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In the Palace of Possession: The Neobaroque Novel and the Pleasure of the Ghost

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In the Palace of Possession:
The Neobaroque Novel and the Pleasure of the Ghost

By

Vanessa Nelsen
M.A., Emory University, 2012

Advisor: Jose Quiroga, Ph.D., Yale, Spanish American Literature

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Vanessa Nelsen

This dissertation studies works by Jose Lezama Lima (1910-1976), Severo Sarduy (1937-1993), Reinaldo Arenas (1940-1990) each of whom holds a singular position within post-revolutionary Cuban literary history, yet they are also bound together by the fact that their work is marked by loss and haunted by specters that obsessively return and claim originary status within their works. This recurrence is intrinsic to the Neobaroque aesthetics that binds these authors. Their works are virtual 'palaces of possession' that serve to reunite readers, whether marginalized, in exile, or faced with existential and historical doubt, with the stories of a literary generation paradoxically at the center of the Latin American canon of literature and at the edge of erasure within a larger intellectual and international tradition. One reason the Neobaroque authors call forth uncanny and spectral stories is because this form of writing directly resonates with the conditions of having been denied basic rights of existence, censored as they were during in the decades surrounding the Cuban Revolution of 1959. These writers adapt a neobaroque aesthetic, not in order to respond to national context, but for the purpose of abstraction and invocation from their own—physical, discursive, and emotional—states of exile. This dissertation moves beyond the Revolutionary scope of Cuban history as presented in literature and enters into an inquiry for the individual at the boundary of historic obliteration and literary expression. The purpose of this study is identify the spectral forms of the Neobaroque aesthetic as they come together to point to the paradoxical positioning of the self during times when the impact of an historic event or political and social system may be felt and expressed and yet, before a public or a body of readers, still remains underrepresented, unspoken and uncertain. The transatlantic Neobaroque aesthetic, defined by a continuous displacement of meaning or origins, offers a point of entry into 21st-century representations of Cuban exile as it celebrates a indeterminism for which specters are not uncertain and dubious figures, but a proper form of expression.

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I wish to express my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, Jose Quiroga, Maria Carrión, and Valerie Loichot, for offering to me the challenging questions, crucial insights, and bibliographic references that have made this dissertation possible. As a scholar, I cannot over emphasize the impact that early conversations and coursework with Professor Quiroga had on my process of interpreting what has often been called the "difficult" and "complex" Neobaroque poetics of the Caribbean. My inquiry into the spectral features and the fundamental relationship between specifically Cuban works within this area and the representation of exile began after reading his work, *Cuban Palimpsests* (2002) during my Masters degree studies in the University of Kentucky. Soon after, I was fortunate to meet Professor Carrion who has contributed to my training and this dissertation through her understanding of the culture, thought, and people of early modern Spain by the means of architecture and memory. As any scholarly work on spectrality necessitates not only an understanding of the problems that may be present in the materials of study but also those that have been occluded or hidden by one's field, training, or language, the endeavor of producing this dissertation is also greatly indebted to Professor Loichot, whose expertise in the French Caribbean and African Diaspora pushed me to look beyond the material boundaries that separate the study of the Caribbean into linguistic regions and towards the still- forming theoretical conversations of their shared past, taking place in the 21st century. I must also thank the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Laney Graduate School, and the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program at Emory University, which reinforced my understanding of transatlantic thought and its development over time and across centuries as these academic divisions jointly funded my participation in an archival research and paleography program in Spain, access to the holdings at Princeton's Firestone Library and the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami, and onsite research and travel to Cuba. My experience in Cuba was one that I will never forget and which allowed me to refine and reflect on that meaning of censorship, dispossession, and spectrality—crucial components to my study—within the 21st century context of Havana. Discussions about the legacy of Arenas and Sarduy within the ghostly reality of this city with the poets and scholars Norge Espinosa Mendoza as well as Victor Fowler encouraged me to look further into the spatial reality behind the text. As a concluding thought, I have found that, alongside of consistent processes of cultural confluence, the tensions between the islands of the Caribbean provide the structure for the region as whole larger region; comparatively speaking, I cannot deny that the pursuit of a Ph.D. entails a tense writing process that can be isolating and frustrating, but the ideas, individuals, and assistance that have guided this project have converged to help me envision new modes of conversation and a sense of intellectual community for which I am forever grateful.

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Introduction: Specters, Ghosts, and Neobaroque Possession

In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) and *The Uncanny* (1919), Sigmund Freud suggests that the experience of an irrecoverable loss may cause a melancholic subject to project matter from their unconscious into their physical surroundings, possibly taking the form of a phantom or ghost (584-5; 157). This blurred embodiment of the taboo returns to shape what one cannot remember or admit to and which may eventually unveil that something has been repressed within the unconscious. The haunting—the repeated experience of seeing the ghost—ceases to occur once the reason for the ghost's return is recognized, but those who are haunted will forever be possessed by this figure unless they progress away from these projections and into the work of grieving. As the trope of possession and dispossession would have it, essays, novels, short stories by Jose Lezama Lima (1910-1976), Severo Sarduy (1937-1993), and Reinaldo Arenas (1940-1990) that have outlived the authors' physical existences end-up channeling themes reminiscent of recent Cuban history inclusive of the struggle for self-expression within it. The tropological structure of their novels is consistent with, and yet pushes away from, the concerns of nationalism discussed by preceding literary generations [and an opposing group of pre-Revolutionary intellectuals]. The phantom, for other authors, is the force behind language that hides a secret story possibly lost over generations and across time. In their study of the transmission of trauma across multiple generations, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994), Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok suggest that unaddressed psychic issues that are rooted in the life experiences of the deceased may be passed down and reappear without explanation in linguistic form and as an epistemological block in the life of the inheritor. Abraham warns: "what haunts are

not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others," those family secrets that cannot be resolved because their root cannot be found (287). Like generations of a family, shared histories and their narration in literature may house irresolvable tensions, secrets, and untold stories, which the Pulitzer Prize winning author and scholar, Toni Morrison, asserts in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," (1988).[1] In this essay, Morrison charges the literary cannon with unwittingly emphasizing the inclusion, exclusion, sheer denial, or exceptionality of black Americans on the written page. To their presence, she suggests, we have turned a blind-eye. My understanding of the selected Neobaroque novels and moves across histories with attention to linguistic operations to prove a similar point within a more turbulent national and international frame of reference. Yet, I prefer the term 'specter' as opposed to 'ghost' or 'phantom' as it resonates within the Neobaroque poetics associated with a series of transatlantic revivals in this dissertation, the contemporary Cuban context during the turbulent years surrounding the Revolution of 1959, and three of the 20th centuries' most renowned Latin American writers (afore mentioned).

The specter seeks acknowledgement—a recognition that it returns not because its secret is taboo or because a trauma has been left unresolved, but because its language exceeds signification and is wholly incomprehensible, as Jacques Derrida determines in *Specters of Marx* (1993) (18). In this text around which the emerging field of critical thought known as spectral theory has centered, Derrida declares: "A traditional scholar does not

[1] In the essay delivered first as a Tanner Lecture on Human Values at the University of Michigan, Morrison goes deeper into the work that she began with *Beloved* (1990), searching in the margins of American newspapers to find and recover the manipulated stories of enslaved persons that she claims to have remained "unspoken," glaringly omitted or unconvincingly incorporated into contemporary American literature (129-30)

believe in ghosts-- nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality" (11).[2] Arriving to this argument from the linguistic parameters set by deconstruction and not by a discussion of physical ghosts nor merely psychological one, Derrida describes the figure of a specter as a paradoxical incorporation of a "becoming body" as a "revenant" that begins to appear and disappear in the same instant, in the "imminence" of its re-apparition before our eyes (3, 5). Always forefronting linguistic, philosophical, and thus aesthetic conceptions of this term, Derrida points out that the clearest distinction between the specter and Freudian notions of the "ghost" may be that the specter "delights in the act of conjuring" rather than resolution (5). Unlike psychoanalytic notions of the phantom that forms alongside of lost or forbidden information, the specter is a figure of disjunction, divide, and disintegration and, for that matter, so is the aesthetic of the Neobaroque. The figure of the specter and not the ghost, responds to the critical paradox of the most recent Neobaroque literary production, although elements within these texts may appear and be discussed as ghostly from time to time. Nevertheless, the distinction is crucial as this dissertation does not attempt to resolve

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[2] Derrida further notes: "There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being ("to be or not to be," in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity" (11). This claim that places the deconstructive mode of inquiry and the consideration of specters on equal footing also puts uncertainty and irresolution at the foundation of academic and intellectual pursuit towards new forms of knowledge, thereby marking the reality of the specter and scholar side by side and eradicating assumptions about their liminal status. Indeed, the celebrated theorists Ernesto Laclaou, Gayatri Spivak, and Christopher Norris responded to Derrida's work on specters in *Ghostly Demarcations*: *A Symposium on Derrida's Specters of Marx* (1995) edited and assembled by Michael Sprinker. Essays written along these same lines of thought move deeper into issues of gender, time, language, literature, politics, and ethics, uncovering the broader range of ideas that Spectral Theory and Derrida's thoughts on the matter penetrates and, of course, is penetrated by. It would not be too far of a stretch to view the destabilization of phallocentrism in which these critical thinkers' projects participate as a motion dependent on the spectral other that is behind, beneath, and preceding the phallus or the word (logos) itself, thus within the self, and bearing it's ghostly head as post-structuralism is canonized and in full fruition by the time both books are published.

historical traumas, nor gesture towards what could be misconstrued as the narcissistic projections of some of these writers.[3]

The Neobaroque spectral aesthetic, as a portal between worlds, a force that mobilizes irresolvable tensions within a literary realm, operates in the absence of a predetermined, dependable or direct sense of language and in spite of their ephemeral form; they open the divide between absence and presence, the present and the past, the known and the possible; And, as Derrida says about specters, Neobaroque aesthetics of this sort break down closed and totalizing discourses because "the force of their presence has everything to do with returning the gaze of an onlooker", "with vision as much as materiality, with a sort of predetermined denial that allows for the disappearance and appearance to become equally haunting events"(6). Often times appearing at the intersection of two divergent points of time, space, or fields of knowledge, the specter underscores the same sets of grand scale tensions on which the larger framework of the transatlantic Baroque as well as the most recent Cuban reconfiguration of Neobaroque have been founded. Lezama, head and founder of the literary magazines *Verbum (*1937), *Espuela de Plata* (1939-1941), *Poeta* (1941-1942), *Nadie Parecía* (1942-1944), and *Origines* (1944-1956) and which were associated with the Neobaroque, was known as "the immobile traveler" and was not allowed to leave the

[3] My interest in the figure of the specter and the contemporary Caribbean authors of this aesthetic deals more with what Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) would call "an impulse to form" in his "Le Style Baroque" insofar as I uphold the idea that the specter appears and seems to speak because it can and because something is always left to say. This power to haunt those who seek out silence and certainty is at the core of the figure as it appears in literature. Extending the metaphoric but also philosophic matter of the specter, Derrida further follows through with this thought by discouraging the attempt to exorcise the specter from one's sight and suggests opting instead to animate the world of the unknown in a form of séance that exposes the frailty beneath the notion of certainty. Indeed, the works at hand are alike in that they avoid and demand totalizing approaches to interpretation making known that, when it comes to the baroque aesthetic and all of its instantiations from the 16th century on, "one cannot control its coming and goings" (Derrida, 15).

island after 1959, neither to attend cultural activities in his honor nor to visit his family, most of which had emigrated early on. Sarduy was born in the former capital of the French sugar trade, Camagüey, and he spoke about it often during interviews. Yet, the town itself does not play much of a role in his novels nor figure into his experimental work insofar as most of his literature was written after he left the island in 1960. Reinaldo Arenas, on the other hand, was born on the eastern, rural and poor part of the island, and so he initially welcomed the Revolution of 1959. His involvement, as recounted in several of his writings, even helped him flee the stifling atmosphere of provincial Cuba. The Revolution that provided Sarduy with possibilities including emigration from Cuba on scholarship and the chance to study art and travel in Europe, also offered Arenas a route to education, to Havana and to his dream of being a writer. This dream was one he shared with a number of people from his generation who were forced to give up on this idea as they were imprisoned, censored, or even executed. Although many writers and their works did not survive the turmoil of the 1970s, Sarduy and Arenas received numerous awards for their works that were published abroad.

The works analyzed transform insofar as the exile of each writer intersects a polemic period of history wherein interpretation and factuality remain incomplete, particularly as politics of this era continued to evolve and influence history. The specters that can be found in their work may recall the authors' history or a history of writers like themselves, a history difficult to tell and which becomes an object or a space marked-out across their works and over time through a series of possessions and dispossession.

Possession and dispossession, complimentary actions that point to the notion of ownership and otherwordlyness, are understood in my analysis as central tropes of a

Neobaroque aesthetic that is spectral. From a different angle, we can say that spectrality, understood as a theory applicable to literary analysis, provides an approach to that which is present, avoided, weaved through, does not belong, and must borrow from a broad territories of symbols, examples, contexts, and modes in order to make itself known through patterns, actions and operations. I find possession the perfect complement to the theory of spectrality when considering the most salient examples of Neobaroque literature because it underscores the relationality and recurrence of certain types of events in Cuban history, in these author's lives, and from the 17th century Baroque on, eventually leading into surrounding critical literature filled with meta-commentary, subtle or not so subtle political gestures that relates to these authors and the slight air of contention that still seeps into classroom and intellectual discussion when these author's names are involved.

The evolving critical reception of each of these author's works and the proliferation of personal and affective response (in newspaper journals but also in academic magazines) to each of their deaths—pointing here to the most literal aspect of ghostliness of literature, when the deceased continue to speak through others, could be understood as channeling a very real lack of confidence in state-produced reports, official stories and documentation or, from a different angle, the ongoing commitment that readers make, whether they are implicitly for or actively against whatever they understand these particular authors to have represented: a sense of community, a struggle for rights and representation, for art--whatever its content or however it may have problematized political engagements such as Revolutions or the cultures and counter cultures surround them.

These authors had the Cuban Revolution of 1959 not merely as backdrop within many of their writings. This pivotal date in Cuban history and the hardships that followed it came to impact their ability to publish, the topics their texts would treat, and who the

authors and the narrators of their texts would become. By no surprise then, a history of the denial and negation takes shape within the novels, essays, poems, and short stories to which this dissertation is dedicated.

I am not the first to suggest that Lezama's masterpiece *Paradiso (1966*), Arenas' *Celestino Antes del Alba* (1967), and Sarduy's *Colibrí* (1983) and essay "Barroco y Neobarroco*"* (1974) are *all* semi-autobiographical works, nor in stating that their structure simulates breaking the frame that traditionally separates reader, narrators, and protagonists, as the early Baroque literature of the Spanish golden age had done. However, this unmasking of an organic aesthetic reception before the reader constitutes an act of possession in the selected novels precisely because the simultaneously porous and sumptuous nature of all literature and particularly that of the contemporary Neobaroque canon reflects a tenuous crossing of political and economic systems, oppression, and escape, individuation and collectivity that resonates within a readerly subject and across time. Again, the uncanny divide in which a single text can appear shallow, unwieldy and then turn to reveal something deeply divine and unexpected is already a general aspect of literature, but the Neobaroque novel, set within the extreme conditions of a revolutionary society, exile and a space of existence (even if it is only imagined) engages the reader in its own capacity to project and revive the dynamism of literature but by means of the others accidental or incidental rescue. When the frame of a narrative break in these texts and in the second half of 20th century Cuba, the experience of the uncanny also resonates with the linguistic, historic, and affective components of this aesthetic. To begin working towards the intricacies of their interface, we can observe that each text recalls an absent, perhaps never existent, and respective past whose image is recreated through key linguistic maneuvers and visual mirages in the text that distort time and characters notion of the self. Insofar as these works all include some variation on the

apocryphal author examined in Jorge Luis Borges' "Pierre Menard" if not Cervantes' Baroque masterpiece, *Don Quixote* that serves to break the frame of the text. As Borges looks back on his Baroque predecessor, this author, from the angle of not simply Cervantes' character or the author, but their hinge—the fictional, relational subject (the apocryphal author) that brings writer, protagonist, and reader together as much as these literary greats, we begin to see how possession unfolds within texts, across times and geographies, imaginatively and yet with a certainty that draws from the world of fiction just as much as it does from the world of the reader.

In the broadest sense, 'possession' is a word that may describe the affective impact and phenomenological possibilities of textual interpretation within the world of historic readers—a world that changes, is subject to time, trends, and histories, as the book stays the same. Possession is, from my understanding, an insistent feature of the novels, writers, and aesthetic tradition that turns into something tangible once recognized. Take, for example, the fact that works by Lezama, Sarduy, and Arenas, but also Cervantes, Góngora, and the broader baroque tradition position readers as potential characters created by the narrator's voice at some point or another. Possession, although a well-known action, involvement with objects, and even political concept, is not a well known literary feature and, in fact, is barely conceptualized, but helps to draw out the especially spectral quality of Cuban Neobaroque works and the range of political actions and atrocities of the time in which these works were written. In Baroque and Neobaroque works alike possession becomes spectral and not a common feature of literature because even the most basic interpretations of these author's masterpieces motivate the reader to presume his ideas maybe nonsense if not the result of a tricky or simply advanced writing style. The illusion of interpretation, a sort of possession, introduces interaction. The reader is possessed by a writer he knows well—the frame of the

text breaks and the two unite, but also share disillusion. Dispossessed of each other they are utterly isolated, as the mirages, less real to each other than the apocryphal author on which their relationship hinges, something that inconsistencies and the inversions so common to this literature makes clear. To recognize the ornate, illusory, active, and antithetical nature of the spectral experience that is founded within the Neobaroque, it is helpful to gain a working understanding of the evolution of Baroque aesthetics in key moments of its resurfacing.

European Foundations and Historical Parallels

The European Baroque of the 16th century was associated with extravagant, unwieldy, and generally abstruse aesthetics until the end of the 19th century. Even while Elizabethan aesthetics was admired in Britain, a somewhat historically contemporaneous Baroque served as an expressive model for writers and poets in the Spanish language. The Spanish generation of 1898, which thought about its own placement in the long history of Imperial decline which culminated in that humiliating defeat, the Baroque had no lesson to convey other than its own semantic obscurity, which privileged the ostentatious and not the utilitarian functions of language. For some philosophers, the Baroque could be understood in economic terms, as the Spanish material historicist, José Antonio Maravall seemed to explain. Marvall was, perhaps, the first to link the language and culture of the Counter-Reformation to cultural changes that coincided with a news forms of mercantilism, the growth of the Spanish city and masses there, and the spectacles a land owning elite and members of the still empowered clergy thought necessary in order to subdue the masses in the decades surrounding the plague. John Beverly, the foremost scholar on Góngora, writing freely from the Americas and not from underneath General Francisco Franco's rule (as was the case with Maravall), explains the paradox from which the Baroque developed and which it simultaneously represented in avowing that, to represent history, the notion of

change must be taken into account, as it was for the artists, playwrights and authors of the baroque, but it is "precisely this change that the baroque--as an affirmation of the conservative sectors of society—intends to resist" (225). The historical North of Europe and America saw religious uprising and political revolts; it defied the Catholic Church and the Pope as the supreme incarnation of the Church in the World. Political liberation was also related to economics, for the North was also more concerned with transforming primary materials into commodities for exchange within a growing transatlantic trade between the Continent and the Americas. The reason for the Baroque, as Jose Antonio Maravall argues in his analysis of the aesthetic as a historical structure, is a widespread Spanish and European economic crisis, followed by the invigoration of feudalism and the impoverishment of the masses in Spain, thereby causing a feeling of threat and instability in the social and personal life of the elites and a new urban milieu and a general worsening of the situation through repressive taxation (Culture 32). Culture and control, according to Anne Cross and Mary E. Perry, became key issues of the Baroque Spain and led to a redefinition of the the former concept that maintains the latter through establishing new limits of what is inside, and what will remain outside social, economic, and national spheres (*Culture and Control* ix). The redefinition of such rules during phases that are, in the least, expressed through Baroque aesthetics returns to the past, however. Maravall points to this regressive action when stating that Spain

> "se encuentra en el estado de una sociedad aristocráctica decaída, desvitalizada, penetrada de elementos alógenos, plebeyos, que trata de procurarse un alimento que la tonifique, en un arte que le presenta sus viejos

> ideales, y de ahí, ese reviver de formas medievales que respondería a una sociedad efectivamente privilegiada (La cultura, 76)[4]

The present situation inspired reflection and retrospection in which the present unfolded as if it were the ruins of the past and not vice versa. Perry and Cruz's thesis regarding control, something that often appeared through strategies of staging spectacles of life, added to this sense of disjunction wherein novelty and stagnation coincide.

The sermons, processions, sacred festivals, responded to the emergency with devices that all served to conceal a fear of emptiness, the lack of substance, and sedimented beliefs, filling up these rhetorical and metaphorical—but also palapable spaces with the ornate and opulant aesthetics that, retroactively, made this feeling and the need to gapple with it known. In his essay "Religious Oratory in a Culture of Control," Karol G. Barnes explains the purpose of opulence within sacred festivals as not just integrating citizens, but impressing and even blinding them into almost dumbstruck viewers. Everything had to be inflated so that meaning could be discarded more easily as this was a society in which "anonymity [was purported to] spread" (Culture, 50-51).

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[4] There is an urgency to narrate even though the narrative can not erase that deep wound that life goes rogue. According to N. Spadaccini and J. Talens, autobiography and the construction of the self meets the need of the person who wants to be proposed as a test of truth (10). (Of course, writing valid, what is written is the real) It is not merely to be told to be restored, but to become a discursive entity among many others, to confirm or reverse the effect of the story on some subjects. Expansion, mobility and deteriorating ties linking the subject with other entities in society, Maravall say are the three factors that distinguish the Baroque period (Literature, 23). The emergence of biography and autobiography, say critics, is tied to the desire to endure in the memory of mankind (Spadaccini & Talens, 15). According to John Beverly, to represent the story is necessary to consider the possibility of change, but that change is precisely what the Baroque, as conservatives claim of the city wants to resist (225). The stories of rogues can be seen as anti-discusivae practices to the extent that they are built from, and to the movement, constant change, the break with the space, and to incorporate a new law that will fit these new subjects who can not find a place in the dominant discourse.

While reformers threw out religious imagery and idolatry from the church, the Counter-Reformation and the states, which raised the banner of orthodoxy, resistance and tradition had to generate new artistic means to express the sentiment of a confusing time and simultaneously maintain order. The term Baroque was copied from the world of architecture and was inserted or transliterated (still to this day, polemically) within the field of literature. The architectural penchant for "shock and awe" was most evident in religious edifices and in altars that were meant to fully convey the fear of God. Used as backdrops for the spectacle of the mass, the religious iconography of altars was part of a pageantry of state and a pageantry of religious stagecraft that accounted for some of the most successful enterprises of religious popular conversion seen in the history of modern imperialism: the subjugation of tens of thousands of "infidels" into loyal subjects of the Catholic Church and of its salient rigidity within the flexibilities of the modern world (Maravall, 257-290). While literature made of use of different forms of stagecraft, it aimed to give stylistic life to a language whose syntax proved to be exceedingly flexible and pliant. While economic and political stability reined, the Baroque's penchant for tropes and images of mirrors, fun houses, madmen, and other forms of artifice and inversion ruled. A sensuous textual body extolled flights of fancy, lyrical play, and conceptual excess in an orgy of consumption that ultimately led to what the Spanish readers termed "desengaño."

Desengaño is a difficult term to translate, and it alludes to a temporality that its prefix underscores: what comes after the "engaño", what erases it, what modifies it and, perhaps, rectifies it. In Spanish the "engaño" refers to the awareness of illusion, the anagnorisis where the subject understands that what s/he has been seeing is what Buddhists would call "maya"—chiefly external reality behind whose curtained beauty something else resides. While this something else was never exactly disappointment, it not only radically

rewrote the experience that provoked it in the first place, but also redirected the subject's temporal reflection on what had recently happened towards the sense of reassurance that only the timeless edifice of belief, structured by means of the Church and the State, could sustain. Baroque expression, and "desengaño" in particular contained the subject's fear of confusion and redirected the social order towards a deeper understanding of and dependence upon, the certainties of the Church and its moral order.

Associated as it was with imperial authority, and hence as an aesthetics and philosophy that did not question it, but rather fled to it as the bedrock of stability, the Enlightenment turned its back on the Baroque and favored the clean lines of a Neoclassical aesthetics. Ordered symmetry allowed for independent thought, rational use of materials was favored over the chiaroscuro of stained glass and the plays of light and shadow. Baroque acquired a negative connotation, signifying at some time "poor taste," "excess," and pure semantic flourish that hid a poverty of thought that could be merely found in a couple of recurrent tropes that generally led to a certain futility of life, the presence of death and decay within beauty, and of an inevitable encounter with the Creator—not as the mathematician of the Enlightenment but as the source and end of life.

Defining the 17th Century Foundations of the Baroque

During the years of the enlightenment, which favored a Neoclassical aesthetic, the Baroque was not an object of study, but described as a period of poor taste adding to the already pejorative connotation of the Baroque form. In the final decade of the 19th-century, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and art historian Heinrich Wolfflin begin to reconsider the unnecessary value judgments of this period. They view the Baroque as expressive a series of qualities or characteristics that permeate across geographies and times.

This reconsideration that uproots and universalizes a form that not only would maintain its negative charge, but also relate chronologically to the colonization and the decline of Spain in socio-economic terms, prepares the Baroque for its transplantation in the American space and transformation into a particularly Caribbean and Cuba form. Nietzsche's "On the Baroque" (1878), mentioning the 19th century tendency among scholars to associate its style with the disease, compares the Baroque's emotive, uncontrolled and open qualities back to the Dionysian spirit of ancient Greece, at which point, the same myriad of features is shadowed by controlled, order of the Baroque philosophical concern for relationship between art and science, that fuel societies inspiration. Recurred since the time of ancient Greece: in poetry, in oratory, in prose, in sculpture, and—as is well known—in architecture; Not the decline of the renaissance, but a key feature in the birth of civilization. Associated with "visual arts and music" and an "overwhelming, urgent will to form" always arises "when the demands of classical expression become to great" (437). Being the Dionysian content of the renaissance, 'the baroque' (written as a presumably all encompassing noun) should be restored and understood with neutrality, not rejected out of a puritan-type fear. Nietzsche writes: "Only the ignorant and arrogant, by the way, will immediately associate this word with something to be disparaged" (439). Again, he warns "It is arrogant simply to vilify the Baroque," first to apply the term to literature, warn against rejection and transhistoricize: thus influential in Latin America, no characteristics within scope Apollonian classicism. Removing the baroque from a specific period of geography, Nietzsche paves the way for the Swiss historian, Henrich Wolfflin to complete the first formalist studies of the Baroque in his classic text, *Principles of Art History* (1915). Here, Wolfflin explains that, contrary to what was believed at his time, the baroque was not inferior to the renaissance classicism but radically different and equally valuable. Five chapters, each aimed at the visual

characteristics (able to be adapted to the literary study allow Wolfillin to determine that the baroque art is "painterly" and observes "things as they seem to be"; and thus it appears to be an affective or expressionistic art form, something that is consistent with the notion of the ghost and projection (157). Accordingly, Wolffilin suggests that the Baroque painters prefer recession and tended to emphasize depth and restlessness. Indeed, they present open and often asymmetrical works wherein composition points everywhere beyond itself. This work no longer reckons with a multiplicity of coordinate units, harmoniously independent, but with an absolute unity in which the individual part has lost its individual rights." Even before the American space, the associations of the aesthetic and philosophic implications are unavoidable, as if any discussion of the basic characteristics of the artform was a metaphor or a philosophy for art itself that solicited other's response.

In "What is Baroque," the German art historian Erwin Panofsky accuses Wolfflin of ignoring a broad range of artistic production in effort to create an "impression of a straight, diametrical contrast between Baroque and Renaissance where, in reality, a much more complex development had taken place" (20). [5] In relation to our study, the points he makes are useful as they provide a formal structure of understanding literature as an apolitical entity, but which also underlines the sort of dynamism and optical illusions which allows one to relate this history back to a context however open it might be. Only after Rene Wellek, the English scholar of literature, conducts a bibliographic study of the Baroque—which had yet to coalesce outside of an extremely intellectual tradition of northern Europe—does the

[5] Arnold Hauser seconds this critique in *Renaissance, Mannerism, and Baroque* by suggesting that Classicism is implicated in the baroque and that the baroque is a broad, diverse category. Nonetheless, the categories he observes clarify the dizzying urgency by which Nietzsche had identified the term. While the opposition to Renaissance has been reevaluated, the features he observes persist in the study of the baroque.

term enter into larger and more accessible argumentations.[6] This literary reconsideration of the Baroque and the development of the New World Baroque also intersect with a Hispanic, as opposed to more widely influenced European tradition, of scholarly reconsideration.

The colonization and the decline of Spain in socio-economic terms, prepares the Baroque for its transplantation in the Americas and transformation into those scenarios that first felt the full onslaught of imperial domination: the Caribbean, Mexico, and what was then called the Viceroyalty of Peru. This literary reconsideration of the Baroque and the development of the New World Baroque also intersect with a Hispanic—which doesn't preclude a broader European filiation-- tradition of scholarly revisionism, present at least since the Nineteenth century, if not before. Just as the Romantics rediscovered the Gothic, and the avant-garde discovered African or Egyptian art, in Spain a group of writers came together in order to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the death of one of the most important Spanish writers, the Baroque master Don Luis de Góngora. While Góngora can be said to have been the excuse, or the fulcrum by means of which a whole group of poets with disparate aesthetics and contradictory poetic practice actually came together, there was no doubt that their admiration for the Spanish master was genuine, even if their reasons for rediscovering him were also personal and corresponded to different impulses. Thus, while some understood Góngora's practically inscrutable Baroque syntax as evidence for an impulse of experimentation, others admired his unearthing of idioms that, with their pure Latinate origin, served to broaden the lexical richness of Spanish and produce effects which were at once unsettling and erotic, within the context of the Counter-Reformation. Others

[6] Wellek discovers that the term was used on occasion in Europe in the sixteen hundreds onwards, leaving a several hundred year period for ideas to embody its name. The baroque even if it is not necessarily a product of the counter-reformation, makes sense of the regionalism that swallow up baroque art form.

still admired Góngora's independence and refusal to submit to the demand for clarity.[7] Whatever the specific motives to the archaeological unearthing of this literary giant, the celebrations served to usher a new generation on to the public literate arena.

Apart from defining the Neobaroque aesthetics as a style of writing that has to do with spectrality, I understand that Neobaroque writing appears across histories that are specific but not conclusive, and, in this way, I maintain an understanding of it as consistent with Northrop Frye's analysis of 'literary modes.' Distinguishing between three categories of literature (tragic, comic, and thematic) and five modes (mythic, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic), Frye's vivid 'Theory of Modes', derives a nearly mathematic schematization of the literary realm that places characters and their characterization, setting and plot, and thematic content in structural relation to a complex context—with a varied readership (33-4, 53). Frye's theory helps solidify the spectral aspect of our study insofar as emblems that arise through abstraction (a character's action rather than a symbol, for example) end up mimicking or foreshadowing the arch of more substantial content or, in other cases, multiple registers of language that allow for contradictory interpretations. The Neobaroque operates in this way being at once fully open to the whim of the reader and yet it remains, as Frye's ironic their initial or utter incongruence when examined from outside this angle. His complete and dynamic criteria and qualities that comprise literature accounts for production and reception or a work while building visibility for how one form might relate to or exist within another example or society. I maintain a notion of the historical period and aesthetic tendencies, but position the Neobaroque mode as such in order to

[7] Some of this insistence on the writer's independence and underscoring of a personal aesthetics at all costs would resurface in the 1960's defense of Jose Lezama Lima's fiercely independent stance *vis a vis* the Cuban Revolution's demand for a political, clear, direct expression of style as radical will (to quote Susan Sontag)

clarify the abstract operations and emblematic axioms as deep concerns and not merely complimentary features of style.

It is possible to speak of a Neobaroque literary tendency towards non referentialism, wherein distinct poetics systems override contexts, politics and anything outside of these poems. As a result, studies of Neobaroque poetics tend towards formal definitions in order to offer alternative identifying definitions and descriptions. Semiologist Omar Calabrese's *Neobaroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992), removes the positive or negative value of formalist qualities in Sarduy's work in his own attempt to find "something behind them," a "deep form" (xii). The deep form concerns possibility, doubts, ontology and is represented by space and language at the same time. Most anyone who writes on the baroque agree on a few identifying descriptors of more precise formal operations, and thus terms like "heterogeneity" and "complexity" are commonly applied to Neobaroque and baroque literature, but *Neobaroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992) identifies the Neobaroque as a social aesthetics, shared across disciplines through the visual form. For example, chapters are dedicated to a visual characteristic of the Neobaroque (entirety/repetition/dispersion) aesthetic that may be literary or scientific, and which are always emblematic. The emblem itself becomes symbolic of a context in Calabrese's work, similar to Sarduy's own writings. Unlike the "artificial" forms (to reference Sarduy's separation of the deep form to the baroque artifice), the structure of a deep form expresses not whether something is, similar or dissimilar, but the possibility that such a divide exists and needs to be broken down.

These broad features have surfaced from a scholarly tradition, then, that admits to the problems of historical and contextual periodization of the literature while relying on the generation relationships of different authors, formal similarity and differences, thereby systematizing the anti-systematic and always inventive literature. With regards to a timeline

of the Baroque or Neobaroque, a wide range of historic, literary and philosophical studies mark multiple reinventions of the poetry as they contrast other possibilities but also flow into one another. This necessarily multi-faceted and nearly paradoxical feature of scholarly literature on the Neobaroque has called for not only interdisciplinary references as is the case with many periods of the arts, but also a tendency towards visual language or graphic figures to describe the literature. Temporal continuity, spatial dispersion and simultaneous singularity or particularity come together in the secondary literature on the Baroque, which like the literature itself, tends towards visual imagery and special allusions. I believe this visual side of the written poetics is not referential but a matter of poetic autonomy. The image of language surfaces as a marker that sustains the patterns of thought, thinking, and being itself outside of language and yet adjacent to language insofar as both the image and the word are relational and incomplete. Under this first exploration into Baroque and Neobaroque poetics as they relate to a context, time, or semantic system, the amount of contradiction, abstraction, and unfinished analysis—openness—already points towards the ghostly features of the Neobaroque literary form. It is thus unusual that the field of Contemporary Hispanic Literary studies of the Neobaroque, as a mode, historical period, or aesthetic, no one has conducted a reading in which the specter occupies the foreground. Concepts lateral to spectral theory (concerning images, architecture, memory and history) have generated a wealth of criticism that provides the groundwork for understanding spectral themes as well as recurrent historical tendencies within this literary mode.[8]

[8] Neobaroque scholars Gregg Lambert and Monika Kaup suggest a return of the baroque in very recent cultural production. Kaup's Calabrese, Kaup, and Lambert are involved in exploring the Neobaroque not only as a unique Latin American experience, but one that can be reflected onto other continents destabilizing historic and geographic certainty. Post-Modernity is cast as the uncanny reflection of the Neobaroque. As Neobaroque literature

Transatlantic Movements from Baroque to Neobaroque

Of prime importance for any study of the baroque aesthetic conjurations in is the fact that the Generation of 1927 was directly affected by the savage conflict that ended the Spanish Republic with one of the bloodiest of all civil wars that had ever taken place in Europe. Many of the most important Spanish poets who had participated in this attempt to renew Hispanic poetic and intellectual expression after the debacle of 1898 were either killed in this conflict, (Lorca himself being the most prominent example) or left for exile (Altolaguirre in Mexico, Juan Ramon Jimenez in Puerto Rico and the U.S.), Maria Zambrano in Cuba, Luis Buñuel in Mexico, and Salvador Dalí in England and then France. In addition, the Spanish Republic had mobilized the most important artistic minds from Latin America and elsewhere—prized Communist public intellectuals and supporters of the Spanish. The Republican supporters and communist partners Rafael Alberti and Maria Teresa León headed the Spanish section of the international writers group, the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectual for the Defense of Culture, whose inaugural conference in Paris of 1935 marked a historic shift towards the radical experimentation of the Generation of 1927 (Hemingway and Franco 25,26). The second conference held in during the Spanish Civil War brought prominent members André Malraux, Ernest Hemingway and George Bernard Shaw to Valencia in 1937, where the announcement of new intellectual appointments and artistic alliances was set against the backdrop of an increasingly international Spanish Civil War. Constant intervention and political tension kept some authors at a critical distance (but always in solidarity with the events in Spain) including in this list the young Mexican poet

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evolves, deviates and divides, in history and criticism, Cuba becomes the home to the image of the 21st century: spectral and, inasmuch, paradoxically complete.

