengua española," in *Creación y público en la literatura española*. Ed. J. F. Botrel y S. Salaün (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> This view coincides with the interpretation given by the historian George Pagès, *La guerre de trente ans* (Paris: Payot, 1939).



# Modelos Sociales en la Evolución Literaria de Venezuela

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El estudio de la literatura venezolana no puede comprenderse como tarea ingenua, pues más allá de las cortinas imaginarias se encuentra el aparato ideológico, que no es a su vez un algo surgido del solo individuo, sino hecho complejo del que participa un estado de la sociedad, las clases sociales actuantes y la inclusión del escritor en un estrato definido. No quiero decir con esto que el poeta o el novelista se encuentren apresados en un cepo, sino que, a pesar de su propia invención como individuos dotados de un alto grado de percepción y de imaginación, los escritores son los testigos e intérpretes del pensamiento y la praxis de una época, trabajan sobre una realidad (o a partir de ella) y de allí pueden remontarse hacia donde les venga en ganas, pero siempre quedará aquella como punto de partida, como base, y así, fantásticos o realistas, sus palabras estarán siempre volando alrededor de unos hechos y unas ideas a las que pretenden escapar, reflejar o reinventar. En el marco de esta concepción de la literatura ya Goldmann asombró a más de un ingenuo cuando afirmó que "los verdaderos autores de la creación cultural son los grupos sociales y no los individuos aislados,"<sup>1</sup> y Christopher Caudwell había escrito hacia más de treinta años en su bello libro *Ilusión y Realidad* que "el yo de la poesía es el yo común a todos los mundos emocionales de los hombres asociados."<sup>2</sup>

Planteado así el hecho cultural, podremos ver a través de la literatura venezolana la otra cara de la moneda, la sociedad a que ha estado referida, y los que han trajinado con nuestros escritores saben que no andamos despistados, que dictadores y libertadores ocupan mucho espacio en nuestros libros, que ideas de democracia, progreso, engaño social, brutalidad, corrupción de costumbres, opresión, libertad, violación de la ley, paz, guerra, explotación económica, imperialismo, luchas de liberación, acompañan a los personajes de nuestros grandes poemas y de nuestras grandes novelas. Y hasta debemos comenzar la historia de nuestra literatura venezolana con los testimonios de una cultura, la indígena, que fue nuestra primera víctima social en el hecho histórico de esa conquista que Octavio Paz definió como "la gran chingada."

Pero si regresamos a lo que los historiadores llaman la Venezuela republicana, nos vamos a encontrar inicialmente con una sociedad regida por valores libertarios y por una clase dirigente que sabe cumplir su cometido histórico, dejarse llevar por un misonéismo engendradora de héroes, y proyectar hacia el futuro su propia imagen como la de una época de grandeza, a lo que contribuye no sólo su propia gesta sino también la labor de los escritores cercados por la emoción, o, posteriormente, por la nostalgia de un período de glorias que entraría en conflicto con la mediocridad rutinaria y anárquica de los hechos históricos posteriores. En esa nostalgia del pasado escribe Eduardo Blanco *Venezuela heroica* (1883), y su escritura, alejada del hecho histórico concreto, trata de instaurar el mito en nuestra literatura, pero no es el mito a la manera de los europeos, para quienes éste es un hecho a distancia, un acto frío, muerto, propio para el goce erudito, sino que ya en Eduardo

Blanco encontramos una conciencia del mito propia de los americanos. Respecto a esa manera de situarnos nosotros los americanos ante el mito, Lezama Lima ha escrito en *Esferaimagen* lo siguiente: "Si hablamos de mitos celtas o bretones, fábulas milesias o ruinas de Pérgamo, tortugas chinas o el tokonoma de los japoneses, la misma acepción de la palabra mito, la acción que en nosotros engendra, es muy distinta de la que despierta en un europeo. Ellos están en un momento, momento que ocupa casi toda su cultura, en que el mito deriva hacia la imagen participante. Nosotros vamos por la imagen proyectada sobre la futuridad haciendo mito. Para ellos, europeos, el mito como el lenguaje es un disfrute, pueden hablar con no oculta voluptuosidad de recreación; para nosotros, americanos, el mito es una búsqueda, una anhelante y desesperada persecución. Mito y lenguaje están para nosotros muy unidos, no pueden ser nunca recreación sino verbo naciente, ascua, epifanía."<sup>3</sup>

Ante el tiempo perdido, Eduardo Blanco un lenguaje y mito en un acto dinámico que no es mero disfrute sino angustia, y su creación participa de una sociedad mitificadora que pone en el altar (y no hablo en sentido metafórico) al Negro Felipe, a la diosa india María Lionza y a Simón Bolívar, en un intento inconsciente de conciliar simbólicamente los tres estratos culturales actuantes en nuestra sociedad.

