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THE VOICE OF THE TEXT IN SELECTED PROSE WORKS OF REINALDO ARENAS

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Glasgow in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy.

Research conducted within Dept. of Hispanic Studies

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ABSTRACT

In approaching the voice of the text in the prose works of Reinaldo Arenas, I have selected seven texts for analysis: *El mundo alucinante*, the five novels which conform the *Pentagonía* quintet (*Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, *Otra vez el mar*, *El color del verano*, and *El asalto*), and *Viaje a La Habana*. Studies on Arenas's prose work to date have largely concentrated on parallels between Arenas's biography and aspects of his fiction, with emphasis on questions of fantasy and the carnivalesque. I explore the works from a purely textual perspective, taking as my theoretical framework the interplay between three approaches to the text: transtextuality (according to the theories proposed by Gérard Genette), narratology and focalization (Eduardo Serrano Orejuela and Mieke Bal). Through an examination of the structure and narrative voices in this body of prose works, I confront the symbolic and ideological voice of the text. A thematic function is evident behind the structural complexity of the works and the vertiginous reading experience created by the texts, along with the relationship the novels sustain with "history" and other external texts. My consideration of the voices which narrate the pieces and the perceptions through which events are depicted exposes close relationships between sections of the same text and between the prose works I explore. In turn, the characterisation of the narrators, heroes and protagonists of the works centres very acutely around the individual's Other, and reveals ideological and thematic implications that are consistent between the works. The treatment of these aspects in the seven texts engenders the reading process I describe as "vertigo"; it is through this process that the ideological notions regarding testimony and the subjectivity of history are revealed.

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I consulted a number of texts from the British Library's Humanities collection (London) and at the Lesbian and Gay Collection of the San Francisco Municipal Library. I am grateful to my parents for providing the opportunity to consult the critical work only available for reference at the British Library's Reading Rooms as well as the material (and advice) I could only access in the U.S.A., and for their support with the research trip to Cuba and Colombia which I undertook during the spring of 1998. In Cuba, Mr. Leonardo Depestre's friendship and support made it possible for me to approach the interviewees I met there. Mrs. Cira Romero and Ms. Dania Vergara of the Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística (Havana) furnished me with unlimited access to materials from the Institute's library and to their own advice. Mr. Tomás Fernández, Mr. Aurelio Cortés and Mr. Antón Arrufat were gracious and trusting enough to grant me a great deal of their time to interview them about their lives and their friendship with Reinaldo Arenas. I thank them for their candidness. Staff at the U.N.E.A.C. and at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in Havana were consistently willing to guide me through their collections of periodicals and books. In Medellín (Colombia), Mr. Mauricio Vélez Upegui and Mr. Carlos Alberto Palacio kindly arranged access for me to the libraries of their respective universities (Universidad EAFIT and Universidad de Envigado).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. Critical debate and the hypothesis for this study

Reinaldo Arenas and his work have been the subject of many studies since the mid-1960's, both in Cuba and outside. A substantial number of articles on his novels and his memoirs¹ has appeared over the last 10 years, since his suicide in 1990, while in the final stages of AIDS. These studies, not to mention the large quantity of journalistic pieces in the Cuban and overseas press regarding his life and early literary activity in Havana², and his subsequent exile from his native Cuba to the U.S.³, have come from various sectors of the academic world. Predominantly, they have centred around parallels between Reinaldo's own life experience and elements of his fiction⁴, and on questions of fantasy and the carnivalesque⁵. One of the most prolific commentators on Arenas's

¹ Arenas, Reinaldo. *Antes que anochezca*. (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1992).

² Various articles appeared in *Granma* and other Cuban journals around the time of *Celestino antes del alba* winning acclaim in 1965 and first going to press in 1967: for example, see: Lihn, Enrique, "Celestino antes del alba", *Granma*, 14 Sept. (1967) 5-6; Diego, Eliseo "Sobre Celestino antes del alba", *Casa de las Américas* 45, (1967) 162- 166

³ See: Aguirre, Mariano, "Un tosco realismo antisocialista" *El País*, February 3 (1983), 13.

⁴ See, for example: Foster, David William, "Consideraciones en torno a la sensibilidad gay en la narrativa de Reinaldo Arenas", *Revista Letras*, 40 (1991) 45-52; Bustos, Marcela, "Las huellas del camuflaje, una lectura de *Cantando en el pozo* de Reynaldo [sic] Arenas", *Literatura y Lingüística*, 7 (1994) 59-77; and Molinero, Rita, "Arenas en el jardín de las delicias", in: *Reinaldo Arenas: recuerdo y presencia*, ed. Reinaldo Sánchez (Miami: Universal, 1994).

⁵ Regarding the notion of fantasy versus reality in Arenas, see: Solotarevsky, Myrna. *La relación mundo-escritura en textos de Reinaldo Arenas*, Juan José Saer, Juan Carlos Martini (Gaithersburg: Hispamerica, 1993); and: Hernández Miyares, Julio and Rozencvaig, Perla eds., *Reinaldo Arenas, alucinaciones, fantasía y realidad* (Glenview: Scott and Foresman, 1990); for

fiction is Perla Rozencvaig, whose numerous studies, not to say the interviews she conducted with the late Arenas during the 1980's and later published⁶, initially shaped the questions in my mind for further research into the text which then grew into my hypothesis for this study. In her book *Reinaldo Arenas: narrativa de transgresión*⁷, Rozencvaig considers the narration of the text in *El mundo alucinante*, *Otra vez el mar* and *Celestino antes del alba*. However, her approach comments on the ideological aspects of the narrators in question, rather than the notion of the complex interaction between the multiple levels of narrative voices operating in the texts. Her text appeared to travel only part of the way down this avenue of study, then, and inspired me to explore the question of the voices at work in the text to a far greater extent. Rozencvaig's work does not address the reading process produced by these narrational devices. While Gladys Zaldívar does confront the question in her text *La metáfora de la historia*⁸, in as much as she observes the subversion of such reference markers as date and location, the narrational levels and subverted concrete time and space references, though evidently connected in the text as elements of the intricate structural system in the novels, are not considered collectively by these commentators or, indeed, by any of the other studies I encountered during my research. The critical pieces I consulted which consider the question of fantasy or the carnivalesque in selected works by Arenas⁹, while rigorous in their considerations of the genres as they are treated in his work, do not connect this stylistic study to a detailed analysis of the relationship between the novel and the external texts (to which I shall refer in my study as hypotexts or intertexts, according to the classifications proposed by Gérard Genette¹⁰) from which the style is born. The commentary which has come into print regarding parallels between the life experience of

commentary on the carnivalesque, see for example: Olivares, Jorge "Carnival and the novel: Reinaldo Arenas' *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*", *Hispanic Review* 39 (1985) 467 – 476.

⁶ See: Rozencvaig, Perla, "Entrevista a Reinaldo Arenas", *Hispanoamérica*, 18 (1981) 21-23; _____, "Qué mundo tuvo que vivir: entrevista con Reinaldo Arenas", *Vuelta*, 15 (1991) 61-64; _____, "Reinaldo Arenas", *Hispanamérica* 28 (1981) 41-48.

⁷ Rozencvaig, Perla. *Reinaldo Arenas: La narrativa de transgresión* (México: Oaxaca, 1986)

⁸ Zaldívar, Gladys. "La metáfora de la historia en *El mundo alucinante* de Reynaldo [sic] Arenas". In her book: *Novelística cubana de los años sesenta*. (Miami: Universal), 1977.

⁹ See: Olivares, Jorge "Carnival and the novel: Reinaldo Arenas' *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*", *Hispanic Review* 39 (1985) 467 – 476; and: Lugo Nazario, Felix. *La alucinación y los recursos literarios en las novelas de Reinaldo Arenas*. (Miami: Universal, 1995).

¹⁰ See section on Theoretical Framework, later in this chapter.

Reinaldo Arenas and the action and concerns evident in his fiction is undoubtedly due in part to the publication of his memoirs, *Antes que anochezca*¹¹; this is perhaps inevitable, since Arenas's colourful life story has sold widely and attracted a great deal of attention¹². Various studies have already come into print approaching the texts from this perspective and I observed that, by contrast, an extended study from a purely textual standpoint appeared to be lacking. I felt that there may be a danger of the body of critical study on Arenas veering too readily towards an appreciation of Arenas's texts as working in tandem with his life history and memoirs; moreover, there can be a danger of undervaluing the originality and ingenuity of a work of fiction when a writer's notoriety becomes such a focus for study. I wanted to produce a study, then, which would consider the texts as freestanding from authorial presence, since I had begun to realise that the current body of criticism lacked an approach which would confront Arenas's fiction from a structuralist or purely textual perspective, and yet would take its exploration of such considerations far enough to encompass the whole picture of the interaction between the narrational levels; the study would consider the devices that denote the narrational levels, the relationship between these voices and the external texts present in the novels, along with the reader's experience of the narrators and protagonists constructed in the works.

It became apparent to me that still less commentary had come into print which sought to explore the treatment of these elements in a broader body of texts than the three or less novels considered by the published studies I mention, and that this approach might be a fitting and original contribution to the continually expanding debate which surrounds the work of this controversial, but surely extraordinary author. It is exciting for any researcher of Arenas's work to observe the vibrant interest in his texts among the professional academic community and in undergraduate courses across Europe, Hispanic America and the U.S. The relatively newly published English translations of *Celestino*

¹¹ Arenas, Reinaldo, *Antes que anochezca* (Madrid: Tusquets, 1992)

¹² Film distributors El Mar/Grandview Pictures affirmed that a film version of the memoirs, under the title "Before night falls" (in Spanish and English), directed by Julian Schnabel would be released in the U.S. on 22 December 2000, following its screening at the Venice Film Festival and the Toronto Film Festival in September 2000; the film is intended for worldwide general release and is likely to reach a broad public, since two of the major roles are played by mainstream stars Johnny Depp and Sean Penn.

*antes del alba*¹³, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*¹⁴ and *El asalto*¹⁵, and the availability of these titles in mainstream booksellers' in the U.K., rather than purely through special order from the U.S. stockist or via the internet, are testament to the growing worldwide interest in Arenas's novels. Despite the fact that Arenas and his works¹⁶ have inspired abundant studies, these have tended to focus on one text or, in the case of the *Pentagonía* quintet, on only one or two of the novels which conform the pentalogy. It is worth mentioning that the three central novels of the trilogy (*El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*¹⁷, *Otra vez el mar*¹⁸ and *El color del verano*¹⁹) are dense and lengthy works in themselves and, perhaps for that reason, researchers have tended to treat the five novels individually. There are very few studies in existence which seek to analyse his *Pentagonía* in conjunction with an earlier novel (his second,²⁰ written in Cuba) and with a later one (written in exile in the U.S.A.²¹), as I have elected to do in the following Chapters. In selecting the texts to explore in this study, I felt that a later novel, outside the *Pentagonía*, written during Arenas's later years in the U.S. would complement my approach to *El mundo alucinante* and the quintet that is the result of a virtually lifelong writing process (the *Pentagonía*). While my study is not a comparative analysis of the development of Arenas's work over time, it seemed appropriate to select a broad base of texts for study when considering any aspect of the writer's technique.

¹³ Arenas, Reinaldo, *Singing from the Well*, Tr. Andrew Hurley. (New York: Penguin, 1999).

¹⁴ Arenas, Reinaldo, *The palace of the White Skunks*, Tr. Andrew Hurley. (New York: Penguin, 1999).

¹⁵ Arenas, Reinaldo, *The Assault*, Tr. Andrew Hurley. (New York, Penguin 1995).

¹⁶ It is worth noting, at this stage, that Reinaldo Arenas published poetry, short stories and a play (*El Central*) as well as further novels, along with his memoirs (which I have mentioned on this page). The texts I have consulted, besides the body of novels for study, are listed in the Bibliography. His manuscripts and the fullest collection of his works are housed in the Firestone Library of Princeton University, New Jersey.

¹⁷ Arenas, Reinaldo, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1980)

¹⁸ Arenas, Reinaldo, *Otra vez el mar* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1982)

¹⁹ Arenas, Reinaldo, *El color del verano* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1991).

²⁰ Arenas, Reynaldo [sic]. *El mundo alucinante* (México: Editorial Diógenes, 1978); the novel was highly acclaimed by the Cuban literary community and received an UNEAC (Union Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba) commendation in 1969.

²¹ Reinaldo Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1990).

2. Theoretical framework

While I have come across the work of scholars (such as Perla Rozencvaig, mentioned previously) who have included certain transtextual and narratological concerns in their studies, I have not yet encountered any piece of research which sought to combine transtextuality, narratology and focalization as complementary approaches in a framework for examining Arenas's prose works. I have found that, in the case of these seven novels (the five which make up the *Pentagonía*, along with *El mundo alucinante* and *Viaje a La Habana*), the narrative demands the combination of these methodologies to confront the complexity of its structure. As I hope to show, it is necessary in the case of these texts to determine the qualities and identity of the narrator(s) in order to better situate and explore the work according to the criteria of transtextual study. The three approaches I have employed as my starting point in examining the texts depend on each other to open a greater understanding of the techniques employed and to allow us to reach a clearer appreciation of the voices at play in the texts. Many systems have been created to explore transtextuality, focalization and narratology; for the sake of consistency and clarity, what follows are a few paragraphs outlining the principles I have adopted as my basic tools for this study. Firstly, I shall outline the core elements of the theories I have adopted as the framework of my narratological and focalizational analysis. To avoid confusion, I have employed and will make reference to the concepts suggested by only two theorists in this regard: Mieke Bal²² and Eduardo Serrano Orejuela²³.

Let us say, to begin with, that any piece of narrative text which is verbal in character, that is, in which a narrator recounts a story, can be approached from three main perspectives: Serrano Orejuela catalogues these as *historia*, *relato* and *narración*; I shall describe them as *action*, *discourse* and *narration*. The level of *action* deals with the actors in the piece and their respective sequences of actions; *discourse* is the level of the text through which the actors and their actions are told; and finally, *narration* refers to the level of the text on which we find the relationship between the narrator and the narratee, who deliver and receive the discourse, respectively. For my study, I will be concerned,

²²In: Bal, Mieke. *Teoría de la narrativa* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1984).

largely, with the narration itself, though the other levels, of course, will also be relevant to these considerations, and I will refer to the action repeatedly. None of these levels excludes the presence of the others; on the contrary, the interweaving of all three is fundamental for a verbal narrative text to function at all. Logically, it would be impossible for any one of these levels to define a text of this kind on its own: wherever discourse exists, with it will appear the narrator and the narratee (in whatever guise), regardless of whether or not these two are made explicit in the discourse itself. Similarly, wherever *action* is produced, we will encounter actors and their actions and, for the text to constitute a verbal narrative, the discourse will be the means through which the narrator and the narratee can be perceived. The three levels, then, are inherent in any narrative text. It is particularly important that I begin by establishing the operation of these three levels in a text, prior to the Chapter 2 of my study, since it is in *El mundo alucinante* that the most structurally complex interaction between these levels of the texts will be explored. The same principle will be central to the following chapters, however.

When we look at the narration of a given text, we are confronted with the agents responsible for the emission and reception of the discourse. The narrator is determined by what he relates: in each of the texts I will be exploring over the following three chapters, we will be confronted with multiple narrators (and narratees), and I will establish how the characterisation (if applicable) of the narrators can be perceived. We distance ourselves here from the concepts of biographical author and implicit author (who can be inferred by the reader, based on the ideological concepts and moral judgements he finds in the text). Insofar as the narrator is responsible for the emission of discourse, he (or she/it/them) will always have an identity. From this starting point, the narrator can recount *action* in which he may or may not participate. In the first of these cases, where the narrator participates in the action, he is an *endodiegetic narrator*; if he does not, he is an *exodiegetic narrator*²⁴.

So, if a narrator recounts an action in which he participates, two possibilities are opened: the first of these is that the narrator is the protagonist in the action he narrates. In

²³In his article: "Consideraciones sobre el narrador y el narratario", *Revista Polígramos*, 21 (1979) 53-75.

²⁴Different theorists have used different terms to refer to much the same phenomenon but I will stick to this terminology for my study.

this case, he is an *endo-autodiegetic* narrator. In this case, however, the "endo" prefix is redundant, since the narrator, by definition, must be "endo" (an actor participating in the action) in order for him to be "auto" (the principal actor participating in the action). The second of these possibilities is that the narrator recounts an action in which he participates as a witness to events, where his actions are not indispensable to the continuation of the plot (in other words, he is not the character whose actions are most responsible for the advancement of the action). He is an *endo-paradiegetic* narrator; again, the "endo" tag is understood. These classifications will be relevant to my approach to the text as an initial means of examining the narrators at work in the text: we will be concerned with various aspects regarding "who narrates" and with establishing the interaction between those narrators and their narratees. These principles of classification, then, are tools which will facilitate a more thorough analysis of the nature of the narrators in the texts. As we will find in all of the seven prose works, the question of establishing the extent of a narrator's participation in the text will have a direct and significant bearing on the credibility of the perception of events recounted by that voice and will, in turn, condition the reader's perception of the events narrated and of the characters implicated in the action. In Chapter 4, particularly, we will see that the large number and the characterisations of the narrators present in *Viaje a La Habana* will require us to consider carefully whether and to what extent the narrators are actors in the texts they narrate.