Octavio Paz (1914-1998), the Chilean Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989) and Peruvian Cesar Vallejo (1892-1938). These writers disseminated the political and poetic works of their Spanish counterparts throughout the Americas, mingling the verbal pyrotechnics that can be found in Góngora's works of the Golden Age and mixing it with the other linguistic play that was inherited from the Avant-Garde. This combination as seen in the early poetry of, for example, Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989) moves into an Afro-Cuban phase that originated with "Motivos de Son" (1930). Guillén's appreciation of linguistic play that led to the invention of the 'son' movement was and would be seen in his early years as some kind of "nonsensical" language of his had it not been buttressed by the archeological rediscovery of the distinguished lexicon of African words transported to the Americas. And still, in *the Cambridge history of Latin American Literature* explains that the first Spanish American avant-gard poems were "eminently visual texts, and, as such, subject to a kind of afterlife, an interplay between an original text and its reproduction", which I would add was a known tension that such works explored and Lezama continued to consider (306). It was within the framework of early transatlantically inflected experimental works of modernist poets that the New World Baroque developed, advancing an already established interest in topics of occult science (18), deformation, and linguistic construction itself proper to Ruben Dario (1867-1916), Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948), and Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) amongst others mentioned. The early 20th century also preceded the baroque in the establishment of defined approaches to poetics. Following the path of the Avante Guard movements in Italy, Spain and France, Latin America authors's production of poetic manifestos that proclaim a set aesthetics such as Creacionismo, Ultraismo, and Futurismo mark the self reflective and socially critical vibe of the early 20th century, wherein the foundation of the Generation of 1927 fits. If the poem

and the poet allowed Spanish America to explore the vision of themselves before an international audience, then it follows that, more intimately, the archaic language and new arrangements of objects described by poetics symbolized or came to participate in some version of an incantatory ritual, perceived by vanguard poets who sought to reformulate a "fundamental drama [being] played beneath the text" (320).

Even with these ongoing poetic developments of the avant gaurde, the indiscriminate bloodshed and the social upheavals of the Spanish Civil War meant the postwar poetic landscape seemed bleak. The transatlantic currents circulating Spanish and Latin American literary thought led into what might be framed as the initial conceptualization of a Neobaroque style of writing particular to the Caribbean.

During one of those itinerant travels between Latin America and Spain and commonly undertaken at this time, the Spanish writers, Juan Ramon Jimenez and Maria Zambrano, came into contact with the stunning Lezama' Lima's "Muerte de Narciso" (1937), which marked the start of this later author's career (342). Lezama embellished the classical myth by incorporating parts of what he would consider to be a formal aesthetic inheritance in Cuba from Spain, and soon after the publication of his first poem, he would become the founding father of the Neobaroque, particularly through his work in a number of literary journals. The first of his experimental *Verbum*, which took the form of three issues produced in 1937. Six issues of another similar project, *Espuela de plata* circulated between 1939 and 1941, followed by *Clavileño* (1942-1943), and then *Nadie paracía* ("Nobody Can Interfere") (1942 with the final of ten issues appearing in 1944). Members of the literary community surround these journals developed works resting on a tradition largely concerned with the redirection of origins-based political mythos with tropes of open creation.

Cuban History Leading Up to The Neobaroque

A number of historic conditions had created lines of division amongst intellectuals in Cuba during the first half of the 20th century. Because Gerardo Antonio Machado's rule divided Cuban history into events before the Revolution of 1933, Cuban literary history surrounding the development of the baroque is is complicated by the fact that there are two distinct periods prior to Revolution of 1959. The first of these is characterized by revolutionary idealism and the other by failure and degeneration. Machado achieved power during the War of Independence. Placing national industry at the center of his political platform and "water, routes, and schools" as his motto, he earned the approval of businessmen and functionaries alike. The extension of his term by six years in 1927 punctualized the dictatorial nature of his regime and provoked strong opposition by a radical grouped named Directorio Estudiantil Universitario. In the wake of the Great Depression, distinct political factions of the left grew increasingly violent as did Machado's attempts at retaliation. The assassination of the leader of Cuba's socialist party just before Machado's self-imposed appointment of a second term in office points to the social discord and sense of injustice amongst students and intellectuals of the left who were not involved with a mercenary class.

By the end of Machado's second term in office, the Directorio Universatario Estudiantil, which had failed in several attempts to over thrown the government, collaborated with a growing 'secret' organization known as the ABC. Members of the latter, known as Abecedearios published and cirtculated public notices against Machado's government and in support of the people shortly after the foundation of their organization in 1931 and in order to expand their influence through memberships and affiliations.[3] The union between the two leftist radical groups was short lived. The series of attacks, retaliations, assassinations, and general that characterize all political parties in the pre-

Republican era led to the arrival of an American diplomat, Sumner Wells, on the island, whose explicit purpose was to mediate between the groups. Colllaboration amongst the opposition to Machado ended as the DRE refused to negotiate with the American statesmen and pressured the Abecedarios to do the same, unsuccessfully. With Macahdo in exile, the Americans involved in the politics of the nation, and leftist movements unappeased but at a standstill in terms of greater organization, leftist ideals settled but did not dissolved. A number of labor strikes, a weak presidency, then a return to economically interested government led to a sense of irresolution that, retrospectively, pointed towards the pre-Revolutionary struggle of the Batista years.

Machado's oppressive regime was dissembled in 1933 after a number of failed attempts, around these same years, the American diplomat, Sumner Wells, sent to the island to stabilize the island met with stratified political parties for the benefit of Cuba's northern neighbor. Wells presence on the island, however, is understood by the Directorio as an extreme ingression into internal affairs of the island and, by the ABC, as an act of advocacy for their interests, leading to deeper schisms. After Machado fleed, a blood hunt of his former associated begins along with a series of governments that don't yet meet the demands of the nation's youth. Labor strikes, coops, and a refusal to accept any terms of negotiation facilitated by external forces, set the stage for communist insurrection even as the Revolutionary ideals seemed to have failed and the Epoca Heroica was clearly at a close. During the 1940s and 1950s there was a resurgence and boom in terrorist activities in a more degraded state, but the stage for insurrection and Marxist ideals had been firmly set within the country and, of course, externally was well.[5]

The generation of authors who started writing after the Revolution but followed behind writers like Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera challenged attempts at usurping their literary lineage into a national discourse as comments by Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), who had written in *Orígenes* at one point, refused to be associated with the apolitical members of this circle, and yet would be credited with inventing Marvelous Realism, often conflated with the New World Baroque.

Carpentier defined the Baroque as a European art form that resounds within the abundance of the American space in "Lo Barroco Americano" (1976). Carpentier derives his definition of the Baroque as "the legitimate style of the Latin American author" from a "spirit" that "was always Latin American"; thus, he opposed the notion of "style," contradicting himself when urging the reader of "La Ciudad de las Columnas" that examples of Baroque Latin American architecture and literature could ever be seen as "decadent" or "gothic" (*Tientos and Diferencias,* 26, 108). As Carpentier saw it, legitimate architecture, art and literature of the continent must steer away from the repetition, ruin, and excess he associated with Europe even when his argument recalled the essentialism found within the conservative Catalan writer, Eugenio D'Ors (1881-1954). D'Ors saw the entire ocean as Baroque and the sky neoclassical in his essay "Lo Barroco" (1944). It was none other than Lezama Lima and Sarduy who, in their respective collections of essays *La expression Americana* (1957) and *Barroco* (1974), set out against politically-informed appropriations of an aesthetic that they defined in a very different way. Lezama and Sarduy openly admired the decadent examples of the Baroque cultural production from the Golden Age of Spain, meshing into these a ruins a newly founded love for verbal pyrotechnics and semantic diffusion.[9] Their way of

[9] The Catalan philosopher, a few years after the Generation of 1927 first Spaniard to undertake the baroque in 1931 in "La querella de lo barroco en Pontigny" published in

writing was understood accepted the aesthetic as one that entailed a more generalized social questioning by means of these qualities, as it had in prior centuries. But, arguably, the themes, topics and general understanding of a Baroque form of writing that Carpentier translated from ephemeral abstraction into a materialist and architectural one, one that also met the standards of a highly erudite French anthropologist, interested in a region, its politics and its essence but with an eye from afar.

The problem that surfaces with Carpentier's essays, the censorship or relative censorship of authors such as Lezama, Arenas, and Sarduy, and the politics of the Revolution, concerned not only specific literary genealogies on the island, but a longer trajectory of thought completely opposed to facile artistic maneuvers and, in fact, obsessed with acts of subversion, opacity, erudition, rebellion, and artistic expansion in the face of oppression, violence, poverty and war—a tradition centuries in the making and which required a heightened intellectual commitment and abstract poetic sensibility that anything to tangible or immediate threatened to erase in an instant.

In the contemporary Caribbean context, this dissertation covers three closely related phases of Cuban literary history. As I make clear in my first chapter, a study of Lezama Lima's Paradiso and the history that precedes it, I demonstrate that in early 20th century works of the New World Baroque, it is precisely the successive repressive experiences from colonization to dictatorship have problematized the development of an autonomous

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France in 1935 and in Spain in 1944. This work, discussed by Lois Parkinson Zamora in *Baroque New Worlds*, developed out of a 1931 seminar held at the Abbey of Pontigny in France. There, D'Ors explained the baroque and classical, not only stylistic, but metaphysical in forces of the human spirit a ahistorical cyclical force; "eon": reveals itself in aesthetics. Baroque, apparent throughout nature and often latent in periods of classical aesthetics, opposes controlled, clear and rationalized tendency of classicism.

epistemology in the Caribbean.[10] Even when understood as a literary search for poetic voice that could supplant absence, Neobaroque authors cannot escape its historic condition and so it would seem that the literary form arises precisely from a historical absence left by colonialism and expressed in the Cuban national discourse.

In the first part of the Cuban Twentieth Century Machado's government, his escape to Miami, Batista's separate terms in office and the resulting violence, led writers, activists, intellectuals and students to establish political parties often associated with journals. Socialists became involved with *Revista de Avance* (1927-1930) and *Social* (in its four periods 1916-1922, 1923-1928, 1929-1932, 1935-1938). The Grupo Minorista, consolidated behind *La Revista de Avance*[11] and included members such as Martínez, Marinello, Villena, members of *The Protesta de los Trece,* as well as writers Alejo Carpentier and Novas Calvo.[12] Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera would also publish pieces in this journal regarding the black culture on the island. In 1927 the Grupo Minorista manifesto, written by Jorge Mañach, criticized imperialist governments and denounced any professors and intellectuals inactive in the group's struggle against imperialism.[13] In this journal, Mañach created a distinction between "pure poetry" and "social poetry". "Pure poetry" is associated with bourgeois values and,

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[10] In *Motivos de Anteo* (2008), Rafael Rojas discusses how the long history of foreign invasions in the island affected the development of the intellectual. Since the Creole intellectual class developed late and its duration was short in Cuba "se expresa siempre a través de un malestar y una frustración, de un anhelo y una nostalgia: el anhelo de realizarse alguna vez en la historia, y la nostalgia por la edad dorada en que esa realización fue casi un hecho" (46).

[11] *La Revista de Avance* corresponded with similar vanguard journals from including *Amauta* in Peru, *Contemporáneos* in Mexico, *La Pluma* y *Repertorio Americano* in Uruguay.

[12] In March of 1923, Falangists Rubén Martínez Villena, Juan Marinello and 11 other, attended the Machado government's sale of the Convento Capitolio de Santa Clara to a private business, designed to launder money. The young socialists gather to demand honesty in governmental representation before high officials. The event known as "The Protesta de los Trece" marked the start of the Revolutionary movement and its violence. (The Manifesto is published in *Heraldo de Cuba* on March 19, 1923).

[13] The manifesto of the Grupo Minorista appeared signed by all authors in the journal *Social* in June of 1927 (7).

specifically, Juán Ramón Jimenéz and Lezama Lima. Lacking a social practice, this poetry was planted as the form susceptible to be practiced by those not faithful to the Revolution. Despite their initial similarity to *Origines*, different reactions to a similar political environment polarized the two groups' values as the Revolution of 1959 drew closer and Batista took on a second term.

Over the years, and particularly once the Revolution was institutionalized in 1976, the Neobaroque was refashioned as a profoundly Cuban—and Revolutionary—aesthetics. But the death of Lezama emigration of writers and intellectuals from the island meant that the state could never fully redirect its terms.[14] The Neobaroque, in its *derive*, is easily adapted to an expression of exile, which the second chapter of this dissertation explores through viewing Sarduy's novel, *Colibrí* as a sort of architecture—a projection of the self and a haunted house.[15] Severo Sarduy's redirects the state-directed form of the Neobaroque by readdressing a crisis of language and expression and all logic of determination. In doing so, he describes a praxis that will have the effect of explaining, through linguistics, the erasure of

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[14] Once the fervor of the Revolution subsided and state power was secured, socialist rhetoric could not detain the reality of absence in economic and cultural terms. The Zafra de los Diez Millones (1969-1970), an attempt to repay all loans from the Soviet Union in a single year of Sugar production, failed immediately and dug the island deeper into debt. The Mariel Boatlift's emptied even the island's prisoners (1980) and allowed writers known as the Mariel Generation to escape The Soviet Union's Collapse (1990) inaugurated the Special Period (1991), characterized by massive economic loss felt on the quotidian, material level.

[15] Situational theorist Guy Debord defines the derive as "a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances." The need for "derive" is brought about through everyday monotony that dominates in the time of advanced capitalism. The derive differs this experience as it depends on chance Historically as Debord explains, the derive was a military tactic: "a calculated action determined by the absence of a greater locus," and "a maneuver within the enemy's field of vision" (259). This journey is unplanned, beginning at one point and ending in another, but because the aesthetic conditions of geography and architecture cause the individuals to make unconscious but meaningful choices throughout this period. While the term in English is translated as "drift" we are not talking about mere drifting—a nautical world implies aimlessness and lack of control. The derive is unpredictable, but intentional.

an originary presence. He returns the Neobaroque movement to its dialogue with an originary absence. These sites of poetic interest maintained the poetic community that participated in the consistent expression of its own creation, a sort of an unknown story, in which lies some unspeakable, and thus presumably forceful if not endless, secret concerning life and being outside of national governments, contemporary forms of autocracy and the economics of practical semantics.

Reading Spectrality within Neobaroque Novels

In the first chapter of my study, I expand on the critical construction of the Neobaroque through novels and essays that guide a Neobaroque methodology of reading as much as they do seeing. Lezama's *Paradiso*, the Neobaroque masterpiece, par excellence and the center of the Neobaroque revival in the Caribbean, connects the concept of parody—a space outside of a song (what?)and directly beside poetic language—to notion of paradise: something that supposedly existed within worldly space and time but, by all recourses, is fundamentally unreachable because its very nature is to mark the threshold that can be known but never fully accessed or expressed. This chapter situates the relationship between image and textuality in several scenes from the novel in order to draw forth a tertiary space that mobilizes a dialectics.

I argue that Sarduy's essay "The Baroque and Neobaroque" (1972), like the poetics of *Big Bang* (1974), make the Neobaroque aesthetic a sort of edifice that is built between worlds, disciplines, and media, not within national boundaries or strictly defined geographies of reality. Whereas irresolvable tensions between systems of meaning or isolated within a literary realm point to the contextual concerns shared by other authors of this tradition, the essay itself explores an ontological notion of exile inherent to all existence and obviated by

the distance between this knowledge and the means with which it is navigated within the world. Because exile always depends on a loss of the homeland, the uprooting experience leaves its victim with the impossible vision of returning to a place that no longer is and it is this desire, impossible to satiate that sustains a community. National identity no longer necessitates an attachment to space and obviates the construction of a new and more open Cuban imaginary through a language, no longer confined by politics of its geography. In *De donde son los Cantantes* (1967), published in the same year as Gabriel Garcia's Marquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967), figures of the underworld, prostitutes, transvestites inhabit Cuban reality, making it theirs and ridiculizing the notion that Cuba could be anything else except another imaginary illustration, caught between the phantasmal world and the concrete.

In Severo Sarduy's *Colibrí* (1982) a strange, ephemeral being returns from a jungle to the delta of a river in the Latin American continent only to be persecuted by a dictatorial figure, its followers, and eventually, the white-mask-of-death. Colibrí himself moves like a ghost: when he is sought, he disappears, when he is forgotten, he returns and by flight, gravitating and standing still in thin air for instances at a time. In each of these texts, the ghost recalls an absent, perhaps never existent, past whose image is recreated through key linguistic maneuvers in the text. Critical thinkers suggest that this novel belongs to the author's short-lived phase of transition away from Cuba and towards post modernism, French, fragmented and, from my perspective, deeply problematic in terms of assessment. A series of mirrors reflects the protagonist that dances between two mirrors and, as the narrator and reader watch, reveals at the margins of Neobaroque texts such as Lezama's the existence in between histories, continents, and forms of expression.

One year after *Paradiso* appeared, Reinaldo Arenas published in Cuba, the first text, *Celestino antes del alba* (1967), of what he conceived, later, as a *Pentagonia*, defined as a "secret

history of Cuba" in an interview with Francisco De Soto (*Una Conversación*, 82). Unlike *Paradiso*'s nostalgic imagery of Havana, Arenas parodies the autobiographical form as he brings his reader into the dark, and closed-off world, ridden with violence that is supposedly the Province of Oriente during the pre-Revolutionary years. The protagonist is chased by a chorus of dead aunts, his grandfather pursues him with a hatchet, along with his mother; and all remind the boy of childhood traumas that he evades. The protagonist escapes into the forests with the poet Celestino, his perfect other-half, being both an object of affection and a product of his own imagination, part of his own self. The protagonist escapes into the forests with the poet Celestino, his perfect other-half, being both an object of affection and a product of his own imagination, part of his own self.

The Neobaroque was at odds with the literary projects that Socialist Cuba by the 1970s, wanted to disseminate both in the island as well as abroad and the relationships between authors that were once friends or former opponents was completely rearranged or even torn apart. Those involved with the Neobaroque aesthetic were no longer seen as prized national poets, but as progressively having descended from the status of dreamers, to deviants, anti-socials and then on into exile where they continued to struggle without clear social rights, economic advantages, or a strong sense of public approval or readership willing to go to bat for them. Indeed, the exile communities was seen as being comprised of the Cuban elites who left in the first two or three years had no connection if not disdain for a class deemed as criminals, but their anger at the Cuban state was stronger. However, by 1968 scholars agree there was also a middle class professional migration that formed decades before the Mariel exile 1980 were not at all the same in terms of their public and political interests in the island or their experience, nor could these generationally separated groups be compared to those that existed in France, Spain and the rest of the world although the

majority of these communities had left in 1960s like many of the residents of Miami. Even if severed from a unified tradition whether political or poetic, the earlier writers of the New World Baroque laid the ground for a complex political game that extended not only across the transatlantic, but into exile communities that formed after the Cuban Revolution.

Recent Latin American criticism studies the specter divorced from the field of the Neobaroque to underscore discursive constraint in hispanaphone cultural production across the ages and dating back to contemporary Latin American literature's Baroque and Spanish predecessors.[16] Avery Gordon's sociological study, although departing from aesethetic concerns into the field of the material reality, incorporates Latin American and American literature, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008) and considers ghosts a sociological fact of quotidian reality—a reality structured to negate the existence of both ghosts and the secrets they lay bare. Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) avows that post-dictatorial novels coincide in their tropes of fragmentation and divide, rather than resolution, and yet the residue of being

[16] González Echevarría's *Celestina's Brood: Continuities of the Baroque in Spanish and Latin American Literature* (1993) focuses on a troublesome figure that exceeds signification—Fernando de Rojas's dramatic iconic character know as La Celestina and taken from *La Tragicomedia de Calixto y Melibea* (1499). González Echevarría also pays particular attention to the continental conversation between different moments or emergences of a Baroque style as an expression of modernity in Latin America. With modernity, comes a series of questions regarding subjectivity. The baroque displays, time and again, the constitution of the self through language. Since the self *is* language for the Baroque and Neobaroque alike, subjectivity nears erasure under the pressure of the linguistic sign: "there is no hidden residue of being after the linguistic display of baroque poetics" (4). I agree with these precepts, but add that if Celestina, the historically problematic "go between" recurs time and again, it is, in fact possible, that language addresses a concern for a non-being because her position in literature and within the text represents the unsettled accounts active within the past just as much as the present: the play commonly titled *La Celestina* acquires meaning as history recalls her very form, making it clear that her construction conjures a shared historical experience of un-allowed language itself.

is there. From my understanding, it is simply converted into a text and the text into a sort duplication of experience or a psychic structure. Ibdelbar argues that the acceptance of aesthetics, indeed, is representative of the factual state of reality, and this state replaces the dream of resolution and throws its positive valorization into question. Gordon and Avelar along with this dissertation suggest that irresolution and fragmentation should be accepted, not to achieve an end of resolution, but as valuable expressions that open up factual history to possibilities previously eclipsed. Irlemar Chiampi, in *Barroco y Posmodernidad* (2001) is the only scholar that has identified that the rhetoric of the Neobaroque with the ghost explicitly. She states that the Neobaroque presents Latin America as "something unrepresentable, an unspeakable, strange, or sinister ghost or monster" (116). Her use of the term "ghost" results from a discussion of how the Neobaroque casts Latin America as resistant to or outside of traditional epistemological frameworks. *Barroco y Posmodernidad* examines the Latin American re-appropriation of a literary baroque aesthetic as an expression of an alternative Latin American modernity. Chiampi's model makes possible my reading of discursive exile that erases geographically bound knowledge because this work replicates the positioning of Baroque and Modernity in the discussion of Neobaroque and Post-modernity, interchanging the terms to give, rhetorically, Latin America, Europe's former prescriptive role in both examples. Taking a Derridean approach to the baroque, I will explore in the case of Arenas, Sarduy, and Lezama, a technique that simulates tampering with the archive, is the production of a poetics that, like the specter or theories of deconstruction, manifests the productive act of play, of haunting.

In summary, the particular attention paid to a spectral method of reading in this dissertation and also writing as one that insists on bringing to life or animating textuality itself is an angle that poses significant challenges to more orthodox methods of study

precisely by recognizing our approaches to obtaining any information or even forming an opinion, as disjoint, out-of-line and ghostly in themselves. One can speak about the presence of the ghostly in their work and thus speak about the Neobaroque, but one can also speak of these authors themselves as ghosts. To what extent does that Baroque style of these texts allow them to resist the social controls that were prevalent in their day? Can a literary style flee, or be an effective form of flight *vis a vis* a political present, especially when the Baroque is associated with escapism, with the game of obscuring or even having the ultimate signifier totally be absent. They offer an alternative to a notion of site that envisions belonging (as well as all of its customary synonyms) as a matter of poetic creation and readership. Neobaroque aesthetics, I argue, take—it becomes something entirely different (perhaps a point of reference, more than a praxis), a substitute for a sense of culture that is definitely Cuban but that is not tied to empirical knowledge as such. This spectral Neobaroque develops as these authors find themselves exiled; internally within the Cuban penitentiary system or hiding within a country whose government formerly published their works or externally while living abroad in Europe or the United States. After discussing these works I move on to the Cuban involvement with the broader parameters of what in fact is a transatlantic aesthetics (originated in Golden Age Spain, but with more resonance in the New World) as its trajectory leads it into a realm that is unworldly.

From the perspective of the text as palace, the emphasis of an uncanny and ephemeral sorts of interaction (amongtextual elements as much as reader and author) aspects of an abstract literary world, a sort of myopic mirage, functions to unlock the binary ideals and rhetoric particular to Revolutionary Cuba and the critical terrain of Cuban exile. All scholars who engage with the Baroque seek to access the complexities of contemporary

Cuban literature after years of censorship and intervention. Ultimately, this dissertation acknowledges a version and vision of history, literature, and reading that aligns questions of nationalism and exile with intangible, uncanny or "haunting" sensations. The analysis acknowledges areas in which reading and retrospective consideration only possible after the end of these author's lives, align in order to reveal a more open structure of being within their works: an understanding fundamentally uncertain if not defiant of the basic features of being, space and time. At the conclusion of all analyses, the project maintains a simple fact that has not been brought to light but is consistent amongst the Caribbean writers studied. That is, one can speak about the presence of the ghostly in their work and thus speak about the Neobaroque, but one can also speak of author's themselves as ghosts, exiled from life into their writing, writing which, whether forgotten or remembered, recalls a self torn between multiple moments, one place and another, writing wherein words are bound to time then move far beyond it centuries later.

The method of writing that insists on drawing in the margins of textuality—abstract images and settings, narrators that are doppelgangers of their protagonist, stories that intertwine to the point of rendering one anachronic and out of joint--intercedes in frames of historical reality, upsetting a standing narratives or suppositions regarding their contexts and repossessing the site of signification, the language of their story, and the realm of inexpressibility of which they had been previously dispossessed.

Even if severed from a well-defined tradition, contemporary readers confronted with unraveling the complex circumstances of exile, the Cuban Revolution, censorship, and oppression, may locate within Neobaroque authorship the construction of an abstract space

in which the possibility of solidarity with a spectral, coming community capable of uncovering evidence for an alternative history. Looking back over literary history, early examples of the New World Baroque laid the ground for a complex political game of chess that would wind up repeating on the island and then again communities to which the Baroque arrives during the second half of the twentieth century and which I discuss and expand on theoretically in the first half of the first chapter of my dissertation.

Wherever we look, the question of this literary style or mode begets a mine field, a discourse where a reader may be trapped—to give an example—into stating the similarities of condition that produced this genre in two distinctly different historical time period. Or the author could follow the 19th and 20th century trend traced by Nietzche, D'Ors and Wofflin and the authors at hand, whose works generally accepted the Baroque as an art that resurges time ae and again, regardless of context or even of specificity. The Baroque then, transported to many different iterations, seems to be as specific as readers want it to be, or equally as general. Leaving aside the question of nomenclature for the moment what seems to happen in texts by Severo Sarduy, Reinaldo Arenas, and Jose Lezama Lima is a strategic use of a lexicon, a nomenclature, an aesthetic move on to the dissertation, which in turn focuses on texts by Severo Sarduy, and Reinaldo Arenas written within the first two decades of the Cuban Revolution. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to access a version of history, literature, and reading that aligns questions of nationalism and exile with intangible, uncanny or "haunting" sensations. The spectral lens that I have chosen as an approach to the Neobaroque speaks directly to the complexities of contemporary Cuban literature after years of censorship and intervention, but it also acknowledges areas in which reading and retrospection, or even introspection, align in order to reveal a deep structure of being that is

fundamentally unmarked, uncertain, defiant of concerns for space and time. In this form of textual exile, the author locates an open expression or sensation of storytelling that is conditioned by the life experiences of those who hope to hear it.

CHAPTER ONE: Writing Possession into *Paradiso*

Having traversed the territory of a broad intellectual tradition through his body of work and with his personal library as his point of departure, Jose Lezama Lima expanded on a few premises on death and the figure of the poet put forth by the German author of *Being and Nothingness* when stating "Heidegger sostiene que el hombre es un ser para la muerte; todo poeta, sin embargo, crea la resurrection, entona ante la muerte un hurra victorioso." (Heidegger sustains that man is a being onto death; all poets, however, create resurrection, holler before death a victorious hooray"[17]) The insight that poets confront death through creating a form of resurrection is at the center of Lezama's own masterpiece, *Paradiso* (1966), the novel that has been understood as the culmination of Caribbean and contemporary Latin American letters. In first book, "Death of Narcissus" (1937), Jose Lezama Lima already reveals his choice to deal with the subject of death understood as something difficult, tricky, ephemeral and inherent to poetics. Indeed, the very first word in his long poem is "Death". But death is established however through a series of fleeting images of imminent return and through a language. A few years later, *Enemigo rumor* (1941), which encompasses his views on aesthetics and the essence of poetry at this time, spoke to the writer's belief that the act of poetic creation is laden with metaphysical possibilities. After the death of his father, Lezama Lima wrote about the incidents of his youth and his mother's influence on his artistic growth in *Aventuras sigilosas* (1945), events that, like the ideas within *Enemigo rumor*, reappear throughout the winding narrative and dense prose of *Paradiso.* Lezama would go on to become one of the pillars of twentieth century Cuban literature through his work in a number of small magazines that led to the foundation of *Origenes*, the influential literary

[17] From the selection of En dialogo con en diálogo con Tomás Eloy Martínez titled "Tracterus mínimo del asma y otras cosas" published in A Manera de Epigrafe by

journal that published the first excerpts of this novel in 1944. The foundation of this journal made clear the poetic ideology that brought about Caribbean reconfigurations of the 17th Baroque aesthetic. Lezama's work laid the foundation of Neobaroque literature as both became a focal point for writers and intellectuals that were involved with or exorcized from the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

Although in retrospect *Paradiso* clearly marked Lezama as one of the pillars of Twentieth Century Cuban and Latin American literature, this novel was not widely circulated nor understood as something more than a compilation of autobiographic sketches told in an inaccessible and fundamentally problematic form at the moment of its first publication. The novel's free play – its focus on the interiority of the poet rather than his setting – show the attempt to transcend the limitations of a specific place. It weaves together references from ancient myths, eastern religions and intellectual traditions—Roman, Phoenician, Egyptian, Hindi, Grecian, and pre-Colombian thought. Yet it is also a novel that tries both to define and defy what Cuban being is about. It does so, however, without any explicit reflection on Cubanness, and without any direct reference to the predominant factor one might suspect at work in contemporary Cuban identity–the Revolution that came to dominate and define the island and its people in the years following 1959. That is, a poetic praxis is emblematized through a series of spectral figures and occurrences that play up the forces acting upon literature within the context of the book's publication, even as the novel is set within a previous and bygone era, and not the moment in which it was written nor any strict notion of time at all. In spite of the total absence of direct political opinions and allusions to Revolutionary Cuban history, the novel ultimately, offers up an extensive yet intimate portrait of life, thought, and poetry as they were experienced on the island at this time.

Following the story of a young poet similar to the author himself, *Paradiso* also traces around a poetics and a plan that the author laid out decades prior. This plan sought to replace a fraying and problematic sense of national history with a poetically-constructed myth – a poetic theology that could organize a new sensibility and sense of tradition that would organize future intellectual and political thought. In the famous essay *Conversation with Juan Ramón Jiménez* (*Coloquio con Juan Ramón Jiménez,* 1936), Lezama announced his search for a literary form proper to Cuban and Latin American writers, early on in his career. *Coloquio con Juan Ramón Jiménez* is an essay written as an imaginary conversation between the Spanish exile, Juan Ramón Jiménez and Lezama, announced the invention of a plan to "decidir un mito… integrar el mito que nos falta" (*Coloquio*, 11). From an originary lack, a historical, literary and ontological problem, comes the need perceived by Lezama to form a teleology capable of organizing an "insular sensibility".[18] For the writer, only poetry could "supplant the absence of an originary myth" (11) This inquiry into poetics argues for the expression of this insular sensibility in light of an affective condition, that is, in the wake of a past that referred to colonialism, economic dependency, and political corruption, which Lezama refers to later when reflecting on this early period of his writing: "un país frustrado en lo esencial político, puede alcanzar virtudes por otros cotos de mayor realeza" (Orígenes 61).[19] Referring back to E*spuela de Plata*, Lezama found that the formal aesthetic presentation of poetics as essential to disorienting the supposedly existent ruins of a semi-colonial inferiority complex, which he believed to be marked by the lack of a tradition or

[18] Translation mine. original is: "he planteado el problema en su esencia poética, en el reino de la eterna sorpresa, donde, sin ir directamente a tropezarnos con el mito, es posible que este se nos aparezca como sobrante inesperado."

[19] "I have raised the problem in its poetic essence, in the realm of eternal surprise, where, without going directly to us with the myth, it is possible that this is appears us like unexpected surplus." (translation mine)

foundational myth, but the "political frustration" referenced was reflected in the debates that took place within a variety of literary magazines published during the Cuban Republic (1903-1958). Despite this context, Lezama's writing, meanwhile, maintained a closer relationship to the value of writers within the Cuban Republic including Julian de Casal but also the more nationalist and vehemently American, Jose Martí. Lezama's from early journals throughout *Origines* demonstrated a vested interest in the development of a form of expression that could carry complex concerns for identity into the service of a cultured, Latinate poetics. Origines, the longest running literary journal of its kind, was cofounded with Cintio Vitier, who embodies the sort of trials and tribulations that impacted the work of writer (such as Vitier) who were supported by the Cuban Revolution.

Early Reinvention of a Literary Tradition

Cofounded with the literary journal Origenes with Cintio Vitier and the literary critic and editor Rodrigo Feo (1920-1993), the pages *Espuela de plata* and *Origines*, featured poems by Virgilio Piñera, Gaston Baquero, and Cintio Vitier, who have been credited with uncovering "enlaces ocultos" of their historic condition, excavating and eradicating the remains of a semi-colonial inferiority or, in Lezama's own words, as palpable "lack of a foundational myth". The journal circulated works by Fina García Marruz, Elíseo Diego, Lorenzo García Vega, and Virgilio Piñera and translations of poetry by T. S. Eliot, St. John Perse, and Wallace Stevens, along with pieces by visual artists and musicians.

The overarching purpose that joined *Espuela* and *Origines* and these authors was as Lezama explained the production of a poetry that could and would secure a future for the arts itself and, in this way, enrich the orientation of the nation through a process of narrative integration. an aesthetic capable of creating an intervention into the experience of reality.[1]

Returning to the purpose of poetry as understood by the generation of *Espuela de Plata* in an issue of *Origines,* Lezama distinguishes his early design for a prophetic discourse—one that cultivated a tradition, "replacing it" "where it did not exist."

> La poesía, lo que ya se puede llamar con evidencia los poetas de la generación de *Espuela de Plata*, querían hacer tradición, es decir, reemplazándola, donde no existía; querían hacer también profecía para diseñar la gracia y el destino de nuestras próximas ciudades. Querían que la poesía que se elaboraba fuese una seguridad para los venideros. Si no había tradición entre nosotros, lo mejor era que la poesía ocupara ese sitio y así había la posibilidad de que en sucesivo mostráramos un estilo de vida. (*Orígenes* 52)

To complete this work of poetic transfiguration, he consistently referenced the force of the image and even a conceptual edifice or enclosure, that poetry could create.

Accusing the vast majority of modernists and their predecessors for having navigated closed and personal circles, Vitier, who would write the polemical critical introduction to *Paradiso,* found hope in Lezama in exclusion to almost every other writer of his time. Vitier argued that Cuban poetry at the time fell into three fundamental categories: poesía pura, Afro-Cuban poetry, and poetry of social commitment with the latter two fundamentally conflated. In the discourse that he deemed to be "un studio Lírico acerca de las relaciones de la poesia y la patria" he censured the writers that immediately preceded him such as Brull, Florit, and Ballagas claiming that they merely imitated Lorca, Alberti, Jorge Guillen, Salinas, Cernuda, and Aleixandre in Spain, thereby keeping poetics within a personal, closed, confining spheres. For example, Vitier's comments within the canonical anthology of the *Orígenes* group, *Diez Poetas Cubanos* 1937-1947 (1948), explicated the sort of break he saw as necessary for poetry if it were to achieve a form of penetration in the idea of the nation in

the way that Lezama had proposed:

> Y en efecto, a las bellas variaciones en torno a la elegía, la rosa, la estatua (típicas de la generación anterior, y persistentes aun en otros poetas hispanoamericanos) sucede entre nosotros un salto, que diríamos en ocasiones sombrío de voracidad, hacia más dramáticas variaciones en torno a la fábula, el destino, la sustancia; el justo y transparente endecasílabo es abandonado por un verso imperioso e imprevisible; una poesía de deliquio, en fin, da paso a una poesia de penetración. Comprobamos así como el intimismo esteticista [...] se abre a la aventura metafísica o mística, y por lo tanto muchas veces hermética. (*Diez poetas Cubanos*, 7)

His reaction stood against the possibility that also concerned Lezama: that some form of Republican vacuity would make of Cuba a "land without telos, without participation" that is, a country without a destined landscape."

Even with these divisions and the migrations Vitier would make from one range of this binary to another overtime, it was a dispute between José Rodriguez Feo and Lezama Lima, that would lead to its end. And just as how espuela de plata and verbo, or even the more modernist nadie parecia preceded Origines, the end of the journal led to Ciclón, and then to Lunes de Rev. Over the years a number of authors would attempt to redefine the project and reposition it as something in line with state discourse. Not dissimilar in its entirety to other impetuses towards Cuba's expressive identity, the journal became a historical object—a paradoxical point of origin that, while attempting to break away from Spanish Generations it found itself engaged and then cornered into become just that.

The approach, obsessed by the ephemeral and aesthetically influential within his literary circle—inspires a wide variety of response over the next few decades outside of the critiques

offered in his essays. As later spin-offs such as *Lunes de Revolución* (1959-1961) acquired social connotations by the 1960s the pre-existing tensions and literary alliances that began to develop in these early projects, heighten the ongoing reorganization of literature the status of the earlier magazines, seen as precursors. These debates continue after the Revolution when pre-existing tensions and alliances heighten the ongoing reorganization of literature. It was with Origenes that all of the key concepts and themes present in Cuban literature up until the present would be formed as debates on the expression of Cuban identity through poetics continues through the Revolution of 1959. In the words of Cintio Vitier's *Lo cubano en la poesia*, *Origenes* changed everything and nothing was ever the same after this journal had exhausted its course.