Pero ese tiempo que mitifica Eduardo Blanco es el mismo que engendra en los contemporáneos de los héroes no sólo admiración ante la guerra liberadora, sino también un sentimiento de esperanza para lo que sería entonces el futuro de Venezuela y de todas las naciones americanas. Es el tiempo que dicta a don Andrés Bello su "Alocución a la poesía" y su "Silva a la agricultura de la Zona Tórrida," donde al lado de su vocación de fisiócrata, predicando la utilidad económica de la tierra, hay un Bello que cree en el futuro de América (y de Venezuela), que narra las acciones guerreras de los americanos (y Bolívar es el primero de ellos), pero donde coloca un anhelo de paz que debería estar unido a un afán de progreso que obsesiona al Bello enciclopedista y que le hace dictar sus más bellas imágenes. Bello constituye para entonces el espíritu pacifista de una literatura que pretende guiar a los jóvenes países, pero las energías se consumen después en la maniobra separatista que echa por tierra los planes de Bolívar y al afincarse la oligarquía venezolana en su poder regional, nos vemos ante una situación de cierta estabilidad política, de cierto conformismo y de una necesidad de reorganización que tiene una literatura academicista, retórica, en hombres como Baralt o Fermín Toro, este último el primer novelista, ciertamente, pero el más alejado en el arte y sólo en el arte de los problemas suyos y de su sociedad. Para Toro, mente que participa del ordenamiento jurídico de la sociedad venezolana, la literatura no puede captar lo esencial y se proyecta, como los artículos de un código, hacia un plano meramente convencional, vale decir, el plano de la convención interesada.

Más tarde, cuando esa sociedad entra en crisis y se produce la guerra federal e insurgen los nuevos hombre fuertes que obedecen a condicionamientos distintos, la literatura venezolana interpreta la crisis y hace sus primeros ejercicios (que desembocarán después en la novela) en las prosas hirientes de los llamados costumbristas, hasta que *Peonia* (1890) aprehende más o menos bien la complejidad del nuevo mundo y tras la fachada de una historia a lo *Maria de Isaacs*, se introduce en medio de las fuerzas sociales que pugnan en el país y logra establecer ciertos tipos que tendrán validez en la novelística posterior. El país parece ser entonces un desastre y se inicia un proceso difícil que algunos novelistas llamarán decadente. Al resquebrajarse el poder que los criollos habían consolidado en la guerra de independencia y en la presidencia de Páez, surge con la guerra federal la toma del poder por hombres diferentes, distintos de aquella clase culta, y si Venezuela parece haber alcanzado, como afirman sospechosamente algunos, una democracia social, la nueva clase tiene atributos de rusticidad, a pesar del ridículo afrancesamiento de Guzmán Blanco (que le llevará a casar sus hijas con nobles franceses). Y la literatura habla de todo esto. La literatura descubre la chatura intelectual de la clase gobernante, la mediocridad de los ministros que, según los novelistas, parece iniciarse en esa época, la descomposición social producida por las nuevas autocracias, aquella irrupción contra el espíritu que, según una literatura, caracterizará a la nueva situación y que es simbolizada por los soldados violadores de estatuas que aparecen en *Idolos rotos* de Manuel Díaz Rodríguez. Y las novelas de Díaz

Rodríguez son, al comienzo, un enfrentamiento al nuevo status, hasta que es absorbido por el régimen (que a pesar de las diferencias culturales, es un buen defensor de la clase del escritor y de sus intereses). En sus obras encontramos, como más tarde en Pocaterra, la pintura de la aristocracia derrotada y un cuadro generalizado de descomposición que abarca a todas las instituciones sociales. A diferencia de *En este país* de Urbaneja Alchepohl, que acepta de manera honesta la turbulenta democracia venezolana, y nos hace ver con simpatía a los hombres en ascenso, al humanizarlos y confrontarlos a la clase aristocrática, Díaz Rodríguez dice "no" al nuevo grupo y, sobre todo, a los nuevos valores, y sus escritos lo plasman bien hasta que participa del poder y entonces escribe una novela idílica (*Peregrina*) donde mistifica la realidad de las relaciones en el campo venezolano, y gracias al artificio llega a la creación de un mundo convencional que poco tiene que decirnos, desde el punto de vista literario, salvo lo que podemos sacar del silencio y del artificio, que hacen referencia a la ideología del escritor.