So far, then, we have been concerned with criteria based on the narrator's participation in the action. However, Serrano Orejuela also considers the criterion of stratification: according to this principle, a narrator can be *supradiegetic* or *infradiegetic*: the first of these terms corresponds to a narrator who operates on a commanding level of the narrative. That is to say, the narrator's speech does not depend on his being handed the opportunity to narrate by another narrator. The *infradiegetic* narrator, on the other hand, relates events when and because another narrator hands him the opportunity to do so. What this means is that, in handing on the narration to a new narrator, a *supradiegetic* narrator opens a new, additional narrational level within the discourse. This is a notion I will use to consider the sheer complexity of the stratification at work in the seven novels for analysis. I do not propose to undermine the validity of Serrano's theory: on the

contrary, while it will not be practical to use such a classification scheme to catalogue the stratification of these texts (as we shall see), the basic principle will be a yardstick for me to explore the sheer intricacy of Arenas's construction of the narrational levels of his texts. As we will find in Chapter 2, the narration of *El mundo alucinante* is shared between multiple narrators, switching between them throughout the text and often in dizzyingly irregular fashion. In *Viaje a la Habana* and in the *Pentagonía*, too, the frequency of the narratological stratification has a direct bearing on the reading process the reader undergoes: in *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, for example, we begin with Fortunato's autodiegetic narration²⁵, but even on the first page of the novel, the text is interrupted by his cousins' conversations, his aunts' recollections and narrated thought processes and with sections of external text such as newspaper clippings; none of these changes in narrator is announced or directly credited to the narrator in question, and it is only over the course of the whole work that we come to discern which voices are which and, indeed, how the various voices interconnect. With regard to the narratee, the fictitious subject to whom the discourse is directed by the narrator, the same principles are applied based on participation and stratification. As we will find, exploring the identity of the narratees (in approaching all of the novels I have selected for study) will prove to be an inextricable part of the analysis of the narrators themselves, not only in identifying the narrator, but in examining the characterisation of that narrator.

The concept of focalization is closely related to that of narration. Narration is concerned with the linguistic subject who "speaks", while focalization deals with the linguistic subject who "sees". Just as, in confronting narration, we must study the narrator and what is narrated, in exploring focalization we must analyse the focalizer and what is focalized. The first classification we should make in such an analysis is to determine whether or not the focalizer belongs to the *action*. Accordingly, the focalizer will be *external* (does not participate in the action) or *internal* (participating). Very generally speaking, the vision we are offered by an internal focalizer (a character, in other words) is likely to be more partial and limited than we could be afforded by an external focalizer. In that respect, a degree of similarity exists between these two categories of focalizer and

²⁵ Fortunato, as we will see in Chapter 3, is the protagonist of the novel and its first narrator; I will discuss the narration of *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* in Chapter 3.

the concepts of endodiegetic and exodiegetic narrators. A similar affinity exists when we come to look at focalization from the point of view of stratification: a focalizer can carry out his function without depending on another focalizer who permits him to do so, or the opposite situation can occur. Very commonly, for instance, an external focalizer hands over the focalization to an internal focalizer - a character. In any case, the key concern lies in the relationship which can be established between what is focalized, the way in which it is focalized and who (or what, perhaps) focalizes it. The differing (and often contradictory) perceptions of narrators and focalizers will be poignant in all of the Chapters but, particularly, it will play a large part in my study of *El mundo alucinante* in Chapter 2: the question of “who focalizes” at various stages in the narrative will present us with highly contrasting visions of the protagonist (Fray Servando), throwing the intangibility of his life history into relief.

The complex system of narration and focalization in all these novels goes very much hand in hand with the transtextuality of the texts: in order to explore the narration, necessarily, I found that I had to consider the transtextual relationships in operation (very loosely speaking, the relationships with external texts as well as the relationships between various portions of the same text). In order to present this necessity further ahead in my study, it is important that I make clear the various relationships which can conform transtextuality, as I shall apply the term and its concerns to my approach. Gerard Genette's exhaustive study of transtextual techniques and relationships, *Palimpsests*²⁶, which will serve as the theoretical framework of my transtextual analyses, has been adopted as a model for many pieces of work since its publication. The majority of these studies, though, limit themselves to employing only the basic principles of Genette's system, as described in the first chapter of his work, without extending their view beyond this point to consider the detailed study of hypertextuality in its multiple forms as developed in the subsequent chapters of the work. The examinations which appear in the following chapters are founded on a selection of the principles of study as proposed by Genette in his work as a whole, in as much as they are pertinent to the transtextual

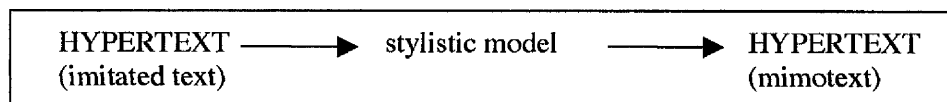
²⁶Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsestos: la literatura en segundo grado*. Tr. Celia Fernández Prieto (Madrid: Taurus, 1989). I have based my study on the Spanish version of Genette's text, translated from the original French (*Palimpsestes*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), but have translated his terminology into English.

analysis of my chosen novels and to the textual transcendence between them. The following examination of Arenas's prose works, then, seeks to establish to what extent the concepts of transtextuality Genette examines can be perceived in these seven novels and how they operate. Genette's work merits a far more committed reading than I can produce here as a framework for my analysis. The outline I have provided is merely a sketch of the main concepts which I will employ as tools for my study.

Genette believes that every individual text depends on a series of factors (genre, mode, narrative voice, etc.), which is the object of any study of poetics. It is this complex of factors that he describes as *transtextuality*, or "la trascendencia textual del texto" which is "todo lo que pone al texto en relación, manifiesta o secreta, con otros textos."²⁷ Initially, he defines five types of transtextual relationship, which he catalogues in ascending order of their abstract, implicit and global qualities. Broadly speaking, Genette's five principal classifications are based on the tangibility of the relationship. The most tangible of the five classifications – intertextuality – is the most manifest. Intertextuality includes quotation (literal and declared copying of text), whether it appears with quotation marks or italic type, with or without an exact bibliographical reference, and so forth; plagiarism (literal but undeclared copying of text) and allusion (implicit reference to, not copying of, another text, but which necessarily recalls another text or piece of expression). Paratextuality refers to the usually graphic or "distributive" structural markers of a text, such as the title, subtitle, footnote, preface, epilogue, illustrations, etc. Genette describes as metatextuality any critical relationship between texts: commentary, in other words. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, a proportion of the narration of the text is metatextual in character, in that the narrator passes judgement on affirmations made previously by another narrator, commenting on those sections of the text. Similarly, in Chapter 4, I will look at the inclusion of fictional editors' footnotes within the narrative: these, too, are metatextual, since they comment on the text in hand. Hypertextuality is the fourth denomination, and is the principal object of examination in *Palimpsests*, I will return to it later in this chapter. It does not consist of commenting on a "previous" (or pre-existing) text, but of deriving a new text (a hypertext) from a pre-existing text (a hypotext) through a process of transformation. Architextuality is the silent

and implicit relationship between the text and the genre or form to which it belongs. These five classifications are not to be considered as exclusive genres or denominations that define a work, but as facets of the transtextuality of a given text, interwoven and coexistent. All these classifications will be pertinent to my study of Arenas's novels but I will be most concerned with the hypertextual relationships the novels reveal.

Within the scope of hypertextuality, Genette perceives, initially, two essential types of transformational operation: *imitation* (extracting the style of the hypotext to then apply it to a different action or series of actions) and *transformation* (pinpointing the main actions and the scheme of relationships between the characters of the hypotext, then communicating them in a different style); see table 2 in Appendix 1. Neither of these practices precludes the other; it is possible to combine the two. Less immediate than transformation, imitation requires a further step in the process before the hypertext can be produced; a generic or stylistic model to be imitated must first be created. Imitation is a function, rather than a figure or motif. It is the mimetic function which can be applied to any figure. From the hypotext, the imitator extracts his object style; this object style must be understood in a broad sense, on a thematic level as well as a formal level. On this pattern, he constructs his mimotext (a hypertext created through imitation), as follows:



The variety of figures this process can imply is extensive; it includes not only structural figures in a strict sense, but syntactic figures - morphology, vocabulary, and so on. It is not possible to imitate an individual text directly: indeed, it is only conceivable to imitate indirectly, to apply a style to *another* text. Direct imitation would be a faithful copy, a reproduction (which would be feasible in graphic art: it is hypothetically possible to reproduce a painting or a print), copying out a text word for word. So it is not possible to imitate single texts, only to imitate a genre (however limited) of texts, since imitation in itself presupposes generalisation. From imitation as a syntactic phenomenon, we get "-isms": latinisms, homerisms, spoonerisms, etc. Such "-isms" ("imitations of...") are

²⁷Genette, p.9

created only when they are used hypertextually, that is, when the imitator employs them as a model to imitate. It is worth underlining that, for a figure to be an "-ism", it need not be authentic: a homerism is not necessarily a faithful quotation from Homer. The imitator, then, is essentially concerned with a style and, only peripherally, with a text; a writer who undertakes transformation, on the other hand, is principally concerned with the text and, peripherally, with a style. He can transpose the text onto another style, in an even and systematic way, or he can transform it according to his own semantic and formal criteria. Unlike imitation, transformation is always practised on a single text (or determined body of texts), never a genre.

There is one more variation I should like to highlight, which will be pertinent to my analysis: *contamination*. Contamination is a procedure based on a combination of multiple (two or more) hypotexts, which can be from a mixture of genres, taken from one text (or several) and one (or several) genre together, or from two (or more) individual texts. In other words, a hypertext is not necessarily produced using a massive process (all of text B, the hypertext, derived from all of text A, the hypotext); complex and mixed practices, in which the hypertext is derived from several hypotexts through a combination of operations, on both imitational and transformational levels, are possible and frequent. In *El mundo alucinante*, as we will see in Chapter 2, various hypotexts are evident in the work (contamination), subjected to different hypertextual treatments. Among them are the memoirs of the real friar (we will discuss the real, historical Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, who appears as the fictional protagonist of Arenas's text), historical texts, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy*: they undergo different hypertextual processes in *El mundo alucinante*, but it is the whole picture of the system of hypertextual relationships that will be most revealing.

As I have mentioned, no hypertextual work can be "innocent" or "objective". Any hypertextual creation (unlike intertextuality) is, indeed, creative in character, and must involve a certain degree of interpretation of its hypotext (whether conscious or subconscious) and, therefore, a certain implicit metatextuality. Totally innocent transformation cannot exist, since the letter of a text cannot be manipulated without affecting its meaning. I pose Genette's question:

¿Se puede [...] modificar el sentido de un texto sin modificar su letra, por ejemplo, sin tocar su acción? ¿Se puede concebir una transformación puramente semántica que no vaya acompañada de ninguna intervención pragmática, diegética, ni siquiera formal?²⁸.

Genette turns to the fictional demonstration of the question offered by Jorge Luis Borges in *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*²⁹, the short story in which Menard ends up writing, quite spontaneously, a perfect reproduction of the *Quijote*³⁰. So, does this engender some kind of pragmatic transformation, even though the work has been reproduced without alteration? Yes: semantic transformation is always subject to a new interpretation of the cause of the events in the hypertext. As Genette affirms, "la causa de un hecho es otro hecho"³¹. If we compare the concept of hypertextuality with the title of Genette's work, we begin to visualise the game involved in the technique: hypertextuality, as the author says, adds a further dimension to the text³². Every text, he assures us, possesses this textual transcendence to some extent. All texts recall one another and are interrelated in an infinite textual transcendence, like Babel's multidimensional, unending library³³, but in which every hypertextual work is a new and complete, autonomous text, transcendent but still immanent. Genette's concept of transtextuality fits more comfortably under the heading of transcendence rather than immanence, perhaps, but does not belong under either exclusively. The transcendence of all texts is not the object of my study, however: my concern is to use these concepts as a means to opening up the novels I have chosen to explore, and to establish how the procedures of narratology, focalization and transtextuality expose the structural and linguistic techniques at play in the texts, and what they reveal as regards the ideological concepts embodied by the narrators and the protagonists in these seven works.

²⁸Genette, p.402

²⁹ Borges, Jorge Luis. "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" in: *Ficciones* (Madrid: Alianza, 1990)

³⁰Genette, p.409

³¹Genette, p.409

³²Genette, p.247

³³ Borges, Jorge Luis. "La Biblioteca de Babel" in: *Ficciones* (Madrid: Alianza, 1990)

3. Structure of the thesis

To conduct my study, I have begun in Chapter 2 with Arenas's second published novel, *El mundo alucinante*. A manifest and very marked transtextual relationship exists between *El mundo alucinante* and various external texts (among them, most evidently, the memoirs of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier³⁴, fictionalised in Arenas's novel as the protagonist of his "*novela de aventuras*"³⁵). I shall examine the structure of the text as a means to illustrating and exploring the saturation of evocations of "exterior" texts in the novel. The exaggerated use of the technique surely invites the reader to question more closely the relationship these hypotexts sustain with Arenas's work, in other words, the transtextual relationship between them. I have intentionally laboured somewhat over the paratextual devices employed in *El mundo alucinante*. I have allowed myself to do so in order to make the process clear for the subsequent chapters, but also to facilitate later references (in the same chapter and in the later chapters) to the devices used. I felt that some care over this part of the analysis would be helpful to establish the structure of the novel clearly and comprehensively, and would permit me to establish the curious and intricately constructed reading process imposed by the text. All tables and graphics relating to the text of my thesis (except for small explanatory ones, which remain at their appropriate place in the text) appear as Appendices at the end of my study. I refer to these graphics over several pages in the relevant Chapters and so they have been separated for ease of reference. In Chapter 3, I have approached the five novels which conform the *Pentagonía*. The individual novels are complex in their own right and have, individually, been the subject of various published studies³⁶. I have considered them as a single,

³⁴ Mier Noriega y Guerra, José Servando Teresa de. *Memorias* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1946); _____. *Apología* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988).

³⁵ "Una novela de aventuras" appears as the subtitle to the novel. I shall explore this subtitle and its significance within the structure of the novel in Chapter 2.

³⁶ See: Ramos, Alicia, "Reinaldo Arenas, *Celestino antes del alba*", *La palabra y el hombre*, 42 (1982) 72; Valero, Roberto, "Otra vez el mar de Reinaldo Arenas", *Revista Iberoamericana*, 142-143 (1991) 355-6; Barnet, Miguel, "*Celestino antes del alba*", *La Gaceta de Cuba* 10 (1967) 11-12; Bustos Pereira, Marcela, "Las huellas del camuflaje, una lectura de *Cantando en el pozo* de Reynaldo [sic] Arenas", *Literatura y Lingüística*, 7 (1994) 59-77; Diego, Eliseo "Sobre *Celestino antes del alba*" *Casa de las Américas*, 45 (1967), pp. 161-166; Lihn, Enrique, "*Celestino antes*

composite piece (though I make many references to aspects of the individual novels) in order to appreciate the relationship between the 5 components. Chapter 4 deals with *Viaje a La Habana*, written some 20 years after *El mundo alucinante*, following Reinaldo's illicit departure from Cuba with the Mariel exodus of 1980³⁷. *Viaje a La Habana*, as we will see, is quite a kaleidoscope of narratological levels and, therefore, I have chosen to approach the text initially by concentrating on the narrators of the work (by examining the levels of narration and focalization) and, from there, I have taken up the transtextual analysis of the novel. Necessarily, Chapter 4 leans most heavily on the narratological aspects of the study.

With this study, then, I hope to bring a contribution to the complex of studies by scholars who approach Arenas's work. If I can go some way towards communicating the vertiginous, kaleidoscopic, sometimes phantasmagorical pleasure of reading Arenas's novels and produce my own slant on exploring his work from the textual perspective that I have chosen, and perhaps pave the way for some further study on this writer's work, I will feel satisfied that I have achieved my goal here. What I hope to establish with my study of the seven prose works I have selected is the result of the complex (not to say exciting) multiplicity of structures, voices and hypertextual relationships in the texts: my intention is to reveal the function of these techniques and of the interplay that is evident between them, and their effect on the reading process taking place in the reader's mind. From there, I shall draw my conclusions on the purpose of the rather exhilarating reading experience generated by these multi-voiced texts.

del alba", *Granma*, 14 September (1967), 5.; Olivares, Jorge, "Carnival and the novel: Reinaldo Arenas's *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*," *Hispanic Review*, 39 (1985), 467-476;

³⁷ I cannot claim to have conducted any sort of journalistic study of the late Arenas's life, but it has been helpful to me to bounce my readings of his memoirs, *Antes que anochezca*, off the interviews I conducted with Arenas's peers (namely Aurelio Cortés, Tomasito Fernández and Antón Arrufat) in Havana during March and April of 1998.