Eventually in *Lunes de Revolución* (1959-1961) Despite their initial similarity, different reactions to a similar political environment polarized the two groups' values. In 1927 the Grupo Minorista manifesto, written by Jorge Mañach, criticized imperialist governments and denounced any professors and intellectuals inactive in the group's struggle against imperialism. When concerning literature, Mañach explicitly censured the writers of Origenes and Espuela de Plata that followed some notion of 'pure poetry', which totally opposed his belief in a poetics of social practice. Mañach's spoke most vehemently against Lezama's who he saw as a nihilist too far invested in a "poetic utopia". Mañach's political desire for action meant that writers of pure poetry did not just differ from him artistically, as which might have been a primary concern for those invested in this project; Representations and concerns of a "nihilistic and utopian, roughly reframed as ideological and national disinterest if presented within the social sphere, stilted the political progress of his own group.

Lezama reflects on the group of writers in *Espuela de Plata* in a 1945 issue of *Orígines*. He explains that the purpose of poetry for members of *Espuela de Plata* was the creation of a

tradition that, more correctly put, was "replacing" a tradition, "where it did not exist" and to design a prophetic discourse (their poetry) that could express "the grace and the fate of our future cities." Even here, poetry is caught a temporal divide between what has yet to be and what will become, and this divide, unlike metaphor or symbol, was a historical fact. Indeed, this generation, as Lezama saw it, wanted to produce a poetry to secure what would be to come, not "a poetry of distancing, a state seen by innocence that might reveal the possible supernatural order" but rather something that "prophetically cried out to be converted into an enclosure as secure as tradition", then could be "magnified by the total value of orthodox and *maudit* poets, artisans of omens":

> No era pues la poesía un alejamiento, un estado entrevisto de inocencia que mostrara el orden de lo sobrenatural posible, sino que clamaba proféticamente para ser convertida en un recinto tan seguro como la tradición, aumentada por la suma de ortodoxos y poètes maudits, de heterodoxos y artesanos de buen signo. (*Orígenes*, julio de 1945, p. 52)

Both Lezama and Vitier debated the creation of a Cuban national culture by stepping outside their circumstances and looking towards a logic of transfiguration akin to their catholic fate. Their shared project became associated with bourgeois values as opposed to the value of this ideology, couched in Catholicism, but radically secular if understood from a different and purely literary or philosophical angle. Lezama focused on the capacity of poetry to unfold an open image of expression as opposed to conveying directly a specific (and often political) idea. Only within the field of images could the idea within poetics achieve its intended outcome of dispelling from Cuban identity a sense of something somber or shadowy as Lezama implied in 1952 when evaluating the achievements of Origines. "La

adquisición fundamental de Orígenes" was precisely "el concepto del Imago como una fuerza tan creadora como la semilla" (the concept of the image as a force as creative as the seed) (*Imagen* 71). He goes on, to compare this image operating in history and rendered with such a "creative force" to not just that of the seed but "semen" within the domain of its "resurgence", "the child." "La imagen operante en la historia, con tal fuerza creadora como el semen en los dominios del resurgimiento de la criatura" (ctdo. en *Imagen*, 71). Whether taken as a mere fact or from a theological perspective in 1952, by the time the journal closes a series of divisions between Lezama and his disciples leaves his fellow cofounder to assess this same project, from a totally different angle.

Vitier suggests that the journal contribution was far less spiritual in its reality and, from his perspective, more closely linked to national concerns, suggesting "un rescate de la nacion a traves de la poesia" (rescue of the nation through poetry) as the intention of the journal and not some "utopian dream" that would have detracted from the political spirit and reality behind the revolution. This difference in perspective amongst the two founders, even as Vitier's poetry became more and more cohesive with Lezama's by the close of Origines in 1955, lays the grounds for explaining a series of division that precede and last long after the Revolution of 1959:

> A Origenes es algo más que una generación literaria o artística, es un estado organizado frente al tiempo. [...] Será siempre, o intentará serlo en forma que por lo menos sus deseos sean a la postre sus realizaciones, un estado de concurrencia [subrayado de J.L.L.: los demás son de R. F. R.], liberado de esa dependencia cronológica que parece ser el marchamo de lo generacional. [...]. De esa manera colaboran en Origenes, el hombre joven de veinte años, que comienza a intuir la alegría de su expresión, o [...] (George Santayana in

> Orígenes, núm. 31, 1952, págs. 64-65).
>
> *Origines* is something more than a literary or artistic generation, it is a state organized in the face of/before time. It will always be or it will try to be this in form insofar as [the] desires [of the group/works] will continue to be the 'desert' (final course) of their work, a state of concurance. In this way, the young man of 20 years will begin to understand the happiness of his expression (*Orígenes* 68).

Although Vitier and Retamar read Lezama as messianic who had foreseen the 1953 Moneada barracks attacks that would lead to the events of 1959, Retemar (1994) where he would be rejected for the cultural and ontological nature by his critics, they aspired political meaning to his words in the 1950s and 1960s. Vitier responded to what Lezama had already viewed as a disintegration of the Cuban national framework by openly upbraiding the "stale", closed minded, and overtly personal generation of the 1940s that immediately preceded the creation of their project and which he describes at length in "Lo cubano en la poesía," a series of lectures delivered at the Lyceum in Havana from October 9 to December 13, 1957, which has influenced the historical understanding of *Orígenes* and led into a series of reactions against the journal and its writers after the Revolution of 1959.

By the 1950s, Anton Arrufat call out Vitier "As a professional man of letters" that "should have evaluated his own productions more severely" and, specifically, his collection of poetry titled "Canto llano" (1956) which included poems that, "perhaps", deserved to be "written, but never published" (May 1956). He finds *Ciclón* (1955-57), a spin-off and variety of Origines that marked the latter's closure, too negative and, as X would claim, nihilistic. Yet, it is Vitier who, in Lo Cubana en la Poesía, repudiates the poetry of Mañach and fellow authors for being "banal, ineffective, and futile": "all method and system, "artificial poetry

filled with scandalous contradiction." Vitier, disagreeing early on, re-evaluates Origines in a summarily different way than Lezama would. What Vitier once described his own *Lo Cubana en la Poesía* as "un rescate de la Nacion, a traves de la poesia" had, in fact, been a shadow of his experience of poetic communion, which he, by implication, devalues through distinguishing his larger purpose by situation this as something simple, passing and personal—a state indicative of his spirit and resources at that place in time: "una sombra o huyella de lo que fue el curso, experience para mí involidable, que aveces rayo en eso tan raro y dificil que podemos llamar una comunia poetica" (Obras completas, 1: xxv). It is clear however, that the writings undertaken in the journal were as much about creating a new historical direction, and guiding it, as opposed to following history or anything that had been said in the past. Vitier, following this line of thought, clearly revises the thesis of the *Origines* group's purpose as a whole in order to resolve potential complications evoked by the journal or associated with its presumed ideas; He states that their poetry was confining and that it lacked a sense of impulse as it were pure imitation. Vitier explains that the apparent lack of political commitment revealed a prescient instinct at a time when no other options were available, nor capable of responding to the real needs of the country (Obras completas, 1: xxvii - Vitier's emphasis).

The Orienting Image for *Paradiso*

When a series of five essays is published as the single, project of *La expresión americana* (1957), Lezama broadens and explains his interest in the Baroque by framing it as the original and originary style of the Americas distinguishing the course that his writing would take in the next decade. Even though this series of essays was written during the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959), it cannot truly be separated from German

philosophers who were the first to revive the Baroque within the context larger bodies of work on myth, national identity, romanticism, and expression. Throughout *La Expresión americana,* Lezama swerves out of historical readings and opts for a different kind of aesthetic account. Since he is not dealing strictly speaking with American literature, nor with American art, but rather with American "expression," he does not offer a historical account of the Baroque, nor does he give us a literary history of American novels, poems, or essays. From the first essay in this important collection, *La expresión americana* posits how figures such as 'el señor barroco' or 'el romántico', lord and master of a literary realm and sensibility, became mythical, forging an American historical identity to rival the European. In this book of essays, Lezama elaborates on the process by which history enters the collective consciousness, examining how history is a shared memory, and that memory is creative insofar as it is oriented towards an image and a myth. What he is after is a notion of American "discourse" that is on the one hand rooted in history, but understands the limitations of history as a source for "truth." The strangeness of *La expresión americana* is found precisely at the moment in which the Baroque as style, as aesthetics, and even as "worldview" ceases to be delimited historically, but rather, by having recourse to what Lezama calls "imaginary eras," an idea that he develops further in a later book, but is ultimately resistant to critical exegesis. Lezama speaks of a cultural absence that is then what produces the creation of an image. For Lezama, "imaginary eras," are those where "imago" (image) gives order and illustrates a historic structure (39).

The historic image presents itself as an entity of meaning open to interpretation, a force that consolidates a heterogeneous community, such as Latin America, and especially Cuba. Thus, Lezama suggests that, if America was discovered during what is normally in Europe understood as the "Renaissance," it was in the Baroque that America understood

itself as the fusion of disparate cultures, and traditions, all of which are amalgamated onto what seems like the formlessness of Baroque aesthetics, as the desire for incorporation crams from and more figures, adornments and such into an ever closer and more densely populated space—an idea relevant to Nietzsche's writing on the Baroque and Heideggerian concerns for nationality, and to the sense of temporality and variety of perspectives within *Paradiso*.

The novel opens with a description of an October night at twelve o'clock with Cemí gasping for air as a result of his asthma and suffering from an allergic rash causing welts all over his body. Baldovina, his nanny and nurse, attends to him at his bedside. Opening in the middle of this dramatic scene wherein details reveal the sickly state of the young boy in comparison to his stately father, the novel starts off as a bildungsroman. The reality of Havana, told from a particular perspective and traced by a semi-omniscient narrator, moves into the surrounding environment of the boy, his family home, and then begins to unwind, delving as it does into a more ancestral inheritance.

Cemí's inheritance depends on the Cuban national economic paradigm of tobacco and sugar, which Ortiz made famous in the early 20th century with his canonical book, Tobacco and Sugar that the revolution would latch onto as it explored Cuba's distinct identity. Other coincidences were perhaps never explored in their relation directly, but come together in the figure of young Cemí. For example, Jose Eugenio Cemí, meets Cemí's mother, Rialta Olaya through Cemí's uncle, who appears in Chapter four and reappears and the figure of the uncle, Alberto, becomes important in later chapters that act against the structure of direct generational inheritance that these first chapters set-up only to reorganize with the death of the Coronel Cemí, the protagonist's father, by chapter IV. Other asides in these first chapter titter on a theme of being orphaned both economically and through

deaths in the family.

Chapters three and four draw out the various branches of the Cemi's family, from aspects of his great grandparents lives through that of his aunts, uncles, and parents from their childhood until the marriage of the latter and beginning with the maternal side of his family. Generational structure is cut across by profound atemporality; dreamlike memories, premonitions, literary distractions, and shifts in perspective. Characters fade on and off, the objects and ideas within their experience follow currents of symbolism, and their largely asymmetrical stories that are never clearly parallels overlap, occasionally touch, but their intersection are left implicit and cloudy. Spaces like the characters move on and off the page as the narrative lens shifts with long digressions, character details, and comparisons weaved throughout these.

It is thus the prehistory of Cemí's family that takes over the first few chapters. Although the details of this storyline will feed into the protagonist's development as a poet, sudden tangents and detailed descriptions dealing with curious figures outside of the family and spaces beyond Cuba depart from this world of ancestral inheritance, tipping upon the air of mystery or supernatural misfortune that also surround Baldovinia and the initial scene It is by no surprise, then, that in Cintio Vitier's introduction to his critical edition of *Paradiso* he affirms that Lezama Lima considered his novel "outside of time," thereby labeling the novel as something to be grappled with from a perspective not yet had but also situating it in this way for its problematic and promising nature and thus remove himself from any totalistic beliefs. He opts to reference Lezama's own words, claiming that even the author himself described the contemporary literature as "impregnated by this terrible concept of temporality." (xvi-xvii). Indeed, many of the reactions to Lezama's novel were inconclusive at best. But before broaching those concerns, it is useful to outline Lezama's own

understanding of the novel and his experience writing it.

Critics have suggested that the text is organized around the young protagonist's life and around the life of the protagonist, a writer. While this is true, Lezama also states just the opposite. That the creation of the novel becomes clearer through one's arrival at the final image that materializes out of it. The particular force of the image of the novel clarifies to the writer what he has been able to do over the course of his life, so that he may finally approximate the center of his own text, a center which is a form of paradise.

> Para llegar a mi novela hubo necesidad de escribir mis ensayos y de escribir mis poemas. Yo dije varias veces que cuando me sentía claro escribía prosa y cuando me sentía oscuro escribía poesía. Es decir, mi trabajo oscuro es la poesía y mi trabajo de evidencia, buscando lo cenital, lo más meridiano que podía configurar en mis ensayos, tiene como consecuencia la perspectiva de *Paradiso*. (X)

Lezama claims that essays and poems, not years and experiences, were pretexts that needed to happen in order to arrive at the redaction of his novel. Rather than describe the time of writing, Lezama describes the mood of this time and the result it had on *Paradiso.* He goes on to explain that a conversation exists across his works, one that lead him daily to his own mood, discovered through writing his poetry or prose.

> Mi obra de poesía y ensayo, mi conversación de todos los días, se esclarece en parte en esa obra (...) Usando de maneras expresivas que me son muy queridas, yo diría que la metáfora de mi poesía, de mis ensayos, de mi conversación, avanza hacia la imagen de *Paradiso* […] Para un escritor que ya ha cumplido sus días y sus ejercicios, el centro del paraíso es la novela: ella ordena el caos, ella lo tiende bajo nuestras manos para que podamos

acariciarlo. (16)

From this perspective, the image of the novel organizes the writer's life and not vice versa. If we consider that Lezama describes his life as a writer as a conversation amongst all his works, the poetry which he wrote when feeling "dark or unclear" and the prose he composed when feeling the opposite, the novel pulls together the days as much as the moods and modes that comprised his body of work.

The temporal circularity that informs Lezama's sense of textual creation add to Vitier's claim that divorces *Paradiso* from chronological time, and, allows room to understand Lezama's own opinion that contemporary literature is impregnated by temporality. The notion that literature follows a sequence of events, necessarily organized across a timeline is not how Lezama experiences writing or temporality. Other works, essays and poems, are the only sequence or steps that resulted in body of work that looks inwards towards the self and simultaneously at the larger conversation amongst a collection of works that make the writer who he is. Thus, even if understood as a semi-autobiographical work or a bildungsroman, *Paradiso* is built across a web of temporalities, each pregnant with their own reiteration of experience.

The novel and, from Lezama's perspective, the sort of writing that produces an image before its writer, is something comparable to a dialectics that pushes the author towards critical reflection if not transcendence, but both Vitier and Lezama underscore the sense of impulse not present in a Hegelian model: hypertelity. *Paradiso*'s form of temporality, Vitier once avowed, "audaciously confronts hypertelity". The hypertelic, according to him connotes "immortality or resurrection, and, in the teleological sense, also part of collective

history" (xxviii).[20] Hypertelic literary forms, then, also might describe the temporal workings of one might deduce that the apparent desire to escape, or at least to confront novelistic temporality, also resists those literary forms that adhere to a particular genre.

To exemplify this claim, in the absence of the Colonel Jose Cemi and his wife Rialta, Baldovinia speaks with two other servants about the boy's fragile state, moving back a mosquito net to care for his ailments and pouring all her energy into his recovery. From the candle quarter of colonial style Spanish estate on nothing other than a dark and stormy night, *Paradiso* begins as a history of a family that coincides with Cuba's own. However, it is the air of mystery, the trope of sickness, and the sense that key characters are somewhere between life and death and the image and affect that results from overlapping timeframes and a complex set of characters and their stories that truly guide the structure of the text.

The again, when chapter three branches off from the story of Cemí and covers Rialta Olaya's infancy when her mother, Augusta Alate, her father, Andres Olaya's, and her siblings Leticia, Carmen, Andresito, and Alberto are living in Jacksonville, having relocated temporarily in 1894. Also present is Doña Mela, a strong supporter of the independence movement having lived in the years of these movements (46, 16). With the predominate figure of Augusta, the beliefs of her grandmother, Mela, and the legend of her mother Doña Carmen Alate, who reportedly served in the Audience de Puerto Rico, all present, the chapter strings together a matriarchal underpinning to the family.

Extending on this idea, Rialta's father, Andres Olaya, is described as having

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[20] To be more specific, Vitier furthers this thought by referring to one of he and Lezama's contemporaries: Fina Garcia Marruz ha llamado "la imagen que no regresa" patente desde tejido e impulse de su escritura: hipertelia que no lo es solo de la inmortalidad o de la resurreccion, en el sentido teologico, sino tambien de la historia colectiva. No en vano, en profecia historica que escribio en 1953, Lezama se llamo a si mismo "el dialextico frenetico que gime por una ausencia de telos (xxviii).

orphaned at a young age by his father, the fact that the children's father, Don Andres is raised by his mother and not his father precedes the untimely death of Andresito and the misfortune of the Andrews. Later in the novel, Alberto premature death in a car accident leaves Cemí as the only male descendent on this side of his family. The pivotal moment in chapter VII, when the Cemí's father die continues to emphasize the idea of a default matriarchal order to their family. Before these later tragic events and in spite of the patriotism denoted by the stories the hearer and the verses of Mela, a sense of misfortune surround the family history during these years of the republic and the presidency of Tomas Estrada Palma which pulls the chapter out of any political reading and indicates that Cemi's prehistory cannot be read for the purpose of national history or politics at all. Instead, a number of secondary figures along with Andresito's death draws attention to a variety of religious references. In fact, each of the characters in the text provide to the novel, through their personal and often winding story, a sense of premonition otherwise unwarranted by the story line. And, true to this fact, within this same chapter we find Frederick Squabs wife, Florita, a pesky neighbor argues about Protestantism as compared to Catholicism just before Andresito dies in the church. Suddenly, Rialta's sister's Leticia and Carmen began spreading rumors about him smoking when Andrés claims to be practicing guitar. To top off this web of familial actions that seem to point to an air of hex lied upon the family, Alberto tells a joke about the organist all the siblings laugh at just before Andresito dies, hanging from a rafter and before this very man. Alberto, who will later be exiled, becomes a scapegoat or at least a black sheep, having survived his brother. Whereas Cemi is not present in this chapter the same signs that appear in rotation, incongruous and in no way possible to interpret as autonomous symbols, points towards a web of relationship that are strange, upsetting and effective, but totally indeterminate and uncertain. They do, on the other hand recall the

mood overarching the first chapter. The text marches forward but retrospection as must as a family order of any inheritance pints together events that, without reading the text forwards and backwards simultaneously, would be of little consequence.

From Anti-Collective to Anti Novel

Whereas the collective history unleashed by a novel depends on the internalization or understanding of the image of the novel and a will to align oneself with this and adapt it (as *La expression Americana* indicates), the impulse of the novel is not towards an end goal, but towards the transcendent or even dialectical orientation within the hypertelic object form its own set, a sort of faith in what will be revealed. Hypertelic texts lend themselves to a collective history precisely because it makes no attempt to align itself with a certain history or end, and in this way, hypertelity also confronts novelistic temporality based on a narrative sequence of chapters, events or other literary units. Repeating Lezama's own words, Vitier cites another reflection on the interaction between time and the novel.

> es isolorio que el autor de una obra sea el que major puede penetrar sus secretos. Mientras la obra esta en el horno el creador dicta y recibe un dictado despues que la obra esta hecha solo podra ejecitar sus dones en form aigual a cualquiera que se cerque a su obra. (xxvi-xxvii)

Whereas the novelist must discover the novel and the secrets it holds through its reflective image, the reader receives the creation without this process, reflects onto it, and then onto the novelist, who is another reader himself, but singular amongst the readership body.

Meanwhile, as critics have interpreted on Lezama's abrupt and seemingly arbitrary changes of place, long digressions, or chapters divisions as a disregard for narrative and novelistic coherence. Julio Ramón Ribeyro, editor of the first Peruvian edition, was

conclusive about whether or not the book was a novel at all because of its structure, style, and by implication, its time: *Paradiso* is not really a novel (...) It is located in this area of heterodox, anarchic, arbitrary books, nourished by a rich autobiographical substance. (26) Una obra así no se lee; se la consulta, se avanza por ella línea a línea, jugo a jugo, en una participación intellectual y sensible. (25) *Paradiso* is the true antinovel, since, apart from transforming every event into structure, every anecdote in ritual and myth breaks systematically with all kinds of rational coherence, both at the level of the narrator's strategy, anecdote, characters, as of the total reality of the world it presents. Even at the level of the narrative thread (only part where the laws of continuity cannot be dispensed with), it falls into frequent contradictions and inconsistencies (29). Cortázar writes

> "Es una novela *Paradiso*? Sí, en cuanto hay un hilo semiconductor -la vida de José Cemí- al que van o del que salen los múltiples episodios y relatos conexos o inconexos (...) *Paradiso* podría no ser una novela, se aparta del concepto usual de novela. Es una ceremonia, algo que preexiste a toda lectura con fines y modos literarios (…) (12)

The language and grammar, in the lack of a unifying thread, in the segments of text and their organization and in the fact that the book has no apparent predecessor, but does underscore a fundamental image, a coming to form in which reader, writer, and protagonist alike are positioned within a 'paradise' that takes the form of a palace, wherein narrator performs a series of acts of possession. Between santos, witchcraft, smoke and muffled musical scales, a choked environment piled high with mythical, typical, archaic, exotic, philosophical and even mathematical elements woven together over some six hundred pages, possess the reader as the narrator moves in and out of unwinding spaces and stories endowed with what Cemí and narrator recognize as a sort of animism, which, in the final interpretive moment, ends up

allegorizing writing as a process.

The fourth chapter shifts into the paternal side of his family. They have earned their wealth from sugar plantations on the island in Vuelta Abajo, and seemingly departed the island during a turbulent period when many sugar owning Spanish and Cuban families were subject to the restructuring of the economy on the island during the nations move to independence. The fourth chapter shifts into the paternal side of his family, the Cemí's, detailing the Basque and English blood lines of the soon-to-be Cornel, Jose Eugenio Cemí. Cemi's great grandmother implies, the source as well as the gradual decline in their family's wealth, having moved from the sugar industry into that of tobacco by chapter IV.

Introducing the Doña Munda grandmother and family history of Cemí, and his three sisters, who are orphaned very young and in charge of Grandmother Munda. At the trunk of the Cemí family is El Vasco, owner of a Resolución, a plantation in the center of the island who marries a woman of English inheritance and from Pinar del Rio, the other economic base of the colonial economy. Thus, the family of the mother of Vuelta Abajo, the world of snuff, the father's family in the world of the tabacco, but it is the Basque who, according to Munda and her son Luis, reportedly led the family to ruin and who raises Jose Eugenio, as the Basque descends into a state of depression and dejection shortly after his young bride passes away. The story of Jose Eugenio Cemi, father of Jose Cemi, compares to that of Andres Olaya, but this fact is buried or at least not brought out directly as the connection Jose Eugenio has to the Olaya is not made directly in a way that clarifies the series of relationship, but after Alberto, who—having impressed the Jose Eugenio in school one day, establishes a friendship that eventually leads him through Rialta. Here, we might not that their first encounter is also not direct. The boys attend a party uninvited and, before any introduction, Jose Eugenio first meets Rialta when she is concealed behind Persian blinds in

Chapter 4.

The family trunk of a national combinatorial Cemí: the family of the mother of Vuelta Abajo, the world of snuff, the father's family in the world of the plant. In this case, it is the stubbornness of the Basque, the father of Jose Eugenio (the grandfather of José Cemi) who reportedly started taking family ruin the maternal family of snuff into sugar. See turn the sudden transfer of the history of the family to the school scene the ruin of the father's side of the family, as Cemi's great grandmother implies, is deciding to move their family's business from sugar into tobacco. The prehistory of the young poet begins to set up a serious of coincidences between his father and mother. The first of these coincidences is that Cemí's inheritance depends on the Cuban national economic paradigm.

Paradiso takes a sudden shift, at this point, to the history of Luba, and from there to the story of Colonel in Kingston in 1917, and from there to the story of Colonel in Taxco, winding a weaving all the way to a sudden stop: the intuition of the death of Colonel. appears toward the end of the long paragraph starting with "The soldiers went very quick ...." In relation to Mamita and Colonel. In this chapter, we add the first writing this intuition of death, a series of changes in terms of setting, and the virtual disappearance of Cemí from this space until the following chapter, when we return to Havana.

Retroactively, there are many narrative fugue lines that underline a theme of narrative dispersion drawn into the prehistory of the poet. Compared in retrospect, the novel opens with a description of an October night at twelve o'clock when Cemí is suffering an asthma attack and his nurse Baldovina attends to him at his bedside. As Rialta's side of the family sits at the dinner table the topic at hand becomes "the arrogance of Spanish cuisine and voluptuousness of Cuba, which seems Spanish but rebels in 1868" The discussion between the Spanish and Cuban fruits becomes the evidence that sets up the central idea of class

structure within Cuba families of this period which is, secondarily, defined by the tangential reference to a date in the paragraph before.

Throughout this prehistory of the protagonist, the narration centers around cultural and literary custom common to the late 19th century, when the Spanish influence on the island, of the sugar aristocracy, and the pre-republican era of independence was the main topic within the literature of the island. By the second chapter the narrative lens takes the reader out on to the city and street scenes typical of this same period, and of the frequently painted and depicted Cuban Solar of Havana. In this period Cuban national development in a juridical sense was linked to literary style, and those writers that took on questions of literature and Cuba's national identity also depicted these same streets. In the novel, this tour of a former era, of the familial structure at the heart of the novel, and the streets of the city, which will also remain a constant focus within the text, come together in a curious detail capable of being overlooked.

As the family members sit around the dinner table, the topic at hand becomes "the arrogance of Spanish cuisine and voluptuousness of Cuba, which seems Spanish but rebels in 1868." The discussion between the Spanish and Cuban fruits becomes the evidence that sets up the central idea of class structure within Cuba families of this period which is, secondarily, defined by the tangential reference to a date in the paragraph before. The organization of the family nucleus is offered over the course of several chapters and at the start of paragraphs and the center of the dinner table, but the impetus to narration detracts from any solid sense of order, which unravels by means of a serious of details and narrative asides offered in fully colored details of fruits or even the welts on the body of the narrator, that disappear as the narration turns again, away from the families and into the streets of society. Indeed, both of these families as archetypical as they may be for their day, are

alternative, the sugar owning Olayas, living in Jacksonville with the Cemí's economic diversification leading into ruin, foreshadowed by the matriarchal voice the condemns the decisions made by the Basque paternal figure.

Paradiso is not a chronologically ordered novel in the sense that there is not a linear story told from start to finish. And yet, there is a strong sense of family and nation around which the first third of the text is arranged until is devolution, that is not a total upheaval of these structures but, rather, a complex and poetic reworking that acts retroactively on the spaces and scenes from which the text sets out. Spaces like the characters move on and off the page, and the sense of perception itself develops alongside of the story of the protagonist as a poet. Characters fade on and off, their experiences occur in isolation and yet overlap loosely or by comparison, often in tragic ways that undermine the relative importance of such divisions and isolations as an affective current is a constant of the text.

The Future of the Writer

In chapter XI, Cemí receives a poem from Fronesis, that is, nothing other than a portrait of himself. As Fronses' poem symbolizes Cemí, poetry appears within Cemí's thoughts. Contemplating this gift, Cemí suggests that making a poem is as mysterious as one is to his own self. (335) One might infer from this that Cemí embodies poetic creation. The process of poetic creation will be essential to our understanding of *Paradiso* as a palace in which characters converge, conversations flow into one another, and acts of poetic possession occur. In a totally distinct scene from the first pages of the novel, a drop of wax that falls from the candle that she is holding is a parallel semantic figure of the welts that have formed on the protagonist's body. These same figures that point to the idea of a ripple in the text also bear some resemblance to a drop of cream or custards that becomes the focal

point of a costumbrista or realist dinner scene a few chapters later. Writing becomes a ghostly process in the next section of the novel, an almost self-propelling fate that possesses the perspective of the protagonist and, by default the reader, if not the physicality of the boy himself. Cemi is emancipated from determinacy. In Heideggerian terms, boredom is the suspension of forces that determine subjective action as he becomes a writer.

Chapter nine begins with a scene of students organized against a cavalry of soldiers. If anything, boredom and not politics, motivates this scene. But boredom is introduced with a touch of irony: "Arranging cards, changes in schedules, lists of wrong names, last minute switches of classrooms for popular teachers," a throng of errors, miscalculations, changes, and rearrangements that would seem to imply a break or redemption from the quotidian rituals that pattern the day, are only part of the "minutiae" that torment the bureaucracy."

At the same time, the movements of the students are patterned around an analogous return of the same. They willfully enter Upsalon through the staircase because they prefer the test of "reunions, greetings, and memories." The author likens it to a furnace where what is burned is the contingency of "adolescent indecision," which is transformed into purposive relationships of friendship, love, "boredom and emptiness." Maturity involves a both a break from indecision and a mutual comporting oneself to the return of the same. But the cyclical and lifeless pattern is broken by the "presence" of Cemi. Cemi is placed in direct contrast or incongruity with the rest of the school. He is walking "without predisposition and.... without direction." He cannot conquer his "indecision," so, instead, he gets dressed and goes to the library to wait for someone to start chatting. But he is motivated less by the content of the chatter than by its mere duration: "The dialogue gets nowhere, but the day has been overcome." The other students are accorded such a determinacy: they "leap" to a professor so that they could ask him "banal questions," unaware that such acts "earns them an enmity

or remark that would make them blush if they overheard" it. Here subjective action corresponds to the de-subjectification of the students. That they are so quickly prompted by the sight of the professor, means that they are blind to the fact that their very actions subvert the intended outcome. Rather, he occupies a Stoic position relative to the other students. He listens to their conversations and watches their actions, but he is not involved in the actual performance. Boredom and indecision are phenomena through which Cemi breaks the endless cycle of the return of the same. It can even be said that his being is asserted through boredom and indecision, that his "will to boredom" breaks the cycle of ritual and fate that order the movements within Upsalon.

The daily routine of Upsalon is broken by a standoff between students and soldiers. But there is something mischievous, almost sardonic about this scene; hyperbole is bedizened upon banality. The students are led by an "Apolline" figure, organized against soldiers wearing "Carmelite capes" .... like "shells of cockroaches." The Apolline figure alone (along with the author, or Cemi) is fully attuned to the situation, to "light vibrations, malevolent changes in the breeze." When he sees the spurs dig into the horses' sides, he shouts the order for the counterattack: "death for the tyrants, death too for the rat-faced slaves of Babylon." What should have been a slaughter, is instead a parodic and mostly bloodless dance between incompetent soldiers on one hand and students armed with rocks and chants on the other. The battle plays out more as a tension of forces than as an act of individual agencies.

The students gather in "islets... as if by previous assignment" (243). The cavalry appears as a unitary mass undulates through coalescence and dispersion, where dispersion "weakens the cavalry." The author frames the action through invisible forces. A bugle "appears," following a "vibration" that "releases machetes." The spurs "jabbed to force a

gallop." The lard that "cared for the gilding of the crullers turned over on top of the eyes of the hooded one." A door "flies open" and knocks over a canary cage that spills the "urine of contempt" on the face of a soldier, the permutation of the canary's rage of being locked in a cage. The morning sings "to deafen the horsemen."

Everything is endowed with its own purpose and life-force. At the very moment in which the narrative provides a possible break from the perpetual return of the same, a clearing in which subjects can reveal themselves as such, the author immediately closes them off within a ring of determinate forces. Even desire has its own will, and it moves like a specter between objects and people, and rather than ever really fading away, it lurks in the "subconscious like an invisible star that will re-ignite later in the soldier, in the student, in the one to kill, in the other to let himself be killed."

Salgado's explanation of the relationship between poetry and the novel. "Poetry and the novel are variables of the same equation as one genre "emanates" from the other, just as the spectral transcendental essence of poetry-what Lezama calls lo invisible (the invisible)—requires a brief materialization in the poem, the full complexity of aesthetic experience requires yet another incarnation, the bildungsroman…As poetry becomes a system in Lezama and a metaphor begins to generate other metaphors in a network binding the imago, it tends towards narrative supra-or para-poetic forms (anecdotes, plots, fables) which Lezama associates with the *sobreabundancia* [overabundance] of the novel." (51) Salgado continues:

> The story of the dawning of poetry on the poet is thus a narrative paradox which only the novel as form can convey: the initiation into an alternative form of cognition that, ironically "has always been there"; a process that seems incremental since it takes a lifetime of maturation but arrives suddenly

in the shape of a revelation. (51)

Again, Cemí's poetry forms an allegory of the narrator's creation of the text. The proliferation of meaning, which stems from the orthographical error, extends to allegorize that which exists beyond *Paradiso*: the Neobaroque. If Cemí's position within the text moves the reader towards the possible existence of a ghostly presence beyond the space directly described, then the narrator may extend the allegorical form and point towards a space beyond his text. Although assuming the existence of that which is beyond the text would appear a logical fallacy, the proliferation of meanings relates to a frantic search for that which is missing, moving, or motivating these objects to be described in such a light.

This search and the continual displacement of meaning has proven to replace a central narrative or meaning and, does so, by requiring the reader to acknowledge absence—to look beyond the text and with faith. Although a faith in a space beyond the text suggests that the poetic object will always remain unattainable, once one realize this fact, *Paradiso* no longer appear marked by morning and grimace, in no longer appears as a literature in search of its proper place of being. By refusing to exhaust its act of signification, *Paradiso* is constantly displaced into the utopian space of paradise. But Utopia under Lezama's definition, is impossible because it brings together of the imprint left upon the subject by a material world and the spatiality of language

Cemí describes the poetic exercise as a verbal search without a definite end. In an almost hypertelic fashion, objects appear before Cemí. He realizes how to animate these and perceive of their relation. This vision allows him to access words, yet these words, even if he is able to articulate them, seem invisible or liberated from an ordinary vision of the world (in which the poetic quality of objects and words are separated). The object, which formerly

could not be seen as animate or in relation to other object, presents its relation to objects and from this, poetry is born. The narrator expresses Cemí's poetic ambivalence:

> Así fue adquiriendo la ambivalencia entre el espacio gnóstico, el que expresa, el que conoce, el que de la diferencia de densidad que se contrae para parir, y la cantidad, que en unidad de tiempo reaviva la Mirada, el carácter sagrado de lo que en un instante pasa de la visión que ondula a la mira que se fija. Espacio gnóstico, árbol, hombre, ciudad (agrupamiento espaciales) (351).

The relationship between objects indicates an ambivalence that does not privilege one object over another. Ambivalence then denotes transcendence of the ordinary world in which the interconnectedness of objects appears greater than the object itself. The list of objects that follows the description stresses the importance of spatial relationships. Cemí's poetic gift is not merely linguistic, but spatial. In a sense, he possesses the gift of connecting contrapuntal objects. To expand on the significance poetic creation, I will now consider counterpoint as a theoretical concept that underscores Cemí's poetry as well has his position within the novelistic structure.

The subtle rhythm of breath, as a single example, exemplifies one way in which writing moves beyond the symbolism and metaphors marked, in this case, by patterns of long parenthesis, sentences spices, and unexpected commas, and actually ends up connecting a condition the author suffered, his poetics, and the protagonist and narrator, as point critics have made clear. The breathlessness of the written text, of course, also implicates a very real intervention made on the world of the reader, easily relatable to the tricks and tropes of earlier Baroque. Hundreds of years later and more savvy to such techniques, this chapter attempts to recuperate the interactive and even theatrical elements of the novel that make it possible to speak of not just a conceptual palace, but the very real and even physically

perceivable acts of possession. These aesthetics that churn-up perspectives and philosophies out of extremely experimental techniques that exist at the margins of text.