A una sociedad violenta (bárbara, es la palabra entonces de moda) la literatura responde también violentamente, y la literatura es arma para el combate y a veces los géneros mismos se retuercen ante el inusitado oficio de pelea, y al lado de la literatura panfletaria, que tan bravo exponente tuvo en Pío Gil, la novela, el poema y el ensayo participan del compromiso, pues hasta los poetas rústicos, paisajistas, se encuentran incluidos en el cerco, ya que su creación, al realizarse en ese plano de armonía con la naturaleza, está tendiendo el puente de la armonía con el orden establecido. Puesto que hay una literatura de la agresión en Venezuela (y de hecho casi toda lo es), yo me atrevería a tomar como ejemplo para las primeras décadas de este siglo a José Rafael Pocaterra, un hombre de gran pasión y que traslada su furor a sus escritos, un escritor que pretende (ante los afeites de la retórica de moda) que se le considere marginal, fuera de la literatura, y hasta llega a plantear el criterio *sui generis* de honradez dentro del arte. "Puede haber un arte sin honradez—dice,—como una mujer es bella sin honestidad," y con esa visión de la literatura va a recoger sus tiempos de la cárcel, va a hacer la parodia de su sociedad, de aquella Venezuela de la decadencia. Es una pasión elemental que desborda la trama de sus cuentos y novelas, es Pocaterra un moralista agresivo que sacude las conciencias de sus paisanos bajo las dictaduras de Castro y Gómez. El mira en la vida de sus contemporáneos un conformismo vital, que también quiere descubrir en ciertas corrientes artísticas, y entonces arremete con furia y trata de poner al desnudo la decadencia de las instituciones del país, la quiebra moral de la aristocracia criolla, la traición en las relaciones humanas, y la oposición con el pasado que considera glorioso, el pasado de los valores elevados que condujeron a una galería de héroes, al sacrificio por la libertad, y que a él, nostálgico, como tantos otros, del bello tiempo, lo sumerge en una frustración y en una amargura sin salida. Pocaterra no concibe el buen futuro en su sociedad, su visión es desesperanzada (la utopía ha quedado en aquel pasado), y en esto no difiere de los escritores que le precedieron en el tratamiento del asunto, sino que podría decirse que es él quien recoge todo lo que otros apuntaron (el aura melancólica, la furia, la agresión, la desesperanza) y las lleva a los fondos más oscuros de la literatura. Pero es necesario observar que a diferencia de nuestra literatura actual, aquella creación no da señales de impotencia, ya que se coloca frente a lo que considera su enemigo y libra combate, denuncia, ataca, en una función de agresión que lleva implícita una posibilidad de futuro. La desesperación de Pocaterra ante una patria decadente lo lleva a las pinturas de lo grotesco (un mundo que se nos aparece deformado espiritualmente); y los tonos sombríos en las narraciones, la ausencia de nobles actitudes, de altos valores, contrasta con la patria de la emancipación que el escritor recuerda con nostalgia, por ello se aferra a una narración como "Patria la mestiza" para tratar de descubrir cuáles eran las motivaciones vitales del venezolano en ese tiempo, en un esfuerzo desesperado e inútil pero que sirve para calmar sus ánimos torturados por una vida dentro de una sociedad que considera deforme.

Después vino Rómulo Gallegos y lo aprehende todo, y lo dice todo en sus novelas que informan acerca de unas características sociales que si bien pueden estar marcadas por la decadencia, o por la barbarie, o como se quiera llamar, lo cierto es que este escritor utiliza con mayor amplitud la memoria, que fue elemento sustentador de todos nuestros escritores (y de allí que la literatura venezolana sea una secuencia, y todas las novelas formen una novela y todos los poemas formen un poema). El escritor usa la memoria, pero en la