CHAPTER 2

A historical hero in a hall of mirrors:

El mundo alucinante

MIER (fray Servando Teresa de), dominico, orador y escritor político mexicano, n. en Monterrey (1765 – 1827), que luchó denodadamente por la independencia de su país. En el Congreso Constitucional de 1824 defendió la forma de gobierno centralista. Autor de *Memorias*, *Historia de la Revolución de Nueva España*, etc.¹

1. Structure of the text

1.i Introduction to the chapter

El mundo alucinante has been the subject of many studies since its publication in 1969². Several highly respected commentators published enthusiastic articles in the Cuban press regarding the promising prose work of the 26-year-old Reinaldo Arenas. Since the Casa de las Américas edition of the novel went out of print, and Arenas became *persona non grata* in the country, *El mundo alucinante* became largely unavailable to the Cuban market. During the sixties and seventies some studies came into print which, for the most part, were

¹ Entry from: García-Pelayo y Gross, Ramón. *Pequeño Larousse ilustrado: edición exclusiva para Colombia*, 1994 (Buenos Aires: Larousse, 1994) p.1444.

² First published as: Arenas, Reynaldo, *El mundo alucinante* (México: Editorial Diógenes, 1969); studies include: Arocha, José A. "El mundo alucinante de Reynaldo Arenas", *Alacrán Azul*, 1, (1970), 69; Borinsky, Alicia, "Re-escribir y escribir: Arenas, Menard, Borges, Cervantes, Fray Servando", *Revista Iberoamericana*, 92-93, (1975), 605-616; Cacheiro, Adolfo, "El mundo alucinante: History and Ideology", *Hispania*, 79, (1996), 762-771; Gonzalez, Eduardo G., "A razón de santo: últimos lances de Fray Servando", *Revista Iberoamericana*, 92-93, (1975), 593-603; Volek, Emil, "La carnavalización y la alegoría en *El mundo alucinante* de Reinaldo de Arenas" [sic], *Revista Iberoamericana*, 130-131, (1985), 125-148; Zaldívar, Gladys, *Novelística cubana de los años 60* (Miami: Universal, 1977).

relatively brief (with the notable exception of Perla Rozencvaig's chapter on the novel in her book *Reinaldo Arenas: narrativa de transgresión*³). Latterly, the novel has inspired further studies outside Cuba, for the most part centred around questions of realism and around the ideological aspects of the text. Rozencvaig's analysis is concerned with the narration of the text, as is Rodríguez Ortiz's⁴; however, neither of these works explores the question of the levels of narration of the text and the interplay between the various narrative voices except as a peripheral consideration in a study that relates more closely to the notion of dissidence as it is treated in the novel. What appeared to me to be missing from the body of critical work on *El mundo alucinante* was a detailed exploration of its extraordinarily complex construction. I have approached the text from a different starting point to the published analyses – a structuralist one – in order to fully explore the relationship between the levels of narration. So far, no study has come into print which approaches this aspect of the novel in a detailed fashion, or which seeks to confront the work from the structuralist perspective I have chosen. With such an abundance of studies on Arenas's prose work which explore the texts in the light of the author's life experience, I felt that the close textual analysis I have undertaken could bring another dimension to the vibrant and growing critical debate surrounding Arenas's novels.

In this chapter, I hope to apply the methodological principles I outline in Chapter 1 to the novel with a view to exploring the functions of the complex web of narrational voices Arenas has woven. In doing so, I have been careful to factor out the life of the author from my consideration of the actions of the novel's protagonist, Fray Servando, in order to produce the kind of approach to his texts that I perceive to have been lacking until now: that is, a close examination of the intricate structure of the work and its recourse to other texts (hypertextual relationships and intertextual relationships, in Gérard Genette's terminology⁵). As I shall discuss later in the chapter, history itself is hypertextualised in the novel. As we will find further ahead, in addressing the structural devices present in *El mundo alucinante*, we will necessarily be faced, on the one hand, with the relationship between the narrators of the novel (which I explore in part 2 of this chapter) and, on the other, with the equally complex transtextual relationships at play in the work (these I shall consider in Parts 3 and 4). The relationship between the voices of the narrators sustain a clearly

³ See: Rozencvaig, Perla. *Reinaldo Arenas: La narrativa de la transgresión*. (México: Oaxaca, 1986) pp. 5 - 36

⁴ See: Rodríguez Ortiz, Oscar. *Sobre narradores y héroes: a propósito de Arenas, Scorza y Adoum* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1980) pp. 12-56

⁵ See outline of theoretical framework in Chapter 1.

perceptible relationship with the transtextual aspects of the novel: based on the findings my initial, structural study of the novel reveals, this is the relationship I will be exploring later. From this, purely textual standpoint, then, I aim to produce an appreciation of the voices which recount this text and the perceptions they expose.

1.ii The structure of the novel: paratextual devices

El mundo alucinante is notably architectural in nature and its complex structure begs to be examined and questioned, so I have elected to use the structure itself as the starting point in my approach to the novel. In the spirit of Genette's study on transtextual relationships, I have begun by looking at the most tangible level first, i.e. the structural division of the text and the paratextual devices employed in its construction. Even before we open a copy of the novel, we are presented with a title on two levels: a main title ("El mundo alucinante") and a subtitle ("Una novela de aventuras"). The split-level title implicitly instructs the reader in how to approach this text: it announces itself as one novel, made up of multiple *aventuras*. Indeed, *El mundo alucinante* is loaded with paratexts of various forms, which, collectively, make for an intricately constructed text. So, as a preliminary means of looking into the various sections of the text, I will look first at the paratexts themselves, hoping they will provide a springboard for my approach to the interweaving of the various levels of this novel. In Appendix 1, I have outlined the paratextual devices at play, illustrated in a linear fashion as we would find them on reading *El mundo alucinante* once through, from cover to cover. As we can see, then, we travel through: title, subtitle, dedication, quotations, prologue, chapter numbers, settings and titles (or some of the above, depending on the chapter), followed by the narrative of each chapter, which involves footnotes, variations in typeface, spacing variations and direct speech indicators, at various stages in the narrative, and finally an epilogue section, which carries its own title but not the label "Epilogue". Clearly, then, this is a carefully structured novel and the reader is meant to react to the techniques used in sectioning the text. Our reading will require us to process all the text from title to prologue before we enter into the main fictional narrative, so it is appropriate to explore the function these paratextual levels fulfill and how they may condition the way the reader then receives the chapters themselves.

As we have seen, the first instruction the reader receives is to qualify the main title (*El mundo alucinante*) with its subtitle (*Una novela de aventuras*). We are instructed that *El mundo alucinante* is to take the form of a single, organic novel (as suggested by the singular of the subtitle, “una novela”), but will somehow be a composite of multiple *aventuras* (plural). It classifies itself as a novel, i.e. a piece of fictional narrative (not a historical piece or a memoir or any other type of nonfictional work; this will be a significant consideration in our appreciation of the hypertextual aspects of the novel). Moreover, this is a novel made up of *aventuras*, suggesting action of some extraordinary nature. Our expectations are built immediately, then. Later in this chapter, I will consider whether the novel delivers on the promise of these two qualities. A single dedication is made to two individuals, both writers in their own right, crediting them with a specific quality: “honradez intelectual”. With a dedication such as the one that appears here, we can generally assume that we are still outside the fictional narrative of the book, and that the narrator of the dedication is the author, Reinaldo Arenas. Even if we stick militantly to the “death of the author” for our examination of the fictional narrative, we must assume that the narrator of the dedication is Arenas himself, since we have no reason to think otherwise and the generally accepted norm in the publication of a novel is for the dedication to be an enunciation by the author to its recipient, and the recipients of the dedication are real individuals known to be prominent in Arenas’s life. I refer to the concept of discounting authorial voice in analysing fictional text, such as the principle discussed by Roland Barthes in his text *The death of the author*⁶ and intend no reference to the actual death from suicide of the late Reinaldo Arenas. Indeed, for the purposes of this structuralist study, I will assume the author to be “dead” in this sense: my approach to the text comes from the text itself and will not look at Reinaldo Arenas’s life experience or at any parallels this novel may have with it. Such considerations would require an entirely different approach. In other words, we have taken a step onto an extratextual footing here. While this point is of minor significance with regard to my approach to *El mundo alucinante*, the death or presence of the authorial voice is a concept we will return to concerning the *Pentagonía* in Chapter 3 and, in greater depth, *Viaje a La Habana* in Chapter 4.

For the moment, it is evident that *El mundo alucinante* so far conforms to a conventional, not to say exacting format. It is precisely the solidness of structure, such as we have so far, that will undergo a vertiginous process of subversion later, as the narrative progresses. Following the dedication are two

⁶ Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142 – 148.

fragments of text quoted from different sources and each credited to its source. It is worth noting the source both excerpts come from: one is a purportedly non-fictional work (a historical text), while the other is taken from *Les Martyrs* (again, see Appendix 1). Though the author is not cited, *Les Martyrs* is a work by Chateaubriand⁷, who will appear much later in the narrative, hypertextualised as Arenas's character. At this initial stage in the reading process, of course, the reader cannot be aware that this will be the case, so the resonance produced by the section quoted from Chateaubriand's text is likely to be more related to temporal setting, Chateaubriand, after all, being a contemporary of Servando's and so emphasising the timeframe of the friar's life story, allegedly contained in *El mundo alucinante*. The sections quoted both refer to the notion of destruction: martyrdom (destroying the self to aid some higher purpose) and destruction (of property and life) as an act of triumph: both are surely triumphal and heroic concepts, but they are also opposing. The reading process so far stores these notions for later reflection (as any pre-narrative quotation does, even the one I have used to begin this chapter) and plants them in the reader's mind, conditioning his/her reception of the text to a degree.

Only after all these pre-narrative texts does the narrative "proper" get underway, with an untitled prologue section: it is not titled as "*Prólogo*" or anything else, but opens directly in letter form with the greeting "*Querido Servando*"; the letter is not signed or dated and makes no suggestion as to the name of the sender. It sets the subsequent text in the context of its fictional production: the letter is written to Fray Servando Teresa de Mier Noriega y Guerra, from an unidentified narrator in the twentieth century⁸. The narrative that will follow is "allegedly" the memoir of Fray Servando; this relationship will be prominent in my hypertextual study of the novel later. I will look at the prologue letter in detail further ahead in this chapter, and at its relationship with the memoirs of the real Fray Servando. Following this prologue letter, the narrative "proper" of the novel starts with a heavily labelled first chapter, introduced as: "*México I*". So we have a setting for the action of the first chapter (Mexico), and it is helpfully numbered to establish a chronology, a linear system for the narrative. The chapter title itself is a mini-synopsis of the action apparently contained in the chapter: "*De cómo transcurre mi infancia en*

⁷ Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* was published in 1809.

⁸ Later in this chapter I will establish how we can locate this narrator in the twentieth century and what bearing that has on the text.

Monterrey junto con otras cosas que también transcurren" (p.10)⁹. Paratexts generally appear in order to provide clarity and orientation for the reader, but, as I hope to illustrate, they are placed in this text to be contradictory from the start and become increasingly subverted and disorientating as the novel progresses. The precision of the paratexts in this first chapter serves to set the reader up with a concrete system of reference before the rug is pulled out from under him and the system contradicts itself. So far, we are (apparently) in Mexico, looking at this narrator's childhood and some unspecified "other events". A first person (yo: "I") narrator is clear in the title (*mi infancia*). However, the narrative is immediately confounding, when the opening sentences of the text blatantly contradict each other, as follows:

"Venimos del corojal. No venimos del corojal. Yo y las dos Josefás venimos del corojal. Vengo solo del corojal y ya casi se está haciendo de noche." (p.11)

As we can see from the opposing statements "venimos"/ "no venimos"/ "yo y las dos Josefás venimos"/ "vengo solo", the versions of events offered are placed in direct opposition. In the chapter headings where there are titles (as opposed to numbers and/or locations alone), these register the alleged movements of the protagonist, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier. They subvert the accepted characteristics of the technique as it is generally accepted in writing, that is as a means of synthesising the arguments or content of the section of text to come. The notion of reality in *El mundo alucinante* is devalued, then, even at this early stage in our reading of the work via techniques which establish systems of concrete reference in the narrative and then subvert them. The effect on the reading process is highly disconcerting, but produces a questioning attitude in the reader's mind: what did happen? And why the controversy? Even paratextual devices generally used as structuring tools in a text (titles on their various levels and chapter sequence markers) evidently have an ulterior function: they challenge the realism of the events narrated and distance the text from nonfictional works which purport to be historical or biographical in nature: *El mundo alucinante*, after all, is a self-professed *novela*.

⁹ My references to the text are taken from the 1969 edition of the novel, and appear as page number references in parenthesis throughout this chapter. In this chapter, as in the subsequent ones, the typeface, spacing and other graphic devices used in the novel will play a significant part in my study; I have therefore reproduced any quoted sections of text as faithfully as possible, and all italic type or other variations in the appearance of the text appear exactly as they do in the original text, unless I have stated otherwise.

As we proceed through the novel, the titles' function as devices to confuse, rather than guide the reader evolves and becomes more evident. Bizarrely, following chapter number 1 we find, not chapter 2 but chapter 1, introduced (with right-hand then left-hand alignment, as in the original text) as follows:

1
*De tu infancia en Monterrey junto con otras cosas
 que también ocurren*¹⁰ (p.14)

What we are presented with is clearly a chapter which is “the same but different”: still chapter 1, but not situated by its title in a particular country or location; it will contain similar events, but these are clearly to be seen and narrated from a different perspective. The title is phrased differently, and narrated by a different narrator, speaking in the second person: unlike the first Chapter 1, we have a narrator whose narratee is Fray Servando himself. In this sense, the different version of events he (or she) recounts is a direct contradiction to the “yo” narrator (N[yo]) about his version by the “tú” narrator (N[tú]). From now on, I shall refer to this first person narrator as N[yo], and so forth; for reasons which will become apparent in part 2 of this chapter, it is not practical to refer to the narrators by number, as in N1, N2, etc. in the order in which they first narrate in the text. The chapter which follows muddies the waters even further: it is the third chapter 1, entitled:

1
*De cómo pasó su infancia en Monterrey junto con
 otras cosas que también pasaron*¹¹ (p.16)

Evidently, the same game is underway: here we have a third version of the first chapter, according to a third person narrator¹² (N[él]). The titles of the three accounts of “chapter 1” are similar but not identical: aside from the evident play on pronouns, it is clear that a constant is to be drawn from the similar (but not identical) verbs used in the titles. All three relate to “happening” or “taking place”: *transcurrir* (from the first chapter title), *ocurrir*, *pasar*. In other words, one would assume from these titles that the central thing would be the action, the “happenings” of the chapter: the three versions collectively, however, shift the emphasis away from ‘what happened’ (or didn’t happen or may have happened) and place it on the act of recounting (narrating) itself. It is a textual game. Each title is a hypertext of its predecessor as is each version of events itself. While the period of events and the protagonist of the action (Servando as

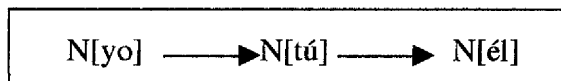
¹⁰ The spacing and italic type appear in the original text.

¹¹ Again, the format is taken from the original text.

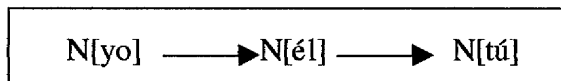
¹² I will explore the narratological techniques later in this chapter.

a boy) are constant, the three versions are indeed varied: to a large extent “what happened” (some of the major action) is agreed upon, but “how it happened” is very much disputed. There is no verbal confrontation between the narrators, though, in the sense that none of the three makes any reference to the narration of the other two at this point, but their differing versions are there, presented on the equal footing of having the same Chapter 1 tag. In other words, each version is a bona fide first chapter in the life of the friar who is their protagonist. In the first chapter (the three Chapter 1s) of the novel, the distinction between the voices is made clear through the paratextual techniques involved; thereafter, however, the voices alternate with less and less distinction.

Indeed, there are three Chapter 1s, three Chapter 2s (which do not follow the same sequence of narrators) and then one curiously long and intricately spaced Chapter 3. Placed as they are in close succession, and very deliberately marked with paratexts, these chapters create and intensify the effect of oscillation between levels of narration and between stages in the action: no sooner have we gone through one period in the action, than we are instantaneously transported back to where we started, only to go through the same events, but quite differently. While in the chapter 1s, the titles have played on possessive pronouns (*mi/ tu/ su*) to expose the three narrators who will tell their versions, chapter 2 subverts even this, relatively solid system. The order in which the three narrate is distorted:



becomes:



Neither the order in which the narrators speak, nor even the number of versions of each chapter is constant throughout the novel.