From Possession to Prophecies

In chapter IX, Cemí returns to a palace that he once visited with his father and a group of students. Here, he first becomes aware of the absence of his father's hand (228). He returns home, uneasy and stunned and encounters his mother, Rialta, who begins to speak with him about his father's death:

> La muerte de tu padre, pudo atondarme y destruirme, en el sentido de que me quedé sin repuesta para el resto de mi vida, pero yo sabía que no me enfermaría, porque siempre conocí que un hecho de esa totalidad engendraría un oscuro que tendría que ser aclarado en la transfiguración que exhala la costumbre de intentar lo mas difícil….Algunos impostores pensarán que yo nunca dije estas palabras, que tu las has invencionado, pero cuando tú des la repuesta por el tesimonio, tú y yo sabremos que sí las dije y que las dire mientras viva y que tu seguirás dicendo depués de que me haya muerto. (231)
>
> The death of your father, could come and destroy me, in the sense that I remained unanswered for the rest of my life, but I knew that I would not get sick, because I always knew that a fact of that totality would engender a dark that would have to be clarified in the transfiguration that exhales the habit of trying the most difficult .... Some impostors will think that I never said these words, that you have invented them, but when you give the answer by the tesimonio, you and I will know that yes the I said and I will tell them while I

live and that you will continue to tell me after I die. (231)

Rialta's voice appears prophetic—it possesses oracular knowledge—and avows that Cemí will provide testimony to her loss and to the death of his father. In saying this, Rialta incites Cemí to poetic creation at the same time she foreshadows it. Even more, however, is the entrance of another voice that speaks on behalf of Cemí, thereby displacing him. The narrator writes "Sé que esas son las palabras más hermos que Cemí oyó en su vida" (231). Here, the oracle is not Rialta, but the narrator. It seems that in this moment, Lezama becomes the narrator and speaks for Cemí. In this case, the text would speak of Lezama's father's death, which, perhaps, inspired this narrative. Either way, Cemí sudden absence signifies the existence of someone beyond the text—who maybe but is not necessarily Lezama himself. Now that the author, or at least narrator, presents himself within the text one might contemplate this moment as signifying his absence in other parts of the narrative. Additionally, the existence of an absent, or sometimes present, writer suggests that the reader is not to believe that Rialta's words are her own. Immediately before the reader becomes aware of the narrator or writer, Rialta implies that some imposters will say that she never said these words to Cemí. Thus, her prophecy comes true—her words appear those of an imposter. Because Rialta is written to foresee her own words being perceived as untrue, her words are positioned as those of the narrator. However, if the narrator, at large, is absent within the text, then Rialta does not appear as a written character to such an extent. On another level, the narrator could be writing his own story and, thus, by questioning Rialta he also foreshadows whether his own words, through Rialta's speech, will be doubted. A moment of parricide thus occurs: Any contemplation of whether Rialta is to be conceived of as something constructed or an authentic character in the text remains unknown. Additionally, one might refer to the homophone parasite here, which could describe the

narrator who feeds off the characters he creates at the same time he depends on these. From here, I conceive of a shift in the ontology of the novel that occurs because the narrative content is multiplied through the use of figural elements. One recognizes that the emphasis on structure in the text compliments a process of creation that is also the narrative content of the text. That is to say that Cemí's poetic search—as the direct novelistic content—opens a space in which the narrator (or writer) to exists.

This footnote is in analogous tone to that of Rialta's in her prophetic speech about the death as engendering creation. A series of questions haunts the reader: Who are these "imposters" that Rialta believe "llegarán a decir que ella nunca ha dicho esas palabras." Who is the imposter here? Is that voice that seems to possess Rialta and the margins of the page an imposture, or the representative of a Lezamian form of truth, based on his catholic faith, a coming community, an "imago" the discursive production of a triangulation of voices? Who or what speaks and through who? And hence the text metamorphosis from an allegory on creation of poetics cast through a relationship to death to an ontology of Caribbean existence established through the poetics. Retrospectively one might guess those poets who continue to attempt the most difficult: create resurrection would be would be the Origines Generation and the impostures the Revolution that would deny not only their mission, as expressed by Rialta, but the beliefs of those who follow it.

The absence of a mother's response to the dispersion and obscurity that arises after the disappearance of the family center must follow the difficulty that the son tries to transfigure. That is, as the transformation, in every sense or theological, of the son in the father, as an incarnation of the same sense, of the same focus of organization that death has decentered. Decentralization engenders "an obscurity" to semantic difficulty that must be clarified or deciphered by means of a recovery of the lost center, an exact restoration of the

disappeared pattern. But it would have to be questioned immediately if this transference with which the mother dreams can coincide with the father; if the testimony can become testimony, if the recovery of the lost center can in fact restore the same center, or if, on the other hand, that tentativeness would be in advance condemned to always produce another center market for that original loss: a repeated center or de-centered, a sort of non-center in which the presence in itself would never be possible (348-9).

Chapter Two Severo Sarduy's Uncanny Architecture

One year after the Revolution of 1959, Severo Sarduy accepted a scholarship to study art in Europe. Sarduy disembarked in Spain from his month-long transatlantic journey and spent January of 1960 frequenting lectures at the Museo del Prado in Madrid (Castro Flores, 177).[21] Rather than return to Cuba in February as scheduled, he made his way to Paris, where he met the man who would be his long-term partner, Francois Wahl.[22] Alongside of Wahl, Sarduy joined the intellectual community consolidated behind the Vanguard literary magazine, *Tel Quel* (published from 1958 until 1982), which founded revisionist projects of psychoanalysis and critical deconstruction. Neither *Specters of Marx* nor *Diacritics* mentions in their review of the contemporary state of Marxism the still-developing case of Cuba during this time. As a counterpoint to such a lapse, *Tel Quel* members declared their break with the French Communist Party (in 1971) and their affiliation with Maoism in 1974 (though the latter would be revoked publically by 1976). Yet the French thinkers of this time would be and were always more receptive to the critiques of Cuba that filtered out of the country then, as well as later when the repression of homosexuality provoked a political scandal in terms of the allegiances of the French left with the Cubans. Of *Tel Quel* members, Sarduy's partner François Wahl and semiologist Roland Barthes influenced

[21] For the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Fernando Castro Flores edited the published catalogue of Sarduy's exposition of paintings for the museum which took place in 1998. The catalogue includes an essay by Francois Wahl and Gustavo Guerrero, and it offers this information as part of a detailed biographical timeline of the major events in the author's life. It also compiled alongside of a wealth of photographs of the author.

[22] Ruben Gallo reports on Sarduy's relationship with Wahl, mentioning Barthes and Lacan in the 2007 article, "Sarduy Avec Lacan: The Portrayal of French Psychoanalysis in *Cobra* and *La simulación*, which provides an outstanding review of the Cuban author's intellectual and social relationships in France

Sarduy's writing by introducing him to writers central to post-structuralism.[23] Sarduy clearly read Lacan, and his interest in divided identities and subjective intersections also explored the works of writers involved in the group such as Julia Kristeva, Gerard Genette, and Phillipe Solers (the editor of Sarduy's publisher Édition du seuil Seuleil). Sarduy's collection *Baroque* (1974) first appeared in French (Conférence publique: Le baroque et le néo-baroque, 1973) and then in Spanish. It was thus from Paris that Sarduy coined the term "Neobaroque."

Expanding on the "Neobaroque" literary framework first assembled by the Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos, who was best known for his concrete poems such as "Galáxias" (written between 1963 to 1976 and finally compiled in 1984). Sarduy avows in his 1972 essay "Baroque and Neobaroque" that all baroque aesthetics are productions that fall within the category of "artifice". Artifice is explained as a linguistic structure, a ceaseless act of signification liberated from any referent and forbiding the completion of a sign. The rhetorically visual and performative texts "Baroque and Neobaroque" and *Barroco* (1974) lodge an argument for challenging, judging, and parodying a political economic system through the devaluation of its "cheap administration" just as much as its "goods":

> ser barroco hoy significa amenazar, juzgar y parodiar la economía burguesa, basada en la administración tacaña de los bienes, en su centro y fundamento mismo: el espacio de los signos, el lenguaje, soporte simbólico de la sociedad,

[23] As another example, Sarduy's essay "Baroque and Neobaroque" directly references the prominent thinkers and editorial members of *Tel Quel* and the spin-off journal *Diacritics* (1971-present). The American literary and Cultural Studies journal *Diacritics* took the stage once the intellectual activities of *Tel Quel* disintegrated. Again, "Baroque and Neobaroque" includes a discussion of the leader of both groups, Jacques Derrida, who published death summer issue of this journal, in 1995, was dedicated to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) and consolidated the critical lens of spectral theory through which I formulate my study and understanding of the Neobaroque aesthetic in exile

> garantía de su funcionamiento, de su comunicación. Malgastar, dilapidar, derrochar lenguaje únicamente en función de placer —y no, como en el uso doméstico, en función de información… (*Barroco*, 1385).
>
> To be baroque today means to challenge, judge, and parody the bourgeois economy, based in the cheap administration of goods, in its center and fundament: the space of signs, the symbolic language of the society, the guarantee of its functioning, of its communication. To waste, to dilapidate, to [destroy] language only for the function of pleasure—and not in the domestic use in function of information….[24]

Unlike writers aligned with the state in his home country, Sarduy insists on the idea of language and literature as a path to pleasure and freedom as he distances himself from an economy of meaning and rudimentary use value functions. His understanding of literature and the systems surrounding him relates more closely to the global perspective of post-structuralism that he found in France.

Sarduy's time in France did not result in a simple synthesis of European and Latin American traditions. From this intellectual hub, the author took up an interest in both China and Tibet in his essays "El cristo de la rue Jacob" (1986) and "Tibet Sur Seine"(1989): texts that inaugurated the most productive and brilliant period of his literary life. Around this same time, he published works in the polemical cultural journal on Latin America, *Mundo Nuevo* directed by the brilliant academic, Emir Monegal Rodriguez and featuring the works of writers such as Reinaldo Arenas. The journal, like Sarduy and Arenas seemed to promise something else to Latin American literature that had yet to be offered in the same way it had been in Europe and at this time: a literary language and expression that is totally

[24] Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

cosmopolitan and at the same time rooted in its sense of national belonging. It is with this authority and sense of autonomy that Sarduy's larger body of work (including his visual works) deviate not only between Neobaroque and Post-structuralist tendencies— from *Tel Quel* to Tibet, or from China back to Camaguey to Cuba from France, from France towards Cuba again— but also between text, its image, and the song, from the radio to the novel. Sarduy refused to adapt the Neobaroque as an aesthetic of exile to only one medium, cultural context, mode of existence, or route of expression. Instead, homeland for the émigré became a site of reproduction and of exile, wherein the lost elements of literary or artistic expression could be grounded.

In the short essay "Exiliado de si mismo"(1990), Sarduy claims that the "true" or "verdadero" experience of exile is linguistic and, for artists, as numerous and varied as their individual styles (41). Indeed, the literary and linguistic exile appears to the author as the fact which precedes any physical movement:

> Y, después de todo, el exilio geográfico, físico, ¿no será un espejismo? El verdadero exilio, ¿no será algo que está en nosotros desde siempre, desde la infancia, como una parte de nuestro ser que permanece obscura y de la que nos alejamos progresivamente, algo que, en nosotros mismo es esa tierra que hay que dejar? (42).

> And, after everything, might it be that geographic, physical exile, is a mirrorism? Isn't true exile something inside of us since always, since infancy, as part of our being that remains dark and from which we distance ourselves progressively, something that, in ourselves is the earth that we have to leave?

The key to Sarduy's literary praxis, offered in these words, arises from the acceptance that, just beyond the act of reading, what one encounters is an uncertainty that is a form of exile and also freedom. In this space of exile produced within poetic or artistic expression, the inaccessible, unadulterated and desired elements of expression stand utterly outside of stable language and concrete imagery and yet return the reader and the author to similar spaces wherein existence appears liminal and still in formation. Insofar as "Baroque and Neobaroque" discusses and models this literary praxis, it also points to this idea of uncertainty and imaginative exile, which I associate with something ghostly, difficult to hold onto and even spectral. Sarduy's essays awake in the reader (often characterized in his fiction or implicated in his visual poetry) literarily indefinable sketches of previously unforeseen modes of being in-and-outside of material reality. And like the characters and settings of his novels—and particularly *Colibrí* (1983), to which I dedicate the second half of this chapter—the divisions, chapters, and subsections in Sarduy's works mark a territory of insolvency and erasure where autonomy no longer depends on concrete events and places of reality. Indeed, Sarduy's essays on the baroque and this novel unfold into an uncanny architecture of abstraction from which ghostly forms and spectral realities intervene on the boundaries of the material world through a formal and aesthetic rendition of exile. This chapter unveils Sarduy's strategic alteration and extension upon a version of Baroque aesthetics as coopted by state-sanctioned discourses prior to his publication of his essays. The form of exile Sarduy feels preexists any historically produced exile is produced in these texts through pushing the reader into a state comparable to the author's; marked by ludic displacement, invasive efforts, and formal robberies; that I call possession.

The scholarly articles that surround Sarduy's essays and novels divide into two branches: on the one hand, post-structuralist readings of his texts and on the other, his

involvement with the Cuban tradition of the New World Baroque aesthetic. This division is the thesis of Roberto Gonzales Echevarria's *La Ruta de Severo Sarduy*, a book which contains one of the few in depth readings of *Colibrí* and which is cited in almost every article on the novel thereafter.[25] In this way, the subject of exile and the author pivots between a series of spaces, fields or forms of expression, and intellectual traditions, and—from another angle—speaks to the polarization and polemics within the literary community, comprised of exiles and/or intellectuals concerned with Cuban politics and their representation at the time in which Sarduy was writing. That is, Sarduy's narrative footing became problematic amongst his readership in the context of the Cuban intellectual exile community that was highly polarized, in part, because of his involvements abroad. I prefer to view Sarduy as a playful and mischievous narrator whose jab is to frustrate the reader as such. *Colibri* for instance, a text which escapes the narrator and eventually stages its own self-destruction, becomes a single piece of a larger project in which a series of stories reflect and resonate openly, supplanting a direct testimony or narrative. The spectral but also playful form of haunting, presented in this novel that is about a disappearing narrator and narrative, points to a story not yet known, or even told, and perhaps never will be. Similarly, Sarduy's own intellectual development engages something beyond its own limitation, which could be described as the deep form of the Neobaroque. Along this line of thought, Semiologist Omar Calabrese's *Neobaroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992) removes the positive or negative value of formalist qualities in Sarduy's work in his own attempt to find "something behind them," a "deep

[25] Because Sarduy left Cuba in 1960 at the onset of the Cuban Revolution, his involvement within the French intellectual elite led some philosophical thinkers and scholars of literature to reject his work, bolstering their analysis of his literature Sarduy's personal history. Rolando Perez's work on Sarduy, *The Religion of the Text*, for example, claims that Sarduy's works are so detached from Latin America that his work has no place within this cannon, but leans heavily on the relationships he had with other writers in France.

form"(10-11). Unlike the "artificial" forms represented in materialist readings, the structure of a deep form expresses not whether something is similar or dissimilar, but the possibility that such a divide exists and needs to be broken down. The deep form concerns possibility, doubts, and ontology and is represented by space and language at the same time in Calabrese's text as much as in Sarduy's. This deep form of the Neobaroque, present in Sarduy, traces broken signifiers that circle around and thus delineate an absence that can never be expressed; this operation parallels a concept of exile as the absence-producing departure from the homeland in turn produces creation. This chapter shows how exile transforms into a poetic praxis related to post-structuralist anti-deterministic thought, but also a metaphysical condition linking geography and its resonance with a parallel representative state of mind. It is perhaps this divide between material reality, language, and existence with which the Neobaroque is deeply concerned. I begin with the linguistic analysis of baroque that Severo Sarduy locates in the figure of a pearl, into which we can easily dive to discover the deep form that the rest of my interpretations of Sarduy's essays will trace.

Baroque commences with an analysis surrounding the etymology and the shape of the irregular pearl. The author situates this description as a juncture between language and image, a point on which a debate concerning the Baroque hinges:

> La naturaleza de las cosas, a preceder así que la tienen—estaría substancialmente escrita, como un significado aunque olvidable presente, en las palabras que las nombran: así, del barroco perdura la imagen nudosa de la gran perla irregular, del portugués barroco—el áspero conglomerado rocoso—del español berrueco y luego berrocal—u más tarde como

> desmintiendo ese carácter de objeto bruto de material basta sin fractura, barroco aparecen entre los joyeros, invirtiendo su connotación primera, ya no designará más lo inmediata y natural, piedra o perla, sino la elaborado y minucioso, lo cincelado, la aplicación del orfebre. (1199)

> The nature of things, to precede, so that they have it, would be substantially written, as a meaning but forgettable present, in the words that name them: thus, from the baroque remains the knotty image of the great irregular pearl, Portuguese baroque—the rough rocky conglomerate-from the Spanish 'berrueco' and later 'berrocal'—or later as denying that crude object character of simple material without fracture, baroque appears among the jewelers, reversing its first connotation, no longer designating the immediate and natural, stone or pearl, but the elaborate and meticulous, the chiseled, the application of the goldsmith.

The chiseled and elaborated (that is to say, Baroque) style of writing acquires meaning as the process of indicating multiple roots--all equally plausible-- destroys rather than strengthens the possibility of a unified or complimentary meaning. Hence, the Baroque becomes itself and simultaneously its opposite in the same process. The labored process of its explanation rather than any word or attached concept to the essay supplants the definition it struggles, in Baroque fashion, to consolidate. An etymologic search for the "pearl" as the original object referenced by the term "Baroque" reveals the capacity of language to reflect and reproduce the destruction of this particular physical entity: comprised of shells broken by waves, reconstituted by the pressure of the water, and transformed again into a polished surface however irregular form. The tension between luster and irregularity, indicative of a process,

provides a metaphor for Sarduy's notion of baroque language. At the beginning of the essay "Barroco y Neobarroco", Sarduy illustrates a similar process to the one modeled here when referencing the genealogy of this term.

By the end of reading the 1974 essay, it is clear that the work rotates around an implicit and visual structure, but in a textual fashion. One might recall that the earliest examples of Baroque aesthetics had been founded in Italian post-Renaissance architecture, in which layered and vibrant façades redirect inhabitants of a space and their range of possible thoughts away from the fading or falling ecclesiastical ruins and into a sustained and exciting presence. After setting up the fact that the word Barroco originates from two distinct sources, one European, and another based in the sea—that is, the pearl, Sarduy proclaims that "the abuse or terminological ease from which the Baroque has suffered recently" necessitates, as a response, the reduction of Baroque discussion to a clear and "precise operatory scheme" (1386). Sarduy's essay sets out to relieve the art form of politicized contexts and, moreover, expose its "pertinence" and thus belonging to a Latin American transatlantic tradition, circumventing any final conclusions to be tallied up at the end of an interpretive reading. Sarduy moves on to refute D'Ors essentialist notions that had been presented in his *Lo Barroco* written in 1935 (although Sarduy cites the 1964 edition) and in which the Spanish author posited the Baroque art as one of "pantheism, inexplicably tied to God or nature," a critical task which Calabrese also takes on and brings up when citing Sarduy (Calabrese 16).

Sarduy calls D'Ors work on the Baroque as amongst the best of Spanish grammar, thereby maintaining his own formal expansion of the underlining features of the baroque in forms of "artifice" that implicate "illusion". D'Ors manipulation of a "grammar," called upon as a spirit and eon, does not, according to Sarduy's text that studies the Baroque as

forms of artifice, offer any final word or definition, which is totally unlike the intrinsic qualities of material reality put forth by d'Ors. Sarduy's critical intentions are not direct, but woven into subtle references and sustained by an overarching essayistic artifice that this literary vignette offered in the later essay engages. In stating that "extreme artificialization" opens a "faultline between namer and named and the emergence of another name", Sarduy describes processes he aims to activate within his own "Baroque and Neobaroque". He has obliterated the occluded element of former arguments towards a baroque eon and era, reassembling their dependence on a horizontal logic of metaphor and the constructor of this, and, instead, inviting a layered version of artifice by which illusion can actually attain depth through vertical as opposed to horizontal movements of a metalanguage. As if reproducing this in the formal properties of the essay itself, with its array of references, examples, and explanations, it is divided into subsections that, in spite of their glossy texture, constantly digress from the apparent hierarchical organization revealing niches and nodes that hide amidst the formal order, not unlike the glossy and irregular pearls of the earlier essay.

Finally, Sarduy discusses the Baroque by defining three operations each of which will be exemplified and diagramed in visual form: "sustitución", "condensación", and "proliferación" (1387, 1389, 1391). Each of these aesthetic operations signal the former existence of a mobilization expressed, ultimately, as versions of artifice, beneath which another structure has mutated or disappeared. Explained as a linguistic structure, a ceaseless act of signification liberated from any referent, artifice forbids the completion of a sign, its development of a natural language or finalized form, easily accepted or understood:

> "Otro mecanismo de artificialización del barroco es el que consiste en obliterar el significante de un significado dado pero no reemplazándolo por otro, por distante que éste se encuentre del primero, sino por una cadena de

> significantes que progresa metonímicamente y que termina circunscribiendo al significante ausente, trazando una órbita alrededor de el, órbita de cuya lectura –que llamaríamos lectura radial—podemos inferirlo." (1389)

All Baroque is artifice in that it is constructed over an absence where essentialist, determined or deterministic qualities were assumed to have existed. Sarduy's definitions of these terms reference disfigurations, transformations, fugues, memories, desires and loss, woven into these three subcategories. A series of his citations refer to precisely those Latin American authors of the Boom (whom he opposes), affiliated Latin American authors (such as Lezama, Arenas, Guillermo Cabrera Infante as well as Jorge Luis Borges and Juan Rulfo) and critical voices of *Tel Quel* and associated predecessors (Kristeva, Foucault, Barthes).

If the operations of the Baroque, according to Sarduy, are: substitution, permutation, and condensation in his essay "El Barroco y el neobarroco", the tables and drawings included to illustrate this text create a distance between the image of the text and the language of it. That is, Sarduy's enchained signifiers involved in a "radial reading" from the assumption of any existent referent (1389). This distancing impedes the completion of a sign, and moves realistic expression into an expressive action. This practice (rather, praxis--to emphasize the political and ideological realm of literary operations in Sarduy's essayistic work), also conjures lost objects of semantics, to which the author returns by reaching from one semantic system into the field of another: from language to image. The illustrated diagrams bolster the idea that these Baroque aesthetics depend on formal properties, whether visual or textual, but their visual design also results from the same substructure, a sort of spectral series of connections, that Sarduy highlights.

The visual image of the text confirms practices of spectral language; neither system of expression can sustain the apertures of creation. Because the vertical layering of the text also exposes, at the horizontal level, similar creative-divisory originations, the reader is included in a series of unwinding textual shifts. The structure of the text employs the poetic process discussed in Sarduy's essays in order to recreate in the text this experience of exile. Neobaroque moves between materiality and disappearance, across textual structures and into the image, where temporality or narrative progression becomes tenuous. In this way, Sarduy's definition of the Neobaroque signals the existence of a realm known only by its omission and the faulty project or means of language itself. The transient process of the Neobaroque depends on spatial imagery and also language in order to highlight the impossibility of a determined meaning or the fulfillment of a desire or wish. This essential feature of the Baroque literature is at the center of his novel *Colibri*, but also at the center of all of these essays—included in the most paradoxical of ways.

Lost Objects

One tendency described in "Lo Barroco y Lo Neobarroco" encompasses the mechanism of the essay at hand; it also proves quintessential to Sarduy's novelistic and poetic endeavors, his total body of work, and, in my reading, the visual and textual form of both spectrality and exile. Sarduy refers to the syntagmatic grams: a visual image of the text, left in abstract form, but produced through sets of linguistic unites, tied together by their order and appearance in the texts and guiding an overarching structure of it.

Syntagmatic grams make structural understandings possible, which the sections "Eroticism", "Espejo" and "Revolution" also authorize. Syntagmatic grams return time and again; they are known by "desciframientos parciales y progresivos" through the ongoing

experience of poetic creation and retrospective recollection carried out by the text (1400). Sarduy's essay exemplifies the operation of the syntagmatic gram because he compiles characteristics of the Baroque as an artifice, from beneath which a Neobaroque technique and process surfaces. Sarduy's definitions of the Baroque and Neobaroque underscore semantic corruption as necessitating contradictory expression in order to maintain the openness of a poetic object, and by extension, identity. As possible meanings proliferate at the intersection of Neobaroque operations, the reader must interpret actively and read between the lines of the text to decipher any meaning in an ambiguous structure until the eventual visualization of the syntagmatic gram confirms the reader's sense of awareness. This visual yet abstract structure comprised through textual language guides the active reader's participation within the text.

Sarduy had indicated at this point in the essay that the Baroque is a process that simultaneously connotes a full range of opposing meanings, ripping its textual foundation out from underneath itself time and again. Yet this same open process, in the abstract and visual form, may repeat this gesture to unite diverse elements independently mutating and evolving meaning through progressive destruction.

An allegorical structure that expands metonymically toward Sarduy's historical reality becomes the basis for a reading set between textual language and imagery. The spectral and potential component of the text maintains deconstructive features of post-structuralism, yet, at the same time, marks a visual "trace" bound to Neobaroque tropes of return, repetition and spectrality. An image-oriented perspective, founded in syntagmatic grams, positions the reader in a sort of exile. Removed from the organic notion of a union between space, time and reason, readers become the producers and experiencers of the same worldly events that

move elliptically between the interior of the self and the field of the unknown or otherworldly, of which only a vague image can be developed.

Artifice, as a 'syntagmatic gram' (an abstract image of the text's total idea that is presented as a subcategory of Sarduy's essay) sustains the insight that identity and meaning exist as unstable and indeterminable categories (difficult to localize through traditional semantics, if discoverable at all, but not necessarily non-existent) (1394). If language and space are conversant and fluid operational and reordering techniques, then artifice may outline an absence that motivates a process of creation according to my own interpretation. The image of this operation rearranges notions of time and space, radiating around an absence that cannot be located in the past or the future alone. The reader becomes conscious of this operation. This operation progresses as allegorical expansion outlines an absence that exists as a repository. Reading becomes a queer and purposeless process of pleasure and waste, as the author himself indicates. As a result, readers are removed from the presumption of purpose within the essay. This aesthetic does not reflect natural orders, but instead reorders them. The accomplishment of the essay results from its capacity to move the reader from seeking a certain meaning to observing what is between the lines. Sarduy opens this possibility that other discourses had sealed shut, building union between the exile context and his national context.

When Sarduy diagrams the semantic concepts of permutation, proliferation and condensation in each model, he crosses out an originary signifier: an absence marked on the page with the character "X". He delineates a subsequent production of signifiers that sustain signification from outside of this originary sign only known by the "X" which marks its absence (1389-91). In all texts and images, the poetic praxis incorporates an absence it never fully possesses; at the same time, it expels meaning from the site of interpretation and

into the act of signification the position of the former, lost, signifier—which may have never existed in the first place. The diagram establishes an original signifier already detached from a poetic object and crossed out, but nonetheless illustrated in the process of delineation that surrounds this supposed initial point (1385). The model suggests semantics cannot express determined meaning, a poetic object, an origin or root. However, the graphic capacity of the letter suggests that even if assumed to have existed, the original thing unexpressed by the Neobaroque was already an intersection of meaning. Crossed lines intersect at the site where absence may have formerly existed and which is now eroticized via secondary signification acts.

The "lost object" that motivates signification compares to the lost partial object of psychoanalysis. I believe that it is possible to gain a complex understanding of this lost object, the absent center, the intersection of the X, but the image or other information rotating around this event, must include all chains of signifiers as they repeat and mutate. By tracing the space of absence in which the structure of this process itself reveals itself to the reader, who may only intuit or develop a vague sense of the text.

The lost object, like the partial object of psychoanalysis, or the syntagmatic gram or specter, is never fully formed. For authors like Abraham and Torok—who revised Freudian psychoanalysis (and whom Sarduy mentions in passing in this essay), Sarduy's structure coincides with a "crypt" in their model of transgenerational trauma (1390). Whereas some "crypts" may allow their guards or the daring to estimate contents, based on what has already been known, in other cases---cases of transgenerational trauma, a secret, an object, or an originary signifier, is forever lost. The partial object causes Sarduy to describe:

> El erotismo, la artificialidad, lo cultural, se manifiesta en el juego con el objeto perdido, cuya finalidad está en sí mismo y cuyo propósito no es la

> conducción de un mensaje –el de los elementos reproductores en este caso- sino su desperdicio en función de placer (1401).

> The eroticism, the artificiality, the cultural, is manifested in the game with the lost object, whose purpose is in itself and whose purpose is not the conduction of a message - that of the reproductive elements in this case - but its waste in function of pleasure (1401).

This lost object takes the form, in the essay, of the syntagmatic gram. If Sarduy founds his alternative semantics in the interstices of language and space, absence and presence, and then reformulates Neobaroque from the space of exile, specters (analogous to the Neobaroque poetic praxis) parallel the formation of an exile community with a textual origin. Sarduy's poetic operation borrows the spatiality of narrative and page to gesture beyond its parameters; meanwhile, the specter lacks proper form, possesses another, to present for what cannot be. The poetic operation that destroys the confines of narrative settings and absence and the visual constitutive features in the construction of this canon is thus spectral, rendering Baroque aesthetics itself as fundamentally spectral.

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This essay concludes with two final sections titled "Revolution" and "Mirror". Here, Sarduy parodies a discourse of the Revolution and the Baroque by beginning with a discussion of eroticism, bringing prohibited forms of pleasure to the forefront of the revolution in a moment of excess or "Suplemento" (1251). He continues to subvert Revolutionary ideology in "Mirror", indicating that his own text serves as a mirror for another, which is no longer there. "Neobarroco: reflejo necesariamente pulverizado de un saber que sabe que ya no está apaciblemente cerrado sobre sí mismo. Arte del

destronamiento y la discusión" (1252). The mirror, a concept at the root of the word specter, also calls forth the lost partial object of psychoanalysis, something desired and not given. The relationship between the mirror and the text also underscores the graphic image desired and not given within a purely poetic praxis. Sarduy's radial reading interprets art, reproduces and, eventually, implies that the absent motor and basis of Neobaroque epistemology is the image of the text.

In addition to offering a reading that overturns some aspects of previous literary history, Sarduy's work opens that of other authors and postmodernity to a sort of limbo, in which the author, exiled into the absence beyond the written page, materializes as a ghost whose fullest possibility of existence or form is confined to possessing the reader—a medium, perhaps, predisposed to his own phantasmal understanding of the text and a communion that conjures exchange and inversion amongst the world of the living and the dead. Sarduy's understanding of the Baroque neither fully annihilates nor roots out the formation of a subject. Sarduy traces an originating absence and destabilizes subjectivity and signification, but does not merely erase or eliminate base categories of signification, identity, or meaning. Sarduy's layered aesthetic allegorizes the process of writing as visual, and visual art as textual, in order to highlight this very struggle of signification, which is a struggle of being in the world, in one place, with a temporal trajectory.

Rather than concern absence alone as a fundament of existence, this mode of expression exhausts itself in an attempt to house matters, information, histories, or experiences that resist or move outside of easily accepted or existent fields of knowledge or vision. As exemplified in this essay, the Neobaroque aesthetic moves between materiality and disappearance, across textual structures and into the image, where temporality or narrative progression become tenuous. The Neobaroque poetics of Sarduy also call to mind

to the figure of the specter; both Neobaroque aesthetics and the specter signal the existence of a realm known by its omission from language. Sarduy's reader, who comes to question his beliefs about the possibility of the text and his capacity for reading, fails to realize that this textual architecture and its structural design simulates an act of possession and is not merely his own projection. Reading equates to entering an edifice of the unknown and otherworldly. Sarduy suggests that the baroque, from his perspective, creates its predecessor. The notions of origins becoming departures and arrivals suppress the sense of final destinations as they await return to an uncertain origin.

***Colibrí*: Sarduy's Alternative Autobiography**

Two decades after 1960, when Severo Sarduy had left Cuba, he planned his "return to the homeland" and to "the American continent" (*Autoretratos*, 23). This return took the so-called form of a "modernist novel", described in a short essay written in French, "Pour quoi le Roman" (1982) under the title of *Colibrí* (1984). He also envisioned that this, his next and penultimate novel, would constitute a "Baroque" and "visible allegory". The engagement or perhaps mockery of critical terms and markers of literary categories introduces an awareness of the development of literature and the development of an understanding of the reception of his own body of work as the author's relationship to his nation, to Latin America, and to then recent and former waves of exile became a matter of public discussion in the 1980s. Sarduy goes on to describe the baroque allegory in new terms that begin to tie the Cuban tradition to postmodern France and vice versa. Indeed, it is as a "perverse" "multiplication of spearheads" that the novel evades the ideas and characters commonly affiliated with the within the nation-building realist tradition proper to the 19th century which marks Cuban narrative, cuts across Sarduy's notion of geographic and aesthetic return, and knocks down national boundaries by referring to the continent while at the same time

highlighting the dialectical fluidity by which the Latin American Avante Garde evolves: from a Latin American version of Modernism, through the early Baroque, into the post-modern decentered and despatialized present, in which experimental lit, amongst other terms was sexual, hyperbolic, and performative.

The eponymous hummingbird protagonist appears on the first and final page of the narrative as if in a constant process of departure and return, dancing between two mirrors, before a social spectrum, of sometimes strange or foreign clients seeking sexual gratification, close to figures of power, and in libidinal tug-of-wars as his own. Frequently disappearing from the written page and disappearing from a given setting, this character never fully offers with any exactitude information about his origins. He does not acknowledge an eventual destination, nor does he achieve a full departure from the dynamics and destinations conferred loosely across as a range of possibility in the text. That is to say that carefully layered actions, explained in ornate and even ornately obscure language, unfold to form a textual architecture in which terraced images become an artifice of textuality. Beneath these layered artifices comprised of ideas and connotations, the structure of the text establishes its foundation as a tertiary space that illustrates the interstices of possibility and knowledge, causality and temporality, and the linguistic and the visual sides, present in Sarduy's other novels. The hummingbird—a white and, at times, seemingly translucent being with golden hair unfolding—extends into otherworldliness, which further marks his exile from other elements of the text. The escape artist simulates bringing the reader into his own unbridled realm of expression on the verge of articulation, prior to and post narration. This seduction, once the narrator loses the celestial beings tracks and is offset from his own story, points towards the pleasure and play of being endlessly in-between. Between two times, between two continents, and between two mirrors as the only means of expressing—not an end, but

an ongoing phenomenon of the world and of the self, Sarduy "dances" as Colibrí does as the author behind the narrator on the first page of this text, through the narrator towards the middle, in which Sarduy is introduced as a character that supplants, redefines the narrator, and mutates from the narrator and within the narration, and through the illusion of the hummingbird in a performance of autonomy by the end of the book. This performance depends on intradiagetic and extradiegetic aspects of textuality and visuality presented through this fictive expression--a creation of transformation. And, as an image between two mirrors suggests, this creation is infinitely refracted. The novel also gestures towards the visual as the story is grafted onto materiality of social reality in its production and inspiration, borrowing its organization from within written history through the architectural ruin from the American continent—which provides the base image for a protagonist that moves like the entire text, and directs its readership. In *Colibrí*, this image, text, and edifice, are constructed out of a register of language that locates divides, disappearances, and transformations.

The ephemeral and shifting image of *Colibrí* binds both the aesthetic and spectral together by the end of the text in which the recurrent image of a hummingbird is tied to a Nazca funerary ruin (of a gigantic hummingbird), the famous nazca lines once written across the Peruvian desert and covered by woven textiles that aided pre-Columbian peoples and their deities to move between their underworld and earth. By examining the language, locations, histories, and theme of transformation as they progress to position a form of mimicry in which the author includes a symbolic invitation and invocations of his future reader in order to ensure the ongoing transformation of the text, *Colibrí* emulates a deep architectural knowledge of literary language and social history as dependent on the memory of images and not actual spaces. *Colibrí* similarly provides an autobiographical account that

links the operative structures of the text to the author's larger Neobaroque aesthetic.[26] This aesthetic founds a visually based definition of exile as a form of transcendence made possible by the absent space or the indeterminate areas of the text.

The preceding chapter demonstrates that the impulse towards a system of representation, analyzed within this author's essays, presumes the validity of its prerogative in the fact of its production, and thus the resulting heuristic as a method of exploration is fundamentally misguided. Sarduy puts on display a form of exile wherein his characters and chosen settings preemptively simulate self-awareness of the pending arrival of a forthcoming or future redefinition, demolition, or displacement. This representation of exile as a form of isolation, open to its own divides and destructions, brings about an uncanny form of introspection in which one part of a fragmented being or individual may interfere and conceptually possess another. My reading of Neobaroque aesthetics and spectral textual operations exposes not only funerary tropes and symbols that are relevant to, first, the process of writing, and second, the return from the afterlife. This mediation moves spaces, times, and images of arrival into the precursors of exile, and, in a sort of mutant form of messianism, the conclusions of the text casts final departures as an origenless origin, a re-encounter that confirms the uncanny understandings wherein origin is confirmed as nonexistent as the possibility of a set conclusion for *Colibrí*.

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[26] As the Nasca symbol indigenous to Peru once directed the living to the world of the dead, this image within the text guides the reader to understand the spiraling relationship between author, narrator, and protagonist. As the protagonist escapes the narrator of the story and an original antagonist, and the text begins to self implode, Sarduy's own father figure appears on the page, just before the climax of the text. Whether running from a site, a version of the self, or an element of its legacy, the observer, witness, survivor or visitor that stand before representation as if inhabiting a space of exile, becomes a mirror of a generation and a history long since blurred or lost, and, at the same time, an emblem of exile insofar as the present becomes displaced through this mirror towards another time or from reality into fictious form, inaccessible beyond these layered artifices and their instances of changing interconnection.

In *Colibrí,* language and settings situate a divide between the linguistic and the spatial form, respectively and together. This novel sustains space and time in an overarching textual image, but the narrative evolution that allows for the appearance of this image breaks down. The sequence of structural transformations that replaces plot development eliminates causal logic as a consequential element of the plot by placing on display, for instance, vocabulary and disappearances that frame and limit the text from the first pages, although the reader may not realize this until the final pages, once the visual image of textual formation is grasped. Reading is forced into retrograde; progression propels narration into destruction of former textual elements. The text acquires greater narrative and temporal fluidity, simulating the movement of a humming bird: traveling backward and forward with ease, disappearing, and then reappearing. Intertwined and isolated stories of a protagonist, narrator, and characterized author (by implication through the reference to "Sarduy" within the text) uncover stacked superficies. The forming image of the text, originating from the linguistic and symbolic base level of the text, becomes an overarching structure that peels away an intermediary narrative strand (between this base and this final, but still forming image). Repetition of concurrent destructive and creative actions ensues the unexpected: this strange disrobing of an abstract image, which increases (rather than decreases) a range of extradiegetic textual reference.