dimensión que le da Lezama, es decir, como un plasma del alma y que "es siempre creadora, espermiática, pues memorizamos desde la raíz de la especie."<sup>4</sup> Sin tomar el carácter místico y jungiano que Lezama le atribuye, podemos hablar de una memoria que el escritor maneja como sujeto histórico y en una secuencia de hechos, ideas, carga cultural en fin, que va a converger en su creación. Gallegos comenzó planteándose también la utopía del pasado, los conflictos entre una patria de la gloria y una patria de la decadencia, y sus objetivos estuvieron inicialmente en aquellos tiempos lejanos y míticos, pero pronto se da cuenta que el dinamismo de su sociedad está emitiendo las señales para situar la perfección en el futuro y no en el pasado. Gallegos es el primero que logra penetrar la realidad en su esencia y captar las fuerzas negativas y positivas que allí estaban en pugna, percibió la complejidad de una sociedad que se desperezaba, y que escritores anteriores no pudieron captar, tal vez porque entonces no fue fácil o porque se contentaron con los elementos aparentes de un mundo complejo. Toda cultura engendra un tipo de imaginación, y con Gallegos se aclaran para nosotros los rasgos que caracterizarían a la clase de imaginación que ha sido creada por la cultura venezolana, pues son siempre las mismas constantes. Sería una imaginación maniqueísta con un espíritu del mal (la sociedad real) y un espíritu del bien (la sociedad ideal), en un dualismo que participa de los inicios culturales y que bien podemos encontrar en la Biblia, en el Popol Vuh, o en nuestras mitologías cosmogónicas indígenas. La sociedad ideal es colocada por los escritores en el pasado lejano, en la Venezuela heroica, y es una especie de paraíso perdido, y por eso cuando se vive después en la realidad antiheroica, rutinaria, se produce un desajuste psíquico que tiende a la mitificación de los primeros hombres de la nacionalidad, y al rechazo de la realidad tal cual es, pero no con un esfuerzo de futuro sino con una proyección nostálgica de pasado. De allí la exaltación de este pasado, el llanto por la aristocracia criolla decapitada que se evidencia en casi todos nuestros grandes escritores, incluido el primer Gallegos. Pero es precisamente Rómulo Gallegos quien ha de cambiar de tiempo para esa sociedad ideal, y ésta no es proyectada más hacia el pasado sino hacia un futuro real, concreto, surgido de esa sociedad que acusa su dinamismo para los días en que Gallegos escribe sus obras más importantes. Claro está que ello corresponde a una época distinta y el escritor pudo percibir entonces las fuerzas sociales de progreso que quizás no fueron claras para escritores anteriores.

En la visión maniqueísta de nuestra cultura, en lo que hemos llamado la imaginación producto de la cultura venezolana, la naturaleza es maligna, es, simbólicamente, el sitio del mal, y por ello tendemos a pensar que cuando un escritor establece para ese entonces una armonía con esa naturaleza y no manifiesta el conflicto sino que se recrea en sus colores o en su primitivismo, está tendiendo igualmente el puente armónico con el mal general.

En Gallegos encontramos además un don plástico para que la naturaleza heterónoma sea tratada por sus propios elementos, como un mundo definido y rico que ocupa un espacio estético a través de la narración, pero que es siempre mundo conflictivo, universo para las pasiones, seno de belleza que recibe en sí misma lo que destruye. Los afanes simbólicos de Gallegos, como es bien sabido, parten de esa naturaleza pero no se queda en ella, sino que abarca todo lo que puede abarcar, y como la metáfora, se da a la tarea de establecer las analogías posibles dentro de los confines de la sociedad venezolana, con lo que se pretende ordenar el caos en un esfuerzo de la memoria que aprehende lo cercano (pequeñas guerras, clases en conflicto, situación semicolonial) y también lo más lejano, lo que se remonta no sólo a los orígenes del país como nación sino igualmente a las raíces más amplias de nuestra cultura en un panorama de civilización que enmarca modos occidentales y pensamiento mítico originado en nuestro substrato indígena y africano. Ciertamente que Gallegos nos pone ante una realidad que es la nuestra y allí aparecen campesinos desposeídos, rapaces jefes civiles azotando los pueblos del país, caciques dueños de fortunas y de vidas, caudillos como posibilidad, la violencia y la hombria como un valor social que bien pudiera ser aprovechado como fuerza positiva, el mesianismo de grupos dirigentes, el deseo de respeto a la ley (y sobre todo a los derechos de propiedad, como ya lo ha observado Ernest Johnson en su trabajo "The Meaning of Civilization and *Barbarie* in *Doña Bárbara*"). Sin embargo hay en Gallegos un uso de la imaginación originada por la cultura venezolana, es decir, un uso de las oposiciones entre sociedad presente y sociedad ideal, entre infierno y paraíso, que, como ya dijimos, no busca el pasado utópico de nuestros grandes hombres sino que dirige sus fines hacia lo que habrá de ser, hacia las fuerzas actuantes que habrán de producir un importante cambio social.

La novela de Rómulo Gallegos es también novela de combate, sólo que se sale del esquematismo en que habían caído algunos escritores que le precedieron y busca las formas del enfrentamiento de una manera más compleja, utilizando a veces el símbolo en su carácter alusivo a una realidad política, como ya sabemos. Es literatura de lucha, no sólo de interpretación sino también de resistencia ante un medio que se presenta hostil.