The second of the chapter 2's is entitled: “*De la salida de Monterrey*” (p.18), with the definite article “la” in place of a possessive pronoun which might suggest whose departure it will describe. So, in the second version, the title gives us no clue as to who is going to narrate. The system of reference is set up, then progressively eroded, so the effect on the reader of following a system which then contradicts itself is kept up. It is a “vertigo” effect which leaves the reader questioning and disorientated. By chapter 3, the game is in place, and the chapter number “3” does not appear. In chapter 7, there are three chapters of the same number once again. Up to this point in the narrative, the events described

are based on the real Fray Servando's "*Apología*"¹³ and cover the period of his life until the immediate aftermath of his famous and controversial sermon on the Virgin of Guadalupe (which I will discuss later). In the *Apología*, Servando defends himself against the attacks his sermon provoked and attests that his life's path, subsequently, was very much a result of the sermon. From Chapter 7 of *El mundo alucinante* onwards, the narrative is based on the friar's life as he recounts it in his *Memorias*¹⁴. The titles of the three Chapter 7s, then, are as follows: "*De las consecuencias del sermón*"; "*De la consecuencia del sermón.*"; "*De la consecuencia del sermón.*" (pp. 39, 40 and 41). There is some dissent among the narrators, then, as to what did result from the sermon, but (from the titles), all we can discern is that there may have been one consequence or a whole series or multitude of them. Once again, these titles do not pre-establish who is to be the narrator of each piece. In chapter 15, only one "chapter" appears, and its title does not indicate who is to narrate it: "*De la visita a la bruja*" (p. 96). In this chapter, however, the system of one narrator per chapter has disappeared, and each of the three narrates a portion of it. In chapter 16, it is the title itself which is contradictory: "*De mi llegada y no llegada a Pamplona. De lo que allí me sucedió sin haberme sucedido.*" (p.103).

As if this were not contradictory enough, the text of the chapter continues the confusion. It opens repetitiously: "Parto para Pamplona. Ahora parto para Pamplona. Voy rumbo a Pamplona. Hacia Pamplona" (p.103). N[yo] certainly highlights his departure, but we are left with the question of his hypothetical arrival very much up in the air. The question is not so much whether the friar reaches Pamplona in the end, but the effect of disorientation this technique has on the reader. In chapter 18, the contradictions are made more confrontational. The title appears narrated by N[yo]: "De lo que me sucedió en Bayona al entrar en una sinagoga. Y de toda mi vida en esa ciudad hasta mi huida para salvarme." (p.113). It is certainly an intriguing title, which promises curious action: the synagogue is not something the Roman Catholic friar has encountered on his travels yet, even if fleeing to save his skin has become a habit; nevertheless, his dangerous undertakings have involved colourfully unexpected action. Immediately, though, another narrator, N[tú] contradicts him directly: "Jamás has estado en Madrid. Jamás has atravesado los Pirineos" (p.113). The chapter title sets up its own code system, then subverts it. N[yo]'s version of recent events is being vigorously debunked. An opposition is being

¹³ Mier Noriega y Guerra, José Servando Teresa de. *Apología*. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988)

¹⁴ Mier Noriega y Guerra, José Servando Teresa de. *Memorias*. (México: Porrúa, 1946).

established, then, between the conflicting versions of the story offered by the three narrators. It is important to be aware, however, that none of the three narrates with more authority or credibility than the others: their versions conflict, but nobody's version actually wins. The reader is not encouraged to choose any one version, only to accept the equal plausibility of all three. We are made very aware that things can be and are seen and reported from different perspectives.

It is important to underline the multiplicity of devices used in the text to denote separation of the narrative into levels of narration. The indications are not always what they appear, as in the title above. Not only do the devices often trick the reader, though; increasingly as the novel evolves, the markers used to denote stratification of the narrators become less tangible. Spacing between paragraphs is all that appears in places, as in chapter 8. In this chapter, we are given one chapter number and title (in N[tú] form), then only double line spacing appears to indicate the transition from N[tú] to N[él] and then to N[yo]. The spacing involved is only a double line space, as might appear simply to indicate a new paragraph for the same narrator anywhere else, and it is the language itself which reveals who is narrating. This kind of spacing is used for theatrical effect on p.23. Spacing appears here for impact following a rather macabre description. The paragraph ends:

“De vez en cuando se escuchaba un gran estallido, tal como si fuese un huevo huero cuando se echa a las brasas. No era otra cosa que las cabezas de los achicharrados que reventaban en el calor.” (p.23)

A double line space follows, allowing the reader to process the image. Then we cut to: “Tocó a la puerta.” The same line spacing follows, but this time the above line takes on the effect of a stage direction. It heralds a change of narrator, from N[él] to N[yo]: “Toqué a la puerta y entré.” (p.23)

It is important to notice the use of changes in typeface (also a paratextual index) in the text: italic type is used frequently. In certain instances, it highlights specific words for effect. The italicised word *rojizo* appears five times, along with the word *rojo* (in italics) once (p.15). Clearly, words are italicised to place emphasis on them; in this case, the emphasis is on the ghoulish red colour in the depiction of the scene. The young Servando is recounting (or dreaming or fantasising) the phantasmagorical scene where, at dusk, his mother cuts his hands off, black scorpions appear out from reddish rocks, his father cuts off Servando's third hand (yes) with a reddish knife and sows it like a seed in the reddish earth (it grows into a hand plant). Wherever “red colour” appears in the description, the word is emphasised, strengthening the hellish, bloody quality of

the scene and the dreamlike exaggeration of the colour and of the quantity of blood as focalized by Servando's mind. Italic type is also used where fragments of text are quoted from external sources; in these intertextual instances, the quoted text usually carries a footnote. Intertextual references are plentiful in *El mundo alucinante*, for a work of narrative fiction. Text is directly quoted from Servando's *Memorias* and *Apología*¹⁵. Pages 82 and 83 have two quotations from José Deleito y Piñuela's *La mala vida en España de Felipe IV*: these sections appear to substantiate a point made by the narrator. Most of the footnotes that appear are there to credit a quoted piece of text to its source, but one does appear (on p.82) purely to clarify a reference in the narrative to a place called "Avapiés"; while footnotes elsewhere are sourced from other texts and credited to the appropriate author, giving added weight to the point being discussed, the explanatory footnote here is just that. It clarifies the location: "Lavapiés antiguo" (see p. 82). Still, it does not "prove" the correctness of this fact with any references.

There are a handful of places in the novel where a significant (and visible) change of format occurs: while there is room for some grey area between what constitutes a paratextual device and what is style or literary form, I will stick to the letter of Genette's methodology and assume that paratexts are the levels in the text which are graphic and which visibly mark it out in some way. So, for the moment, I shall leave aside places in the narrative where the form, rather than format, change radically; these I will explore further ahead. One of these instances is significant, in as much as its form is, in itself, loaded with hypertextual references which will assist me in approaching the novel at this stage: in Chapter 20, suddenly, we are confronted with the chapter title: "*Del diario del fraile*" (p.129). What follows is exactly what we might expect from a diary format: the entries are preceded by the place and date of writing, such as "*París, agosto 16*" (p.129). The implications of transferring to this format at this advanced stage in the novel will interest us further ahead but, for the present, I will consider this glaring break in the standard, continuous format of the narrative as part of the complex of paratexts combined in the work. Dating and situating the sections of the account is carried out meticulously at this point, and these references (and the title) are used in a diary format, i.e. a piece of text one would assume to be written in the first person and based around a personal testimony to the narrator's life and experience.

From examining the paratexts of *El mundo alucinante* alone (before entering into the main narrative and its content), we are aware that this is a text

¹⁵ I will mention these intertextual relationships later.

very concerned with its own structure, not least with the stratification of levels of narration (highlighted by titles and spacing) and the rather vertiginous reading process this produces. Indeed, from the outset, paratexts appear to be there with the function of guiding the reader through a very strictly ordered text, only to be shot down by their own contradiction, leaving the reader with no concrete point of reference onto which to hold. The chapter titles, abundant as they are, initially appear to be a very standard point of reference, which the reader might expect in a novel; as we have seen, any orientation they might have seemed to provide is subverted as the text progresses, to the extent that we are unsure who is speaking, who is going to speak and how the events described took place. So, it is evident that a disorientating reading process is set up through these many and diverse structural devices in the text, designed in such a way that they create the illusion of a conventional literary structure, only to then pull the rug out from under the reader, leaving him in the rather bemused, but, equally, challenged and questioning frame of mind. It is this reading experience that I describe as a “vertigo effect”: the text is constructed to give the impression that it will follow concrete reference markers, but instead, these function by subverting the literary norms and disorientate the reader. With the evidence of this system of threefold narration on board, I shall now look more closely at the main narrative itself and approach the voices of the narrators who deliver it.

2. Narration

2.i The levels of narration (stratification)

As we have seen from the paratexts present in *El mundo alucinante*, the narrative is founded on the interaction between multiple levels of narration. We need to establish, then, how this interaction is constructed and what its function is. I am interested in the constants between the narrators and what they narrate, as well as the contrasts between them. By extension, I am also concerned with the focalization involved in each level of narration: “who speaks” is, of course, not necessarily the same person as “who sees”. *El mundo alucinante* requires a very particular type of study due to the complexity of the narrative: it is both repetitive and contradictory. At its most simplistic, the narrative involves three voices and three perspectives to recount one event (but we will have to look further at the number of voices and perspectives at play at various stages in the text). The multiple versions of an event do not, at any stage, serve to clarify which, if any, is the true account of “what took place”: thus, the importance

shifts from the story being related through these varying accounts to the act of “telling” itself.

From the paratexts themselves (the chapter headings), it was possible to discern three narrators, as we know: N[yo], N[tú] and N[él]. N[yo], evidently, recounts Fray Servando’s life experiences in the first person, so he embodies a fictionalised Fray Servando, the protagonist of this novel (which is a fictionalisation of his autobiographical works); to use Serrano Orejuela’s terminology¹⁶, N[yo] = autodiegetic. N[tú] is unnamed and unidentified; he (or she or, for that matter, they) is exodiegetic. N[él] is also exodiegetic. We should also keep in mind that the tags I have chosen to apply to these narrators refer to their relationship to Servando: N[yo] addresses him as “I”, N[tú] addresses his discourse to Servando directly by calling him “tú”, and N[él] refers to Servando in the third person. This may be obvious, but it is important to be aware that N[él], like N[tú] is unidentified and may equally be masculine, feminine, singular or plural. So we will have to look into what is narrated by each of these speakers if we are to explore their identities (if we can) and the standpoints from which they speak. What is clear from the outset, as we progress from our paratextual road into the text, is that these multiple, repetitive and yet conflicting accounts of Servando’s life offer visions of the friar’s character (both the fictional Servando and, by extension, the historical figure) that are complementary and which, put together, make up a complex and multi-faceted representation of the protagonist. Unlike the narrators in the second part of *Viaje a La Habana*¹⁷, the narrators of *El mundo alucinante* are not situated in distinct and clearly defined timeframes which would allow us to distinguish between them. The three narrators relate the same events, often recreating the same basic plot but with conflicting elements. It is this space – the combination of all the opposing versions of action and motive – that is the “mundo alucinante” in which Servando acts. No version is superior to the others in any way: none is more authoritative or less fantastic. This is the space where we are left floating, without the concrete points of reference a non-fictional biography would offer.

Given that we have three such opposing views of each section of the text and the friar’s life, it is necessary to explore the types of rhetoric at work in the novel. We do not have a defined identity and situation for N[tú] and N[él], so we will have to consider the situation of the discourse itself, i.e. the circumstances in which the narrators speak at various stages. It is worth bearing in mind at this point that when we consider the focalization in the novel (and we

¹⁶ Serrano Orejuela, Eduardo. “Consideraciones sobre el narrador y el narratario”, *Revista Polígramos*, 21 (1979) 67 – 73 (as outlined in Chapter 1: Introduction).

must, when such distinct perspectives are present in the narration), we should not only be aware of “who focalizes” and “what they focalize” but also the quality of the focus: whether it is sharp, selective, murky or filtered may reveal a great deal about the focalizer and/or the narrator. Hopefully all these considerations will provide some insight into the games *El mundo alucinante*’s narration is constructed to play on the reader’s imagination. As I have stated, my door into the text is intended to be consistently textual and I have chosen to approach the novel from a structuralist perspective as far as possible; so I will explore the narration and its levels by looking, firstly, at the logistics of the narration. The three basic narrators narrate a different perception of things, but only N[yo] advances the action. This will be our starting point in looking at what is narrated and, also, at the focalization in the text. To pinpoint who is the focalizer, we must examine the main characteristics of the narration of each of the three, in order to determine the narrative function of each. From there, we can establish whether a role (an identity or an ideology) is evident for each narrator. Since the three offer accounts of largely the same things, “what is focalized” will be constant: what we must consider, then, is “how it is focalized” (the quality of the focalization), “who focalizes it” and the relationship between these aspects.

In exploring the incidences of the narrators’ speech, I take on board Oscar Rodríguez Ortiz’s study¹⁸, in which he catalogues the frequency with which each narrator appears. He calculates it as follows:- N[yo]: 43 incidences; N[tú]: 12 incidences; N[él]: 18 incidences¹⁹. As is evident from the arithmetic calculations above (and as we already know from our paratextual study), the sequence N[yo]/N[tú]/N[él] does not generally apply in the text after the first chapter. This inconsistency does provide some movement in the reading process, though: it is certainly a more dynamic and challenging reading experience than a repetitive sequence would have been. This scheme (or subversion of a scheme) in itself creates the vertigo effect in the reader. Increasingly, and especially in the second half of the novel, the jumping between narrators is more rapid, less explicit and less sequential. Similarly, the length of the passages narrated by each narrator becomes more disparate. Even so, it is essential to bear in mind that at no stage does any narrator take precedence over the others, despite the inequality in incidences of narration.

¹⁷ I refer to the narrators of the *Segundo Viaje*: see Chapter 4 on *Viaje a La Habana*.

¹⁸ Rodríguez Ortiz, Oscar. *Sobre narradores y héroes: a propósito de Arenas, Scorza y Abum*. (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1980) p.70

¹⁹ The abbreviations N[yo] and so on are my own and do not appear in the same way in Rodríguez Ortiz’s text; for consistency, I have kept to my abbreviations here.

Moreover, as in chapter 10, dialogues are stretched into long soliloquies by individual narrators. Wherever we have stratification between two narrators (even if it is only one brief interjection in the form of direct speech, say), we have (logically enough) a new narrator: so even our initial scheme of three narrators, while still central to the structure of the novel, is not rigid. Characters (besides Servando) also narrate, albeit only as “cameo” narrators (e.g. Borunda and Orlando, whose direct speech extends into narrate long portions of text).

Given the predominance of “yo” narration in the text (as Rodríguez Ortiz’s calculation reveals), it is important that we examine N[yo] as he first appears. It is the Prologue letter that places this narrator in his particular context and qualifies every enunciation he makes in the text. Granted, this *novela de aventuras* is a novel recreated from a block of main hypotexts, in the form of the “real” Servando’s memoirs and, therefore, the “Narrator Servando” is necessarily a fictionalisation of the historical figure who wrote the *Memorias* and the *Apología*²⁰. So “Fray Servando the historical hero” is already transposed onto another, hypertextual level. The Prologue letter, though, transposes him once again, a further step away from the historical friar. The letter, as we know, is not signed but is written to “Servando”. All we know of the narrator, then, is that he narrates here in the first person; Servando, clearly, is his narratee. His letter in itself raises Servando from the dead: we know that he is not writing during Servando’s lifetime, since he refers to his disappointing searches for Servando in endless *bibliotecas infernales*. We can situate him somewhere towards the 20th Century, since he tells Servando: “...en estos días [el tiempo] te hará cumplir doscientos años”(p.10). By a loose calculation, then, the year must be somewhere around 1965 (going by the Larousse dates for Servando’s birth and death, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter). So this 20th Century narrator sets the forthcoming text into context, explaining (according to his version) how the *Novela de aventuras* is to be received:

Sólo tus memorias [...] aparecen en este libro, no como citas de un texto extraño, sino como parte fundamental del mismo, donde resulta innecesario recalcar que son tuyas; porque no es verdad, porque son, en fin, como todo lo grandioso y grotesco, del tiempo; del brutal e insoportable tiempo que en estos días te hará cumplir doscientos años. (pp.9-10)

So time is both a thematic concept and a functional device: this narrator is now set in a context of time, two full centuries removed from the timeframe of his narratee: at the same time, they are detached in the extreme and very much bonded. The narrator goes on to declare to Servando that his great discovery

²⁰ I will examine the hypertextual treatment of these texts in detail later in this chapter.

during his research into the friar's life has been the revelation that: "...tú y yo somos la misma persona." (p.9). This solemn declaration (absurd and confounding though it undoubtedly is at this stage in reading the novel) is fundamental to the narrative action to come:

narrator of letter (20th Century writer) = N[yo] = fictionalised Fray Servando

Thus the N[yo] puts his own mark on what he narrates; in doing so, he frees Reinaldo Arenas as an author of fiction from the constraints of being faithful to history. The Servando we are to encounter here in *El mundo alucinante*, therefore, is not (and does not seek to be) the historical figure N[yo] found in the *bibliotecas infernales* or whom I found in the Larousse encyclopaedic entry for him²¹. I have steered well clear in my study from inferring that N[yo] = Reinaldo Arenas: there is no textual evidence to suggest this and, while several commentators have drawn a parallel between this narrator and Arenas, based on their respective life experience, these are considerations that fall well outside the scope of a structuralist analysis, fascinating though such a comparison would be. Rather than suggest an author/Servando relationship, then, I will consider this a fictionalised author (N[yo], the 20th Century writer)/Servando relationship. The fusion of two identities has been established from the outset: as we will also find with the novels of the *Pentagonía* and with *Viaje a La Habana*, a symbiotic process takes place between Narrator (in this case an endodiegetic narrator) and the character who is his *alter ego*²².