The novel conjures an interstitial reading between the lines of the text—in a space of absence that reframes post-modern and post-structuralist readings as consistent with Sarduy's poetic praxis. This praxis expresses an action of recuperating something previously absent, now generative in the image, and its coming formation. The image of *Colibrí* is secured in the corporal form of the protagonist, Colibrí, then transferred onto the American

landscape. The text itself ciphers the archeological ruin of gigantic Nazca humming birds, written across the Mexican desert and representative of a former funerary rite. Sarduy discusses this humming bird at the conclusion of a dialogue he imagines to have with himself, (again, in "Severo, ¿Por qué pintas?")

> Pues bien, creo que hay un saber, algo que lo traviesa a uno, casi genéticamente, pero que es inexplicable. Antes de la conquista, antes de la lógica, los hombres de América tejían, es decir, repetían un mismo gesto minúsculo y en rojo, con frecuencia. Ésa parece ser la explicaciónón de uno de los misterio de la cultura: los geoglifos de Nazca, esos gigantescos colibríes, mascaras, tigresa, inscritos en el desierto. No se sabe qué son. Se ha llegado a decir, incluso que son pistas para el aterrizaje de los extra-terrestres. Una de las versiones más recientes es que se trata de soportes para elaborar hilos larguísimos, para tejer, ya que hay mortajas que envuelven esas momias que tiene doce kilómetros de hilo. (79)

> Well, I think there is a knowledge, something that crosses it to one, almost genetically, but that is inexplicable. Before the conquest, before the logic, the men of America wove, that is to say, they repeated a same miniscule gesture and in red, frequently. This seems to be the explanation of one of the mysteries of culture: the geoglyphs of Nazca, those gigantic hummingbirds, masks, tigress, inscribed in the desert. It is not known what they are. It has even been said that they are clues to the landing of extra-terrestrials. One of the most recent versions is that it consists of supports for making very long

> threads, for knitting, since there are shrouds that wrap those mummies that have twelve kilometers of thread.

Sarduy identifies with this figure of the hummingbird, which the novel clarifies. This image substitutes loss as a theme and trope in the text at key pivotal moments. In this essay, Sarduy is using the first person to speak to himself about his beliefs and his own unexplainable genetics, which have transferred to him qualities of the past. This statement returns us to the partial object discussed in transgenerational trauma models of Abraham and Torok (1401). Sarduy, who reports to have consulted the dictionary frequently while considering *Colibrí,* most likely takes interest in the verb "tejer" because of its relationship to the word "text", which initially indicated gathering and weaving sticks, as if walking in a garden, then re-assembling one's paths with twigs as referents. He finishes this statement by suggesting his mother is an excellent "bordadora famosa" and moves from there to discuss "Una imagen del tránsito" (79). Pre-Columbian Latin America and writing frequents a pattern, an image, weaving a text, a *tejido* that begins to hint at a trope of exile—if not in the biblical sense, of exile from a garden, then from the loss of history at the onset of colonization, in which heritage is felt as an erasure and an importation of a discursive and lived experience, which responds to the loss of another. This conceived departure figures the referenced mother, alongside of a pre-colonial moment: realms before present language and understandings which memory cannot recall.

Rather than ramble and weave together indiscriminate threads, Sarduy's choice of words and mention of the hummingbird arise from careful research. Sarduy includes a footnote in this essay to explain a recent discovery he came across while reading Henri Stierlin's *Art of the Incas and it's Origins*(1984) a book detailing the artisan works of the Paracas-Nasca zone:

> Cuatro milenios de evolución cuyo mejor emblema son los tejidos, los mantos de Paracas-Necrópolis, por ejemplo. El propio autor [Sterlin] habla de motivos *obsesiónales*, en este caso, felinos estilizados. Los tejidos formaban parte del llamado *fardo* de los difuntos y están hechos con la técnica de la tapicería y el sobre bordado. La 'cadena' es de algodón; la trama de lana. Las obras data de 300-100 antes de nuestra era. […]De los geógrafos de la región Nazca Palpa, el gran Colibrí tiene noventa y cinco metros y está trazado de un tirón inscrito con un solo trazo en el desierto. La sequedad del clima ha preservado por más de mil quinientos años esos vestigios, al borde de la llanura fértiles. (79)

> Four millennia of evolution whose best emblem is the fabrics, the mantles of Paracas-Necropolis, for example. The author himself [Sterlin] speaks of obsessional motives, in this case, stylized felines. The fabrics were part of the so-called bundle of the dead and are made with the technique of upholstery and embroidery. The 'chain' is made of cotton; The weft of wool. The works date from 300-100 before our era. [...] Of the geographers of the Nazca Palpa region, the great Colibrí is ninety-five meters and is traced with a single inscribed pull in the desert. The dryness of the climate has preserved for more than fifteen hundred years those vestiges, at the edge of the fertile plain. (79)

Sarduy rests his paradigm for the plot—a field of forming expansion—in an image formed out of and secured by its own incomplete materialization. This process is possible because the image is one permutation and a larger version of an expression already located in the

most basic units of language: syllables, suffixes, prefixes, and letters. As I explain in the following subsection of this chapter, these elements of language link in a vocabulary register that emphasizes disjunction, at sites of fusion and fission, the words create new worlds, and the conditions in which textuality may exist and continue this process at a larger intradiegetic level. As an artist that expresses essential divisions and juxtaposes a series of binary relationships to carry out this task, Sarduy's practice conjures lost objects of semantics, the fissures of language and the disintegrative points of any vision---inaccessible in language or image alone. This expression of interminable and undirected creation, regardless of higher or lower textual orders, replaces rooted structures and expands the possibilities of the known into a structuralist sense of the possible, which resonates directly with materials of this same sort of matter, material or essence.

Where language presupposes narrative coherence as constitutive to the plot, *Colibrí* maintains the durability of its image outside of space and language in the interstices of several narrative levels. This chapter navigates the world cast between the text and it's final image, which coincides with the narrative's total structure and rests on a Nazca funerary symbol. The novel is also organized around the actions of characters, which serve as emblems for the poetic operations that they paradoxically represent at the narrative level. Parallel actions amongst the narrator of *Colibri* and Colibrí connect the image of the protagonist within the narrator's mind as an edifice of memory, or, alternatively, relate the structure of the text—the narrator's story, to an existent edifice, outside of the narrator's control and which the reader learns the actions of the narrator and character, overlap with the text as a material object. Characters and these operations underscore absence and disappearance as readable phenomena often dismissed from interpretative thought as they are hidden away behind the most obvious visual features of the text.

"Pour quoi le Roman?" determines that its protagonist will be a "humming bird" that moves backwards and forewords, only to disappear from the written page (24). In Cuba, the word "bird" or "pájaro" and particularly those members of the species marked with some singular exotic feature or feather such as the hummingbird may connote, depending on their use, a slang meaning relevant to homosexuals. Birds, apart from being populous, colorful, and extravagant across the Latin American tropics, instinctively display at sun up and sun down, calling to others throw a variety of imitations and songs, showing-off their tale feathers and, refusing to quiet upon request as those who have attempted to domesticate the animal will note. In fact, they get louder and do not silence at the request of another unless this individual or animal first yells alongside of the bird. The hummingbird is also defined by a species specific trait: It is original to the Caribbean region and the Americas, although it has come to be associated with exiled Chinese writers and is commonly confused with oriental symbolism amongst the French, leaves it's young and it's nest after mating never to return again, unlike the vast majority of other birds.

Sarduy writes on these birds not only in his comments preceding the publication of his text, but also in his essay "Cristo en la rue de Jacob" in which he appears to link Apollanaire's long poem, "Zone" to the humming bird. In this poem, flocks of birds bind together like the language of the page, forming ornate stacks and assemblages of feathers from all corners of the world. The hummingbird in this preceding poem represents the Latin American continent. The again, in the tropical writings of the Avante Garde, Dario is the first to canonize poetry through the figure of the swan, Horacio Quiroga brings together the "Almohadon de Plumas" and the Latin American lifeforce as one of experimentation that dies at the event of ordered regimens or the installation of foreign knowledge within its own domestic space. Sarduy recalls the story implicit to the Chilean poet, Vicente

Huidobro's *Altazor* when discussing in *Barroco* the activities that train a night hawk to return to its cage after hunting during the daylight. Whereas Huidobro positions this figure between strata of the universe—a distant point in space and the eventual destination of his fall, a space beyond language and fully outside representation--as his ultraist manifesto proclaims, Sarduy places his protagonist of unknown origins at a textual point of inception and end that is simultaneously a delta for the amazon and thus a cipher for the entire Latin American continent. More specifically, the text opens as the protagonist hummingbird dances between two mirrors.

Here, the visual form acquires the fluidity to move backwards and forwards through narrative schemes that flee temporality in preference for the image. Depending on an image rather than a set progression, visual symbols mobilize plot movements and mimic the selection of a vocabulary register in which words complete this same work. Because the novel evidences its own progression from one system of signification to another and the elemental features of the plot multiply across a larger and similar narrative structure, the reader is forced to confront an inescapable and surreptitiously changing dynamic of power, desire, persecution, and persistence. Sarduy's works supplants a geographic space with a literary one that carries with it the notion of an absent homeland. The texst themselves weave a Cuban story. Each appearance or disappearance, chase, dance, or fight reflected in the protagonist's movement's brings about a play of power and desire as do these preceding experimental poems of exiles, escapes, and experimentation. Sarduy describes

> Colibri, un blond assoiffé de tatouages, de rhum et de combats simulés, va tenter de défaire ce cycle, de couper --tanto monta-- ce noeud: il le paiera peut-être de son essence, en disparaissant ou en devenant, à son tour, tyran (24)

> Colibri, a blonde who is thirsty for tattoos, rum and simulated fights, will try to undo this cycle, to cut [—tanto monta—] this knot: he will perhaps pay for it by disappearing or becoming, in his time, tyrant (24)

The novel comes to emblematize, in its critical and historical context, the polarized literary periods of Neobaroque and Postmodern tendencies of Sarduy. This happens not only amongst the texts but also at the base of the linguistic system for Sarduy: absence as part of a formative and guiding structure, that is, unlike the post-modern, both teleological and utopian.

Hiding and Seeking Language

Colibrí, the protagonist and a young unattainable being of unknown origins, "leaps" onto the first page of the novel and "freezes" for an instant, to dance "ingrávido" between two mirrors (693). *Colibrí* centers on a hummingbird protagonist, who, at the start of the text, arrives to a brothel at the delta of the Amazon (693). Inside the dense American jungle and this den, "whale" clientele purchase the services of young, dancing men (694). The dictatorial Madame La Regenta is a successful pimp; her band of employees, clients, and followers, do whatever she commands, leaving one individual as a problematic exception to her otherwise total rule: Colibrí. La Regenta chases, desires, and censures the hummingbird, sending pairs of huge dwarfs and little giants to track down this escape-artist, but Colibrí, when sought after, can never be found. When the narrator loses sight of his protagonist and cannot continue relaying his stories, characters deemed "Decorators" devour the text, creating holes in the pages and replacing the initial fiction with their own presence. These linguistic beings invade the scene at the delta of the Amazon and the jungles that surround it, where Colibrí cannot be found. The narrator's digression into a search for Colibrí unveils a

secondary space of the text. The narrator, pushed to the margins of the novel, begins to converse with Sarduy's father, a new character introduced in the middle of the text. The missing protagonist and the occupied story reveals settings as illusory, incomplete, forming and subject to change. Each intradiegetic element of the novel converts into another, looses its initial position, and, in a process of transformation, mobilizes further textual creation. Colibrí protagonist and *Colibrí* text merge to construct a unified image that obliterates the novelistic frame. The novel's final scene does not conclude, but unhinges or explodes in a moment that reveals itself at the start of another chase.

The visual image and the performative process of language in *Colibrí* conjure an interstitial reading—between the lines of the text, where the reader will yield to an experience shared by protagonist, narrator, and a narrator-as-author. All characters—and even non-characterized objects in the text, such as words, and settings—will confront the self. As the individual faces another textual element as a mirror of its own image, the materializing image or the not-yet-spoken language heightens the textual experience. The interstices of mirrored experiences, refracted by other's in the text houses information that exceeds signification and inherent uncertainties within one's own experience. Neobaroque writing, an open-ended praxis, authorizes this moment, encouraging the individual to develop an alternative mode of being founded in the interstices of presumed language, knowledge, absence and presence, cause and effect; here, unbound existence critiques Western Epistemology and all that concerns it by stepping momentarily outside of its amorphous range. This alternative perspective exiles the reader from the comfort of chronology. The text abandons the reader into the narrative maze, where the protagonist formerly hid: characters and readers alike are alienated from time, but also unrestricted from

possibilities. The novel, then, removes the protagonist, the narrator, and, by implication, the reader from the supposedly organic union between space, time, language and truth.

The Derridean specter, the Neobaroque as defined by Sarduy, and the textual process of *Colibrí* all possess the space of the other—in the last, we can see textual alterity in the image and the alterity of textual operations in cascading meanings outside of the author's control— animating it with its own unknown story that, in retrospect, appear more animate than those poetics, which this animation lays to rest. The words and descriptions that, under the definition of Sarduy's proposed way of reading radially are "chains of signifiers", repeat and mutate, eventually delineating, not itself as the cast object, but its mold, the extension beyond its parameters. Unrestricted from chronology of narrative progression, the visual image compensates by providing a complex of spectral connections. The image overtakes temporal progression in the narrative as destruction and deconstruction become the occasion for its materialization, albeit unfinished, ungrounded, and abstract.

I put forth that, like the individual elements of Sarduy's text, an overarching and spectral image is emitted behind *Colibrí*, which moves the author's body of work from a series of representations concerning Cuba and the Latin American continent, towards the textual universe of images in flight, without a steady state, which the author explicitly attempts to construct in *Big Bang* and perhaps found in *Pájaros de la playa*, but which he truly commenced in *De dónde son los cantantes.* This final image is found neither the delta where *Colibrí's* plot commences nor the desert where it ends, but in a return to tropes of flight, exile, departure, and desire.

When desired, Colibrí disappears, reappearing only once forgotten. When Colibrí escapes "The Regent", his text escapes the narrator's hands; the narrator attempts to locate his character, often referring to the reader and asking where he has gone. The narrator shares

with his characters the lack of control over Colibrí, and also *Colibrí*. The superposition of similar actions among the novel's protagonist, the narrator, and, also, "Sarduy" (written into the text) led to a climatic event, in which the textual point of inception, the setting at the Delta of the Amazon, is destroyed by Colibrí. Whereas Colibrí intends to end cycles of persecution, in his return to the page, he inaugurates another cycle; this time around, the protagonist will be the persecutor and not the persecuted.

Regardless of probability or likely verisimilitude, seemingly cursory actions and immediate appearances demarcate the entirety of characters in *Colibrí* (as opposed to internal definition, rooted emotions, or assumed intentions). The characters' actions and appearances correspond to a range of vocabulary adopted in the novel. Certain prefixes and suffixes predetermine the vocabulary incorporated into the text and also the characters' actions. Adjectives and verbs that compound prefixes and suffixes which emphasize disjunction multiply and proliferate, particularly with regard to Colibrí: the "ingrávido", "translúcido", and "inverosímil" protagonist (698, 707, 725). The list of most frequented adjectives include: irregulares, inmaterial, insólito, inmóviles, and impostores, indescifrables, deshuesada y descarnada, desvestidos, devoradores, desaparecido, decadentes, descoloridos, desengañados, desconocidos, transcendentes, translúcidos and transparentes.

The preference for a combination of alike or at least comparable prefixes (in/im/ir--all derived from the same Latin roots; des, and trans) dominate the language of the novel, and call forth a shift, from one thing, individual, or state to another, as Veronica Grossi has, in part, argued in her article "*Colibrí* de Severo Sarduy: La caída perpetua en el espacio cerrado, infernal de la escritura" (1994). In the cases above, these prefixes complicate the meaning of each descriptor's root—decadent signals a chain that is broken, regularity is reversed in "irregular", the image of meat, bones, and colors, are thrown into their reverse

state. To be specific, dis indicates transition from one into two, a movement apart, or a reversal; in each case the state of the then quality of the thing--appearances, coloredness etc. -- has been removed to the extent of marking lack as a positive feature. The prefix "des" (related to "dis" but not one in the same in their origin) indicates the removal and reversal of an action towards a thing. "Trans" differs slightly from prefixed words as it underlines movement across and beyond. "Trans" summons change. The majority of these words point to processes that disjoin and separate in their verb form, but the adjective suffix is equivalent to the gerund and past participle, thus the movement or transition at hand, is halted in action.

This range of descriptive vocabulary does not punctuate properties and concepts, but de-scribes them, writing around and even un-writing former meanings, and circling around an action, now frozen and uprooted. That is, "ingrávido" like Colibrí. As such, movements that have already passed, designate the qualities and states of the things and individuals described (698). The duplication of similar descriptors disjunctive in their root leads the reader to the next world, line, and page, but the movements fused in this vocabulary, over time, discourages the digestion and visualization of the micro-levels of the text. If the protagonist moves backwards and forwards or in and out of the narrative settings and across narrative levels of the plot, then this vocabulary overlies the actions of the hummingbird's wings, moving back and forth with such speed that they disappear, while governing agile and skillful flight.

A secondary set of vocabulary rivals these prefix/suffix descriptors, but, converts concrete and autonomously rooted words (easily visualized or imagined symbols) into mechanized processes. Sarduy, across the text changes from "blanco" to "pálido" "translucido" efervescente"; similarly he frequently describes objects and places as

"sombroso", "negro", but then converts these qualities into more temporally complex processes "ennegrecidos", invisibles, desaparecentes (699). Colibrí, the young, desired, and unconquerable protagonist of unknown origins is, "por supuesto, rubio" but the narrator advises that by blond, one should and must actually visualize an immense mane "engrifado, resplandeciente" and, at this point, the sentence continues to correct the last words applied to this hair digressing to state: "albino más que rubio" (692). This head of hair is in fact, opening up in slow motion with "volutas encadenadas", oxígeno, ozono de lluvia fibra de vidrio, pajuza de maíz soltando gotas finísimas, como el de un atleta victoriosa emergiendo de un chupazón" (693). The register of quintessentially Baroque language proliferates to explore a range of qualities, but the original "pelo" has become a free-flowing corn of glassy and fibrous ozone". Perfunctory and often exuberant language simulates a matter-of-fact edification and manipulation of intradiegetic textual space, which will facilitate the process of textual disintegration. Not only do words shift from "black" to blackened, or from white, to pallid, to translucent, to effervescent, then invisible and disappearing, the characters and the reader must attempt to sustain the image. To maintain the metaphor of the text, a comparable scope of vision might be locating the wings of a hummingbird in flight, to following the bird's momentary detentions, back and forth, flower to flower, then watching him zip-off. Disappearance and a loss of scope are expected in spite of the simple attempt at hand.

Because the characters are always escaping, chasing, pursuing, leaving and returning, the text exhibits almost all of its action through movement verbs. Colibrí falls, escapes, eclipses himself, appears, reappears, vanishes, hovers and flies. Colibrí is the being that is frequently transformed, characterized in strings of contradictory, abstract, complicated adjectives, but his actions are visual, and simple. We can see his movements, but the clarity

with which they appear, given the absent and mutative quality of the character leaves open a contradiction. His process supplants or rather constitutes his being. Simple nouns, strung together and comparable to the proper character, undergo similar transformations through adjective descriptions; words that do not denote movement come to represent a transformation, action or process. Sarduy's lengthening of sentence structure forces unto the reader an extended reading that traces the various elements of the sentence, the words, the prefixes and any contradictory combinations, that are in fact a murder and a massacre, in lavish revenge. Language, assembled in this way, attempts to move beyond itself, revealing its means (but not its interstitial objects around which it circulates) as dead. Again, this example of verbal disjunction and transformation results from a single letter, the disjunctive o, which allows for the text to diverge, move towards contradictory or similar meanings or ideas:

> Ofuscado por sus propias musarañas, o por esas cacofonías insultantes que con ancestral aguces marcial juzgaba como encantaciones incorruptibles o venenosos mantras, según lo tuvo delante, se abalanzó el Amo las Llaves contra su rubio rival. (698)

> Effaced by his own shrews, or by those insulting cacophonies that with ancestral martial aggres he judged as incorruptible incantations or venomous mantras, as he had before him, Master the Keys flung himself against his blond rival. (698)

Individual words, sentences splices, and strings of sentences model and condition the operations of characters, narrators, and text (as a self-referential symbol). Individual words that emblematize dialectical parts of speech, paradoxical actions, or transitory movements

comprise a spectral register of vocabulary. Meanwhile, words written in French, English or Italian work against the solidity of narration and mark the text with a semantic gap.

Sarduy refers to "inmaterial pupilas vidriosas" of a Carmen Miranda-like character, who then materializes as a reappearing Colibrí (764). This description unveils something prior in the preceding noun. "Immaterial" functions as an abstract descriptor that binds two contradictory texture substances, both highly material in themselves: pupil and glass. "Huecos" are specified for their irregularity, in another description, which illustrates their "visible desconfianza." In this similar process, a hole becomes irregular—an absence and empty space takes a particular form, then connotes a perceivable mistrust; the replacement of the former word for the latter, rather than testifying to a lack, seems to build a presence as "visible", despite direct denotations. This draws up a vague sense of illustrated presence, rather than mistrust, which only loosely returns the reader back to the initial image. The description goes deeper into the missing presence of these irregular holes: visible indicators that the object here should not be trusted transfers distrust onto the aware reader.

The series of descriptions unveils an absence that permeates through the materialized final definition of the holes. The level of abstraction causes the reader to recognize process in the text, or, perhaps, risk his or her own disappearance into this world of faulty and changing language. From this overriding quality of abstraction, complication, and mutation in the text, comes a process of materialization of more concrete words, which are nonetheless problematic. The text presents us with a variety of extremely concrete and physical objects and signifiers, seemingly innumerable. Disjunctive acts of signification delimit interstitial areas of the text, where new meaning surfaces and resides.

Sarduy's choice of language, when describing this protagonist, is not casual, but conscientious as he admits:

> Hace algunos años, cuando escribía *Cobra* y *Colibrí*, consultaba mucho más el Diccionario. Tenía entonces unos sinónimos y antónimos; eso le dio a mi prosa un brillo, una exuberancia, un lujo un poco fanfarrón que hacía pensar en el palacete de un nuevo rico, en el sueño de una portera lograda. (32)

> A few years ago, when I was writing *Cobra* and *Colibrí*, I consulted the Dictionary much more. It had synonyms and antonyms; that gave my prose a shine, an exuberance, a luxury a little boastful that made think of the palace of a new rich, the dream of a successful gatekeeper. (32)

A language of pleasure, rather than definition, determines characters and actions, hoists them up into theatrics, as if the text were set on an expanding and rotating stage. Precise narrative maneuvers stage openness and breakdown barriers between layers of an expanding and allegorical plot. The narrator, who presents the protagonist to the reader, later loses his character, as if the protagonist were autonomous and independent of all narrative control.

Because the narrator must chase down the protagonist, venturing into the interiors of the jungle, and the interstices of the text, he begins to move exactly as the protagonist. When we lose the protagonist, the narrator simulates his sequence of actions, which are respectively performed. These same actions that mark the narrator's loss of his text are conjured forth by Sarduy in his discussion of Cobra and Colibrí. Indeed, Sarduy states that he used to consult the dictionary in order to write, representing in an additional text after the open-ended conclusion or termination of Colibrí's project, his own hunt for the protagonist and the words that define his action. Essential to *Colibrí* is a play of absences and presence, made possible by a series of doubles. These doubles are not only existent in the pairings of languages and external discussions of the text, nor are they limited to a scaffolding of

authors, narrators, and characters. The linguistic and artistic capacities to divide, double, deform and delude clean or clear operations and directives is marked at the level of syntax.

Disjunctive sentence structures, in which words like "o" "como" and "si" perform and create rather than describe, open the text to potentiality and possibility. Repetitive sentences simultaneously expand and reduce these ideas through elaborate descriptions. This logic of animal symbolism is clarified through a simple analogy. The total movement of the hummingbird, backwards forwards and disappearing, depends on the identical movement of the animal's wings; meanwhile, the total movement of the text, depends on the identical movement of its language. Language, in this case, offers the possibility of creation on one hand, and overturns this idea with the other. As sentences unfold, the text reveals settings and characters previously unforeseen and now surreptitiously materializing.

Ghost Hunters and Sarduy's Trace

One could paragphrase a properly ornithological text and say that the hummingbird (Colibrí) abandons its home, offspring and origins never to return. In Sarduy's body of work, *Colibrí* is the last text to reference Latin America explicitly, and, which exhibits the linkage to Cuba in particular, as established in his early works, critical readership, and in the animal trilogy that the novel concludes and which includes *Cobra* and *Cocuyo*. These texts maintain the repetition of the consonant "C" in the title representative of Cuba, as it had been in his other text, *De dónde son los cantantes*. The alliteration of the C sound supplants the presumed word and initial space of "Cuba" with permutation, around which the text circles. Like the rest of the text, language, from the very title of *Colibrí*, and words and images, begin to situate this community. The C in these titles prefigure "Cuba" as a geographic concern that Sarduy's process of permutation supplants with language. Colibrí does not address Cuba, as

De dónde Son had--even in its restructuring of national order-- instead, it addresses the continent. Pájaros de la Playa, Sarduy's final text read as a memoir, breaks from the model of titling but borrows the physical form of Colibrí in its title and significance: Colibrí, the hummingbird, is the only pájaro that departs from its origin, never to return. Similarly, the Colibrí, which disappears and reappears in flight, borrowed the alteration of appearance and disappearance with *Cocuyo*, the firefly, as, in both texts, a former model of national understanding begins to fade. Permutation is not an act of random order in Sarduy, but a process. Titles and text relegate a presumed space of origins to an artifice, informed by immaterial language. The allegorical structure emerging from this language spirals towards a community of exiled readers for whom the text supplants physical space. Although the premises of this reading are not necessarily the only case, the relationship between previous texts and Sarduy's final text *Pájaros de la Playa*, confirm this suggestion.

Where *Cobra* exhibits minimal change and for some critics follows in the line of *De donde son los cantantes*, *Cocuyo* the firefly begins to situate a transitional animal, between light and darkness, which the hummingbird as a symbol continues to construct. Only in Sarduy's final text does the consonant pattern give way; however, a trace or spectral relationship between all texts remains. *Pájaros* maintains and transforms the image of the *Colibri* that had appeared more closely linked to the firefly. The physical transformation supports the tropes of flight and escape. The visual allegory that the text will sustain does not only commence in the title, but in the mere consonant, "C" whose graphic image (an open circle) sustains an escape and flight that does not conclude or arrive at a root, but rather, opens meaning. This circle correlates to the visual and structuralist diagrams of the Neobaroque praxis in "Lo Barroco y lo Neobarroco".

The final image of Colibrí merges Freud's notion of *Heimlichkeit* and *Unheimlichkeit* through textual development of meta-levels and, retrospectively, through the use of images that prefigure their divisible nature. Colibrí distinguishes home and hearth, conscious and unconscious, but illustrates the divisions, which should be restricted to single instances of division, across a broader time scale and several continents (196, 98). In this projection, the text constructs out of language the very divides that language in itself also represents: the constraints placed on meaning or knowledge that negate the unknown.

Because language and characters coalesce then contribute to meta-levels of the text, *Colibrí* represented from within narration, coincides with the notion of *Heimlichkeit* in which the subject becomes aware of the union between their predetermined consciousness and present experience of space. The experience of the uncanny, like the union of textual elements, indicates in their moment of unveiling the coming of knowledge not yet clear and hence operative and potential. The allegorical image contains remnants of the first plane of narration and of a broader view of, at least, the narrator's psyche—represented by the character of Sarduy's father. In this sense, the uncanny corresponds to the *unheimlich* space in which knowledge of this very process of indirect self-representation remains only partially repressed. In the same way that repressed desires can return and reappear as uncanny, the force of the allegorical image further expounds on the protagonist's actions as motivating a spectral reading in which the text appears to acquire an animistic force. The fact that the narrator is aware of his desire to describe Colibrí, and articulates this throughout the text by means of other characters that achieve an autonomous quality of operation, suggests that the uncanny image of the allegorical edifice does not result from the narrator's desire for the protagonist or even the protagonist's own actions as they turn desire into a tangible system, but also express a deeper condition of being.

The text offers visibility (though it's continued interpretation and mobilization of a series of hypertelic sub-stories) to the experience of a journey that, without a destination, continues to occur. Conversely, spectral experience does not total to a single and stable whole because its story is not yet known and perhaps never will be. Sarduy's text positions the reader before a confrontation with this reality. If Punter's definition of Spectral theory holds and it "reiterates our own complaint of being not at home in the world, of being adrift, lost in a prior space that can never be re-created by any rolling away of the stone" (Punter 6), then spectrality in Sarduy's work, as it dialogues with the tradition of the Neobaroque under this reading, also helps to untangle a critical divide that both the Neobaroque and Sarduy's work has faced—that which exists geographically as much as intellectually. The larger allegorical significance of Sarduy's work resonates with the experience of exile. The loss of a homeland, which had always been a creation out of nothingness, equates to the initial act of writing on the blank page. Sarduy's text forces confrontation with this structure, which parallels its own. As the text begins to outline an allegorical image upon which it is structured, the reader experiences the allegorical image as an uncanny occurrence, particularly as the text refers directly to this reader. This realization of the reader comes to terms with a sense of "other-worldliness", as carefully layered readings and symbols recall a single structural logic comparable to the haunt and uncanny in its mere duplication. Characters, narrators, readers and their actions are exposed to a structure that signals its own coming into existence and at the same time its own lack of means to do exactly this. Sarduy's poems, novels and essays cast a ghostly hue over the text, which seems to animate and posses its form. These funeral features resonate with dialectical structures of Derridean notions of spectrality perhaps because, as *Colibrí* clarifies, the position of Sarduy as writer is one and the same as that of the poet: that of exile.

Colibrí, published originally in French after Sarduy had been living abroad for 10 years, has not found a strong critical readership. Although Sarduy calls it his "true return to his homeland", the novel is considered by critics to be one of the more difficult of Sarduy's texts, often not discussed as a trilogy, with the exception of Gonzales Echevarría's *La Ruta de Severo Sarduy*. In this trilogy, I argue that *Colibrí* becomes a sort of "sun/son", a center of a universe that both implodes (in plot) and explodes (in rhetorical gestures grafted onto historical reality of the text). The interstices of the text are operative and resonate with a series of critical divides. To further this cosmology model (as Sarduy himself might prefer): on the one hand, *Colibrí* demands the opening of a critical space because the operative elements in the text that move across diverse geographies, histories, continents, and critical traditions are developed through a structural argument, an aesthetic that outlines absence. This obliges his critical reader to consider (as Santí had indicated, in the introductory part of this essay) the full range of meanings implicated when Sarduy states that, of his readers, none should be Cuban. I argue that not only is *Colibrí* central to Sarduy's work, but it houses a Baroque structure, lost and eroticized objects of Sarduy's own autobiography. Sarduy, indeed, becomes the hummingbird himself, a bird that doesn't merely escape or flee, but continues a process of transformation, directing, symbolically, ancestors and future generations between the past and present, the dead and the still forming, through the very architecture of text, cast as an architectural ruin and a forming edifice already haunted but yet to be explored.

When Colibrí disappears and the narrator searches for him, he encounters "Sarduy's father", who is abruptly introduced in the text. This event implicates an overarching and metonymical relationship amongst hierarchical levels of the text. The destruction of the site of textual origin in the final scene indicates the metaphoric continuance and inevitable return

of not only protagonist, but also narrator and "Sarduy", revealed as one and the same in this moment. These effects are reproduced at the level of the narrator later in the text. Invading the originary plane of narration, characters called "Decorators" "devour" the text from outside in and the narrator must confront them. This inversion of interiority as Decorators become pivotal characters and the narrator's project begins to appear as a projection (in the psychoanalytic sense) which creates gaps in the narrator's story: white blanks on the page that mark the loss of textual control over both protagonist and text.

The text foreshadows its own return through the immanence of its final images. Tropes of *Colibrí*, like much of Sarduy's work, delineate semantic confines in order to exceed these, time and again. Sarduy's poetic operation borrows spatiality of narrative and page to gesture beyond its parameters; meanwhile, the specter lacks proper form and possesses another to be present for what cannot be. The poetic operation that destroys the confines of originary narrative settings is thus spectral. Sarduy's visual allegory, one and the same as *Colibrí*, the specter, is forever in the process of becoming and disappearing. The specter is a manifestation of an unspoken language or thought, something that has been denied existence now beginning to materialize, and in this instance, also to disappear. Just as the reader traces spectral objects as they disappear, to become acquainted with the unknown, Sarduy's text, which escapes and eventually self-destructs, becomes a single piece of a larger project in which a series of stories reflects and resonates openly, supplanting a direct testimony or narrative. Colibrí resonates with the historical context of the literary community at the time of the novel's publication and reflects the story of dispersal, fragmentation with which Sarduy himself was involved. The text's structure, founded on language, rearranges space, but, allegorically, establishes the erasure of the necessity for origins, a homeland, and a

geography through the participation in a system of language that creates this possibility and the possibility of sustenance through this new creative system of language.

At the novel's end, the site of origin is destroyed; however, both text and protagonist appear to live on and retrospective reorganization of textual order draws forth gothic content specific to our Neobaroque and spectral reading of the text. *Colibrí* develops an architecture conducive to transcendence. It parodies Latin American literary tradition of the continent through arriving and then departing from its representation as a representation, but this novel extends beyond simulacra. The parallel actions between author, narrator *and* protagonist, mediated through space and language, reconceives of the past as it mobilizes a secondary and tertiary narrative on a variety of textual levels. Lack manifests from behind the progressive introduction of characters and spaces. This artifice sustains Sarduy's insight that identity and meaning exist as unstable and indeterminable categories--difficult to localize through traditional semantics, if discoverable at all, but not necessarily nonexistent. Thus, the Baroque artifice transforms into a platonic, inaccessible form, rather than an empty façade, and the limits of worldly knowledge expand.

Exile as Return: Sarduy's Ghost

Colibrí conditions an uncanny experience in reading that localizes the formation of a community in historic reality as it imagines it from a textual space. The text's illusory and final image results from acts of mobilizing spatial destruction to reveal a loss that is also a creation and a return. Rather than mere decorations of a greater artifice, there are two dramatic symbols that constitute a single interstitial setting: the Aids epidemic of the 1980s and pre-Columbian Nazca funeral lines where the image of a hummingbird directed peoples between life and death.

Depending on an image rather than time and evidencing its own progressive transformation, Sarduy converts Neobaroque semantics into space, language and setting, all of which situate a divide between the linguistic and the spatial form, respectively and together. When a mask of white death steps onto the scene, an AIDS motif takes the form of a visual image insofar as the letters "S" "I" "D" "A" begin to descend the page. The image confirms that this mask of death inflicts the character *and* narrative as the mask of white death compares to the blank page. The text authorizes a reading it does not fully incorporate, recurrent in the text. This image of gigantic Nazca funeral lines that take the shape of a hummingbird, inscribed across the American continent in historic reality, recur in the text. These lines directed indigenous peoples of the continent towards death, as Sarduy notes in his text. This image, of Colibrí, protagonist, text, and symbol appears alongside of the mask of white death, and thus unites a mythic continental past with the context of *Colibrí*'s present. As the mask of death that concerns writing and historic reality at once, the funeral lines, black lines across the continent, add to the significance of the lost continental past and a funeral rite to Colibrí. Across novelistic images and symbols, death and writing coincide, but so do destruction and resurrection.

Although Sarduy's novel may not appear gothic, ghostly or even spectral at first glance, disappearances, destructions, ruins and returns come together as desire arises through the experience of an irrecoverable loss. A range of macabre symbols and tropes of return animate and possess initial narratives and spaces, rendering these as ruins in retrospective comparison. Funeral lines in the shape of a Colibrí served in historic reality to direct Pre-Columbian ancestors and spirits towards the underworld, and appear as a focal point for the narrator as well as Sarduy. The mask of death and the funeral lines refuse integration to an originary narrative; invade narrative progression through conjuring "SIDA" as a spectral

figure to the page. Leonor and Justo Ulloa address the performativity of language, the erasure of subjectivity, and, eventually, the trope of AIDS in the text, arriving at the single reading of the spectral features at length in the article "La función del fragment en *Colibrí* de Sarduy". These tropes negate origins, escape determination, and mark possibility through the presentation of absence. The formative features of a spectral and textual animation have not been discussed in the canon of the Baroque, the works of Sarduy, or *Colibrí*. These tropes refer to both Pre-Columbian and Postmodern contexts, by pointing towards the interstice of history from which new communities, previously denied existence, take form.