Modernamente observamos que la literatura venezolana ha dejado de tener esa función combativa, que su universo está cerrado, que refleja como nunca antes un sentimiento de impotencia, de hombre entrampado, de hombre enjaulado. Tal impotencia bien puede verse en la novelística de Salvador Garmendia, por ejemplo, en que la Venezuela del Petróleo y del engaño parece haber llevado a los hombres a un girar sin sentido, a formas de alienación que vienen a sumarse a los males, llamemos los tradicionales, de esta sociedad, a la presencia de un ejército de marginales y de trabajadores sin trabajo, pero viviendo en el seno de un sector social privilegiado que ha modernizado sus formas y que gracias a una renta petrolera puede vivir en un eterno sueño de una noche de verano, pero con buen whisky y buenos automóviles; para los que tienen la fortuna de participar del ingreso, es gran sociedad de consumo y del derroche, pero improductiva, estéril, y donde la voz de algún hombre sensato que recomienda moderación y trabajo es oída por la caterva de beneficiados como si fuera la voz de un loco. Es un estado poderoso que posee todos los instrumentos para que los hambrientos que miran un televisor, mitiguen su pobreza en el lujoso engaño de propagandas comerciales. En ese cuadro social el escritor escribe su literatura de la impotencia donde Mateo Martán, personaje de la primera novela de Garmendia, es un pequeño ser que no soporta el peso de la carga o los personajes de Guillermo Meneses transitan en juego de espejos que es pérdida de identidad, desconcierto, engaño de las palabras y de la prestidigitación que se realiza en el auditorio de una Venezuela embobada.

#### NOTAS

- 1 Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du Roman* (Paris, 1964).
- 2 Christopher Caudwell, *Ilusión y realidad* (Buenos Aires, 1971).
- 3 José Lezama Lima, *Esferaimagen o sierpe de don Luis de Góngora* (Barcelona, 1970).
- 4 José Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana* (Madrid, 1969).





# El Teatro Ríoplatense (1880-1930): Un Circuito y Algunas Hipótesis

David Viñas

"Funciona como una polifonía. A través de voces puestas en boca de numerosas figuras, iluminadas nitidamente algunas, otras en la penumbra y la mayoría ocultas."

Guy Rosolato, *Ensayos sobre lo simbólico*

Punto de partida posible: la significativa coincidencia y oposición entre la *torre de marfil* modernista y la *barranca abajo* del teatro rioplatense alrededor de 1910. Dos figuras hegemónicas que trazan con sus ademanes principales el espacio imaginario de una producción textual. Tanto en su dirección aérea hacia la transparencia de lo consentido y protagónico de las "altas esferas" como hacia la opacidad de lo excluido, carnoso y humillado en decantación sobre los "bajos fondos."

Aislada respecto de esa escena primordial, si la familia es el espacio dramático por excelencia--a partir de su condensación crispada de conflictos--y la decadencia un desplazamiento acelerado en función del ritmo vertiginoso de caída que genera, la producción dramática de Florencio Sánchez aparece como una metáfora mayor. Correlativamente, su lugar debe situarse en la intersección de las coordenadas más significativas del arco dibujado por el teatro rioplatense que se va poniendo en la superficie hacia 1880 y languidece sobre 1930.

De ahí que *En familia* y *Barranca abajo*, superpuestas en el mismo año de su producción escénica (1905), sobresalgan como el eje central de esa metáfora con sus descentramientos, matices, repliegues escurridizos, estancamientos y contradicciones. Y que exhiban (y oculten) como fondo el extenso corpus que si se va perfilando con *Juan Moreira* (1879-1886) de Eduardo Gutiérrez-Podestá, puede ser leído como un texto corrido hasta encallar en *He visto a Dios* (1930) de Francisco Defilippis Novoa.

Ubicados en esta perspectiva inscrita en los marcos borrosos de ese proceso, es posible verificar en una primera aproximación un rasgo constante y ambiguo. En *Moreira* lo familiar actúa como ausencia. En las flexiones siguientes se organiza en tanto preanuncio, consentimiento o apología de la domesticidad, ya sea en *Calandria* (1896) de Martiniano Leguizamón o en *Sobre las ruinas* (1904) de Roberto J. Payró. Al articularse con "el desbarranque," su significación se expande hasta predominar en el espacio escénico connotándose como disolución. Por cierto que de manera paradigmática en la serie que se va tendiendo a lo largo de *Mateo* (1923), *Stefano* (1928) o *Relojero* (1934) de Armando Discépolo.