So we have an opening letter which qualifies all of the narrative text to follow. The declared intention of the N[yo] is discordant at the same time as it is harmonising: there is a conflict between each level of this N[yo], but the distinction between the imagined and the real and the assimilated Servando is unclear. Perhaps most significantly, the motivation behind N[yo], the fictional writer of the prologue, stems from a purely harmonious relationship with Servando. He affirms that they are one and the same person, so the identification sustained by this narrator, in theory at least, is complete: N[yo] and all his thought processes, is Servando "reincarnated" in the 20th century.

²¹ See quotation on p.1 of this chapter.

²² For instance: the child narrator and Celestino in *Celestino antes del alba*, Ismael and Ismaelito in the *Tercer Viaje* of *Viaje a La Habana*. Each of the novels I have chosen to explore in my study treats this system in a different way and involves a different dynamic in its *narrator/otro yo* relationship(s). I shall discuss these relationships with regard to each novel in the appropriate chapters.

2.ii Focalization, action and introspection

An absolutely exhaustive focalizational analysis of *El mundo alucinante* would require me to classify each and every section of narration: this would be absurdly lengthy, so I do not propose to catalogue the focalization throughout the novel in this way. Instead, I will use the methodologies proposed by Mieke Bal²³ to broadly establish the relationship between the rhetoric of each narrator. I have used the same “yo”, “tú” and “él” tags as for the narrators (F[yo], and so on). I am interested in what focalization can reveal regarding the perspective from which each narrator speaks, rather than the bare mechanics of the focalizational stratification in the text.

The most obvious distinction in the text is between outward-looking narration and introspection. N[yo] bounces between his accounts of his madcap experiences and solemn rumination about his lot. It is a see-saw process: he acts, he reflects on himself, he acts, he reflects, and so on. Servando’s expressions of loneliness, sadness, pain, despair and other (mostly melancholy) emotions certainly humanise his character: in that respect, he is not an inaccessible hero. In turn, it is these human emotions (predominantly his frustration at what he perceives to be a wrongful imprisonment) that give rise to the frantic action and the epic globetrotting he so manically undertakes. Servando lives these events through his cogitating with resignation, as if they were his unavoidable destiny. In a sense they are, in as much as they will inevitably lead, at each stage, to the same cycle of action, reflection, action, reflection, etc. Indeed, each move to a new place or change of direction is accompanied by reflection on the very action he has just taken. It is not unreasonable to deduce from the opposing versions of his life and motives that Fray Servando, as he is fictionalised in the novel, is a character in conflict: the endless ruminations on his experiences conducted by all three narrators in their respective ways are testimony to that.

N[tú] also comments on Servando’s exploits: where he reflects on the action, though, his commentary is either moralising or challenging in character. Such reflections are, of course, metatextual. Servando’s reflections effectively pose a fourth dimension for the game of multiple versions of “what happened”: they do not re-tell the tale, but they do apply an alternative interpretation to it. While they are clearly functional in the narrative, Servando’s meditations are somewhat absurd in places and their inappropriateness is exposed in the text, as

is the blatant functionality of the technique. For instance, when Servando is imprisoned in his gilded cage, suspended from a rope, in Raquel's²⁴ palatial but inescapable home (caged while she pleads with him to marry her), he pauses to "reflect" at precisely the least appropriate moment: as the rope breaks and his cage plunges from a great height, N[él] says: "Así meditaba el fraile, bajando a toda velocidad" (p.117). The reflective, introspective passages expose the workings of the narrator's mind through which he arrives at his actions (in the case of Servando) or opinions (whether explicit, as is largely the case with N[tú], or implicit, such as in a simple contradiction of the events narrated by the previous narrator). The narration oscillates between these two planes, then: action and introspection. The reflections permit an internal reprocessing of the action, i.e. a refocalization of (for the most part) the same experiences by the same focalizer. Since it is N[yo] who conducts most of the introspective narration, this is generally a process whereby F[yo] refocalizes his earlier focalization of situations or events.

Evidently, not exactly the same content is narrated in these sections, so, while the circumstances or central action are refocalized in this way, the process and the object of the focalization will be different, to some degree. In the case of Servando (F[yo]), this process exposes some potentially darker aspects of our protagonist, such as his dubious sexuality. In the course of his reflections, his fear of rape and his generally negative feelings towards sexual situations feature many times. The action provides evidence in this regard (as in Servando's continual escapes from the sexual advances of women, for example), but it is his thoughts on the matter which elaborate and redefine this. So the reflections allow an internal reprocessing of the action: the same action (where the ruminations do not go off at a tangent), refocalized through a retrospective filter. We should remember that the events are not narrated in real time, i.e. they are largely recounted in the past tense. This means that the distinction here is not between immediate experience and hindsight, but between two types of focalization. The focalizer is the same: what has changed is the context and quality of focalization. It may appear that he sees the same thing, but in fact what he focalizes is something different: the focalization may overlap, but the object being focalized is seen from a different angle and, therefore, what is seen is not the same.

²³ Bal, Mieke. *Teoría de la narrativa* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1985).

²⁴ Raquel is the Jewish woman (a rather desperate, but phenomenally wealthy spinster) Servando chances to meet when he allegedly falls (literally) into a synagogue in Spain. She means to marry him and incarcerates him (as she has done with other

Just as we have multiple narrators recounting varying versions of the friar's life story, then, we have multiple focalizers, focalizing loosely the same situations but from differing perspectives. If we explore the situations where near-constants exist in the narration of the three main narrators, we can begin to establish the differences in their perspectives and the relationship between them. In Chapter 7, we have three versions of the chapter, all with titles relating to the consequence(s) of the friar's infamous sermon²⁵:

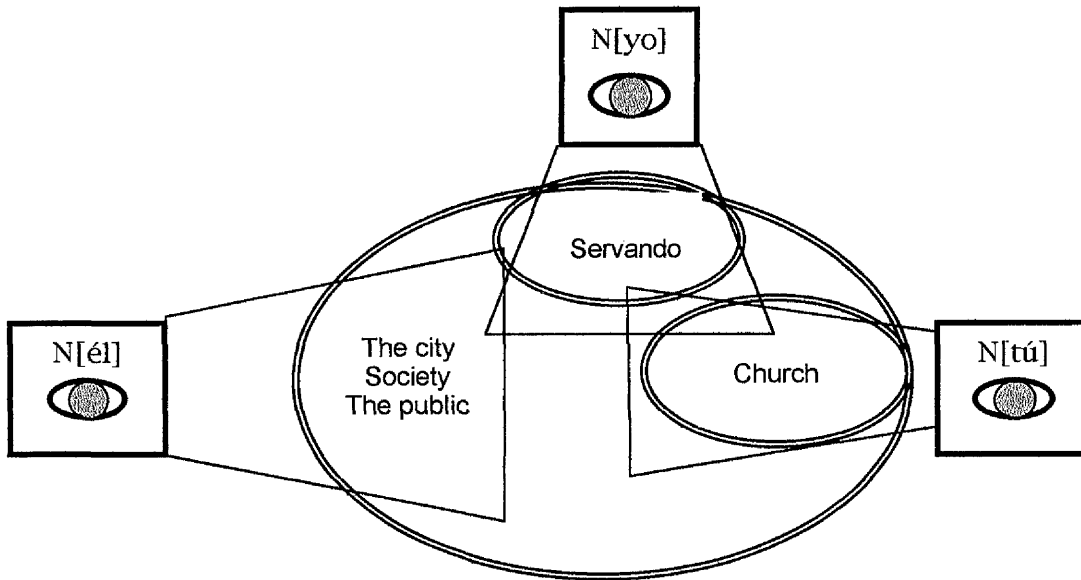
N[él]	→	<i>las consecuencias del sermón</i>
N[yo]	→	<i>la consecuencia del sermón</i>
N[tú]	→	<i>la consecuencia del sermón</i>

Their responses to the results of the sermon certainly differ. N[él]'s account dwells on the whole city's response to the sermon, not Servando's personal reaction or, come to that, any other individual's. In this account, the focalization is that of an observer. N[yo], understandably, focuses on Servando's emotions as an individual and the response is defensive in the face of the outcry the sermon has caused. N[tú]'s focalization differs again: what he sees is the the resulting ire of *Su Ilustrísima* following the actions of a foolish and naughty friar, and the people's outrage (in complete contradiction of N[yo]'s account of the public's response as he sees it). His tone is fond but scolding, and he punctuates his comments with the exclamation "Ay, *Servando*" (pp.41-42). So,

prospective suitors before) in a hanging gilded cage in her sumptuous palace. Servando eventually escapes.

²⁵ Fray Servando Teresa de Mier is the fictionalised character based on the real (historically documented) friar who appears as an entry in the reference work quoted on the first page of this chapter: Servando was Mexican, a Dominican friar, a renowned orator and political writer, known for his support for the struggle for Mexico's independence. In the 1824 *Congreso Constitucional*, he defended the principles of centralist government. He is the author of *Memorias*, *Apología*, *Historia de la Revolución de Nueva España* and other texts. He is also notorious for the sermon he gave at the reburial ceremony for Hernán Cortés, during which he incurred the wrath of the Holy Church for crediting the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe to precolumbian legend. In his infamous sermon, Servando claimed that the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparition to the Indian Juan Diego before Bishop Zumárraga was merely a legend, derived from the story of Quetzalcóatl. The character of Servando in the novel is the perpetrator of endless adventures and sticky situations, who travels the world (as the real friar did, though with more carnival and colour than is possible in a realist context) following the infamous sermon and ultimately dies a hero of his country. The historical Servando did live in Paris, where he worked as a teacher of Spanish and, according to the *Memorias*, he translated Chateaubriand's *Atala* though it seems his translation was stolen and published by someone else.

while all three are allegedly focalizing the consequences of the sermon, the aspects of the situation they choose to focalize differ enormously. They see the outcome largely as illustrated in the following diagram:



Each narrator sees one aspect of the situation in sharp focus; the rest, or some of the rest, they see only peripherally. N[él] focalizes the reaction of the people almost exclusively; the Church and Servando himself are only catalytic to the result he focuses on, i.e. the collective response. N[tú] focalizes the Church, not Fray Servando: his comments on Servando's conduct are directed at him but are focalized through the Church. The Church is the filter through which N[tú] sees Servando here. N[yo], on the other hand, focalizes the Church through the filter of his own perception of himself. His focalization of the Church is the flipside to N[tú]'s; both focalize the Holy Church, but from opposing standpoints. These are perhaps unsurprising discoveries, in as much as it is not illogical for a first person narrator to ponder his own condition or to see the consequences of his action in terms of his own resulting emotional state, and a third person narrator can often function as a witness (since an exodiegetic narrator lends himself to the outsider's overview of events). These perspectives, though, are not static. It is not possible to pin down the qualities of focalization of the narrators in *El mundo alucinante* – even N[yo] (Servando himself). Even this concrete state of

affairs is subverted in the course of the novel: N[él]'s standpoint is not always observational or objective; N[tú] does not always side against Servando and does not consistently voice an ideology compatible with the Church; even Servando (N[yo]) does not view the Church through his perception of himself by the end of the novel (by which time he has become baffled as to who he is or how he should see himself, to say nothing of his country's transformed opinion of him). For the three principal narrators to be so neatly classifiable would be too simplistic for such an intricate and labyrinthine work as *El mundo alucinante*. What remains constant is the opposition between the perspectives of the narrators at any given point in the text, so what we must consider, instead, is how the interaction between the three functions overall.

So far we have been more concerned with "what is being focalized" and from what standpoint, rather than who is focalizing. Focalization, however, does not necessarily shift only when the narration does: a passage narrated by the same narrator need not be focalized in the same way. For example, N[tú] describes the scene as Servando gives his sermon. The narrator = N[tú] but the focalizer = F[yo] = Servando:

Y viste al regidor, regordete, descansando, brillante, entre la turba de mendigos que más que por oraciones parecían abrir la boca clamando por pan. Y por largo rato no oíste otra cosa que no fuera el murmullo de esa potente oración...
Y viste al Virrey que te sonreía (p.30)

Servando's eyes are the camera panning around him, from the pulpit outwards. The expressions on the faces are as they appear to Servando. He observes the public observing each other:

Desde el púlpito la distinción de las miserias se hacía más observable: acá los gachupines que desprecian a los criollos. Allá los criollos que desprecian a los gachupines y a los indios. Más lejos los mendigos y los indios que desprecian a todo el mundo y con cierta ironía contemplan el espectáculo. (p.30)

Although we have three clearly distinct principal narrators, they are not easily distinguishable from an ideological perspective. Whereas N[yo] is identified in detail in the Prologue letter, the other two are discernable only by their second and third person modes of speech. N[él] is an exodiegetic narrator, yet does not embody detachment or omniscience or objectivity. N[tú], although he addresses Servando in the informal way, cannot be said to have a more intimate identification with him than N[él]. These two are not neatly classifiable, but all three can be said to fulfill the same function in the narrative: they construct

alternative characterisations for Servando. There is no conflict of motives, since N[él] and N[tú] do not act in the narrative, but the motivation each constructs for Servando's actions is unique. Each one provides a "possible version" of Servando. The three narrators do not express or confront ideological differences as such. They contradict each other anecdotally, one invalidating the affirmations of another and so forth, but all three contribute to the reaffirmation of Servando's ideological convictions: he is multi-faceted and his motives are debated, but he is still a hero as perceived by all three.

2.iii Non-linear narrative

The narrative, then, does not follow a conventional sequence, whereby the action (and the chronology) would advance with the narration in a sequence of events. Quite the contrary, the multiple narration of this text makes for an account of events that continually jumps backwards and reinvents the version of the action offered by the previous narrator. N[yo] contradicts himself even by starting out as a first person plural in Chapter 1, immediately contradicted in favour of the singular:

venimos del corojal —► vengo solo del corojal (p.11)

The multiple versions of the tale offered by the narrators continue to multiply and to maintain their equal validity (and equal inverosimilitude) as the novel progresses. The confusion only intensifies. The memoir, as a genre, presupposes a factual element, the reelaboration of historical "facts" or "truth", even when the purpose of narration is purely historiographic. Even so, the act of narration itself implies memory, a process of selection and evaluation of facts. Inevitably, it relays what it deems to be of interest, regardless of the veracity of this choice. Even the "real" Servando's memoirs, therefore, are not concrete fact, but a version (Servando's version) of his life's events. *El mundo alucinante*, by its own declaration, is a novel made from this memoir, made in turn from a perception of historical events. The perceptions depicted in Servando's *Apología* and *Memorias* are fictionalised here, reworked as a hypertext, not in one Memoir of a linear format and with a single (first person) narrator, but as several possible reevaluations of Servando's life. It is not a memoir or a cri de coeur, but what it purports to be: a novel composed of many *aventuras*, with all the heroic fantasy that suggests.

The contradictions between the versions belie the apparent objectivity of the narrative. Indeed, the rhetoric becomes increasingly conflicting, even accusatory in places. The conflict between the narrators, however, provides a new space in which the discourse of the novel as a whole and its perceptible political content (implicit in the presence of the historical figure of Fray Servando and the controversy surrounding his fame, as exposed by the narration itself) reveal a closer, but paradoxically more objective image of the actor Servando who undertakes the feats recounted in the text. Far from negating each other, the different versions supplied by the narrators add a further dimension to the discourse. It is not only the figure of Servando and his motives that cause dissent among the narrators, though. Actions, even extended series of actions are contradicted, as are the accounts of actions carried out by other characters. In the second Chapter 27, we are told Lady Hamilton's²⁶ story for a second time by N[yo]. Here, Servando (N[yo]) repeats his story that she paid him ridiculous amounts of money to hear him tell her of her husband's (Admiral Nelson's) death in vivid detail. This time, though, we are told that Servando meets White²⁷ as White tries to stab the Queen with a pin. White later introduces Servando to Mina, who recruits him for the American invasion. Neither of these versions is entirely plausible, yet neither is entirely absurd. Both are recounted by N[yo]; we can accept that this is the same N[yo] in both sections or we can assume that it is a different first person narrator in each case; we have no evidence to show they might be different except, of course, their conflicting stories. What matters, though, is that there is more than one possible account of what happened.