Like the funeral lines that move towards the underworld, the black lines etched in the writing implicate a final story, but its impact mourns a loss of possibility established through repetition, occasions a ritual of return as a passage from the underworld. As writing evidences finality of the text, the blank page brought about through the white mask of death awaits inscription and even appears to conceal a future message. This message—the mediation between the page and writing, the present notion of future possibility and the previously established past, remains freed from determination or a single meaning. The allegorical images that appear in Sarduy's *Colibrí* are uncanny and indicate that memory mediates between levels of spatiality, image, language as triggers that the memory of the knowledge before semantics exists. By rendering preceding textually-produced elements as ruins and fragments, the text dispels itself from the direct image of the text to conjure another more abstract. The abstract image comprised of the totality of textual signification, gathers textual fragments through visual and symbolic trope of a white page and black writing, between death and infinite returns, and between a pre-Columbian funeral rite originating from the Nazca lines, and the early context of the AIDS epidemic.

The aforementioned contemporary literary applications of the uncanny alters when the very emblem at hand supplants the house and also already navigates in itself the operation of the uncanny as a form of being-in-between as *Colibrí* does. Because the uncanny artifice in this case embodies a total process, this process as a total image of existence removes reader or writer from semantic comfort, bringing about a departure from homeland. *Colibrí* displaces the originary uncanny experience because estrangement is evoked from individuals already involved with tropes of divided existence, outside of their proper space (determined nations, politics, races, religions, sexualities) and hence the proper means of expression (informed by these discourses).

Colibrí's reorganization of language and space operation is interrupted midway through the novel when masks of death and tropes of funeral rites begin to haunt the pages. In "La muerte vestida de Jade", a character and white mask of death lies down with Colibrí, then mobilizes a motif relevant to the AIDS epidemic appearing in the years when the text is first published. When La muerte steps onto the scene, the letters "S" "I" "D" "A" descend the page, inflicting both protagonist *and* text. The mask of white death recalls another trope that Sarduy frequents and which haunts the narrator as well: the blank page. Next, gigantic Nazca lines etched across the American continent during Pre-Colombian times mark the blank page. The Nazca lines, particularly the Colibrí, directed indigenous people from their death to the afterlife. The mask of white death converges with the image of these funerary lines to symbolize the blank page and its inscription. If the mask of white death presents the possibility of total dissolution, writing offers the possibility of return as it directs from death to an afterlife, a resurrection in the form of the written text and, even further, the spectral image it creates. Like the theorized figure of the specter, language, protagonists, characters, spaces, narrators and meta-levels of *Colibrí* come into being as they escape the page.

Rather than attempt the approximation of a root, the spectral features of *Colibrí* consider the metaphysical component of space, but, generally, moves towards transcendence that the reader must also adopt to arrive at the discreet forms of knowledge in the text. Colibrí, the protagonist as well as the narrator, reside in a divided but conversant textual reality and their relationship within this parallels respectively that between the author and his text. If home and hearth divide, so do the unconscious and conscious. *Colibrí* restructures the self, communities, and existence through materializing these divides in the space of the text. The divisions of consciousness and the ego link memory and space to the lack of language and the repetition of actions; however, Colibrí through the use of a spectral image, (rather than an architecture that appears spectral) provides a mnemotechnic device, capable of housing a greater diversity.

The hummingbird that describes the narrator, protagonist and text, exposes readers to interstices formerly nonexistent. Allegory expresses complex structures through the image, marking semantic limitations by its form, only to exceed this by requiring the individual to adopt a meta-perspective. The final image of the text in which Colibrí appears on the scene to burn the cite of textual origins, supplant la Regenta as the colonial head and, by extension, follow "Sarduy's father's" advice of burning the narrative, collapses the divide between each of the figures and the narrator. The narrator's text ends here, fogging determination of this act of obedience, repressing individuation or transgression for all. Something akin to a platonic form transforms into a Baroque artifice. This artifice sustains Sarduy's insight about the instability and indeterminability of identity and meaning through dissolving the bond between narrator and narrative. Presented loss transforms the space of the present into a possibility of the future rooted in an irrecoverable idea of the past.

Sarduy's novel opens gaps other discourses had sealed shut, rearranges their notions of time and space, and traces an absence that refutes definition but insists on its own return.

The novel's particular story moves this highly complex pattern into the worldly experience of exile, and, particularly, exile from a history founded on cyclical creations and absences, as in the Caribbean region. Not purely a ludic reshaping of the world, the text also directly explains Sarduy's experience as a writer, then foreshadows his experience with A.I.D.S., aligning these autobiographical indexes of the author to the interiority of the reader's thought process.[27] As characters converse across narratological levels, language itself escapes its storylines, its characters, and its page. In some form of textual exile, language hovers homeless outside of narration, but awaits a return, that of course can never be fully accomplished: the space of the text has been broken by the flight of language and its own confines that language desired to exceed. The original text will never be recuperated but instead, permanently felt as a loss—but a loss that gives way to possibility, creation, and a coming-community. At the deepest level, spectrality in *Colibrí* becomes at once an expression of loss that is also an acknowledgement that the object of loss was perhaps never more than a process, a journey, a dispersion of simultaneous manifestations and disappearance.

Even before the publication of this novel, several of Sarduy's essays, poems and novels complete a textual erasure of Cuba as a geographic space by supplanting images of historic reality with hyperbolic scenes, set in abstract spaces and founded through linguistic means. In Colibrí, the bar, La Casona—the point of textual inception and the symbolic origin of the Latin American continent (as established in the text)—is set fire to at the same instance the narrator sets flames to the text; all are also metaphorically destroyed, but their

[27] Leonor Alvarez de Ulloa and Justo Ulloa's article "La function del fragment en *Colibrí* de Sarduy" first recognizes this trope relevant to the virus (277-281) in 1994.

destruction establishes new meaning reflected retrospectively back onto the text, which now appears outside of time, as an image, destination, or memory. The spectral reading of the text unifies language, character, setting, rhetoric, allegory, and critical discourse. These fields begin to collide as Sarduy conjures its own return and the acknowledgement of this in an exiled community not yet formed, but postured to consolidate through literary praxis.

The text delineates its parameters through excessive production and destructions; reading shifts away from the procurement of concrete images and artifice, towards the interstices of meaning. Similarly, the narrator recedes from narration by the third chapter and begins to operate analogous to Colibrí. The text emphasizes this parallel when the narrator consults with Sarduy's "father". This father figure refers to the narrator as Sarduy, calls him a "pájaro" (Cuban slang for homosexual), and tells him to burn his "cuatro mierdas", referring to the previous four novels Sarduy had written (765). As narrator and author coincide, the forgotten protagonist reappears to burn down La Casona and remains to replace hegemonic rule without altering its structure. The final image collapses the divide between the characters, narrator and historical reality as the three coincide in this act. The narrator's text ends "extinguishing" Colibrí at the same time the narrator would appear to follow the advice of the character deemed "Sarduy's father". The relationship between the narrator and a character called Sarduy's father duplicates this logic as the text gestures beyond its margins towards historical reality.

If the desire of return (impossible to satiate) sustains an exile community after the experience of loss, then Neobaroque literature (an open aesthetic, resisting discursive completion) may redirect this desire by providing means of participation in another community, exiled and literary. In works similar to *Colibrí*, the formation of a community no

longer depends on the originary geographical confines, but instead, on the creation of a textual space, on a process of displacement, and on the shared-experience of taking flight.

Chapter Three: Reinaldo Arenas, Ritual and Repossession in *Celestino Antes del Alba*

"O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!" – Hamlet 1:5:166

> "Every person who lives outside his context is always a bit of a ghost, because I am here, but at the same time I remember a person who walked those streets, who is there, and that same person is me. So sometimes I really don't know if I am here or there. And at times, the longing to be there is greater than the necessity of being here" –from Ann Slater's Interview with Reinaldo Arenas, 1982

Celestino Antes del Alba was Reinaldo Arenas' first novel and became the first of what the author would retroactively name his *Pentagonia*, a massive text that comprised, according to its subtitle, the "secret history of Cuba." This secret national history, however, is entirely filtered through the personal experience of the author. Indeed, the secret the work exposes is precisely the history of lives such as Arenas' rejected by the constructions of state-controlled history and memory. *Celestino* is grounded in the childhood of the author, who was born in the peasant countryside of Cuba's Oriente province in 1943. He moved to Holguín with his family when conditions in the region worsened during the final years of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. While future novels comprise later experiences under the Castro regime, *Celestino* remains a novel of childhood, and hence of the period of Batista. However, its composition in 1964 was marked by the intervening period. Lacking food, electricity, and alternatives, Arenas joined the pre-Revolutionary Rebel army troops in 1957. Executions and violent purges during the Batista and pre-revolutionary period horrified

Arenas, and his involvement in the rebellion not only relieved the economic constraints of his adolescence but provided him, despite its own violence, with an education of the broader world outside of Holguín (*Antes que Anochezca*, 9). In 1960, Arenas enrolled in the Urban Planning and Agrarian Reform Initiatives program at the University of Havana. Until 1963, he lived in the state lodging at Rancho Boyeros and worked as an accountant at the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) (68). While it might appear that Arenas' revolutionary activity and subsequent participation in the government led him to have found a place within Castro's Cuba, his move to Havana also exposed him to the thriving, and politically dangerous, gay scene of the city. He became influenced by experimental art practices at the University of Havana and at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, where he met a welcoming group of those the state would term "anti-socials" – gay and lesbian writers and others opposed to Castro. His freedom from his repressive childhood and acceptance of his sexuality within the artistic and intellectual life of the library simultaneously resulted in censorship and attempts at repression through state-sponsored hostility.

The new government revealed its repressive nature harmful ideology explicitly in 1963, the same year Arenas began to work both in the library and on the novelthat was to become *Celestino*. Already in 1961 reports emerged of crackdowns on gay prostitutes, the violence of which spread to the wider gay community and indeed anyone the state determined "anti-social" as numerous studies by Rafael Occasion make clear ("Gays and the Cuban…", 78). By 1963, the oppressive force of the state was pervasive. According to Arenas, the very year he settled into the library and his literary work, the government opened up concentration camps – euphemistically termed re-education centers -- for social "undesirables." While Arenas himself would later fall victim to this sort of campaign, his own re-education outside of the stifling confines of both rural life under Batista and

revolutionary activity under Castro, in the artistic and intellectual life centered in the Biblioteca Nacional, flourished. These tensions – between the openness of his community and the hostility of the state which would prove catastrophic, determined the approach Arenas would take to his past. Yet it was also the space of the library, the experience of being surrounded by books, of reading everything from Greek classics to new works by Virgilio Piñera, of wandering through the stacks and sitting down to work at the borrowed type-writers of the basement (45-59) that would find their way into hisdizzying and phantasmagoric novel of childhood.

Celestino antes del alba illuminates personal and state histories in their obscurity: "before the dawn" that would be signified by literary expression of this experience of persecution and would articulate, at times, acceptance, outrage, and outsidedness. As we shall see, this novel transmits the story of the author and his generation to a future readership that, during the author's life, risked losing a legible past. It does so by the construction of a fictive kinship network that unites writers and readers in the secret bond constructed by the text, which alters historical reality through evoking ritualistic readings that traverse times. If for the writer, readers are always spectral presences hovering between being and non-being, the inverse is also true. The spectral autobiography both brings the author to the reader and keeps him away from the present not only by his material absence but by the obscurity of a text which resists clear meaning. This obscurity, however, resulted in difficulties when readers who did not find themselves called to kinship with Arenas read his work in the unsympathetic light of the Revolution.

Critical Intervention: Return, Escape, and Anonymity

Arenas' personal trajectory; from peasant, to revolutionary, to accountant, to poet, before the age of twenty-one; collapses in a single early life a trajectory of which the Revolution itself ought to have been envious. However, during the years between 1963 and 1970, which mark the most turbulent period of both artistic and homosexual oppression as well as political change in Cuba, Arenas entered into dialogue with the literary tradition the state regarded as degenerate and counter-revolutionary, meeting nearly all the key figures of the pre-revolutionary literary scene that included Carpentier, Piera, Lezama, and establishing a close connection to Cintio Vitier and Eliseo Diego, Origines writers who contacted him after the publication of his first story in 1963. Despite this, or perhaps in part because of it, Arenas' work was met with near-absolute censorship in Cuba by 1968. Yet, even the works that saw publication were frequently read by critics abroad with a state-like perspective. Carrying out the task of rewriting history, while being subject to its ceaseless enframement of those it rejects, as an exile outcast from the Cuban community in Florida and as a homosexual and politicized writer living within a politically polarized environment in both Cuba and the US, opened his work to conjurations and conjecture from an often predisposed critical audience. While Arenas' reputation currently seems secured, well into the 1980s Cuban leftist critics read the author's first two novels as a symptomology of a pathological delusional affliction. He did not merely write of "hallucinations" as the title of his second book would suggest, but suffered from them (Fernández Guerra, 136). Alicia Borinsky's 1974 *Diacritics* article "Rewritings and Writings" concludes that Arenas demonstrates a "basically unstable system of the text", with "movement that does not lead anywhere in a straight line but diffuses in multiple directions," and psychological and literary dilemmas in which he confronts the "impossibility of choosing between conflicting

alternatives not arranged in a hierarchical system" (27). Ángel Luis Fernández Guerra in the 1971 article "Recurrencias obsesivas y variantes alucinatorias" that considers the first two novels, states that the "terribly narcissistic" Arenas renounces textual development, then reduces it to a "stubborn anecdotal nodule"— "auto-reiterative" of his own "schizophrenic optics" or to a prison *albeit* of "infinite possibility" in which he prefers to confine himself (133, 137). From my perspective, such reactions to Arenas work index the cultural conditioning of aforementioned political and personal alliances as well as the internalization of dogmatic revolutionary systems of thought and thus reduplicate the very perspective upon which Arenas' work rebelled. In such a way, criticism of Arenas peculiarly *predates* the texts about which it writes, texts which are in a manner of speaking haunted by the misunderstandings which follow them.

Peculiarly, the publication of Borinsky's article coincides with Arenas' own return to his earlier work. For the author, however, his return was conditioned as an outlaw from the state, hiding from the authorities in Lenin Park. In his autobiography *Antes que anochezca*, written in New York near the end of his life while suffering from AIDS, he describes the peculiar conditions in which the text began in 1974. Arenas claims he wrote this autobiography hiding for over a month from the police in Lenin Park, a forest on the outskirts of Havana. A place marked in its name by the very revolutionary energies that coalesced to oppose him, he claims he started writing memoires in the notebooks that Juan had brought him (176). Under the title "Before Night Falls" I would write all day until dark, waiting for the other darkness that would come when the police eventually found me" (177). This lost version of the autobiography that discusses it "of course was lost, as was almost everything I had written in Cuba that I had not been able to smuggle out, but at the time, writing it all down was a consolation; it was a way of being with my friends when I was no

longer among them." It is perhaps no coincidence that *Antes que anochezca* began its life while Arenas was hiding in the trees: this scene of writing in fact itself restages the scenes of his first novel, in which the narrator and his alter-ego, the eponymous yet indeterminate central figure who is himself a poet, hide in the trees from a persecuting authority figure–the narrator's grandfather. Indeed, if the lost *Antes que anochezca* began in a way similar to the published text, then it too re-investigates the scenes of which *Celestino* is composed. There is a great likelihood of its having done so, as the title determined within the protection of Lenin's trees itself recalls the earlier novel. As *Celestino* exists before the dawn, in the primordial night of the author's childhood, the latter text occurs "before night falls," the time, that is, in which he was capable of writing in the light of the park and also before his incarceration and/or death. In the cyclical time of Arenas, however, like the diurnal time the texts' titles reference, it is difficult to know what night or day truly signify. And *Antes que anochezca* revisits Holguin as a consolation, not in the consoling nostalgia of a cherished childhood, but as a way of being with absent friends of the present.

The presence of absence, a way of tracing around and carefully articulating that which could not be, had been lost, or was not permitted, within Arenas' work extends to characterize the author's lack of readership and it also locates within the text a space of immaterial connection with those who are not there. I argue that this presence of absence, then, is a central principal around which *Celestino* itself should be read. Far from existing as a pathological hallucination, it serves to initiate readers into a world outside of that determined by the pressures of persecution it documents. Indeed, it is literary production and dissemination that in its actual referential existence follows the spectral logic that one might claim is hallucinatory. It is when texts are censored and destroyed that they take on a spectral form that haunts literary criticism by their simultaneous presence and absence. As

the writer is forced to live in trees, he returns to the time before the dawn, recasting himself as his novel's own offspring. His impending incarceration and already felt life-as-death (figured across the texts) is a physical concern of the protagonist, narrators, and historic authors, but also a trope. Across their settings fictional and materially existent within historic reality, the cessation of writing for each and every version of Arenas threatens figural and factual non-existence, a death that inhibits sight, travel, and love in very real terms as Arenas used his public persona when fearing execution and his literature to keep the network of his connections present to him as an interior reality.

The psychologically-focused frame of literary investigation (or persecution) reveals their critical readers' self-proposed limits of consideration. With these constraints in place, Borinski and Guerra fail to engage a perspective that leaves space for accurate criticism. Critics emerge as spokespersons for a state ideology explicitly opposed to Arenas' work and to which Arenas' work is explicitly opposed. Indeed, critical thinkers' own perspectives belong to a collective developed explicitly against any involvement with the individual perspective of Arenas, the expression of which his literature consists. In conclusions concerning Arenas' own state-of-mind or projects, the author's contemporaneous critics fail to identify or evaluate such overarching ethical dilemmas. Thus, in criticizing his work, they expose a collective evasion of responsibility or self-concern through pointing towards a sort of ritualistic sacrifice motivated by state maintenance and self-advancement, of an individual. Hence, the impetus towards corrective resolution by projecting outwards its own flaws begins to appear spectral—transparent and anxiously before a figure that they long to contain within the resources of their mind. As this relationship is not only symbolic and poetic but also an interpretation of actual events and peoples, this perspective must be seen as actively within circulation, whereas Arenas' solidity would be clearly confined within the

Cuban penitentiary space and outside of national presses and publications. Like a text which is unable to respond, Arenas himself was unable to oppose those who freely castigated the incarcerated author.

In this sense, the critical literature of the 1970s and 1980s ghostwrites Arenas' story, finding and filling in the gaps in the former's own narratives by unveiling the latter's figure in the negative space of their discourse in which he becomes present. In other places where Arenas cannot be—such as Paris where Arenas had won awards and where the politically outspoken Uruguayan intellectual and director of the journal *Mundo Nuevo*, Emir Rodriguez Monegal had circulated Arenas works early-on, Arenas' ghostly form preceded his departure from Cuba and arrival abroad. Indeed, Monegal, the first to unveil the international ties between literary presses and the Cuban Revolution as the motor for the Latin American literary boom, is also one of the first individuals outside of Cuba to publish works by Arenas and speak up against the censorship and disfigurement of his writings and character. Through the efforts of Monegal, Arenas' work was able to voyage across oceans, and the author himself, despite some concern in the French press that he had disappeared, could be discussed through his texts, finding sympathetic readers throughout Europe.[28] While of course the peculiar, spectral effects of textual dissemination are not exclusive to Arenas' work, it is, I argue precisely this disseminatory quality that is at work in *Celestino*, as it

[28] Monegal reflects on Arenas' first two novels, then insists that Arenas' second novel was paradoxically read alongside Socialist Realist texts and Carpentier in 1980; From this fact, Monegal concludes: "The fact that the only one of his narratives to have had a wide circulation is *El Mundo alucinante* has distorted our view of Arenas" (126-7). Monegal reproaches critical applause of other authors without regard to Arenas, insofar as he believes Arenas alone to be the only writer of his generation that "questions the official version of reality, political or otherwise" (131). Arenas' work and political circumstances, as appraised by Monegal, merit further investigation as they call attention to problematic alliances surrounding and within the intellectual community of Latin American expats in the 1980s, although, of course, Monegal's problems with the Cuban revoluton began much earlier.

imagines its relationship to the reader. In reimagining the isolation of his childhood, Arenas configures the reader through the construction of reading as a ritual act as a participant and inheritor of his own peculiar experiences. Already in his first novel, it seems Arenas writes to be present for those who are absent, to spectrally appear within the pages of his text for those initiated into the secret practices of reading the author.

Such a society of readers, however, would prove difficult to establish for an author about whom everything, even his own name, was a source of conflict in the critical and publishing record. In a 1981 interview with Arenas regarding his recent exile and publication of *Celestino* as well as *El Mundo alucinante*, scholar and translator Perla Rozencvaig highlights the mistaken spelling of the author's name, which Monegal had mentioned as well. Rozencvaig requests clarification as to whether a Borgesian literary game of the author's own might be to blame. To this question, Arenas responds:

> El verdadero nombre mío, por lo menos creo yo, es con I latina, pero en algunas ediciones, quizás porque se hicieron un poco en forma pirática, aparece con y griega. Lo sorprendente en el caso de *La vieja Rosa* es que la misma persona que me hace la entrevista es la que se encarga de la publicación del libro. Son cosas que no tienen casi explicación. Esa es una de las tragedias del escritor que se pierde un poco, que se convierte a veces en el producto de lo que hacen con él (43).
>
> The real name of mine, at least as I believe, is [written] with the Latin *I*, but in some editions, perhaps because they were made in a bit of a pirated form, it appears with the Greek *I* [*Y*]. What is surprising in the case of *La Vieja Rosa* is that the same person who is doing the interview is responsible for the publication of the book. These are things that have almost no explanation.

> That is one of the tragedies of the writer who gets lost a little, who sometimes becomes the product of what they do with him (43).

Passing from his true name, this history of pirated editions, and omitting the fact that he had changed his name in order to leave during the Mariel exile, Arenas restages the question by pushing at the formal divisions of writing and language, meanings and names, authors and translators. He directs himself to his interviewer and translator of his work (*Old Rosa*), and then denies his participation in literary games despite all textual evidence to the contrary. He tries to clarify the interpretive predicament, but only by asserting the indecipherability of the context of texts and authors. Arenas responds affirmatively that *Celestino* is an autobiographical text but then reinscribes it in a literary project that he pretends began with it as a recently published work, despite its actual composition seventeen years before and the intervention of several works before the writing of the second novel of the five-part series. At the same time, Arenas challenges the very nature of the literary genre in which he appears to participate, making sure to highlight that these novel-autobiographies include plays, multiple and unreconciled endings for respective stories, religious cantos, popular songs, and other dramatic forms; moreover, the project is neither novel nor autobiography but historiographic - a "secret history of Cuba" [29] The shared and secret histories established amongst texts, their individual significance, and referential interdependence does not indicate mere coincidence, but the author's uncanny awareness of the futurity of his literature and the

[29] The author reports to Perla Rozencvaig during an interview which appeared in the literary journal *Hispamérica* in April of 1981, *Celestino* es el principio de una obra que yo quiero desarrollar ampliamente. Celestino representa la infancia del personaje. El palacio, la adolescencia. Después viene una tercera novela, la de la juventud; el personaje está en la Habana al principio de la revolución. Luego una cuarta novela durante los años setenta, la cual está terminada y una quinta, también ya terminada, que se desarrolla en el futuro"(48) Again, when speaking with a scholar of Arenas' work, Francisco de Soto, the author describes this Project as a "Secret History." (*Una Conversación con Reinaldo Arenas*, 68).

conditions of his time. His own extra-diegetic descriptions mirror and are mirrored by his contradictory and unstable texts, which preclude any simple approach that would constrain them in an easy logical arrangement. Such logic, after all, is that embraced by the oppressive forces of revolutionary progress in a society which takes any information it can find to indict the individuals who were foolish enough to be clear.

Rather than limiting itself to conceptual and metaphoric comparisons relevant to ghostliness, spectrality in Arenas' works serves to explain possession in historical terms. Connecting the materiality of the written page upon which materiality dissolves with the physical present of reading which is challenged by the claims made upon it by the book, the central operational trope of ghostliness in these texts dissolves any notion of its metaphoricity. Metaphor requires and posits a stable referential world which can receive a figural translation. Arenas' works, and even his own life, so destabilize referentiality as to make metaphor impossible. In the face of the pending formation of historical state discourse, Arenas possesses the moment of the present, gesturing towards a future readership and past critics who serve as state proxies. The author returns through the body and action of the 21st century reader from whom he demands transcendence through an "uprooting" of conventional reading.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida reminds his reader that "A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts - nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality," shedding some light on how a system of disbelief—one that, in the case of our analysis, refuses the flexibility of reading across the archive, the mere image of the page, one text, and another—is not truly different from belief as it seeks to outlaw exactly the things, precedence or ideas that its own enunciation has declared to be beyond belief (11).

Released from Cuban discursive manipulation and issues of access of earlier critical periods, the reader can now bear witness to a spectral past subject to another reality that, once glimpsed even in the slightest, continues to destabilize vision, opening reality to the unknown and unspoken. Tom Cohen (2002) defines this mode of reading when discussing (a)material criticism in a recent reader dedicated to 21st century theoretical developments. In short, the approach to the text entails translation from the "familiar referential reading mode" to another that involves "actively re-networking as a trope of material reflexivity" (279, 286). This re-networking is not exclusively symbolic, but instead factually active. (A)materiality pushes performance, history, facts, and reality into an exile of understanding, wherein even the reach towards the restoration of former qualities compensates for and expands on the existence of a realm of cyclical destructions; here, as in interpretations of Arenas' writings, attempts at material and factual description testify to an underlying ontological condition that motivates the need for an individual's escape. Themes of return, repetition, and embodiment mobilize a vision of spectral history that presents itself even in the critical scholarship that concerns Arenas. The possession of history via the imagination and the literary space comprises a spectral mode of expression as this mode of representation was formerly rejected by communist and materialist thought. Rather than an intervention on the text, working against its grain, reading Arenas as a re-networking of the text in fact expresses fealty to the text. *Celestino's* structure makes no sense if read as if it conformed to narrative chronology, plot and character development, and thematic unity. It is not, however, only Celestino and Arenas' other literary texts that demand such re-networking. Indeed, through the strange publication histories of those texts, through the unreliable narration that Arenas himself offers regarding his literary career and autobiography in general, and the undermining of the historical record through interventions

in the archive, Areans has created a text of his life that itself appears re-networked and requires an analogous reading. Such a self-presentation, however, is not mere play. Rather it is a concerted and lasting effort on the part of the author to resist the narrativization of the authoritarian regime which censored and condemned him.

Derrida describes the figure of the specter as a paradoxical incorporation of a "becoming body" as a "revenant" that begins to appear and disappear in the same instant, in the "imminence" of its re-apparition before our eyes (3, 5). This revenant seeks acknowledgement of its existence as such and certainly not resolution. Its secret remains concealed not because it is "taboo", nor because its language is necessarily otherworldly, but because our existence has yet to meet it and so its language exceeds our means of signification and is wholly incomprehensible—beyond the testimony to impossibility that its form conjures forth (18).

Put in these terms, spectral beings, or the spirit or force behind that which is spectral, begins to materialize in the present in order to illustrate that an event, idea or other intervention of thought or reality has been foreclosed and necessarily excluded from understanding. Inversely put, the exclusion of one thing from systems of reason, scientific or otherwise, indicates the absence and the possibility of something and all things which weigh upon their parameters in the inevitable moment that this spirit starts to surface and recur. The appearance of specters, in the absence of a proper language and in spite of their ephemeral form, opens the divide between absence and presence, the present and the past, the known and the possible in their movement from one field of being and of knowledge into another; Derrida explains that this unmentionable "they" can break down closed and totalizing discourses, and yet "the force of their presence has everything to do with returning the gaze of an onlooker", with vision as much as materiality, with a sort of

predetermined denial that allows for the disappearance and appearance to become equally haunting events (6).

Arenas wrote *Celestino antes del alba* in 1964 and later he assigned to it primordial space in his pentagonia was assigned as the first novel in his Pentagonia series of interrelated novels (which Arenas extratextually links together in interviews, but which do not follow a strict order as a more traditional 'series' might).[30] According to the author, however, the classification of the text, *Celestino* as a novel is only partially correct. He is quick to claim that if one thinks of the novel in its 19th century or social realist form, he has has not written one. Rather it is an autobiography of the author's "spirit" as opposed to "the history of events in his life" (Rozencvaig, 44). In an interview from 1981, he nevertheless defaults to the term, stating that his 'novels' reveal a "myriad of perspectives": "Son novelas que son más bien como esbozos de otras novelas" (43, 45). Rather than novels, then, Arenas sees himself as writing "esbozos" of other novels, his own becoming traces and fragments of novels from the past or, perhaps, novels that were never written. *Celestino*, even in its basic structure, is thus figured in its presnece and its absence, a signal and trace of a novel that is not written; if it contains a secret history, it also contains the secret of what it is not or has not yet become.

Celestino's characters, settings, and textual structure oscillate between two focuses and forms of representation. All markers of setting depend on the protagonist's voice or record of his family members who surround him, interrupted him, and chastise both him and Celestino. It is difficult to tell whether a year, three years, a second, or no time at all has passed as certain lines repeat. Because characters are both dead and alive, the text does not have a specific time. Verbal tenses change constantly and sentences appear on the page

[30] See Fernando de Soto's full length study, *La Pentagonia*, which treats these works as they oppose Social Realism, popular in Cuba at this time.

numerous times without forewarning. Like the hiding places, rivers, mountains, trees, towers, coffins, and homes transform into one another fluidly. As the plot progresses, the narrator's family also transforms: Aunts transition into witches, the mother becomes her own doppelgangers, the boy cousins become girls, and the grandfather, becomes a mad man—attempting to kill Celestino with a hatchet and chop down the trees where the boys write and hide. The unexplained alterations, repetitions, and transformations between animal and human, self and other, life and death create a profound instability that resists emplotment and normative character development, resulting in the uncertainty of even the most definitive signs. After a little only half-way through *Celestino*, the reader is greeted with the clearest possible sign: "FIN" (125), only to turn the page, where the narrative resumes without any indication that an end occurred, to conclude with a "SEGUNDO FINAL," likewise false, some thirty pages later (161), resuming the narrative until a final final, an "ULTIMO FINAL." But in the space of a text as unclear as '*Celestino*, even this ULTIMO might not be ultimate; the text continues at least in tagging its time and place of composition, "La Habana, 1964." One might read the *ultimo final*, then, merely as the "latest" end but not the last. The novel, indeed, continues, into Havana in 1964, the scene of writing itself and the time and place of its extradiegetic – at least according to the "latest" insight – continuation. The material book itself, and the act of reading it, become wrapped in the logic that propels the language – one of endless permutations, where nothing is final, cycling between opposites without a sense of forward motion. The specter, according to Derrida, represents exactly what lies beyond the limits of discourse, but aims to reorients the space and sense of epistemological certainty. *Celestino* engages in the creation of such figures, its linguistic strategies are at odds and in a sense beyond discursive frameworks of communication. But it is also beyond discourse in a material sense, in that its very structure,

exemplified by its endings which mark new beginnings, lead out into the world of the reader, to the limit, that is, of the text's own possible discursvie acts. It points to itself beyond itself, within the space of the present.

The story figures the protagonist at an intersection between memory and imagination, past and present, reality and fiction, at which Arenas also stands and is formulated as character. The autobiographical novel occasions the navigation of scaffold settings, from some of which the reader remains blocked. Here, volatile tirades inscribe the text with inhospitable interstices making the reader aware of an unfulfilled form of life, from which the reader aims to escape. Choruses of dead aunts and cousins, abusive grandparents, and the protagonist-narrator's mother provoke the narrator and another version and division of himself, Celestino, to run from initial settings into nearby rivers, mountains, and forests. Family members follows this narrator-protagonist configuration as the setting is lost to sounds of hatchets, diabolic laughter, and echoes of the narrator's own isolation that breaks-up stream-of-consciousness-styled narration. This paradoxically imaginative topography (both ornate and bare) reflects, perhaps, not upon the ostensible setting; rather, it provides a space into which the future reader can project himself. In the second of the novel's three endings, the narrative turns into a chorus of these repeating voices and refractive characters, freed from persecution, yet totally ungrounded as the story begins and ends vacillating between rooftops and underwater rivers or wells.

Celestino is divided into sections by citations rather than clear chapter divisions. In this first of these sections, the narrator-protagonist claims that he invented "Celestino", which calls attention to the fact that both he and Celestino are writers (20). As writer and inventor of Celestino, the narrator is comparable to Arenas, writer of *Celestino*, and this novels' plot replicates an isolated, mediated, and uncanny structure, which defines the

narrator and his lover's life as well as death. Still, critics such as Nivea Montenegro, Andrew Bush, and also Arenas himself indicate that the portrayal of violence within Arenas' familial and social life positions the division of the self and its creation as necessary for survival within the protagonists' dismal setting.

Space and certainty, however, are reduced to merely shifting associations within the text. Periodically throughout the text, a chorus of dead aunts surrounds the narrator, entering a bleak and dark space of this well, the forest, or the narrator's home, presented also as his head and as a tomb. Celestino's equivalent to a normative setting invovles these multiform and ever-shifting spaces. As previously noted and according to De Soto, Montenegro, Oliveiras, and Arenas himself (albeit without emphasis or any demarcation of a final setting) *Celestino antes del alba* would appear to commence in the countryside of Holguin where Arenas spent his childhood: A strange critical convergence given that there is no clear nor singular setting within this text.[31] The plot progresses through a well or "pozo", near the "Monte"[32] on the banks of a river, inside a house or on its roof, and within a patio, all of which narrator claims "dawn never touches"—despite much of the novel happening in daylight. This peculiar temporality is, of course, befitting the novels subtitle but also points to the absence of beginnings and endings. These structures comprise the stable elements of setting. Shifts in grammar and syntax and verbatim repetitions within dialogue render any sense of time obsolete. Still, the title *Celestino antes del alba* references both dawn (alba), the heavens (Celest) and connote blindness as Cecilia is perhaps the most cited protagonist of all

[31] Interviews with Arenas by De Soto and Rozencvaig discuss this setting outside of Holguín yet both authors continually discuss the fantastic and imaginary setting and not-yet-existent space of the text (*Los dos mundos de Reinaldo Arenas*, 14).

[32] African ethnographer who revises Fernando Ortiz's prejudiced texts (*Los Negros en Cuba* in 1902, for example) titles the first study of the secret sect of the Abakuás *El Monte* (1954) and this text, which would lead the Neobaroque writer into exile, remains the most complete work on the Igbo diaspora in Cuba today.

Caribbean fiction and the eyes are a focal point throughout the narrative. Nonetheless, the birth of Celestino, one half of a single, divided protagonist and the celestial being who occasions "light being let in" (as in "dar luz, the Spanish idiom for childbirth) amounts to the production of *Celestino* as an entry point and departure gate for Arenas' literary, politically open, and eventually exiled life.

Or, perhaps, of what it once was. *Celestino* has as its narrator a child who becomes figured as already dead; he is also the protagonist, who frequently appears very much alive. Yet, he is also another, the eponymous character Celestino. This character, however, also appears between life and death, outside and inside, present and absent. These figures hovering between opppositions are clearly expressed in the very beginning of the novel, in which it is impossible to determine whether or not the narrator's mother is at the bottom of a well, if she is threatening to drown herself, or if, indeed, it is the narrator who has drowned.

Celestino and the narrator take refuge in a space they dream-up night-by-night and which, as a product of their own imagination, transforms from trees, into towers, and then to castles, thereby marking the internalization of a perceived persecution from which they can never escape. Persecution, even as it inspires the reconstruction of desire, becomes soiled by the recurrence of the narrator's vision of his mother's death or demand for water (34). Celestino is the narrator's love object whereas his mother oscillates between beautiful, kind, and good, to evil, demanding, and a taboo site of tension. In fact, where the mother will demand water of the boy as a euphemism for her own water and well—a vaginal channel of birth, Celestino's initial visualization is immediately sexual as he desires to drink *from* the narrator, at which point the mother appears, thirsty as well. Indeed, the mother figure discussed by Cabrera and Castellanos matters insofar as she mediates, and thus

embodies the relationship the protagonists have with their settings, writing, the narratives, and other narrative figures.

When the narrator's family sleeps, the narrator and Celestino adventure into forests from which they call forth mythical characters like a "duende" (similar to one described in Arenas' autobiography), a spider, and "The month of January" (86, 113, 115, 120-125, 137, 145, 182-196). These characters relay cryptic messages in passing that the narrator never translates to his reader and forgets on several occasions. Repetitive reference and the resurfacing of reported acts of speech refigure the rivers, trees, and dreams that materialize within the text as they indicate a transference from their anxiety, into an affective reality that guides their escape, and then that need now characterized by cyclical, mythical, and indecipherable symbols that conceal an individuated origin.

These spaces literally stream together in descriptions of rivers and wells conducive to textual and sexual fantasies that flow into one another, merging various currents of the text but haulting the reader's facility towards this story. When the aunts or cousins slip into the scenes of forests, or the mother or grandmother encounter the protagonist at dawn, the stream of invective sends the narrator into panic and Celestino disappears from the scene. The narrator's fantasy is that of Celestino—a text incarnate, a division of entity, that concurrently fragments into multiple voices via a fantasy of reading, that must depend on a relationship to the unknown in order to make sense of such phenomenon.