Familia/caída, por lo tanto. Se van dramatizando la propuesta y el logro de una institucionalización en equilibrio tan oficial como precario. Con la creciente implicancia de una proliferación que se transforma en ahogo o, provisoriamente, se decompone en grito ("¡En esta casa no podemos más estar juntos vos y yo!"). Mirando de cerca: una norma programada, acatada y puesta en escena. De la cual resulta un ejemplo secundario pero decisivo, el deslizamiento desde *El hijo de nadie* de Acosta y Lara hacia *El hijo legítimo* de

Alfredo Duhau. Donde hasta la misma dramaturgia pasa a ser parte de la regulación en su tránsito del picadero al escenario. Pero que, por el revés de la trama de ese espacio legalizado, va generando el drama del espacio incómodo.

En esta óptica--tratando de aislar las líneas de fuerza fundamentales--aun la santificación del contrato o lo vacacional con sus connotaciones de despegue, ya se trate de *El vuelo nupcial* de César Iglesias Paz o de *El tango en París* de García Velloso, en su último cierre representa la desintegración de lo que implica el ocio privilegiado. O la supuesta consagración del "cielo" europeo en deterioro. Por eso es que aquí otra serie conexas de funciones muestra el pasaje del predominio del "júbilo" a la multiplicación de los "jubilados." Y la teatralización de las "posesiones" (de la tierra o las mujeres) a la del "poseso." Lo normativo se impone simbólicamente a partir de 1880; pero las figuras que no entran en esa racionalidad dramatizada son los excluidos que reaparecerán reivindicando escénicamente sus mutilaciones y sus recuerdos confusos y circulares.

Alrededor de 1910, como si de las fiestas del Centenario emanase un halo semántico tranquilizador, el matrimonio y los alambros trasponían al teatro una suerte de extraterritorialidad. El espacio escénico adquiría la nitidez de un espejo. Pero poco a poco, abruptamente a veces, luego de la guerra de 1914-1918, ese campo regulador en lugar de proyectar una imagen nítida se iba transformando en un campo de negatividad. El doblaje especular pasaba de la gratificación a la sospecha y de la desconfianza a la devaluación. Año tras año resultaba más alarmante asomarse a ese espejo; parecía deformar, devolvía una imagen grotesca. Y se sabe: lo trágico del grotesco es el suicidio.

Nada tiene de extraño que los dos componentes centrales de domesticidad y caída, coagulador al máximo en un equilibrio inestable y que, en sus más solapadas tensiones, combinan ceremonias y cautelas como en *El testamento ológrafo* de Nemesio Trejo o en *La dote* de Alfredo Duhau, fueran exponiendo sus primeras fisuras de manera lateral. Es el impacto de "la invasión"; principalmente como violaciones ejecutadas desde fuera hacia lo doméstico. O dramatizada como efracción de la intimidad o el pudor. Bajo la mirada (significado decisivo que soporta la batería de significantes en *Bajo la garra* de Laferrère) o mediante algún desgarrón revelador al estilo de *El malón blanco* o *Los cuervos rubios* de Vicente Martínez Cuitiño.

El interior familiar, recinto de lo manufacturado y la norma, con sus bendiciones, empapelados, herencia y artefactos es desbaratado por el lunfardo presentido al comienzo como injuria. O por la pedrada o el delirio. Son las contradicciones que la regulación liberal ha creído conjurar por la zona de la gauchesca tardía, pero que irán brotando simbólicamente, trastornadas y más agresivas, a través de cualquier fisura del código predominante. En este sentido, lo esencial del espacio escénico rioplatense si por un lado resulta sublimación, por el otro se convierte en desquite.

Se va infiriendo: desde la voz rebelde de Moreira frente a la autoridad, pasando por la equidistancia celebrada a lo largo de las conmemoraciones de 1910 que tapan con su retórica o asordinan con su censura, la condescendencia predomina en el escenario oficial. Las figuras privilegiadas pueden llamarse así "inmigrante próspero," "hijo positivo," "propietario benévolo," "alianza fecunda." Como es un espacio homogéneo donde lo conflictivo parece embotarse, lo dramático corre el riesgo de eregirse en apologética.

Pero ya se presiente otra escena donde rechinan voces, convertidas luego en desniveles, hasta deteriorarse y alzarse contra aquella autoridad paternalista. Es lo que va emergiendo: otra serie de figuras teatrales que desentonan y avanzan hacia el proscenio hasta prevalecer como nueva variable en la dialéctica domesticidad/caída.