The effect on the reader is certainly unsettling, and it becomes impossible to follow the action in a linear fashion. Chapter 16 tells the elaborate saga of Servando's stay in Pamplona (en route for France as he flees Spain). In Chapter 17, however, this whole tale is completely negated, and by the same narrator, N[yo]: "Pamplona (ciudad que nunca he visitado aunque muchos afirman que sí)" (p.108). Indeed, Chapter 17 seems to lose itself in its own precision as regards the friar's alleged itinerary: here, he apparently travels from Madrid to Agreda to Catalonia and then across the Pyrennees to France, with the

²⁶ Lady Hamilton is the wife of the late Admiral Nelson. Servando meets her in London, whereupon she allegedly pays him obscene amounts of money to hear him recount in vivid and ghoulish detail the death of her husband; the more macabre the detail, the more aroused she becomes (and the more the friar – currently down on his luck – earns).

²⁷ Padre White is the fictional character based on the real José María Blanco White, Spanish priest and poet (1775 – 1841), who spent much of his life in England, where he

help of the *clérigos contrabandistas*²⁸. It is already a rather exact account of the route. Furthermore, Servando tells us he was robbed leaving Aragón for Navarra²⁹. All in all, it is a somewhat circuitous route to take, even for a fugitive. These contradictions make for a challenging, if perplexing read, made all the more dynamic by the evolving stratification between the narrators. The passage between narrators becomes more harmonious and structured, more like a collage of monologues linked as if they were long passages of direct speech as the novel advances, compared to the more tangible “one narrator per chapter” structure of the three Chapter 1’s. Whereas the reading process is unsettling as regards the sequence of actions we are to take as “what took place”, the language used to construct the crossover from one narrator’s voice to the next can be harmonious, even where a direct contradiction takes place. On page 117, for instance, the handover from N[yo] to N[él] is very much like direct speech to a third person narrator: “¡Tengo que salir!, ¡que salir! Así clamaba el fraile...” (p.117).

While the narrative can contradict and confound on a logical level, on a linguistic level the process of reading the narration, even where the narrator changes, does not jar, whether the change in narrator is clearly marked or otherwise. The narrational levels do mesh together harmoniously. This is the case even in Chapter 16, where we bounce between narrators without any declaration of transfer between them. Still, the mix of narrators reads harmoniously here, even at the point when León’s³⁰ men catch up with the fugitive Servando. The narration is peppered with exclamations of “*Oh, Pamplona*” (p.106): this adds a further dimension to the narration, since we have a narrator N[tú] (whose narratee is usually Fray Servando, of course) who frequently addresses Pamplona as his “tú” narratee. This means that we might well still be hearing N[él] or, for that matter, N[yo]. What is vital is the rhetoric of each voice here: N[él] defines Servando as the devil incarnate in this section so, here, N[él] is indisputably the voice of a Spaniard (or Spanish sympathiser). He says:

published his famous text *Letters from Spain*. In the text, Servando meets him in London and, through White, Javier Mina.

²⁸ These “dissident clerics” are in fact smugglers, more concerned with turning a profit than with religions or political rebellion; see *El mundo alucinante*, Chapter 17.

²⁹ See *El mundo alucinante* p.108

³⁰ de León, / the witch, as it turns out, is the identity of the witch Servando goes to visit in order to figure out his immediate (and bleak-looking) future. He goes to her to consult her about what action he should take to escape the authorities but becomes bewitched by her with disturbing results, discovering that she turns out to be Antonio de León, Servando’s persecutor throughout the work, and the fictionalised character based on the historical de León.

Oh Pamplona, ¿no son estos motivos más que reveladores para afirmar que Fray Servando es el mismo Demonio, caído sabrá Dios en qué momento sobre esta tierra de paz para despertar nuevos aspavientos y oraciones? (pp.106-107)

Evidently, the narrator speaking here is N[él], as we have defined him so far, not N[tú] who has habitually addressed Servando, addressing Pamplona as his narratee. Borders between the narrators are blurring. N[tú], however, has also chided Servando; indeed, it is generally N[tú] who does accuse him directly in this way. N[tú] repeatedly refers to the senior friar, Padre Terencio, as an “alma noble” (p. 26), when N[yo] (Servando)’s narration would have us believe that Padre Terencio is anything but noble, but is a sexually depraved individual, intent on corrupting Servando for his own satisfaction. For N[tú], though, Servando is the wicked one for rejecting the superior cleric and, by implication, the Church and God.

By way of these conflicting perceptions, the action and the probable motivations behind it are reworked and reworked again, but we do not achieve a sense of dominion over the facts; instead, we become intimately acquainted with the actors’ (both Servando and the secondary actors) many possible facets. From the outset, the reader is drawn into this game of perception.

In the first of the Chapter 1’s, N[yo] is Servando as a child; he says, cryptically, that there will be no game-playing for him that night: “Pero para mí esta noche no habrá juegos de ninguna clase. Ni a la canica. Ni al balero. Ni a nada. A no ser que... Pero no.” (p.14). Here Servando’s incessant ruminations begin, and the reader is sucked into the process of assimilating and questioning multiple truths. At this stage, we are made to query, to ponder: “a no ser que...”; unless what? We are given no further clues as to what this “unless” refers to. Nor are we told why the boy discounts the possibility (“Pero no”); we can only wonder. As the chapter (Chapter 1, after all) closes, we expect to move onto a “Chapter 2” which will provide some explanation for this cryptic last line. What follows, instead, takes us back to the beginning again with the second version of Chapter 1 (N[tú]), and we are thrown off balance. The mystery about why the young Servando may or may not be able to play is overtaken by the conflicting versions of events themselves.

In the second Chapter 2 (N[él]), some direct, accusatory contradiction appears and, for the first time, the narrators (N[él] and N[tú]) comment on each other’s versions of the tale and the text becomes overtly, rather than implicitly self-referential. N[él] begins in direct contradiction of N[yo]’s account: “El camino no le fue tan difícil” (p.18). He refutes N[yo]’s entire depiction of what

took place. N[tú], in turn, contradicts them both: “Ni la salida ni el camino fueron tan difíciles” (p.19). By Chapter 14 we may have come to expect the unexpected as regards the logistics of the friar’s life story, but our anticipated markers in the text are subverted in continually different ways. Chapter 14 is entitled: “*De la visita del fraile a los jardines del Rey*”. The title is clearly narrated in the third person so, logically, we might expect the chapter to proceed in these terms; but it begins: “Lo mejor hubiera sido no haber dicho lo que dije. Pero ya que voy a hacer. Lo mejor hubiera sido no haber nacido. Eso dije” . The narrator, then, is N[yo]; not only that, but in these brief opening lines we are presented with an (as yet) unspecified narratee and, so far, nothing in the dramatic few phrases which seems to relate to the title. The whole of Chapter 14 is narrated by N[yo]: no other version of this chapter appears. Rather than producing a sense of solidity or credibility however, the effect on the reader is still unsettling: given that the experiences described by N[yo] (Servando) are bizarre to say the least, we are left wondering if he has imagined it all: otherwise, would the other narrators not offer an alternative perspective on the same events? They do not, and we are left to take or leave N[yo]’s chapter.

In fact, jumping between narratees is employed in the text on several occasions with much the same, disorientating effect of the unexpected transfers between narrators. The vertiginous reading process is intricately designed and develops over the course of the novel in such a way that we are constantly alert to subversions in the text and never achieve a sense of linearity in the plot. Even in sections where repetition (sometimes to the point of saturation) appears in a section of the text, the repeated phrase itself can be cause for confusion, as in the section above where N[él] addresses “Oh, Pamplona” (p.106). Similarly, the page is dotted with the repeated phrase “eso dije”: the repetition continues until finally, on page 84 (after two pages of repeating the phrase), we find out to whom all these comments were apparently made, i.e. to Cornide and Filomeno³¹. So Cornide and Filomeno are not introduced into the text, as we might expect in a memoir (even fictionalised) with some preamble to explain where and how they came to know the friar. They appear almost accidentally, even though they are fundamental to our being able to follow the action.

The effect is entirely different when the boundaries between narrational voices disappear in Chapter 15. An impossibly beautiful, naked woman (the *bruja* Servando has come to consult) lies in the centre of the room as Servando enters. She sings constantly, hypnotically drawing him into the house of

³¹ Cornide and Filomeno meet the friar in Spain. They befriend Servando and help him on his travels, and it is they who advise Servando to consult the witch.

childhood and lulling him to sleep. She urges him to sleep and confusion develops between her voice and his: we cannot clearly define where the narrator is coterminous with the woman on a first reading of the passage. The section reads like her mesmerising incantation itself, reflecting Servando's state of mind as her song becomes a hypnotic humming and he becomes bewitched by it and, uninhibited, fatally tells her his whole tale. Just as Servando loses sight of what is around him and is unaware of everything except the woman's voice, the reader loses sight of what is tangible (where is Servando? who is speaking?) and only "hears" what is audible in this scene. The whole of Chapter 15 is a contradiction in itself, despite the fact that the chapter is the version of only one narrator out of the three (N[yo]). The same narrator gives various versions of what happened: he recounts the story of the witch/woman who turns out to be none other than his pursuer, León, and of how his friends Cornide and Filomeno deceived him and were then turned into sheep; but then (following a three-line space in the text) he tells us that Filomeno and Cornide called at his room to warn him that León was close by and he must flee to Pamplona and find the underground clerics there. As if to underline the veracity of this story, the paragraph ends: "Así fue"³². However, the next paragraph (following another three-line space) has the same narrator telling how a furious Cornide and Filomeno woke him to call him to breakfast. Again, he underpins this (third) version by ending the paragraph: "Así fue". Once again, this is followed by a fourth and final version of the story, in which Filomeno and Cornide wake Servando to go and consult the witch. Again he says: "Así fue". We could say that one of these, shorter alternative versions would seem perfectly plausible next to the fantastic events of the first version with its visit to the *bruja*/León; since we are given no less than four possibilities, though, we have to accept that every one of them is perfectly feasible within the framework of the novel.

Not always do the narrators cover the same action or content in their sections of narration. One may go further in the action, as N[yo] does in Chapter 9, when he relates the detailed story of his journey to Europe on the prison ship *Nueva Empresa*. The *Nueva Empresa* is sunk by pirates (who mistakenly think it will be loaded with Creole gold), who are then sunk by a slave ship, which is then attacked by slave traders. Servando manages to pass as an African slave after an hour or two treading water in the sun and, when all the other slaves are killed, he saves himself by cow-towing to the slave traders. A whale finally sinks them, too, but saves Servando's life, depositing him on the shores of America. Ultimately, he returns to Europe once more. Prior to this version, N[él]

³² See *El mundo alucinante* Chapter 15.

stops with the initial arrival in Europe. Either N[yo]'s version simply includes more information, or else it embroiders the truth. The manic series of cliffhangers recounted in N[yo]'s tale, though fantastic, are not absurd in the context of the narrative so far: both his version and N[él]'s are fantastic and, therefore as plausible as each other. The *aventuras* involved have been brought about by a perfectly human series of mishaps and misunderstandings. Chapter 9 involves a further twist in the narration: the reader is thrown off balance once again, just when Chapter 8's system of heralding a change in narrator has taught us to expect line spacing to signify stratification, it is used in Chapter 9 to highlight, not a new narrator, but a freeze-frame in the action, as told by the same narrator. The narrator, N[él], continues to narrate, but the form of his narration has changed³³. While the previous section was narrated in the past tense, describing events which "took place", he now narrates in the conditional, describing the experiences that (as yet unbeknown to the unsuspecting Servando), would befall him:

Past tense:	Conditional:
<i>lo llevaron</i>	<i>Luego se estancaría</i>
<i>lo hicieron descender</i>	<i>tendría dificultades</i>
<i>se tapó la nariz</i>	<i>La tripulación [...] se reiría</i> <i>[...] cuando se enterara</i>

The use of the conditional means that we remain paused at the moment of Servando's embarkation. From this point we are told only "what was to happen" (little did Servando know). Undoubtedly, this provokes sympathy and promotes our identification with the poor, unsuspecting friar. Perhaps more interestingly, though, N[él]'s perspective has altered radically: he is focalizing the future events from this point in the action through the character of Servando, not as an observer. If we look again at the three examples above, we can see that the experiences described are viewed very much from the position of the individual undergoing them: they are uncomfortable experiences seen as he will experience them. If we factor in the freeze-frame mechanism used to express them, we find that N[él] here has an intimate relationship with Servando's character; he is looking at him as an emotional individual.

The disorientation of the reader is carefully orchestrated in *El mundo alucinante*, not least with regard to discerning who is narrating passages of the

³³ See *El mundo alucinante* p.47.

text. In Chapter 10, this game is complicated by the introduction of direct speech. Following a section where the narrator is N[tú], suddenly we are confronted with dialogue which is also directed (logically enough) to an interlocutor (narratee) “tú”: “- ¡Al fin llegas! – dijeron las ratas” (p.56). While the rats may be referred to in the third person, this does not necessarily mean that we have transferred to N[él]: N[tú] does address Servando as “tú”, but that, of course, does not mean that he cannot refer to other characters in the third person. No reference/address to Servando that might tell us who is narrating is made for several more lines, so we are forced to be patient and wait and see. The situation is further complicated later in the chapter: Servando (in his prison cell) is having a (two-way) conversation with the rats when, from among the rats, Francisco Antonio de León appears with a dagger between his teeth. *El León* roars and, finally, tells Servando: “Aquí te dejo.” (p.57). This brings us back full circle to the beginning of the chapter, when N[tú] tells Servando he must leave him. So we are left wondering who is who, and whether at any stage N[tú] = León. Once again, no clarification is given and we are left questioning.

The linearity of the novel is subverted to the extent that it is all but nonexistent, despite the skeleton of the text that is Servando’s life story. It is impossible to choose between the versions offered at each stage and so the notion of narrative progression disappears, leaving the discourse itself. At the beginning of the novel, we are given many indications that would suggest a rigid chronology and sequence to the story, on a paratextual level (as we have seen) and a narrative level. In the first chapter, the child N[yo] relates a series of “cause and effect” phrases, repeating “*para*” or “*para que*” (p.12) by way of explanation. His list of “purposes” illustrates a sequence to things: one thing is done so that another thing can take place. This would appear to be good, solid logic. It is even highlighted with a paratextual marker for the sequence: “ - - ”. The chain of reference is illusory, though: the narrative has succession in the textual techniques of the list, but the actions it describes in fact happen simultaneously.

In Chapter 27 the chronological sequence is subverted and we jump backwards in time. Just when we have arrived at Servando’s departure from England to Mexico, suddenly we have circled back to where we came into the chapter, his arrival in England. When the character of Orlando³⁴ first appears, it is without the explanatory preamble we might expect, at least to provide us with

³⁴ Orlando is a hypertextualised version of the character from Virginia Woolf’s novel. In *El mundo alucinante*, she befriends Servando but also pursues him. He is uncomfortable with her and she is described repeatedly in the text as “Orlando, rara mujer”.

a basic orientation as to how she came to “appear” in the tale. Only on page 159, several pages later, do we finally get an explanation of how Orlando and Servando’s paths have come to cross. Until this point, then, we have been floating without any idea as to how she comes to be here at all and the linearity of the narrative has evaporated completely; put simply, we have flashed forward, missing out a vital episode in the line of the plot. Servando’s cogitation on his experiences (as opposed to his recounting of them) serves as a further dimension to be added to the multiple versions of events: while they do not necessarily contradict his own account of what happened, they can provide further possible versions as regards his motivation for his actions. Even within his own narration, what Servando says to one character at the time of their shared experience in the narrative, and his subsequent reflections on those events do not always tally. This is very notably the case in his encounter with Orlando. In the second Chapter 27, N[yo]’s version is very much changed from the version he (the same narrator) provides in the first Chapter 27. In this second version, he depicts Orlando as eccentric and annoying. His comments on her account of her life are now disdainful: what he claims to have said to Orlando “at the time” and what he thinks of her here are quite the opposite. Here, he describes her tales as absurd and claims he played dumb when she told him her story:

Siempre he tenido que hacerme el que no comprendo ante estas insinuaciones que constantemente me han acosado. Siempre teniendo que estar pasando por tonto o por incorruptible. (p.164)

Servando insists that he remains detached from Orlando’s stories, then; he has been playing the innocent and “incorruptible”, suggesting a corrupting influence on Orlando’s part as he sees it. Up until this point, Servando has, indeed, come across as something of an innocent when faced with the sexual advances of another person. This revelation throws into disturbing doubt everything we think we know about the hapless friar and his motives. It is impossible to know where to draw the line between his internal thoughts and his explicit words and actions. So the narration not only subverts and resubverts what we believe we have understood regarding the action, reinventing the course of events over and over again, but it also throws the solidity of Servando’s characterization into disarray. There is more than one version of his motives, his personal qualities and his honesty, creating a multidimensional figure who, for all he is intangible in that we will never have the “definitive version” of Servando, is all the more human and accessible.