Each character that populates the novel divides into another version of themselves: The narrator/Celestino, the aunt/the witch, the mother/another mother, the cousins/school children. Settings and characters interact and divide to reveal a complex and open structure that houses multiple stories within a single fragmentary frame. This frame becomes inclusive of Arenas as an apocryphal permutation of the narrator; the characters hide in the interior of

trees from persecuting family members. Arenas as author, creator of Celestino, follows characters into the interior of, not forests of trees, but pages of the text, hiding within the space of the text, when surrounded by violence of the Batista and pre-revolutionary context of his youth as well as Castro's Cuba in 1964.

The textual setting recurs to unconscious imagery in a topography navigated by the conscious, but influenced by the interiorized external stimuli and associative triggers within an otherwise contained understanding. The perspective of the text is taken from limbo. Between two worlds and diverse beings, the narrator attains a degree of omniscience as an interlocutor among worlds of isolation, and thus Arenas holds this same position as a writer during a time in which isolation and alientation, must be reintegrated into society via systems of secrets, unspoken alliances, and sexual acts. In reading the novel, readers themselves are positioned as participating in this system encouraging an engagement in a secret, ritualized world which expands beyond the text and into the social space of Arenas' present marginalized space in Havana.

From Sexual Inceptions to Textual Crypts

Where the maternal figure appears dead during the first scene, reader and narrator remain unable to process this information in a consequential and immediate way; the relationships are too much to swallow, so to speak. The narrator denies the reality of the situation by insisting that his mother, drowning in the well, is tricking him by playing dead again. He references her illusory or, consistently, changing nature: "Madre mía, ésta no es la primera vez que me engañas: todos los días dices que te vas a tirar de cabeza al pozo, y nada. Nunca lo haces" (15). This vision equally constitutes an act of denial of his guilt felt towards his mother for desiring her or for desiring Celestino. The development of the mother son-

relationship functions inversely as this scene appears before the reader recognizing that the temporal schema of the novel is counter-factual. If the textual setting is the space of the unconscious, then this explains the lack of time, as Freud himself refers to the unconscious as a topographical space lacking temporality throughout his work. The text's topography forms a crypt (as discussed in the several notes of Andrew Bush's "The Riddled Text" of this unconscious space through references to wells as well as processes of isolation, fragmentation, and transference, apparent in the narrative process (379). In this light, the characters that chastise the narrator encourage the memory of the mother floating in the bottom of the well.The interiorized repressive setting, rather than directly concerning persecution and censorship, splits textual actions into actual actions remembered, and fantasies triggered by unconscious desires.

Within the material setting of an affectively-oriented text and as each character seems to split into internal and external permutations, the mother insistently begs for her son to fetch water, water flowers, or rip them out—euphemisms for sexual acts. She cries, reproaching her son, but her actions either register her fear that her son loves Celestino or attempts to instill a sense of guilt towards his relationship to his second self:

> -¡Sácame, que ya me ahogo!
>
> -¡Sácame!
>
> ¡Coño!, ¡que soy tu madre!
>
> -¿Por qué no me salvaste?
>
> -¡Desgraciado! (189)

> Get me, I'm drowning!
>
> Get me out!

> Pussy! I'm your mother!
>
> Why did not you save me?
>
> Ungrateful! (189)

When he escapes with Celestino or engages in writing, the voice of the mother is perceived to return to call him an "animal," a slang term for homosexual used frequently throughout the text, to remind him that Celestino's (his own) writing is "mariconería" and to avow that she prefers death to having a gay son. Through the course of the novel, the narrator returns to the scene and the memory of his mother's death when thinking of Celestino, which is clarified on occasion:

> Ahora, que ya es mediodía y Celestino no llega, yo no sé qué hacer. Mamá me ha preguntado por él, y yo no me he atrevido a decirle la verdad, porque yo dudo de mi madre y creo que ella le llevaría el chisme al abuelo para que él vaya hasta donde está Celestino escribiendo y le dé un hachazo por la espalda. Por eso no le digo nada a mi madre, aunque a ella no hay que decirle las cosas para que las sepa, pues se da cuenta de todo. (196).
>
> Now that it is noon and Celestino does not arrive, I do not know what to do. Mama asked me about him, and I did not dare tell him the truth, because I doubt my mother and I think she would take the gossip to the grandfather so that he goes to where Celestino is writing and gives him an ax for the back. That's why I do not say anything to my mother, although she does not have to tell her things so she knows them, because she realizes everything (196).

While the narrator idealizes his mother calling her the most beautiful woman in the world, he also believes her to be an informant to the dominant authority figure of the text, the grandfather, and believes her report to him will result in Celestino's murder. The mother makes any attempt at secrecy irrelevant – she is the ideal informant, who knows everything, independent of any communication. She is herself, as a figure existing both inside and outside of the author, who possesses him with her own traumas and by an absolute panoptic knowledge of his own thoughts, a specter of authority. This psychic spectral spy who is simultaneously idealized and loved prevents his complete embrace of his own desire for Celestino. The narrator is burdened by her presence, yet seeks out the same lack she confronts repetitiously. In a recurrent vision, Celestino envisions his mother blaming him for her death. As a result, he displaces her figure at the same time he identifies with her, projecting that she is a divided being. The narrator pronounces that his mother is in fact not his mother but in fact of series of separate figures: "Mi madre es otra que siempre está escondida en el pellejo de la peleona"(217). As the mother offers a challenge to the transference of the narrator on to his new libidinal object – which, it should not be forgotten, in some sense represents his own poetic aspirations as well as his own sexual longing, transforms his mother into a specter by multiplying her existence into several uncanny versions of herself. As figures who are both alive and dead within the novel, all characters are subject to such spectral transformations. The narrator, as Bush derives from Abraham and Torok's *The Kernal and the Shell* inherits this gap because of his mother's relationship to him, which is itself refracted through the loss of her husband and his father. Indeed, the father, through his absolute and determinate non-presence, becomes paradoxically the only stable referent in the text. The father, whose absence might be said to haunt the figures of the text, is nevertheless the only figure who can definitively be said not

to be a ghost. Yet, according to Bush, it is precisely his absence that leads to the production of ghosts, through a gap in the ego structure that precludes appropriate reflection and mourning.[33]

Although the reader may consider such figures not as projections but as autonomous beings, they operate as divided entities in dialogue with the narrator's conscious and unconscious, which constitute the narrative settings. Here, the psychological realities of the character's family are directly experienced or encoded as in a crypt: to cover the mental gaps resulting out of interiorized social structures and norms, repressed traumas, and denied information or withheld secrets of the narrator. The crypt mutates into the physical space of the text in which the page acquires topographical and dimensional features that the reader may interpret, despite his/her limited access. Characters reveal their duplicity through frequenting shifting settings. Structural repetitions, as actions or movements within a setting, also cause characters to coincide with their exact opposite, heightening contrasting value systems, magnetizing repulsion and desire, and privileging structural mutations and possibility over the order of relayed information. Unable to process the conditions of his surroundings, the narrator displaces his mother's possible death onto Celestino, who is, tautologically, the cause of her anger.

To exemplify this displacement, the narrator imagines that Celestino appears "con su madre muerta" as if Celestino's mother were not the narrator's own. The conversation continues as the narrator asks Celestino:

-¿Y tu madre por qué se ahorcó?

---

[33]In a revision of Freud's most problematic and transferential cases of psychoanalysis, such a gap may be inherited as a transgenerational trauma, a "crypted" experience in which the secret of the past is swallowed within the proximate generation that is removed from the root of their inherited trauma (as discussed in *The Shell and the Kernel* and the introduction to this dissertation).

-No sé. […]

-Si mi madre se ahorcara podríamos los dos contar las mismas cosas...(57)

And your mother why did she hang herself?

I dont know. [...]

If my mother would hang herself we could both tell the same things ... (57)

His failure to identify with Celestino and his mother's death facilitates the narrator's acknowledgement of his own alienation, which he expresses as a desire to be able to say the same thing to Celestino. Maternal death also becomes synonymous with identification with one's self amongst characters of homosexual orientation. The narrator acknowledges his alienation from his mother when he encounters his mother as or in someone else: "Yo la miré bien, porque no pensé que ésa fuera mi madre. Y en verdad no era ella, aunque su voz y su cara y su cuerpo eran los mismos"(140). As the narrator transforms into two divisions of a single entity, so does the mother: the first pertains to the narrator's projected guilt; the second, to the reality of death and loss that the narrator and the mother share. He comes to terms with his own self and the relationship with the mother and begins to see her as dead once he can identify her as outside of this structure through Celestino, whose subsequent relationship with the dead mother allows the narrator to confront his own trauma. The narrator and Celestino step into his/their mother's room, without windows or a bed and lit by a single candle. Celestino no longer acknowledges the mother as someone within the protagonist's reality; in the narrator's projection of himself he cannot see this mother.

-¿Qué pasa? -dijo Celestino.

-¡Mi madre está guindando de la cumbrera!

-¿Qué madre?

-La mía… (159)

What's up? Said Celestino.

My mother is chirping from the ridge!

What mother?

Mine ... (159)

Celestino's presence confirms the disappearance of the mother within self-identifying characters. Next, the maternal figure demands that the narrator answer a question that regards the narrator's own death from her perspective, which relates to Celestino:

-¡Quién fue el que te mató ahora!"Anda, díme aunque sea una vez, quién fue el que te mató.

-Tú -dije yo entonces para mortificarla.

-Tú fuiste, mama (157).

Whoever killed you now! Go on, tell me, even if only once, who killed you.

You, I said then, to mortify her.

It was you, mama (157).

The narrator's choice results in an outward identification with Celestino and a departure from the image of his mother's death, as this conversation leads to a subsequent funerary trope in which the narrator confronts the scene of the mother's burial. The narrator's distinguishing act from the mother relieves the protagonist of guilt, then confirms his own identity. The mother is upset at the start of this scene as she already recognized that he has entered her room alongside Celestino. As persecution intensifies within the prismic

perspective of the text, the narrator's internal thoughts about his mother relate to the definition of a larger familial and social structure in conflict with Celestino.

Derrida remarked that "a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*" (11). In the reading of the text I have outlined, almost every element is, according to Derrida's formulation, spectral. In the figuration of death, from the first sentence, the novel begins by coming back. Such spectral returns are, however, mobilized by the one figure who does not return: the absent father who is merely gone. In this reflection, in the desire for the father, the desire for a male figure, for intimacy, for the love of the mother, it is desire itself which is the ultimate specter, the fundamental drive of the novel, which, by its foundational structure likewise begins by returning.

Abakuá Rites: Transfiguring the Polemical Past

If the claims regarding *Celestino* as a novel of unconscious projection about taboo incestuous sexuality and displaced guilt are seductive, and have certainly revealed a powerful hermeneutics by which to read the text, it would be a mistake to consign the text solely to psychoanalytic readings. Indeed, they might play directly into the negative readings of the aforementioned critics of the 70's and 80's. The text is far too strange, or at least strange in a different way, to be merely a site of unconscious free association. Rather, the novel frequently enters into a mythopoetic and ritualistic mode that suggests less a form of unconscious projection and more a "state" – both cultural and mental – in which the split between unconscious and conscious is far less definite. That mythologies have been a well-tread site of psychoanalytic reading does not reduce them to it – and it is my contention that the intention of the novel is not to be treated exclusively as the sum-total of such interpretations. In a pardigmatic example, the narrator describes his former ability to fly to

the moon, and the temporal dilations that occurred when he did so. At the time he recounts this episode, he is no longer able to do so; hunger emerging from a drought prevents him. The physical impossibility of dreaming has resulted in a kind of devolution of the family, until they conspire to ritualistically murder and eat the grandfather. Rather than provide a *Totem and Taboo*-styled reading of this scene, however, I would suggest that it is precisely the paleolithic experience itself – rather than its psychoanlaytic meaning – that the scene evinces. Physical starvation produces a failure of imagination, which in turn requires a return to a ritualistic performance in order to escape the constraints of purely material reality. Of course, the grandfather returns later as if nothing had happened to him, which places his own demise as a figuration rather than a reality. Nevertheless, the satiation through ritual allows the narrator to fly again, at which point Celestino and the narrator are capable of investigating the causes of the drought and discover a flood in the sky coming towards them.

The strangeness of *Celestino* – its cyclical movements, its kaleidoscopic shifts, the metamorphoses of its characters, the indeterminacy of even whether its characters are alive or dead, the sudden shifts into impossible actions – might be partially explained by the narrator-child's interiority. These unconscious dream-images exist in a space that does not recognize logical or temporal sequences, in which fantasy and reality blur into an indistinguishable amalgam devoid of a reality principle to anchor them. The novel, however, has another dimension to it that, far from maintaining itself as an interior narrative, strives for exterior connection. Its returns to the images of violence, its incantation-like passages, its movement between life and death, function as elements of a ritualized world. If Celestino is the child-writer who leaves his poems on the surfaces of the natural world, his marks, illegible to the illiterate authoritarian persecutors that comprise his and/or the narrator's family, function both to mark their author for persecution and to create a coterie of readers

– Celestino and the narrator -- who recognize their value. Their secret meaning, unavailable to the illiterate family, is, perhaps, analogous to the novel itself, whose interpretive difficulty can be penetrated only by those who do not reject its strangeness. A tree is transformed into a space for writing; the novel itself transforms all it touches into something equally unanticipated by its reader.

Perhaps the ritualistic function of *Celestino* can best be grasped by comparing it to the most notorious ritual-based community in Cuba, which bears strange, sometimes paradoxical, affinities to the position of Reinaldo Arenas as a gay writer. The secret society of the Abakua would have been well known to Arenas.

Its adherents, known as Ñáñigos, were the inheritors of Igbo and Yorúba customs and practices that originated in the Nigerian Cross River region of Calabar. Despite the catastrophic displacement brought about by the slave trade, the Igbos were able to maintain a degree of cultural integrity through their reputation among plantation owners, who informed of their worship of masculine qualities of virility, bravery, and strength, placed a premium on their ownership (Lumsden 47) and were brought to Cuba's massive plantations between 1762 and 1870. Yet despite the value placed upon these "nanigos," they were also incredibly problematic for their owners, as the very qualities that made them coveted also proved to be the source of their rebelliousness and indomitability; frequently they would refuse to work, going so far as to asphyxiate themselves by swallowing their own tongues.

After the abolition of slavery, freed blacks relocated to urban centers and established formal societies, especially in the regions of Matanzas and Havana based on this Igbo heritage; their practices were closed off to non-members, and one could only join if one was called by particular kinds of visions. While their practices were undisclosed, the group was

also censured by the government, which feared the establishment of an alternate social formation it saw as a threat to its own cultural hegemony (Castellanos, 212).

Anthropologist Fernándo Ortiz expressed the antipathy towards the Abakua in his 1804 text *Los negros brujos*, where he invents and embellishes several ñáñigo and abakuá character types, deems them signs of the "most deplorable" and "murderous" African "tribe" (492). Figures such as Ortiz documented delinquency amongst these societies, resulting in further negative political associations and, in turn, a greater level of secrecy amongst the already clandestine group.

Arenas would have been attentive to the history of the Abakua through the work of Origenes member Lydia Cabrera, who documented some of their rituals in her early revisionary ethnographies. Perhaps more intimately, one of Arenas' closest associates at the Bibloteca National José Marti**,** Tomás Robaina, known by his nickname Tomasito in the author's later works**,** was engaged in a close study of the Abakua around the time Arenas was writing *Celestino.* The literary figures centered within the library were themselves part of a secret society. Theirs was based in sexual identity which was also despised by the state. Yet it is also true that their cultural power was, in a perverse manner, analogous to the Igbo's value to the plantation. Gay Cuba's all-male community, engaged in their own secret practices, could be seen as a foil to the Abakua themselves.

Celestino, however, is a novel of the author's childhood, before he found any type of community. The exclusively male Abakúa would serve as an analogue to the gay community of which Arenas as a child would unknowingly long to belong, despite the former's perceived intolerance towards homosexuality (Thompson 227). Yet along with ceiba trees and rivers serving as the most important symbols for the rites of the Abakua and the setting of *Celestino*, the Abakua founding myth of the formerly all-powerful female who becomes an

assassinated mother could serve as a gloss of Arenas' novel itself. Cabrera states that all Igbo descendants are "artists of substitutions" and "transformation." She references their quick conversion during rituals of a Ceiba tree, in the oration to protect the patio which is central to their rites with merely "any other tree". Again, during urban performances, their sacred river quickly transforms into a puddle (205). Other scholars of the brotherhood explain that the group, heavily involved with a corporeal language of dance and a scripture of signs and drawings, inaugurate the supernatural possibility of transformation from the profane to the sacred (Castellanos, 244, 255).

While the transatlantic Neobaroque almost exclusively crosses the ocean northward to Europe, Arenas' spectral relation to Abakua rites peculiarly reconstructs a transatlantic map that more properly reflects the movements of Cuba's people. As befitting a book of ghosts, the Abakhua and their ceremonies are not explictly present – the narrative never references them. They are there as traces and echoes. Their legibility rests, paradoxically, in the illegibility of *Celestino*. Its strange, seemingly unmotivated images call attention to themselves in their initial illegibility.

While the relationship between Abakua practices and the events of *Celestino* is not direct, moments in the novel appear to echo the secret society quite clearly. Arenas frequently discusses both of these spaces. At the river, Sikan even hides inside of the tree as Celestino does. Abakúas admit only young unmarried males as new members. These members should receive a message from the spirits in the form of a low, natural hum. Such a message appears in an altered form while the narrator and Celestino attempt to tend to a dying bird:

> Ya le di agua fría, ahora le daré agua caliente. ¡Qué otra cosa me falta por hacerle!... Lo santigüaré de nuevo: Padre Nuestro que estás en los cielos que

estás en los cielos que... ¿qué palabra vendrá después de ésa? Ya no sé rezar. Pero, bueno, de todos modos, moveré los labios, como hace la mayoría de la gente que no sabe rezar y se las da de médium. Moveré los labios. Moveré los labios...

¡Que se salve!

-Mummmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmm

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmrnmmmmm mmmmmmmmmrnmmmmm m

m mrnmrnmmrnmmm mm mmmmmmm. Debo seguir moviendo los labios hasta que haya pasado la cantidad de tiempo que dura una oración. Pero, ¿qué tiempo dura una oración? De todos modos los seguiré moviendo otro rato más, por si acaso. MMMMmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

mmmmmmm

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

m mmmmmmmmmm...

-¡Celestino! ¡Celestino! ¿Qué tiempo dura una oración?

-Mmmmmmm mm m mmmmm m mmmmmmmm.

-Mmmmmmmm mmm mmm.

-Mmmmmm.

-Mmmmmmmmm.

-MMMMMM MMMM mmmmmmmmmmm...

«¡Déjalo que descanse en paz!»

-¡Se está muriendo!... Mmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmmm

...Pero, ¿qué tiempo dura una oración? Mmmmmmmmmm. Contaremos

hasta cien. Contaremos hasta mil. ¿Tú sabes contar? Yo nada más llego hasta el diez. ¡Cuenta! ¡Cuenta! Mmmmmmmm mmmm... uno dos tres cuatro cinco seis siete ocho... Mmmmmmmm mmm mmmmm mm mmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmmmm m mm mmmmmmmmmm... (73)

I already gave him cold water, now I will give him hot water. What else do I need to do! ... I will sanctify it again: Our Father who art in the heavens that are in heaven ... what word will come after that? I do not know how to pray anymore. But, well, anyway, I will move my lips, as do most people who do not know how to pray and give them a medium. I'll move my lips. I'll move my lips ...

May he be saved!

Mummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmm mmmm I must keep moving my lips until the amount of time that a sentence lasts has passed. But how long does a prayer last? Anyway, I'll keep them moving for another time, just in case.

MMMMmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Mmmmmm

Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Mmmmmmmmmm

Celestino! Celestino! How long does a prayer last?

> Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
>
> mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
>
> Mmm mmm
>
> Mmmmmm.
>
> Mmmmmmmmmm.
>
> MMMMMM MMMM mmmmmmmmmmmmm ...
>
> Let him rest in peace!
>
> He's dying! ... Mmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmmmmmmmmmmmm ... But, how long does a sentence last? Mmmmmmmmmmm. We'll count to one hundred. We'll count up to a thousand. Do you know how to count? I only got to ten. Account! Account! Mmmmmmmm mmmm ... one two three four five six seven eight ... Mmmmmmmm mmm mmmmm mm mmmmmmmm Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm mmmm mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm (73)

In this passage, the low hum of the call of the Abakhua is visually represented. Its importance, however, emerges in the context of this hum as a replacement for the Catholic ritual that is forgotten. In the narrator's ignorance, in his attempt to look like everybody else in the incantation of an unknown ritual, he inadvertently produces another holy language, that of a call the significance of which he is unaware.

Tellingly, however, this replication of the message of the spirits is not one the narrator *hears*, but one he *produces.* Indeed, *Celestino* is not merely the reproduction of ritual elements from groups like the Abakhua but is itself a kind of source text for such rituals. In another scene, the novel more clearly follows such a mode of incantation, which closely follows that of the Abakhua. Towards the conclusion of the novel, the narrator offers this hymn to his mother, after recognizing that she is who she appears to be:

Mi madre es la más joven de todas las mujeres.

Mi madre es tan joven que yo la llevo cargada a donde quiera.

Mi madre es sabia.

Mi madre me hace un cuento diferente todas las noches.

Mi madre canta como nadie nunca ha cantado.

Mi madre es mi madre.

Mi madre sabe treparse a las palmas.

Mi madre nada por encima del agua.

Mi madre anoche me llevó a ver el sol.

Mi madre está limpiando la casa.

Mi madre está bailando en el techo.

Mi madre está cantando en el pozo.

Mi madre está maullando en la sala.

Mi madre está rifando un vestido.

Mi madre está pidiendo limosnas.

Mi madre está tocando a la puerta.

Mi madre está cerrando mis ojos.

Oigan a mi madre limpiando la casa.

Oigan a mi madre bailando en el techo.

Oigan a mi madre maullando en la sala.

Oigan a mi madre rifando un vestido.

Oigan a mi madre pidiendo limosnas.

Oigan a mi madre tocando a la puerta.

Oigan a mi madre cantando en el pozo.

Cantando en el pozo.

Cantando en el pozo.

Cantando en el pozo.

Oigan a mi madre cantando en el pozo.

Oigan a mi madre cerrando mis ojos.

Cerrando mis ojos.

Cerrando mis ojos.

Cerrando mis ojos (208).

My mother is the youngest of all women.

My mother is so young that I carry her loaded to where want.

My mother is wise.

My mother makes a different story to me every night.

My mother sings like no one has ever sung.

My mother is my mother.

My mother knows how to climb to the palms.

My mother swims above the water.

My mother took me to see the sun last night.

My mother is cleaning the house.

My mother is dancing on the ceiling.

My mother is singing at the well.

My mother is meowing in the living room.

My mother is raffling a dress.

My mother is begging.

My mother is knocking at the door.

My mother is closing my eyes.

Listen to my mother cleaning the house.

Listen to my mother dancing on the ceiling.

Listen to my mother meowing in the living room.

Listen to my mother raffling a dress.

Listen to my mother begging.

Listen to my mother knocking on the door.

Hear my mother singing at the well.

Singing in the well.

Singing in the well.

Singing in the well.

Hear my mother singing at the well.

Hear my mother closing my eyes.

Closing my eyes.

Closing my eyes.

Closing my eyes (208).

It is possible to hear this incantation as a reflection of the Abakhua's own hymn to their collective mother Tanse:

Pez de río.

Pez de mar

Tanse poderoso.

Tanse divino.

Tanse magnánimo .

Tanse hermoso.

Tanse grande.

Tanse sagrado.

¡Tanse es el leopardo!

Tanse es nuestro secreto

es nuestra fuerza:

aquel por quien suspiraban

los adivinos Efor y Efik

¡Oh Ekue, Ekue!

¡Oh, Oh, Ekue, Ekue!

Voz que es como fuego

que calienta el corazón abakúa (Castellanos, 203)

River fish.

Sea fish

So powerful.

So divine.

So magnanimous.

So beautiful.

So big.

So holy.

So is the leopard!

> Tanse is our secret
>
> Is our strength:
>
> The one for whom they sigh
>
> The fortune tellers Efor and Efik
>
> Oh Ekue, Ekue!
>
> Oh, Oh, Ekue, Ekue!
>
> Voice that is like fire
>
> That warms the heart Abakua (Castellanos, 203)

Unlike the Abakhua, however, for whom such liturgical text serve the function of producing a binding community, the narrator is bereft of any voices who will sing his hymnal with him. As Mary Adekson summarizes, myths in general act as "forces of cultural integration and awareness, and promote community cohesiveness" (Adeskson, Mary Olufunimilayo. *The Yoruba Traditional Healers of Nigeria 25).* The myths of *Celestino*, however, are produced by the narrator in a melancholy isolation. After completing his song, he writes, "Por primera vez me sentí más solo que nunca." Directly following his recognition of absolute loneliness, he addresses an undeclared "tú:"

> Si tú no existieras yo tendría que inventarte. Y te invento. Y dejo ya de sentirme solo. Pero, de pronto, llegan los elefantes y los peces. Y me aprietan por el cuello, y me sacan la lengua. Y terminan por convencerme para que me haga eterno. Entonces, debo volver a inventar. Hasta que por fin no quede ni un árbol en pie... Ya puedo dormir tranquilo, con mi gran hacha guardada debajo de los sobacos. (57)

> If you did not exist I would have to invent you. And I invent you. And I stop feeling lonely. But suddenly, the elephants and the fish arrive. And they squeeze me by the neck, and they pull out my tongue. And they end up convincing me to make me eternal. Then I must re-invent. Until at last there is not a tree standing ... I can sleep peacefully, with my great ax stored under the armpits. (57)

The tú of the address is not Celestino, who no longer appears in the narrative; it is the reader, who is precisely the one "invented," at least insofar as he is a reader, by the text of *Celestino*. The creation of the reader is the narrator's cure for loneliness that is at least partially successful. The emergence of spiritual figures who try to convince the narrator to make himself eternal succeed at the expense of the fallen trees. He assumes the position of the hatchet wielding, tree chopping grandfather, but now the trees are felled for the produciton of paper to make the books that will make him eternal. The axe he sleeps with is the sign of his authority, but the authority of the author and not the tyranical persecutor. Rather, the narrator becomes the founder of a new, secret society – that of his readers, for whom he provides the arcane signs and sounds that serve to initate them.

Thomas Glave's *Our Caribbean* (2008) explores the sense of isolation and, implicitly, a form of social exile, that Arenas faced when considering the ulterior social position given their sexuality and, given their vocation as writers, of existing without a sense of security or even safety, without an audience for an expression that seemed to call to them as much Arenas calls to their forthcoming community of readers. Glave explains in his forward to the book, a "gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing" the "inexpressible loneliness" and "agonizing" experience of wanting to speak, without having the proper space, and, alternatively, the "intransigent silences" of editors during the early years, when gay and

lesbian writers of the Caribbean first began to wonder, await, and wish for not exactly a readership, but a space of legibility. Glave states:

> Wondering: could there somewhere "out there" be others like me? Wherever "out there" was, I knew it to be a place beyond the supposed safety of family (which was not always so safe)—a place where I was despised, even hated, by those who ranted that hatred publically and shouted it joyously in church. Were there others in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean who also pondered "unspeakable" things and thought, in the depths of their own silences, "unmentionable thoughts"? Were there others immobilized and cowed by silence and mired in the same shame that colluded with that silences and its creeping shadows"? Shadows that, like the heavily weighted silences, invariably led to rage, self-loathing and desperation? (182)

Glave gives voice to what was not yet compiled in the Space of Cuba and at the end of the Baroque: a desire for something that seemed impossible and yet necessary. Thus, his words reflect the narrative of Arenas, finding joy in the darkness of a space wherein attaining acceptance entailed actively dissembling exactly who they were. Thus, their "unspeakable" and "unmentionable" thoughts were written down form themselves and in spite of their censorship and likely incrimination. Glave continues to explain how these parameters of existence, move isolation into an utter desire for departure, from the dark, from the density of the interior space wherein what is thought shouldn't be written much less said or announced. Here, exile is a matter of fact, uprooted from nationality.

> Desperation backed thoughts: I hope some day I can get out of here. I hope I can survive long enough not to walk, for the last time, with open eyes and

> open mouth into the swirling sea. I hope star apple trees and bougainvillea blooms never learn my secrets—no, not any of them—and that the hummingbird that adores scarlet hibiscus never penetrates my dreams. I hope that this silences doesn't kill me or make me kill myself because (some of us though and continue to think) it doesn't seem as though I can possibly be myself, my fullest truest self, the self that everyone would love to know and hug and laugh with, greet open hands and arms, if I remain here . . . remain here. Some of us, myself included, thought those things. Some of us, in spite of those thoughts, did not leave the Caribbean and will not leave it still (2).

Apart from the images and intensity with which an inside outside dialectic is felt, some of what Glave is saying exists in such words of pathos precisely because these questions, particularly within the repressive space of Cuba after the Revolution, gather outside of regular speech, well-up over a time that lacks the correct interlocutor, a situation resolved in conversations of the text. These conversations stay open; that is to say, the book does not close and is not forgotten in the same way spoken language, when unheard, disappears. As Arenas writes within his texts that initiate a conversation alongside of a world, Glave's impetus for publication is to ask: "What would it be like to attend—to truly hear, for once—the many conversations we have had with each other and still need to very much to have? What would it be like to listen to and now, by way of a gathering of voices like this one, actually observe those conversations between ourselves?

In the figure of extreme isolation, it is, perhaps, fitting that Celestino's death produces. The novels' most definitive evocation of ritualistic time as a form of ceremonial mourning for the founding member of the new religious society.

Towards the culmination of the "first ending" of the novel's three endings, "Estaba muerto" covers the page and the scene of Celestino's death (169-171). These words appear 52 times; that their repetition conforms to the number of weeks in a year establishes their utterance as an inscription of a liturgical calendar. Simultaneously, the time of the actual death is, in the manner of religious traditions, left unclarified. The simultaneous third and first person singular conjugated verb ("estaba") in the imperfect past exposes an action that has no point of origin or no point of conclusion. This moment of repetition or shock detains the story and sends the reader into a cyclical timeframe. Through repetition of the phrase, the text refracts the division of wood during the initial scene in which the mother has died, then again during the destruction of the house, moments before. The narrative picks back up as Celestino, without screaming or blinking, enters into a trance of writing--with the hatchet lodged in his head.

Ritual and Censorship

Earlier in the novel, another moment of direct address occurs in a more perverse form, one in which the discursive relationship between "I" and "you" is completely blurred. The scene begins with a repeated imperative to the reader to "Míralas!," to look at the girls playing with dolls. The playful reference to the reader, who, of course, can only see what the narrator describes, takes on an increasingly active role for him, as "tu" is described as engaged in a particular and unlikely series of activities. As "tu" takes up the doll, "tu" drops it. It lands in chicken excrement, but "tu" precedes to kiss it and then subsequently to masturbate with it. The narrative returns to the first person, as the narrator and/or "tu" are attempting to come to orgasm, with the fear of being caught in the act: "¡Se están acercando! Como me cojan haciendo esto con una muñeca, me caerán a pedradas. -Apúrate. Apúrate."

The narrative, however, follows by completely conflating the narrator and the readerly "tu" through its own version of liturgical call-and-response:

> -¡Se están acercando! Como me cojan haciendo esto con una muñeca, me caerán a pedradas. Ciérrate la portañuela, ya están cerca. Déjalo para otro día. Muchacho, estáte tranquilo. Ahí viene la gente…(180)
>
> They're coming! As I get caught doing this with a doll, I'll be stoned. Close the little stick, they're already close. Leave it for another day. Boy, stay calm. Here people come ... (180)

The repetition of the anxiety switches from I to you, from the simple future to "van a caer". Though it is doubtful the reader is masturbating with a doll while he is reading the text, it is precisely in this unusual moment of address, where the narrator chooses to forge an identification with the reader in the unlikeliest moment that such an identification is occurring, that produces a jarring uncanniness. It is a funny addresss, but as a repetition, and more precisely as a call and response enacted by the narrator but incorporating the reader, it is an address which serves as a kind of iniatiation. The strageness of the scene, in other words, works against identification and towards a symbolic, ritualistic initiation into a secret and persecuted society.

In this way, *Celestino* becomes the ritualized mytho-poetic reenactment of its own origin story – that of the narrator and/or the eponymous character in search of a community, the founding gesture of which is that of the novel. It is thus before the dawn, in the long night of isolation. So too, it is "antes" the "alba" of the blank page, before the secret society of readers can be produced by the reading of the novel.

As if to highlight this point, the scene of readerly sexual initiation into the obscure rites of Arenas' secret society is followed by its discovery and punishment by the characters

of the novel – grandparents, cousins, and mother, who all accuse the narrator of sexual deviancy. Subsequently, however, the narrator is charged with another crime – that of defacing a Catholic prayer book.

> -Dios te salve, María, llena eres de gracia. El Señor es contigo. Bendito sea el fruto de tu vientre. Santa María, Madre de Dios. Madre de Dios, madre de Dios, madre de Dios...
>
> -¿Qué pasa?
>
> -Aquí le faltan unas hojas al libro de oraciones.
>
> -¡Virgen Santísima!, quién habrá hecho eso.
>
> -Yo sé quién fue.
>
> -¿Quién?
>
> -No lo digo. (184)
>
> God save you, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed be the fruit of your womb. Holy Mary, mother of God. Mother of God, Mother of God, Mother of God ...
>
> What's up?
>
> There are some sheets missing in the prayer book.
>
> Holy Virgin, who will have done that.
>
> I know who he was.
>
> Who?
>
> I do not say. (184)

In ripping out the pages of prayer to Maria, the narrative implicitly replaces them with the ritualistic ceremony of masturbating with a doll that precedes it. Outside the bounds of propriety, a new community is being prepared by the narrative to replace that of the

persecutors, that substitutes verneration of the holy mother with an embrace of proscribed sexuality. Tellingly, this scene of ripped pages, the narrator's own form of "censorship from below" and the narrators' interrogation by the familial authorities, is continued with a condemnation of what Celestino has written on the trees.

> -¡Cállate la boca, si no quieres que te la rompa!... Que se me cae la cara de vergüenza al ver que ese come-mierda ha llenado todos los troncos de las matas de malas palabras. Y ya tu abuelo está que no puede más con el dolor de los ríñones, pues se ha tenido que pasar el día tumbando los árboles que ese babieca garabateó...
>
> -¡Eso no es verdad! Lo que él escribe es una poesía...
>
> -¡Qué poesía ni qué carajo!
>
> Y ya horita nos asaremos del calor, porque pronto no quedará ni una mata en todo el patio que tu abuelo no haya tenido que tumbar. Ay, si se me cae la cara de vergüenza al pensar que alguien que sepa leer pase por aquí y vea una de esas cochinadas, escritas en las matas. ¡Qué pensarán de nosotros!...
>
> -¡Cómo sabes tú lo que él escribe, si tú tampoco sabes leer!...
>
> -Yo no sé, pero la mujer de Tomásico sí sabe; y cuando la llevamos hasta los troncos que Celestino había garabateado, pensando que el pobre muchacho lo que hacía era poner el nombre de su madre muerta... ¡El nombre de su madre muerta!: ni siquiera se acuerda quién era su madre. Sí, señor, así como lo estás oyendo; y, si mal no recuerdo, una de las cosas que leyó la mujer de Tomásico decía: «Quién será mi madre», «Quién será mi madre», «Que la busco en el excusado y no la veo»... ¡Dime, tú!: una mujer que no hacía ni ocho días que estaba muerta, y ya él ni se acordaba quién era... ¡Y después

decir que la busca en el excusado! ¡Eso es lo último! ¡Buscar a una muerta en el excusado! ¡Como si fuera un mojón!

Los hachazos se oyen ahora más claros. (192)

Shut your mouth, if you do not want me to tear it up! I shudder at the sight of the fuck filling all the trunks of the bad words. And your grandfather is no longer able to with the pain of his kidneys, because he has had to spend the day knocking down the trees that babieca scribbled ...

That is not true! What he writes is a poetry ...

What poetry, what the fuck!

And now we will roast the heat, because soon there will not be any kills in the whole yard that your grandfather did not have to knock. Oh, if I drop my face of shame at the thought that someone who can read through here and see one of those filthy, written in the woods. What will they think of us!

How do you know what he writes, if you do not read!

I do not know, but the woman of Tomás does know; And when we carried it to the logs that Celestino had scribbled, thinking that the poor boy what he did was to put the name of his mother dead ... The name of his dead mother!: He does not even remember who his mother was. Yes, sir, just as you are hearing; And, if I remember correctly, one of the things that the woman of Tomásito read said: Who will be my mother, Who will be my mother, I look for her in the toilet and I do not see her ... Tell me, You!: a woman who had not been dead for eight days, and he did not even

> remember who she was ... And then say that he looks for her in the toilet!
> That is the last! Find a dead woman in the toilet! As if it were a cairn!
> The axes are now clearer. (192)

The authority, herself illiterate, relies on an informant to read the text produced by Celestino. This informant, however, is outside of the spectral bond of writer and reader the text attempts to produce. It fundamentally misunderstands poetic production, while simultaneously recognizing more than it appears. The poem replaces the mother with the toilet, looking for the love Celestino and/or the narrator did not receive from the mother inside of the toilet stall – a site of covert sexual encounters and anal pleasure. An understanding of this would no doubt enrage the authorities more. And this is the paradox of the secret rituals that produce Celestino's spectral society – it hides in plain sight. The published novel, can be read by all, like the poems on trees, but can only serve as a place of initiation for those called to it.