La metáfora central del comienzo, portando su condensación, se desplaza. Su interjuego inicial se transforma en una oscilación metafórica-metonymica. Y es en esta flexión cuando la escena oculta predomina. Lo que corrobora que ese encadenamiento de significantes pueda ser leído como un continuo desde *Justicia criolla* de 1897. Enhebra luego *Música criolla*, *La pequeña felicidad* y *El campo alegre* hasta alcanzar a *Gente honesta*, *Los disfrazados* o *Moneda falsa*, para incurrir de manera patética en *La quiebra*, *La fuerza ciega* o *El turbión* de 1922.



Es posible palpar esa textura en detalle. Sobre la secuencia más amplia de 1880 a 1930 se van detectando zonas grumosas, en estado coloidal a veces, pero paulatinamente más visualizables que diseñan una constelación de rebeldes en aparente adaptación, incluso eficaces y hasta sumisos. Son "los anexados" que apenas si acatan su progresiva derrota. Portan una señal: el pasado. Sus ademanes, sus convicciones, sus reticencias y su idioma apuntan en esa dirección. En el presente son tolerados, sobrevivientes o *agregados*. Su función escénica se actualiza en la confidencia o el coro. Sólo se exacerban como antagonistas frente al recién llegado. Y sus parlamentos se limitan a la réplica. Son "contestadores." Como la actualidad no les pertenece, sus voces suenan a intrusas o a ecos que replican desde los laterales. Y cuando el Progreso predomina--como núcleo temático que genera el futuro y su conflicto--se apocan, enmudecen, no entienden ni pueden ver. Su paradigma es *El león ciego* de Ernesto Herrera, que se desmaterializa dramáticamente hasta la eliminación. O se relega y sobrevive como "sombra de lo que era antes." Y en contraparte de los antiguos "consejos" ahora maldice. Es la secuencia resuelta por Sánchez que se encrespa con Javier de Viana hasta expandirse por las zonas adyacentes de Güiraldes y Amorim.

Es así como en esta flexión teatral se van polarizando dos términos antagónicos: gaucho/gringo, figura tradicional/hombre nuevo. Se trata del espacio épico en enfrentamiento y repliegue ante (o hacia) lo urbano. Es un núcleo con sus ramificaciones, porque si lo rural decae en elegía, lo urbano se torna autoritario. Y complementariamente, si el campo se interioriza hasta la idealización, la ciudad se corporiza en "lo infernal."

Y sus secuelas: el "alma" se le escinde del "cuerpo" a los derrotados; apelando a ese símbolo, el recién llegado logra una alianza entre sus hijos y los descendientes del otro. La alteridad implica aquí fecundación. Son *Los derechos de la salud*. Es el presente-futuro cuyo emblema más notorio se da en la fusión de los dos términos como "crisol de razas" con el consiguiente "mejoramiento de la estirpe." Y cuyo protocolo decisivo se instaura como testamento, cesión de bienes o hipoteca. El biologismo darwinista--en su proyección teatral--había llegado a ser despiadado, pero su componente progresista necesitaba de "los vencidos" para acumularse en descendencia. En este punto *Nuestros hijos* resultan *Un buen negocio*. El único capital dramático posible.

Al llegar a esta intersección del circuito general del teatro rioplatense, el centro de la disputa se tiñe con la incidencia del dinero. Si en la frenética y vulnerable cabalgata de *Locos de verano* vibra por debajo o se insinúa como opacidad más allá de la transparencia de *Los invisibles*, *La estirpe* de Enrique Crossa alude a ese componente y *La dote* de Duhau lo exagera: sumisión, el arreglo como contrato, convivencia, las instituciones santificadas por la acumulación. Y, en fin, la muerte, el velorio suntuoso y retaceado, las hijuelas y el reparto. Cada vez más será la previsible herencia el eje generador del drama. Con sus flecos y prolongaciones en dirección de la peculiar escritura (tan poco literal como intensamente productiva) de los libros mayores, libros de cuentas, diarios, cuentas bancarias, las firmas con su rúbrica y los pagarés, los cheques codiciados y los vencimientos puntuales. Y la tipología anexa de figuras episódicas: prestamistas, pedigüenos jadeantes, acreedores, jubilados y deudores que si se justifican por la "necesidad de preparar" casi siempre bordean o terminan "cayendo" en el suicidio. Desde *Maula* de Otto Miguel Cione a *El humillado* de Roberto Arlt.