3. History versus Fiction: A hypertextual relationship with History

If the narrators each have a version (or more than one version) of the true course of events, so it must be said do the various chroniclers of history who appear in the novel: the Church, Creole society, minority groups, and so forth. The Church's notion of history against which Servando struggles is exposed in all its subjectivity in Chapter 14, when the *muchacho* who is guiding Servando around the King's gardens in Spain explains that: "La religión nunca debe olvidarse porque entonces los pecados perderían su gracia y dejarían de serlo." (p.87). To remind people, the King has bishops placed up trees in the gardens to pray. Indeed, fact is an impossible notion to define. At best, it is filtered through a narrator – any narrator – (be it an autobiographical text or not) and it is what he processes and relays either from first hand experience or from a hypotext of some kind which testifies to something in the past (newspaper reports, perhaps). Arenas's novel takes this incongruity in any historical text and, in selecting the memoirs of a famous historical figure, and exploring the controversial history of that time, exposes the impossible, endless contradictions inherent in any account of a life. *El mundo alucinante* does not duplicate reality; quite the reverse, it subverts the notion that one reality can exist. It captures, even celebrates the multiplicity of truth.

Even the historical figures chosen to feature here (not least Servando) are cause for debate among scholars and have been for centuries: the very subject of Servando's notorious sermon, (the legend of Guadalupe/Quetzalcóatl) is already prime material for hypertextual treatment and begs to be reworked and re-examined. At the same time, in exposing the subjectivity inherent in any and every text, *El mundo alucinante* (*novela*, after all) distances itself from the notions of reality and veracity with which it toys. The pretext for the novel, Servando's sermon, centres around a question of "fact" that cannot be resolved: exactly what the friar did say in his sermon, word for word. Discovering what he said is not the purpose of the novel: exploring how it may or may not have shaped the friar's life and legend is a valuable part of it, though. The arbitrary quality of what goes into the history books is revealed over and over in *El*

mundo alucinante. Borunda³⁵ (who first instills the basis of the sermon in Servando) tried to publish the manuscripts explaining his theory but he had no money to pay for the publishing. He laments the fact that: “en La Gaceta siempre me decían que debía esperar, que habría otras obras aguardando turno” (p.35). Borunda repeatedly refers to the infinite text of *jeroglíficos* (apparently a “strange mix” of Indian scripture) as proof positive that his theory is legitimate. If a text is “infinite”, though (like the interminable libraries mentioned in the prologue letter), by definition it must contain proof of every theory. He warns Servando of the circularity of history with his sage observations (envy always overcomes, evil is as plentiful as ignorant people, etc.). The friar counters that, on the other hand, there are good people who do manage to save what deserves to be saved. He says: “De no ser así, ¿cómo se iban a conservar tantas obras valiosas como se conservan?”, to which Borunda retorts: “¿Y acaso sabes tú las que se han perdido?” (p.36). There is no arguing with that and, in fact, Borunda has a valid point to make: all we know of history is what is left of what was passed on. The Queztalcóatl/Virgen de Guadalupe tradition, in itself, involves the fusion of two cultures enforced by history. The subordinated tradition (indigenous culture) blends with the conquering one: whether we choose to accept Borunda’s version, or the Inquisition’s is a matter of choice and neither is given more weight in the narrative. The legend, though, much like the historical figure of Servando himself, was hijacked at different stages in history and “reworked” to serve a purpose: when the Spaniards came, indigenous tradition became Christian, the re-working of this tradition made for the reaffirmation of Mexican culture and the legend became a standard for Mexico’s independence. Servando begins his adventures here in the novel as a highly controversial and defrocked dissident Catholic priest and ends his life as a national hero, though not by his own design.

The character of Servando in the novel is frequently perplexed by society’s “logic”. He cannot fathom the relationship between hunger and waste: the price of fish escalates due to increased demand during Lent, so the people cannot afford to buy it, so it begins to rot and the only people who will eat the stagnant fish are the starving. He gives up on this illogical system, concluding that: “Esto me hizo comprender qué bien marchan la miseria y la superstición.” (p.26). With that, he gives up on the contemplation of poverty and returns to the

³⁵ Borunda is the hideous creature who incites Servando to give his cathartic sermon and who (in the fictional work) plants the seed of the sermon’s argument and its justification. Borunda is a fat, repulsive beast who lives in a cave furnished with bat skeletons and faeces. Effectively, it is he who sets Servando on the course which will engender his peregrinations.

sexual lion's den that is the monastery he was trying to get away from in the first place. What places are generally reported to be like and Servando's perception of them generally differ widely. His constant condemnation of Europe and its cities explodes its illustrious image. The Conde de Gijón and his absurd wealth get Servando into Paris's most sumptuous social circles. The Conde persistently throws money away and finds himself ripped off by others, despite Servando's best efforts to teach him some street wisdom. Servando gives up and decides to return to poverty, wandering the streets of "lo que entonces llamaban 'el maravilloso París'" (p.123). He finds it anything but "maravilloso" and (damningly) describes the city as being very much like the court of Madrid, except that the scandals take place in public. This Paris is the Paris of a specific time: the Revolution is over and N[yo] describes the socialites he frequents as: "lo que podría llamarse lo más noble de la época" (p.123). He detaches himself from this accepted image of Paris and her society, damning her with faint praise. This is how Paris is seen, but not necessarily by Servando. *El mundo alucinante* centres around a problem of "truth", of the validity of an accepted truth or set of assumptions, based on a reference index previous to the text: it is a problem with the hypertextual nature of history itself. Everything must be questioned but we will not, by definition, ever discover a concrete "truth", since no such immutable facts exist: they are all hypertexts of previous devices and accounts.

Arenas's narrative in *El mundo alucinante*, as in the other novels I will consider, is based around a manipulation of history. The concrete time and space references mentioned (here, Fray Servando's life in the 18th and 19th Centuries; in the *Pentagonía*, the time span between the pre-Batista years and the distant future in Cuba; in *Viaje a La Habana* a collection of defined timeframes at specific points in the work) are consistently undermined by delirious, fantastic and often phantasmagorical discourse which distorts the linearity of the events and corrupts the physical context of the action. The reference system that does remain intact, therefore, is the hypertextual relationship with history. For the concrete reference markers denoting space and time to be shot down and produce the "vertigo" effect in the reader, they must first be built up to produce the opposite effect: this we have seen in our approach to the paratextual references in the novel. Chapter 2, for example, once again employs a title system incorporating a play on pronouns. Unlike Chapter 1, Chapter 2 contains external references in the titles which set up a temporal and spatial context in which to root the action of the chapter, i.e. dates and places in Mexico. In this way, the character of Servando initially emerges as a historical figure, a product of his specific space and time. History is introduced as an important determining factor in the discourse in this way. This chapter is the beginning of Servando's

public life (both real and fictionalised): he is leaving Monterrey for the world outside. As far as time framing is concerned, *El mundo alucinante* very much explodes in all directions, rather than following a linear pattern of structure or plot movement in its strictest sense. Notions of consequence and sequence are challenged, as is the case in Chapter 7 of the novel. *El mundo alucinante* works with historical data: to that end, it follows what can be considered the life of Fray Servando the historical person. However, it constantly undermines the chronological linearity with contradictory elements, such as the moment in the final chapter, when Servando finds himself walking down a Mexico City street which bears his own name. He comes face to face with the duration of his whole life in one instant. He does not recognise himself in the Fray Servando of the street name. By now he is totally freed from time frameworks and is, indeed, a man *alucinado*. He finds himself in an analogous situation; he is spiritually calm in this state (despite the mayhem going on around him, some of it allegedly in his name) and his memory is nonexistent. What does exist for him is: "...sólo un presente despoblado. La revelación." (p.216)

The process of reading *El mundo alucinante* departs from a factual point, offered by the clearly planted series of carefully chosen concrete references, highlighted by the multitude of paratextual devices which pepper the text. The apparent chronology of the narrative is loosely based around the friar's life story: Servando's proclamations of his innocence allow him to be linked into the action of the narrative. The urgency of his most pressing situations is often underlined in terms of references to time. In Chapter 20, the passage of time and Servando's evolution as a resident of the city of Paris are systematically catalogued in diary format: as the months tick by, his frustration grows. References to dates are used with an intertextual function on three occasions: all three dates are taken from the *Apología*, two of which appear in italics in *El mundo alucinante*, as follows:

"12/12/1794"	→	the actual date of Servando's sermon (p.40)
"viernes de dolores 1801"	→	Servando enters Bayonne (p.112)
"12/12/1825"	→	in Chapter 35, we (and the friar) return to the same date and place as the sermon, 31 years later

The third of these date references is followed by a host of quotations, underlining the historical (and extratextual) quality of the reference. It is no

coincidence that Arenas has us returning to the place and date of the original crime which catalysed the tribulations of Servando's life: history is indeed circular and what Servando returns to find is, quite literally, himself, only reworked by a changing public for the new generation.

History as a concept in *El mundo alucinante* is as non-linear as the action of the narrative itself. Realism in the spatial contexts of the action is also annihilated. The geographical locations for the action are precise in as much as Servando's flight from one city to the next is catalogued by specifying the new city at each stage. As we have already discussed, an element of confusion by over-precision (dissent among the narrators is the vehicle for this) as to Servando's itinerary plays a part in subverting this code, but the accepted image of each illustrious city is also distorted in order to flick the reader out of his comfortable assumptions about "places" in the novel. No sooner have we processed the name of the city in question, with whatever images it historically conjures up (say, Paris the city of lights) than that very image is debunked. *México Virreinal* is a prime target for this treatment: the famed beauty of the city and all its equilibrium are blown out of the water when the demented city planning is exposed. This appallingly bad design leads to disaster (very much in keeping with the moral depravity of the ruling sectors). The filling and emptying of the canals is a festival of bureaucratic and logistic bungling, resulting in a disturbing cycle of flood-drought-flood, which in turn has phantasmagorical repercussions: people metamorphosize into fish or, worse still, half-metamorphosize into fish-people³⁶. The city is an exercise in opposing heaven versus hell, a contrast handled with baroque irony in the narrative. One ascends to the city via a glittering, gleaming stairway made of glass and sparkling pieces; on the surface it looks like an ascent into paradise, but it turns out to be the entrance to a city ruled by the Inquisition, death and destruction. The visual quality of the descriptions of the cities is a mix of the baroque, the magical and the macabre: wherever there is glitz and sumptuous beauty, it masks something sinister. All the concrete references, be they to place, time or a historical figure, evoke a context and historical relevance. Most frequently, the setting in time is dictated not by date references, but by references (by name) to historical personalities, such as Simón Bolívar³⁷ and Madame de Stäel³⁸; their names

³⁶ See *El mundo alucinante* p.24

³⁷ Simón Bolívar is a fictionalised character in the text and becomes acquainted with the friar by dint of the fact that he is Simón Rodríguez's disciple. The historical General Bolívar (*el Libertador*) was a Venezuelan (1783 – 1830) and father of America's emancipation. Simón Rodríguez is credited with schooling him in the texts (Rousseau, notably) which incited Bolívar to act for his causes.

function as the concrete indices which denote setting, only to be subverted later, when their conventionally accepted personae are reinvented and (in some cases) parodied, as we will discover further ahead. The dead and the living even coexist here, inhabiting a common space where time is suppressed³⁹. In Chapter 1, Servando (as a child) makes lengthy reference to his mother and her activities: she hears, acts, speaks and frightens him to an extent, but we later discover that she is dead. Servando (the character) himself is a fusion of the historical friar and his 20th Century alter ego, N[yo].

El mundo alucinante's historical context spans some forty years, covering significant periods of upheaval in the Americas and Europe: the end of the viceregal period in Mexico (which Servando helps to dismantle), the reigns of Carlos IV and Fernando VII in Spain, the Napoleonic wars, and the establishment of a Federal Republic in Mexico (which Servando helps to construct, although with some reservations). History itself, as the accepted versions of the "facts" of the past is unravelled by *El mundo alucinante*'s many subversions of it and revelations of its subjectivity and impermanence. In his infamous sermon, the real Servando claimed that the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparition on the Indian Juan Diego's blanket⁴⁰ in front of Bishop Zumárraga was merely a legend, derived from the story of Quetzalcóatl. He further affirmed that the blanket belonged to Saint Thomas of Mylapore, who evangelised Mexico around 6AD. So Servando has very much torn the bottom out of the Holy Inquisition and Spain's evangelising power over Mexico: Mexico has been redeemed in the eyes of God without the need for the mediation of the Spanish Holy Church to establish the country's people in divine grace. Fray Servando's theory does not withstand 20th century scientific study, but his mythological interpretation was as valid then as were the theories of his opponents; come to that, who is to say that 20th century reactions to all these "variations" on the legend will not seem ridiculous 200 years from now? In *El mundo alucinante*, various versions are planted but none is superior to the others: what matters is their multiplicity.

Not only in the controversial sermon and its allegedly blasphemous unification of Christian legend with precolumbian myth does Servando subvert the version of America's history diffused by the Spanish, but also in his

³⁸ Madame de Stäel is fictionalised as an attractive woman who captures Servando's attention at a party in Paris and engages in some literary banter with him. The real Madame de Stäel (1766 – 1817), a French writer, contributed significantly to the development of Romanticism.

³⁹ This is a concept I will discuss again in Chapters 3 and 4, with regard to the *Pentagonía* (in particular *Celestino antes del alba*) and *Viaje a La Habana*.

⁴⁰ "blanket" refers to the "tilma" in Mexico i.e. a blanket worn on the shoulders.

response to Spanish society during his travels. He is thoroughly nonplussed by Spain, and refers to his time in the country as time spent “entre salvajes” (p.73), inverting the notion of the Conquest and civilisation of the savage Indian peoples of America by the cultured, missionary Spaniards. The priest he encounters in Valladolid is referred to as a “troglodita” (p.73) for as long as Servando believes him to be Spanish; when he turns out to be American (albeit North American), the references stop. We should factor into this equation, of course, the narrative role of Spain in *El mundo alucinante*: on an actional level, it is, of course the Holy Church of Spain that initiates the dynamic of the action and continues to be Servando’s persecutor both as a generic force and in the persons of individuals like León who pursue the dissident friar on his travels; on an ideological level, Spain is the oppressor denying Mexico its freedom and opposing the hero friar in his endeavours to secure it. Spain has her own perception of these points in history, Servando has his and, between these two poles, there may be dozens of variations. The absurdity of the Inquisition’s zeal comes under poignant discussion when, while Servando is in Madrid, Filomeno advises him to see a witch, to see if she can advise him in his predicament (his unending cycle of jail-escape-jail). As the conversation between the two men takes place, it is interrupted periodically by the “annoyingly deafening” screams of the souls being burned to death at the stake outside. Looking for a witch in this place in these times is surely folly, then, but Filomeno reassures Servando: “se trata de una bruja verdadera; de esas que nunca irán a la hoguera porque son ellas mismas las que la atizan.” (p.84). Spain is depicted (focalized by Servando) as a stagnant, ruined nation. The sensation of suffocation in the bad air and infernal heat Servando suffers is overwhelming; even Pamplona’s water is stagnant. To the American Servando, Spain is a conglomeration of ruins, an embodiment of her destroyed past. He says: “Tratándose de España, todo no es más que ruinas de otras ruinas pasadas.” (p.104). The Spain he perceives is clearly not the country of cultural richness and splendid beauty the Spanish in Mexico would have led the friar to expect. He takes these expectations and debunks them without mercy.