Of course, such a society, even a spectral one, could never emerge if the hostile authorities succeeded in completely censoring the text upon which it is founded. The grandfather's mania for chopping down all the trees of the forest upon which Celestino wrote his poem indexes the paranoia of the intollerant society regarding texts that in its illiteracy it cannot even understand. Censorship looms over the novel as its supreme antagonistic force in the figure of the grandfather's hatchet.

Celestino is a novel composed of violence, of threats of violence, of starvation, murder, and suicide. The repeating relationship is most explicitly maintained in the violence enacted by the paternal authority of the text, the narrator's grandfather, particularly in his relationship to writing. Celestino writes a long poem never to be completed on the trees

near the family home; before it can even be read, the discovery of this writing releases the wrath of the grandfather.

The narrator's paternal figure chases the writers incessantly, yet he desires to kill the boys, cut down their trees, and end their endeavours in writing. Although the grandfather desires to eliminate the trees as their space for writing, he pushes the lovers deep into the symbolic space of the forest, which houses their writing, primordial rituals, and shared sexuality. Once the trees in which the boys hide disappear, the boy protagonists erect magnificent towers and the grandfather follows them there. The repetition of "hatchet" cuts-off the reader's vision from where the boys hide and, effectively, ends writing as the words take over the page (86, 89-90). In fact, "Hacha" appears over 500 times in the text. But within six pages it appears 375 of those times. Through its covering of the page, the word becomes a concrete visual signifier of destruction as well as its sound, replacing the text with the destruction of it. The word "hatchet" reproduces the sensation of chopping, deafening all other sounds within the text and before the reader. The narrator's family internalizes and repeats the actions and voice of the grandfather, censor and patriarch whose violence threatens to obliterate yet also incites textual production insofar as persecution intensifies the conceit of the narrative.

Once the grandfather captures the narrator, he tells him to "Advance!" "Advance!" as if he is a rank-and-file soldier or a prisoner in a similarly confining authoritarian space. Again and again, and this fact, links the paternal figure to wider forms of socially oppressive forces, such as Fidel Castro himself who, not longer after the events of the novel would be advancing through the Sierra Maestras of the novel's setting on his way to revolutionary conquest. As the narrator is told to "advance, advance" the grandfather is connected to Castro and this history, of economic "advancement" during the revolutionary years.

From the entry of the grandfather, all the cousins change, horrifying the aunts who are already envious of Celestino and the boy (175-6). The grandfather's obsession with chasing these boys, which also materializes in following them into the male space of the tree, and taking out his own wooden and phallic instrument of power, could also be read as an aggressive fulfilment of a homosexual desire, clothed in his attempt to conceal or rid himself of it. "Hachet" like the word "advance" reveals both an aggressive and oppression action, and a sexual one

The grandfather, as the patriarchal figure and censor, is internalized by all characters that hide from him, disappears from the page alongside of the protagonists and settings in these moments when the word "hatchet" interrupts narration. That is, the grandfather himself remains, at times, hidden from the reader and replaced by the action of the hatchet. Symbolic destruction of the tree with the hatchet, gesticulates--in textual image, rhythm and action—penetration. The space of the forest is also where Celestino and the narrator can engage in sexual acts, "mariconadas," during which characters erect towers and climb trunks to "encaramarse" (to impale oneself through the center, on the top of something). This term relates to a secret sexual act blocked from the page, but also the spread of "esperma" or wax on the young initiates faces in afro-Cuban history, which occurs after a they hide their head between the legs of an elder, are left alone, eventually kiss the "palo" of their elder, and reproduce a few statements regarding their position in the brotherhood, their non-homosexuality and respect for their mother.

Censorship and persecution are eroticized as the text conflates homosexual and authorial pleasure in a ritual that the reader witnesses. The use of the word hatchet transforms into a metaphor of not only textual persecution as censorship, which is linked to the diegetic notion of the text and thus history, but the persecution and writing as they

transform into a bodily and sexual act, in which the repetition forces the turn of the page by the readers hand. The structure and plot push at the material boundaries of history through extending the theme of persecution into the physical space of the page.

Throughout the text, single pages are left blank with the exception of a few lines in cursive lettering, which also divide the text in the middle of actions, speeches and events. Each page includes a citation attributed to diverse and historically existent authors or characters from the novel—regardless of the facticity of this suggestion. There are twenty-seven divisions in the text, but zero chapters. In each division, which might occur in the middle of a sentence, dialogue or paragraph, a single citation—attributed to the narrator's grandmother, "Rimbaud," "Acts" in the Bible, or *El espejo mágico* appears in the center of an otherwise blank page. By conceptual extension of the theme of censorship, dispersed citations symbolize acts of dissemination.

These citations, rather than following-up on the narrated actions as a sort of "key" bolster the logic by which he operates: they express without providing direction or connection between one event and another. They open the text to new ideas and they also hide what might have occurred or even be occurring still beneath their appearance. In this way, the citation engages in a dialogue with an atypical plotline in which narrative blocks mark moments of sexual encounter. Citations of the family members, classmates, mythic creatures and animals distract and intrude on a text, which illustrates aimless existence in a space without a proper setting. Citations shift the actions of the writer-characters which take the place of predominate settings.

Fragments of text, removed or isolated from their context, encourage creation and experimentation as they are the textual counterpoint to a hatchet, with which the grandfather desires to kill Celestino and "chop down" the boy's trees. Alongside the hatchet

and cast of characters, citations introduce themes of censorship at key points in the text. The hatchet, as a central symbol in the text represents a division between an internal and external structure that pertains to the narrator's conscious and unconscious, as well as each of the characters in the text. Citations confirm a division between internal and external textual structures, guiding readers to look beyond the margins of the written text, to question, authorize and deviate from well marked textual paths; they affirm Celestino's escape from material reality, his engagement with the unconscious, and the physical or corporal place of the text.

The citation increases textual dissemination and the hatchet mobilizes physical action. Both result in the rise and fall of the page. Whether by the turn of the page, the return of Celestino and narrator to their home, or the swing of the hatchet, the erection of each textual and sexual act, leads to a symbolic orgasm, signaled at the fall of the page by the reader's hand. The disappearance into the forest and the erection of trees and towers equates to moments of sexual stimulation, which the grandfather attempts to remove from the view of the reader. The text extends into a material act, animated by reading that reproduces the fall of a tree or a page. The dissemination, interspersed through the novel, indicates a loss of erection, but the fulfilment of a sex act—a di-semen-nation, marked by the fall of the page—after its rise, but this fact problematizes the relationship between the grandfather and the boy, or the governmental family and the kinship networks that incite persecution.

The reader, like mother and grandfather, becomes initiated into the world of the forest, as participants and witnesses of the sex act that the censoring act conceals. The body of the text becomes a symbolic forest in which writing cyclically resurrects moments of escape and scenes of sexuality as a refuge from an otherwise dead world. As such, *Celestino*

incorporates within itself the threat of its own extinction – and subsequently the extinction of the secret society founded upon it.

At the intersection of temporal and material conditions internal and external to the text, readers, as if possessed or performing ritual, a rite, witness the breakdown of historical time, causal events, and traditional understanding of language, thereby observing the restoration of a primal, preceding state, difficult to describe. Tom Cohen compares this alienating process to an inherent truth of criticism: "Traditional criticism is always "after 'materiality' – that is, not only in pursuit of a promised ground or ontology that is also worldly, associable with reference and the thing, historical process or analysis, a real, but temporally after (as the model of the hunt suggests too) as though the term were bound nonetheless to linguistic traces, to something anterior to figurative systems"(279). In this primal state explored by the authors and reinforced by the author's personal history of ghostliness brings the author's death into the background of the written text and the text's historic setting, even once the author is gone, into a spectral light in which a community between author and reader may occur. Literature in itself, more abstract and insolicitous than material reality or even history, transforms into an immaterial site of initiation, of writing, of rights on their way to restoration.

Textual Afterlife: the Tortured Movement of *Celestino* and Arenas

The cultural climate the Revolution attempted to produce could not have been less sympathetic to Arenas and his work. In 1965, when *Celestino* was published, Che Guevera published his own manifesto on art and revolutionary activity. "Socialism and man in Cuba" highlights the absolute irreconcilability between Arenas and the state's respective relationships towards artistic production; indeed, although it is unlikely, it seems as if

Guevera had the 21 year old author's first work in mind when caricaturing the decadence of the artists he condemns:

> For a long time individuals have been trying to free themselves from alienation through culture and art....But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: that of a solitary being seeking harmony with the world. One defends one's individuality, which is oppressed by the environment, and reacts to aesthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate. It is nothing more than an attempt to escape….The superstructure imposes a kind of art in which the artist must be educated. Rebels are subdued by the machine, and only exceptional talents may create their own work. The rest become shamefaced hirelings or are crushed. A school of artistic experimentation is invented, which is said to be the definition of freedom; but this "experimentation" has its limits…meaningless anguish or vulgar amusement thus become convenient safety valves for human anxiety….Those who play by the rules of the game are showered with honors — such honors as a monkey might get for performing pirouettes. The condition is that one does not try to escape from the invisible cage. *What is sought then is simplification*, something everyone can understand, something functionaries understand. True artistic experimentation ends, and *the problem of general culture is reduced to assimilating the socialist present and the dead (therefore, not dangerous) past*….In the field of culture, capitalism has given all that it had to give, and *nothing remains but the stench of a corpse, today's decadence in art*….To sum up, the fault of many of our artists and intellectuals lies in their original sin: they are not true revolutionaries. We can try to graft the elm tree

> so that it will bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees….Our task is to prevent the current generation, torn asunder by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and from perverting new generations (Guevera 215-220 *emphasis added*).

As Celestino was born into an intollerant and uncomprehending society, *Celestino* entered a cultural space marked by explicit and absolute hostility. A story about oppression in the Batista years could easily have found a welcome place, but Arenas' story, as we have seen, seeks to find a space outside of the simplifications of the countryside, which were the truly oppressive agents of his novel. Indeed, Che's notion that one can "reduce" the problem of culture to assimilating the dead and the socialist present is, implicitly for *Celestino*, impossible. For the novel, the dead past is an illusion; to paraphrase Faulkner, the past is not only not dead, it isn't even past. The dead do not die and the living do not live. In the logic of the text, in which a tyrant is eaten only to return to murder a poet by the same axe used to carve him up, the dead in their incessant spectral return are always dangerous. Indeed, one might say that the revolution's own reproduction and even intensification of the persecution of the Batista years shows the impossibility of nullifying past dangers. The past, as in the novel, returns, perhaps in an altered form but with the same malicious intent. Its wish to destroy otherness in the name of a new society is the "original sin" of the Revolution. If it sees the "stench of the corpse" in the works or art produced by Arenas and his contemporaries, it is, perhaps, the rotting flesh of re-animated intollerance that was its own.

If Guevera sees the Revolution as requiring a re-cultivation of the masses in the agricultural sense of the term, Arenas' ritualized novel seeks to create a new society, secretly founded by his own text. This re-networking, to borrow Cohen's term for the function of (a)material reading, of the social through the creation of a kinship between the author and

the future, spectral readers, also manifested itself in the way in which Arenas constructed his own literary inheritance and kinship with the past. Arenas wrote his first short story "Los zapatos vacíos" in 1963, after hearing about the Cirilo Villaverde National Competition of storytelling at the library (*Antes que anochezca* 71).[34] He won first place in this contest and was contacted immediately by Cintio Vitier and Eliseo Diego (73). These judges were former writers for José Lezama Lima's *Orígenes* journal, which in the 1940s and 50s consolidated a group of New World Baroque writers.

Arenas' entry into the literary world of Havana in the initial years of the Cuban Revolution would seem to foreshadow future success. However, as the Revolution took the form of a dictatorship (the third in Cuba of the 20th century), Arenas became one of the public figures and writers most persecuted by the state. His inclusion within a literary circle of New World Baroque writers—whose political misalliances predated Arenas' birth and distinguished these authors from the early group of socialist writers (El grupo minorista) favored by the Revolution—pulled the author deeper into the most repressive years of Cuban history as experienced by gay artists and writers in particular.

By 1965, he submitted this work to the annual *Union Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos* (UNEAC, the National Cuban Writers and Artist Union) literary competition. This time, his work caused a discrepancy between the judges. Arenas reports in his autobiography that *Celestino* won the UNEAC's national award, yet he received only an honorable mention from Alejo Carpentier, judge of the competition and writer.[35] Another judge present, Virgilio

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[34] Nivea Montenegro and Enrico Mario Santí, in *Escritos dispersos* (2014) have attributed a previous story to Arenas supposedly written at age eleven, but left incomplete.

[35] Carpentier was favored for his early anti-Batista commitment evidenced in the long running Grupo minorista literary journals *Revista de Avance* (1927-1930) and *Revista Social*, (1916-1922, 1923-1929, 1929-1932, 1935-1938) which opposed *Orígenes*. The Spanish terms "Pure Poetry" and "Social Poetry" distinguish the two journals during the pre-Revolutionary

Piñera, participant and co-founder of *Origenes*, believed the young writer deserved first place. Although a schism between Piñera and Lezama in 1956 resulted in the dissolution of the journal and his break from this group; nonetheless, the established writer, Piñera, introduced his protégé to his second mentor, Lezama Lima. According to Andrew Bush and Jorge Oliveira Piñera and Lezama as Arenas' literary fathers supplanted Arenas' absent birth father.[36]

Arenas' alteration of the historical record in his retrospective conferral upon himself of the UNEAC award suggests a significance beyond the self-aggrandizing. By positioning himself as the inheritor of the Origenes tradition instead of the controversial author who created profound complications for the conferral of the award, the author's autobiography produces a revisionary history that places his novel within the literary tradition. The future kinship of reader and writers is thus offered a geneology that is constructed as public. If the revolution sought to erase decadent writers from hisotry, Arenas' history provactively reinscribes that history to include them.

The entry of Arenas' second novel, *El Mundo alucinante* (1967), to a third Cuban literature competition resulted in another loss that Arenas denies in his autobiography. This 1966 entry also provoked the reformulation of the categories of evaluation at the currently

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period. These terms, which Lezama amongst other New World Baroque writers inherited and defined by the Spanish exile Juan Ramón Jimenez. The terms sets apart the social commitment of writers associated with *Social* and *Avance* from the apolitical commitment to art and literature in itself as exhibited by writers of the *Orígenes* and *Espuela de plata* journals. Both groups opposed Batista, but their vision of society, the work of art, and politics differed, particularly as the Revolution further accentuated their initial divide

[36] Jorge Olivares' *Becoming Reinaldo Arenas* (2013) discusses the author's biography at length and in the context when the author was first writing. As an acquaintance of Arenas, he was able to speak with Arenas mother, Oneida Fuentes, and confirm the often-misleading dates and statements found throughout critical scholarship. Olivares also integrates significant archival information (taken from the Princeton University's Reinaldo Arenas Papers, on which I also depend) into his work.

existent and most nationally influential Cuban literary institution (UNEAC). The panel of UNEAC judges rejected Arenas as a candidate for their yearly award, but they also failed to agree on any potential entry that could serve as an alternative recipient for their prize. Their deliberations resulted in the establishment of an alternative category of evaluation for future years. UNEAC officials replaced the open literary category of their 1966 competition with another[37]. A genre-based contest, closed-off by a new category, was open for submissions in 1967 and better supported the politics of Castro's specific vision for his on-going Revolution of 1959.

UNEAC's establishment of the institutionally supported Socialist Realist literature competition signalled the concrete form in which the Revolution was imagined and the literary organization's complicity with revolutionary leaders' vision for the nation's art. Defined vis-a-vis their pragmatic realist style and specific content, Socialist Realist novels told stories of formerly oppressed members of society such as women or blacks that worked their way to liberation as proud participants of the Revolution. The desire to distribute and honour this genre consigned all literature and art in Cuba from the 1960s to pragmatic parameters, but the role of propriety that literature would take materialized as a reaction to an individual.

Reinaldo Arenas influenced the formation of these standards through his production of works and through their subsequent negation that generated institutional restructuring at

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[37] Fernando de Soto's book-length study, *Reinaldo Arenas: The Pentagonia* was the first to pit Arenas' body of work against the Socialist Realist novel and to analyze Arenas "secret history of Cuba". De Soto categorizes Socialist Realist novel as a form of testimony and then discusses the state of Cuban literature referencing the major writers of this genre (Miguel Barnet and Raúl González de Cascorro), Castro's political speech concerning the state of the Revolution in the late 1960s, and critical works by Seymor Mentón and Tzvi Menton in order to show how Arenas' cannibalizes such categories and authors throughout his five-novel series (37).

the public level. Bound by realism and, implicitly, requirements of content, the propagation of what I believe to be a subgenre of literature (given its formation and rules of topical concern) discounted Arenas' literature directly and also indirectly. The production of this category and national support of the Socialist genre predetermined UNEAC's printed production of only 2000 copies of *Celestino* (*La Pentagonia*, De Soto, 11). This quantity amounted to a tenth of the copies of any single Socialist Realist text from that year but matched the number of copies published of Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*—perhaps the greatest work of contemporary Latin American fiction. *El Mundo alucinante*, which remains unpublished in Cuba, was smuggled off of the and won the French Prix Médicis for best foreign novel of 1969, resulting in its subsequent translation into eight languages by 1976 (Olivares, 7). The repeating pattern of Arena's work—at first, controversy results in limited publication and circulation, followed by eventual success and aclaim abroad—itself repeated that of Lezama's. Yet, it resulted in a greater degree of impact on Areans than it did on Lezama's because the former's authorial development commenced alongside and against that of Castro's government. Indeed, Cuban governmental and Latin American cultural officials marked Arenas as a public nuisance—a homosexual, a corruptor of minors, and an "anti-social"—but Arenas responded to censorship and countered manipulations of his history and literature by writing relentlessly in life, that is, by his "Voluntad de vivir manifestándose" (1975) or "Necesidad de libertad" (1983) titles given to his poems and compiled political letters.

It is difficult to compare Arenas' generation or discuss his publications accurately as many writers or would-be writers spent years of their life in prison, cutting sugar cane, afraid, and without means to write or access to publishers (*Antes que anochezca*, 114). After the publication of his first two novels, Arenas was sent to forced labor at a military camp and

sugar mill: a space transformed by a mimetic undercurrent in his writing and which encapsulated, in its rendering, one possibility amongst various of life on the island during the years of repression. These "re-education camps," in which those condemned were termed "volunteers," have their own obscure and secret history, much of which is disputed. Nelson Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal's documentary, *Conducta Impropia* (1983), suggests that the camps were opened in 1963, with which Arenas (who appears in the documentary along with former detainees Lorenzo Monreal, Jorge Ronet, Luis Lazo, Rafael de Palet, and Jorge Lago) concurs, despite the official government report that they were established in 1965. Many of these "concentration" camps did not post proper names, known by the outside world, and some detainees even report being injected with unknown medicine while held there (Olivares, 53). Others have been renamed and dissembled, and the interior of the camps, according to Internet blogs that have listed information offered by family members of the detainees and the sites of the renamed and dissembled sugar plantations.[38] These conditions mean that people formerly detained within them have not been able to determine their location. And the estimated population of those detained in the camps wildly ranges if numbers are offered at all. In this "history," partially visible and partially obscure, in which every fact is under dispute, in which a volunteer is a slave and re-education involves working to the point of collapse, points to a strange condition of Arenas' work that preceded his internment in them. The narrative of *Celestino*, in its baroque complexity, its contradictions, its skewed chronology, and its constant reshaping in the narrative of a child who tries to hide from facts he doesn't truly understand, places the novel as the true "realist" literature of the period. The simple progressions and idealized portraits of those participating in the

[38] A few of these sites are: http://laverdadofende.wordpress.com, http://puertasabiertasencuba.com, and cruzarlasalambradas.com

revolution that socialist realism provided were clearly inadequate for the tortured logic of persecution and obfuscation central to the reality of revolutionary activity. The mytho-poetic narrative of Celestino functions as the logic of the revolution, while socialist realism's logical development produced the mytho-poetic narrative of the revolution. In other words, the subsequent development of Cuba after *Celestino* shows the novel to anticipate the truly "realist" version of socialism. And Arenas' own tampering with his own history is merely a participation in and balancing of the distortion of the historical record committed by those in charge of it. Because a generation lived through the development of a social history of occlusion and exclusion, Arenas work uniquely addresses complex histories through intervention and skilful tampering with factuality.

For Arenas, this form of literary tampering outlines processes inherent within a larger national and governmental structure. For instance, Arenas reports in Almendro's documentary and in his own autobiography and prologues that he buried and rewrote many texts and, specifically, *Otra vez el mar* three times. He references an interrogation about this work during his incarceration in el Morro prison (*Antes que Anochezca* 203, 232). In his autobiography he describes that upon his release, he returned to the roof in which he buried the text, only to find it removed from its location (249). These histories challenge the Cuban state's charges against Arenas as they point to evidence and discussions that differ from the reasons for his incarceration: the corruption of minors without consent.[39] Arenas' reconstruction and tracing of history plants a seed of doubt within the state's hands because

[39] *Cartas a Margarita y Jorge Camacho (1967-1990)*—the 2010 compilation of letters written to the two French exiles, who visited Arenas, provided him with supplies such as a raft and paper, and exported the majority of his novels—includes a photocopy of Arenas conviction and arrest record (63). Arenas own attempt at reconstructing his life story via the establishment of a personal account in *Necesidad de libertad* (1986) includes a facsimile of Rene Ariza's sentencing that indicates this author's detention in "reclusion" for eight years given his lack of access to his own documentation of arrest at the time (75-78).

they removed, in material terms, the product of his own thought and imagination from a literary and historically real home and origin. The authorities, in other words, created their own extra-diegetical text, conflating the fictions of the author with the author himself. Arenas' own fictionalizing of reality was thus merely the inverse operation of that through which he was persecuted. In both cases, however, the division between fiction and reality has become particularly blurred. Its spectral effects result in the de-realization of referential history and the realization of the fictions such as Celestino that furthers the society of readers in a ritualized world that is, in a sense, outside of fiction or reality.

Inversely stated, Arenas' literary career, is not only problematized from the perspective of the Cuban state by his open discussion of homosexual acts and impulses, nor the fact that his talent and character quickly put him into contact with major public figures and the international audience. His work permeates through state discourse to *possess* it because of its proximity to his actions. Explicitly, he suggests that it is well known that many historic figures engaged in homosexual acts and frequently transformed their behaviour according to their individual needs and those of official circumstances. His history coincidences with that of the Cuban state, thereby undermining the plans of a controlled, fragile, and materialist dictatorship—one that, as the author proves, is unable to rid themselves of his performance, his existence, and his voice.

Traversing the fields topical, philosophical or political that members of the Cuban party hoped to fully close off and, as a result, Arenas' literary accounts correct the present and past as well as measures likely to be taken against him pre-emptively. Arenas' fluid dialogue across space and time singularly contests omissions within state versions of history. Arenas' texts, once untangled from their setting, foreshadow events before their occurrence and contradict official records by inverting their mechanisms of control.

Whereas *Antes que anochezca* builds on the literary spaces of *Celestino* intra and extradiagetically, topically (*topos)* and through the event of its writing, *El Mundo alucinante* completes a similar function but the atemporal assonance and predictive capacity gestures towards the impossible or to a state which follows behind the lines of the author. Arenas sets *El Mundo alucinante* in El Morro prison[40] and in *Antes que anochezca* he references this choice of literary setting:

> "En *El Mundo alucinante* yo hablaba de un fraile que había pasado por varias prisiones sórdidas (incluyendo el Morro). Yo, al entrar allí, decidí que en lo adelante tendría más cuidado con lo que escribiera, porque parecía estar condenado a vivir en mi propio cuerpo lo que escribía" (222).

Celestino antes del alba (1965) and *El Mundo*, haunted Arenas; their publication initiated the persecution that led to his exile which he described in his autobiography. Across these the three texts, the night and the sky transform into each other, into other spaces of return and imagination, like the sea, and the river. These topographies repeat and flow into Arenas' recurrent historic experience of standing at the threshold of death, whether realistic through execution or through censorship in which his autobiographical protagonists disappear. In *Celestino*, conversation, characters, and settings mutate welcoming personal, poetic, or historic interpretation and, above all, complementing the predictive yet paradoxically atemporal understanding of his own history, which makes more causal sense once pieced together bit by bit in out-of-order fragments.

The author's movement (from forest to prison, or Cuba to the United States) amplifies the impact of connective textual perspectives within the literature and as the

[40] The colonial fortress and light house, remains unmarked of its penitentiary history. This fortress is open to tourists and is a world heritage site under UNESCO's patronage.

literature stands for a generation. Historical associations, periods of time, and geographies continue predated in the text and open in their instance of textual isolation come to compliment the trajectory of his life, and then his writings and rewritings future predictive capacity. Once tied down, dated, and explained, of course, an element or edition of a text, space or person may be assembled next to another, yet inadvertently readers encounter another—a lost copy of a buried text, a second story of incarceration, an alteration in the archive— that exceed the ideas held within stable and strict chronologies and place such attempts in light equally as dubious as the information he offers. By extracting fictional implications and faulty logics through the insertion of his voice within a communist dictatorial regime, he deposes socialist rhetoric of its own devaluation of imaginative fiction. His works assume the space of the literary in which history is farce, and fiction beyond both realms as it unearths the very structure by which "history" or "reality" is known.

Plagued by a constant need to escape a present ruled by an unprocessed version of history and without the rights to many of his own works during his time in Cuba, Arenas developed a form of writing that integrated his vision of his historical setting and the literary limitations imposed by it into subversive testimony. Once living in exile, he republished novels for which he had lost the rights through the Cuban government considering all artistic property to be its own. His publications from exile included prologues and data references to an archive he would establish once diagnosed with A.I.D.S. Before his suicide, Arenas reconstructed his corpus, completing his drafted or conceptualized novels and building his literary archive. The exact historical value of these works is unclear as the author responded to his oppression not only by correcting but also manipulating state-authorized versions of Cuban history. The Rare Books and Manuscripts section of Firestone library at Princeton contains an immense corpus of his novels, poems, journalistic projects, short

stories, public letters, private writings, photographs, songs, and correspondence with publishers. His challenge to the dictatorial construction of history is comprised as the authorization of another version that manifests in literature that provides material evidence for his thoughts or imagination. The evidence redirects causality by calling attention and responding to a false and insufficient causal logic and state version of history. To attain any accuracy or grasp of his poetic practice has demanded, as a preliminary guide for reading his works as a single project with social ramification, a loose understanding or premonition regarding the events and thus also that readers themselves demand ghosts that they have hidden or sought to exorcise from their own mind or work.

In *Celestino* settings and references to the prohibited and politicized brotherhoods of Afro-Cuban secret societies, recalls not only the Batista years, as critics have argued, but the formation and destruction of kinship networks with the Biblioteca Nacional de José Martí immediately before the establishment of the UMAP camps (*Antes que anochezca*, 94-96). The space of the library as a refuge for writers, which Arenas describes in his autobiography, and reappears across Arenas' writing to call for the formation of a society of readers originating from the text. Arenas' autobiography, *Antes que Anochezca*, recalls the setting of his first novel thereby conferring upon it the status that the author gave it in several interviews and critical texts, that of esoteric autobiography. This fact encourages the retrospective acknowledgement of a series of subversive layerings of political and sexual subtexts that breakdown material facts and data. Whereas comparative textual analysis reveals prefigured readings designed to conjure histories of assassinated writers within the imagination of a future readership body, Arenas' first text, published before his censorship, persecution, or exile, signals the existence of Cuban purges against homosexuals existing long before the construction of the UMAP camps and seems, uncannily enough, to anticipate them.

If Arenas situates historical interventions that continue to take form long after his death, then the author and his readers, possessed in the moment of present reading as a witness to the past, also work to render Cuba's historic past as spectral. While the standing history of Cuba and Arenas' body of work provided the material sources for my study, literary repetitions, lost texts, and dates which vary across manuscripts and critical readings, as well as names that change depending on geography, language or year of a publication, motivate my analysis. I examine the relationships in these texts to correct several misinterpreted historical facts, expose previously ignored errors and factual omissions, and investigate Arenas' spectral presence as it continues to take form in the archives and scholarship that repeat such misinformation in the 21st century.

Arenas' texts initiate readers into a perspective maintained from beyond the grave via tropes of ancestral heritage and spiritually-bound kinship networks. Readers become ghostly participants in a ritual of reading and witnesses that, when symbolically possessed by Arenas, return to destroyed sites of history and thus reproduce Arenas' relationship to the material world during his life. Arenas seizes in this participatory invitation the sought-after solidity of collectivity and consent, that is, the concept through which Cuban and communist ideologues had attempted to maintain themselves while simultaneously negating or denying its employment in Arenas' literary formation, life, and voice.

Conclusion: The Afterlife of Textual Palaces, Past and Future

Writing decades after Carpentier, Sarduy was the first to define this style of writing in linguistic terms that were diametrically opposed to the economy of means and meaning, and, as a result, to the "directness" the revolution wanted to instill in the literary or artistic production of a new generation of politically engaged writers. This mode of writing validated waste frequenting words like 'exceso',' derroche' and speaking in semantic terms of luxury, foreignness and kitsch, all within an extremely political context predicated by an imperative that demanded some straightforward equation between words and things, if not literature and a purpose. Neither a style, nor genre, nor even a stable term, the 16th and 17th century Baroque aesthetic that came out of southern Europe and reappeared centuries later in literature called the "Neobaroque", was predicated on an excess of language, on the notion of pleasure and "waste" in terms of description. Sarduy's definition of the Neobaroque defied the straight-laced rhetoric of the socialist state that demanded commitment to its own order, which I discuss in my chapter the transatlantic historic development of the Baroque aesthetic as a mode. And if, generationally speaking, we can understand Arenas and Sarduy as exceptional cases in that Fidel Castro's politics actually brought them some level of social benefits, then we are also faced with a second revolutionary generation that moves from being, like Arenas himself, the young promise of the Revolution that he describes himself as, to dissidents and outcasts a few decades later.

Arenas as the most recognized post-Revolutionary writer understood early on that his only option was to leave in any way he could after publishing his second novel, *El Mundo Alucinante* (1967) abroad. Like *Celestino Antes del Alba,* this text dealt with homosexual love in contrast to an extremely and increasingly homophobic institutionalized circuit. The authors

at the center of what could be called a "queer" literary culture between 1959 and 1980 were marginalized not only because of their homosexuality, but because it assumed a specific form: that of the Neobaroque aesthetic tradition.

Of course, the works also take on a distanced point of view that could demythify the Socialist Cuba's source of power, one that was sustained by producing the sensation of a momentum and progress, and not a critical distance from a political system not a queer reinterpretation of the operations at its core or the experiences outside of these. The intellectrual that concerns us could be defined by the questioning of official culture as opposed to others that wrote directly in support of the state, a force paradoxically fueled by the attempts at submitting certain authors that were also praised at the same time their literature was published and then redirected through censorship. Under the political definition of the literature, one could say that the very publication of a book that was in line with state ideology or not marked the material accumulation by which the weight of history and progress, could be held down and validated, but Lezama, Sarduy, and Arenas all mobilized a discourse of spectrality, weightless, slippery, and hard to see through; one that expressed their own spectral experience of life during a period of historic transition

It was during the worst years of political and artistic repression in Cuba, from 1968 through the end of the 1970s, the "queer Neobaroque" was forced into various states of exile, ushered out of national history alongside unpublished, previously imprisoned and publiclly admonished writers, such as the infamous Heberto Padilla or the assassinated Nelson Rodriguez, both homosexual writers who spoke openly in ways that could be interpreted as against the state in *Fuera del Juego* (1966) (by Padilla) and *El Regalo* (1967) (by Rodriguez). Within this context and while offering-up new modes of inquiry, the lineage of the Neobaroque turns the notion of inheritance on its head in so far as this wirting opts for

the decadent display of self-creation. Authors do not credit the Revolution or its politics nor even agree with it or discuss it; In fact, they refer to each other's work, their poor treatment, the praise of unskilled taken by the state, and their own virility: all things that upstage the action of uprooting oneself, endlessly changing and reinventing without asking why, what or for whom.

This literature's multiple counter-configurations represented (or, for that matter, would eventually come to represent) the politics of the Cuban Revolution, social dissidence of homosexuality, a pseudo-religious form of rebellion, the irreverence of belonging to any nation, group, or class, and the pleasure of exile. The spectral figures and forms of Arenas poetics within *Antes que Anochezca* (B*efore Night Falls*, 1992), *Arturo, La Estrella Más Brillante* (*Arturo, The Brightest Star*, 1984), and *Celestino Antes del Alba* (Singing from the Well, 1967) expose the limits of the Revolutionary understanding of literature through their chosen means of expression. As the Cuban Neobaroque aesthetic undergoes the dispersals of exile, the spectral forms that signal attempts at self-expression implicated within these poetics becomes the central emblem of Arenas' and Sarduy's works.

The division between those who would criminalize the literature and worked within a cultural sphere of Havana after the Revolution, and those who defended it implicitly in their works or out rightly in actions that might have lead to their exile, as was the case with Piñera, began much earlier than one might assume, even if consider infamous speeches by Fidel Castro of the 1960s such as "Palabras a los intellectuals."[41] Lezama and Sarduy adapted a several century-old transatlantic aesthetic wrought with simultaneously open-ended connotations and a sense of constraint in their efforts of saturating writing with flowering,

[41] "Words to the Intellectuals" (1966) determined appropriate topics to address even in literary work and was given as a public proclamation by Castro.

effervescing images and ideas. In doing so, they expose the evolution of this aesthetic at the verge of its own undoing: at a threshold that comes across in outlandish, ornate, or pervasive literary operations, which, in the end, appear less tenuous than the historical readings Carpentier offers. The debates on what exactly the word "baroque" meant to those directly involved with this century-spanning tradition points to the political associations that fueled such insistent discussions.

That these aesthetics seem to have migrated from a conservative (let us use this term, for lack of a more adequate lexicon) context only to then resurge within the liberal, anarchic, revolutionary strands of Twentieth Century national struggles for liberation is no less surprising, considering—as I do—that the Neobaroque is invested in the configuration of the past, on the moral temptations of the present, and on a tenuous line that ranges from embodiment to sexuality, and then to an overwhelming sense of infirmity faced with the magnitude that God and his Church entails for the modern man. One of the most obvious questions would be "what is it that reappears?" or, "is it style but no substance?" Or, on the other hand, on the relationship between a "style" polemically called the neo-baroque in the midst of a social revolution, and its relationships (as cultural practice, as prescriptive discourse upon a polis going through immense social upheaval) with modern and romantic notions such as "exile," "strangeness" (Ostreanenie), "the uncanny," (unklempft) in relation to somewhat dissident members of that polis, who had sought refuge both in Miami, Madrid, as well as Paris. This dissertation inscribes itself within the fault lines of a relationship between a genre and the forms that have been used to describe it.

And while it is clear that once the fervor of the Revolution subsided and state power was secured, socialist rhetoric could not detain the reality of absence in economic and cultural terms. The Zafra de los Diez Millones (1969-1970), an attempt to repay all loans

from the Soviet Union in a single year of Sugar production, failed immediately and dug the island deeper into debt. The Mariel Boatlift's emptied even the island's prisoners (1980) and allowed writers known as the Mariel Generation to escape The Soviet Union's Collapse (1990) inaugurated the Special Period (1991), characterized by massive economic loss felt on the quotidian, material level. Situational theorist Guy Debord defines the derive as "a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances." The need for "derive" is brought about through everyday monotony that dominates in the time of advanced capitalism. The derive differs this experience as it depends on chance Historically as Debord explains, the derive was a military tactic: "a calculated action determined by the absence of a greater locus", and "a maneuver within the enemy's field of vision" (259). This journey is unplanned, beginning at one point and ending in another, but because the aesthetic conditions of geography and architecture cause the individuals to make unconscious but meaningful choices throughout this period. While the term in English is translated as "drift" we are not talking about mere drifting—a nautical world that implies aimlessness and lack of control. The derive is unpredictable, but intentional.

Returning to the purpose of poetry as understood by the generation of *Espuela de Plata* in an issue of *Origines,* Lezama distinguishes his early design for a prophetic discourse—one that cultivated a tradition, "replacing it" "where it did not exist", finding the "enlaces ocultos" of Cuba's historic condition, excavating and eradicating the remains of a semi-colonial inferiority or, in Lezama's own words, as palpable "lack of a foundational myth" (*Orígenes*, 52). It is exactly this work of replacement that this dissertation attempts to unearth in the case of Neobaroque spectrality and the pleasure of the ghost. To recall Derrida's own vision of the specter—one that arises to give form to the sort of literary journeys and

experiments that result from history's own *derive*. In the case of contemporary Cuban history, this journey has documented a proper escape path, an expression outside of the structure of history and the policies of the state in which an aesthetic tradition—that of Neobaroque aesthetics, has made into a castle, a ghost, and a will to form, that is: something that haunts, recalls the pleasure of, and reconstruct a spectral experience of participating in the spectral game of authorship that is the Cuban Reconfiguration of the literary Neobaroque.

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