Pero, rescatándose de esa serie, hay una figura que va imponiéndose con la aparición e interferencia del hijo exigente que simboliza "el arreglo de cuentas" (y que en la mayoría de los casos posteriores al 1914-18 traspone y proyecta el malestar--por introyección de los valores oficiales--del dramaturgo profesional de clase media frente al éxito-derrota de su padre de origen inmigrante. Ya se trata de la franja específicamente teatral con el arquetipo discepoliano. O en el andarivel adyacente de la narrativa de Mariani, Barletta o Castelnovo).

Si hubiera que sintetizar estas flexiones dentro del itinerario general del teatro rioplatense: aparición del otro / alzamiento / conflicto de poderes / triunfo del otro / sometimiento / concertación / establecimiento / descendencia / tercero en discordia / nueva rebelión / rendición de cuentas / confinamiento / desconcierto / derrota.

La polarización gaucho-gringo se desdobra para reaparecer sobre la figura de los hijos: si lo urbano derrota al campo, la muerte se reduplica en el centro de la ciudad. Raza gastada-raza energética-nueva raza. La dialéctica de la antropofagia tiene tal voracidad que concluye por tragarse a su propio emisor. Y la elegía hacia el pasado se reconstruye como "voz de la sangre" borrosa muchas veces pero obsesiva siempre.

Y es en la prosecución de esta andadura que si la imagen de "los hijos" puede identificarse como "vengadora," el circuito escénico de 1880 a 1930 más que un arco dibuje un círculo. La dialéctica teatral, sobre todo de 1918 a 1930, se va encerrando en una falsa dialéctica. En una dialéctica en creciente mutilación. O, si se prefiere, en el círculo que, por reiteración de su balanceo interno, dibuja toda paradoja. No hay avance sino vaivén: el eje de *He visto a Dios* expresa, en realidad, un "no me veo a mí mismo." Apetencia de creer a partir del nihilismo. Imposibilidad de proyectarse. Una y otra vez. De esa manera lo repetitivo se torna monotemático. Ya es el autismo de "la caída." El itinerario se puntualiza y su arco se contrae al máximo. Hacia el estrangulamiento y la afonía (*como si el conjunto de la dramaturgia rioplatense se condensara simbólicamente sobre la trayectoria y el cuerpo de Pablo Podestá: al convertirse en el emergente de una familia en avance y en desmembramiento permanente, concluye estrujándose la garganta en un ademán de afasia y rigidez*).

Bien mirado, si lo poético señala obviamente un nivel distinto del nivel social, lo específico de la dramaturgia no se agota en el nivel escénico. Lo poético que, por desnaturalización de lo real, se define y autonomiza en su mejor inflexión productiva, no cesa de establecer una dialéctica constante con el nivel ideológico. Y si en la fecundidad, uno y otro se distancian, constreñidos, ambos se aproximan o superponen. Y lo ideológico predomina.

Dicho de otra manera con referencia a nuestro caso concreto: *la circularidad trazada finalmente por el teatro rioplatense de 1880 a 1930 comenta el itinerario del pensamiento liberal. Se trata del agresivo circuito del "bourgeois conquérant" a través de su programa, despliegue y apogeo hasta llegar a las contradicciones insuperables que le señalan sus límites. En esa coyuntura adopta su ademán más categórico: en la Argentina como significante inaugural con la ley de residencia de 1902; en el Uruguay ese indicador se desliza hacia dos años después concretándose en Masoller. Es lo que a nivel teatral presupone mediatamente el comienzo de la crisis de la imaginación liberal: tanto por su derecho triunfalista como por su revés reprimido pero insumiso.*

Todo lo cual nos reenvía a una hipótesis de cierre: al 1930 como fisura mayor de la crisis del liberalismo. Por lo que concentra esa fecha a nivel latinoamericano y, en particular, en el río de la Plata. En primera instancia, por la muerte de los grandes caudillos paternalistas: Batlle y Ordóñez en 1929 e Hipólito Yrigoyen en el 33. Y por la simbolización que sus ademanes presupusieron en lo escénico: intento de prolongación de lo liberal / fractura de lo liberal. En segundo lugar, la censura que se encarna en todos los niveles a partir del cuartelazo del general Uriburu (1930) y del golpe de estado de Terra (1933). En tercer lugar, muertes y censuras que pueden verificarse en su especificidad en *El desierto entra a la ciudad* y *El criador de gorilas* de Roberto Arlt. Y, de manera más nítida, en la zona adyacente del Scalabrini Ortiz de *El hombre que está solo y espera*: a Dios en su inflexión espiritualista; a nadie en su articulación escéptica.