The people of Spain also come under attack, and the image of a “holy” people Servando will have anticipated in the country of the Inquisition flies out of the window. Servando defines the Spaniards in these terms: “Esta es la gente natural del país. Gente sin educación, insolente, juguetona, y en una palabra, españoles al natural.” (p.82). Servando finds the people of Spain not only ignorant, but also corrupt. He describes them as follows:

En general se dice que los hijos de Madrid son cabezones, chiquitos, farfallones, culoncitos, fundadores de rosario y herederos de presidios, y eso también es verdad, pues no existe sobre la tierra pueblo más corrompido y sucio. [...] En España están corrompidos hasta los recién nacidos; y los muchachos, acabados de nacer, en vez de decir mamá, sueltan una barbaridad increíble que no se puede ni repetir. Pero el mal viene de arriba, y así mientras la Reina derrocha todo el tesoro en sus amores locos con Godoy, Carlos IV no se queda atrás y organiza tremendas orgías; solamente para la gente noble, y donde la entrada cuesta más de mil duros. (p.79)

Squandering, corruption and lust, then, appear to be the order of the day in the Spanish court, while the rest of the country lies in ruins. The notion of the sacred and heroic Spain of the Conquistadores, of the dominant country is unravelled. Although N[él], as well as N[yo] describes it unfavourably (in other words, this image of Spain is not exclusive to Servando's narration), it is in parallel to Servando's current experiences that he views his surroundings; tellingly, he says of Spain: "pues España es toda una gran prisión." (p.42). The Europe/America contest appears frequently in N[yo]'s narration: not surprisingly, Europe is unfavourably described: he makes reference to "la *sucia* Europa" (with "*sucia*" italicised)⁴¹. Various sections of the narrative have Spain's countryside as a phantasmagorical, lunar landscape, such as when Servando looks out of the window to observe the land:

Era un lugar que no inspiraba ni siquiera lástima, sino deseos de salir corriendo sin mirar atrás. Los vendavales habían arrasado con la poca tierra, y ahora emergía un cascajo pardusco en el cual no crecía ni la yerba mala. El fraile lo miró todo y pensó que el mundo se había vuelto de color carmelita. (pp.61-62)

America is presented, on the one hand, as the sordid product of its European conquerors; on the other hand, we are presented with the America of Servando's reflective narration during his exile: this is, after all, America focalized by N[yo], and his perception is frequently tinted by passion and nostalgia: "Pienso en América como en algo demasiado querido para que sea verdadero. Y algunas veces me pregunto si será verdad que existe." (p.133). Servando's Americanness is underlined at certain stages during his travels in Europe by his reactions to things particular to this continent: it is, again, Servando's focalization of Europe, such as the changing seasons. He says of the autumn: "Esto es lo que aquí llaman el otoño." (p.108). Autumn, then, is not a season characterised by specific qualities, but a concept particular to a specific context. Even Servando's reactions to European culture and intellect highlight his American status. Pomposity about literature bores him to extremes during the pedantic

conversations on the subject at Chateaubriand's⁴² party: no American books or authors are ever mentioned, a fact that occurs only to the American, Servando.

Beauty in general is subverted by N[yo] especially in Servando's travels in Europe, though also in Mexico, such as when the bells ring calling the sacristans to mass in Mexico City. What we would assume to be a picturesque image of the faithful being called to worship by pealing bells is inverted as follows:

algunos [sacristanes], enloquecidos por los constantes repiqueteos, se lanzaban desde las elevadísimas torres y alzaban el vuelo sobre la gran ciudad, desplomándose sobre las estatuas...El arzobispo hizo su llegada al santuario, dando la bendición y maldiciendo en voz baja. (p.37).

Evidently, it is not only beauty that is called into question here, but the notions of faith and worship in this society. The Church, of course, does not come out of N[yo]'s narration well. This is balanced, in part, by the other two narrators and by the obvious fallibility of the friar himself: neither he nor the institution is impeccable. The logic of the Inquisition in Mexico is exposed in all its absurdity, as in the case of the woman who refuses to have a tooth taken out along with all the other ladies in the capital, in order to be like the *Virreina*. She is seen as a rebel: she refuses to conform, therefore she has disrespected the Viceroy, so she has disrespected the King of Spain, and therefore also the Pope, and by implication the Holy Church, therefore she must be a witch and so should be burnt at the stake. The anecdote undermines the accepted logic in the society in question. Predominantly, such anecdotes in the text are images which fuse the baroque or fantastic with the macabre, such as the 'fish people' of Mexico City (which I mentioned earlier). The Viceroy himself becomes a victim of this ludicrous situation, with phantasmagorical results: "El Virrey, que se había convertido en un hermoso pargo, pudo llegar hasta el océano y allá dicen que está lanzando maldiciones, pero sin poder salir a la costa..." (p.24).

History is not a series of facts carved in stone, then, but an evolving, varying array of possible perceptions. Just as Servando's sermon offered a possible new dimension, his discovery of it, through the "brujo" Borunda, brought him into contact with multiple precolumbian, pagan schools of thought, all just as valid in the narrative as the established Christian doctrine. It is the

⁴¹ See *El mundo alucinante* p.48

⁴² Chateaubriand is melancholy in the extreme in his hypertextual incarnation in the novel. The real Chateaubriand (1768 – 1848), a French writer held various political offices during the Restoration. His writing was a powerful influence on the development

sphere of vision of an individual or institution or society in question which determines the course history is deemed to have taken for that person⁴³. The perception of any person with all its biases shapes the “truth” which that individual creates for history. Servando (N[yo]) hits on this paradox when he comments: “¿qué puede resolverme una bruja cuando ni siquiera creo que existan? Y si existen prefiero no hablar de ello” . So, if something is believed to exist, then it does. In Chapter 1, N[él] recounts the young child Servando’s discovery of the non-existence of time: “Así se pasaba el tiempo, y así pasó hasta descubrir que no existía y que sólo era una noción falsa con la cual empezamos a temerle a la muerte, que, por otra parte, puede llegar en cualquier momento y detenerlo”. He negates the existence of time and, with it, the linearity of life leading to death: to that end, his perception confirms N[yo]’s prologue letter and its assertion that one life has fused with a previous one. The most fundamental of reference systems – time and personal identity – are not rigid in this narrative.

Servando (N[yo]) insists that what his sermon said is not what the public thought it heard: so we have his word that his speech went one way, and the Church’s (immediately following the sermon) that it went another; then, later, the public’s view of the sermon and of the friar becomes one of hero-worship. According to the action of *El mundo alucinante*, there is still another dimension to this question: Servando’s sermon and its message is not spoken exclusively by the friar, but is the product of Borunda’s words and theories. It is Borunda who indoctrinates Servando in the novel and plants the concepts in his mind that are the backbone of the sermon, that is, that the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a reworking of a myth from the time of St. Thomas of Mylapore, whom the Indians called Quetzalcóatl. Borunda believes this theory to be foolproof: he has read it in ancient manuscripts written in strange hieroglyphics and, furthermore, he explains the logic in it to Servando. He explains that Jesus told the apostles “*predicad por todo el mundo*”⁴⁴ and, he deduces, America is a vital part of the world, hence it is most unlikely that the Virgin would have appeared on Juan Diego’s grubby blanket, therefore she must have appeared long before, on the cape of Quetzalcóatl/Saint Thomas. His thinking seems perfectly rational to him and he asserts that these are his “*pruebas concluyentes*” (p.34). They seem perfectly conclusive to Servando at the time, so much so that

of Romantic literature. Among his published works are *Atala*, *Mémoires d’outre Tombe*, *Les Aventures du Dernier Abencerage*, *Martyrs* and *Le Génie du Cristianisme*.

⁴³ As opposed to focalization by a character in the text, which refers to the focus of the narrative. Here I refer to the sphere of vision purely as the perception held by any person.

he preaches to that effect. Although he does not directly recant, as such, Servando does change his tune about his source for these findings after his incarceration in the convent as a result of his sermon, refering to the brujo as “ese loco de Borunda” (p.41).

In a similar reinterpretation of the words and intentions of an individual, Servando’s oration at Hernán Cortés’s reburial mass, like the notorious sermon which succeeds it, is reprocessed by the ears that receive it. The volatile melting pot of races and the Mexican Viceregal social infrastructure are laid out before Servando in his pulpit and it is these listeners who distort Servando’s actual words according to their own conceptions. N[él] describes the scene:

acá los gachupines que desprecian a los criollos. Allá los criollos que desprecian a los gachupines y a los indios. Más lejos los mendigos y los indios que desprecian a todo el mundo y con cierta ironía contemplan el espectáculo. Y así es que el discurso fue adquiriendo otros matices – casi mágicos – que muchos no entendieron y que hallaron brillante. (p.30)

Without even understanding (or perhaps really hearing) Servando’s words, then, the public appropriate them and stamp them with their own “almost magical”, and therefore unreal, nuances. Servando comes to question his own perceptions of certain notions. At the end of his life as a (dissident) Catholic cleric and celibate Christian he fears the afterlife or the possibility that there may not be one more than the act of dying itself. He fears having been taken in all along, that there may be only solitude after all and, therefore, no possibility even of keeping the faith after death. This brings me to touch on the question of self-referentiality which will concern us in part 5 of this chapter. The illusory effect of objectivity in this hypertext of an allegedly non-fictional body of work (Servando’s memoirs) proves to be only as “objective” as the memoirs themselves, which are exposed (as all history, all accounts are) as subjective by definition. It is a contradiction: in order to expose the discourse it contains and produce the reading process it does, the novel (not memoir!) *El mundo alucinante* must, at the same time, imitate the righteous objectivity of an historical, factual text. It is not so much the action of history as the motive for the actions that is subverted in the text. We know, of course, that the historical friar’s sermon did take place, that it did cause an outcry among the clergy, and so forth: we cannot (ever, regardless of his autobiographical writing) know the motivation behind his actions, however, not even with a lie detector. At best, a memoir is the author’s chosen presentation of his perception of his motives,

⁴⁴ This segment appears in italic type in the text.

modified as they will inevitably be by hindsight, embarrassment, convention and a host of other factors. *El mundo alucinante* is a game of perceiving motive, then, played out to unseat the obvious assumptions that what we might call generally accepted history has instilled in readers. It is the subjectivity of the individual's perception that is undermined. For instance, when Servando's remains are not found under the rubble of Raquel's palace (he has escaped unseen), the Jewish community deduces that, if he died without trace, he must have been the devil⁴⁵. The narrative tells of how the Indians employed to keep the fires burning under the stakes for the Holy Inquisition sometimes "serve as fuel themselves" when they run out of wood, throwing themselves on the fire, thus dying in an unchristian fashion without confession and the last rites, disobeying the Inquisition: this is all we are told, but the absurdity of the whole suggestion only serves to unhinge the logic of the Inquisition and shine a very dubious light on its iron purpose and public support.

The same sting in the tail as we have with the damnability of the poor, pious souls who (allegedly) fuel the fires so willingly is applied to many such situations in the text, where the situation is set up as apparently following some logic, then the logic is followed through to its natural and absurd conclusion. For instance, Servando follows a crowd following a woman, only to discover the source of the chain: "Por curiosar siguió la turba, que seguía a la vez a una mujer, que seguía una soga que la llevaba arrastrada por el cuello." (p.20). The woman, it would appear, is "following" the rope around her neck: hardly likely, but the effect is initially charming, then disturbing. The sphere of vision is not only limited, but distorts the nature of the events being observed. For example, the witch Servando goes to visit for advice describes a storm raging outside in lyrical terms, as if in a lullaby. The main thing is for the "infant" she is lulling (Servando) to be safe and warm, never mind the intense storm that is razing everything outside. The description is two-fold: the storm is depicted as violent and destructive, yet at the same time the woman's voice as she speaks of it is described in terms of seduction, gentleness and calm. Spatial context can also be subverted in the narrative, such as when Humboldt, conversing with Servando about America, literally transports him there. It is quite real to Servando, who narrates up to this point (N[yo]). At the point when he is transplanted to America, the narration transfers to N[tú]: "Hemos vuelto a la América. Estás allí, conversando con la naturaleza y con la vida de la gente. Tocas las cosas." (p.129). With the stratification comes a change of verb tense from perfect to present, and the sensation is one of immediacy. It is a tangible sense of

⁴⁵ See *El mundo alucinante* Chapter 18.

physically being there, evoked by the physical sensations of the verbs used: *estar*, *conversar*, *tocar*. Even so, while the image is solid and real in the physical nature of the actions, it is intangible and unreal in that Servando is talking to abstract, impossible interlocutors: “nature” and “life”. For Servando to be bodily transported across an ocean by a man’s words is not ridiculous in the confines of the narrative, given the multitude of fantastic sequences and explanations in the text, but the narrative itself leaves this segment somewhere between action and imagined action.

When a novel such as this one declares itself from the outset to be a work of fiction (“una novela de aventuras”, as it titles itself) with any kind of reference to historical persons or events, they invite a study of both the fictional plane and the historical one. By approaching the two levels, the hypertextual element becomes explicit. In *El mundo alucinante*, history is subordinated to fiction: erasing the historical timeframe is a declared intention from the opening letter. N[yo] announces that he and Servando are one and the same person, thus making his vocation clear. At this point, historical time gives way to fictional time, that is the time of the discourse. Unlike historical time, it is ruled by imagination, not concrete sequence or time markers; this is *el mundo alucinante*, not *el mundo histórico*. At the moment when N[yo], the 20th century writer, declares himself to be the same person as Servando, N[yo] ceases to be an identity and becomes a function, that is the first person, autodiegetic narrator (as we have seen). He is anonymous, other than in his fusion with Servando, and therefore exists only as language. I would agree with Perla Rozencvaig that a dialogue exists between history and fiction in *El mundo alucinante*, although I feel that her definition of this dialogue as “delirante y atrevido” is a little simplistic⁴⁶.

We must be careful in *El mundo alucinante* to differentiate always between narrative fact and historical fact, between narrative truth and historical truth. In his study *Sobre narradores y héroes*, Rodríguez Ortiz describes *El mundo alucinante* as “literary history”, narrated by deforming history through subjectivity and the author’s identification with the protagonist. He continues that by adopting a different perspective on the American condition in history, Arenas produces a phantasmagoria which questions the objectivity of historical discourses by superimposing various points of view on them⁴⁷. Certainly, history in terms of realism is very much deformed in the novel, but I would hesitate to say that this is based on the author’s identification with the

⁴⁶ Rozencvaig, *Narrativa de transgresión*, p.7

⁴⁷ Rodríguez Ortiz, *Sobre narradores y héroes*, p.36

protagonist (unless this reference is strictly limited to the fictional “author”, N[yo]): such an affirmation would imply the presence of authorial voice which, in turn, would require some substantiation based on Arenas’s life as well as his writing. I would disagree with the second of these affirmations by Rodríguez Ortiz in as much as he bases this deduction on the portrayal of American-ness in *El mundo alucinante*: certainly, as we have begun to see, the objectivity of history is thrown into disarray, but rather than superimposing different points of view onto the “facts” of history, I believe the function and effect of *El mundo alucinante*’s relationship with accepted historical fact is to raise any and every alternative interpretation to the same level. It is a questioning of all history, of each and every previous text, rather than a questioning process centred around the depiction of America. This I hope to establish through my hypertextual analysis of the novel in this chapter. Firstly, though, it is important that we explore the relationship between historical “fact” and narrative fact.

The novel has inescapably set itself up with very specific parameters in time and space in taking as its subject a significant and well-known actor of American independence (Servando). By its very form, the novel creates a problematic relationship between the narrative (novel) and the type of enunciation it purports to be on one level (a reworking of text that is autobiographical). Historical realism, as we know, is shot out of the picture by the fantastic events recounted by the narrators. These moments of magical inverosimilitude abound in the novel: how we draw the line between imagination and hard fact is the polemic. What brings these “hallucinations” into being is the world around Fray Servando, as observed by the focalizers in question, that is the “mundo alucinante”. This world is fantastic, and creates in the perceptions of the narrators that which is imagined, the facts as they see them, just as real as any other perception of them.

El mundo alucinante is saturated by references to historical figures who connotate the narrative. The framework of political and literary history is repeatedly presented. Servando’s sojourn in Bayonne is a decisive juncture in terms of the subsequent action, since from there Servando can return to Paris and penetrate the aristocratic world in the city just as Bonaparte is about to become Emperor. In Paris, Servando meets Simón Bolívar, hears Baron Humboldt’s⁴⁸ “discurso americano” and comes into contact with Madame de Staël. One would assume that such a concentration of references to such specific

⁴⁸ Alejandro Humboldt (called “el barón”) is also a historical figure, fictionalised in the text. In Arenas’s text, he is clearly pro-Independence for the American nations and, at the party where he and Servando meet, it is he who inspires Bolívar. The historical

moments and movements in history would be a core of solid factual reference around which to base the action; on the contrary, the versions proposed by the narrators continue to differ, altering the action (to some extent) and the characterisation of the historical figures in question. Of course, some poetic licence is to be expected when a historical figure is fictionalised in any text; what is significant here is the multiplicity and inverosimilitude of the depictions offered and how the portrayals jar with the generally accepted image of the individuals in the majority of historical texts such as encyclopaedias and textbooks. References are made to a plethora of historically significant figures: Jovellanos⁴⁹ appears as Godoy's servant; Chateaubriand is melancholy in the extreme, pompous and affected; Lady Hamilton is hysterical and macabre. None of the hypertextualised historical figures is represented as an entirely positive character: everyone has flaws, even those characters the friar warms to (such as Mme. de Stael).

Chapter 20 is studded with appearances by such figures, all focalized by Servando. Madame Recamier⁵⁰, a great beauty, held parties for society's elite during the Restoration; in *El mundo alucinante*, she does indeed host parties, during one of which Servando observes her "going upstairs" with Benjamin Constant⁵¹. This is virtually all we are told about these two characters, but it is sufficient to ensure that neither is on a pedestal and that both are revealed to have human failings (implicitly, lust). Benjamin Constant receives unfavourable fictionalisation; he is portrayed as a bitter individual, of no interest to Servando. Lucas Alamán⁵², on the other hand, is a compatriot and, therefore, very interesting company indeed for Servando, and so the two talk and become friends, enjoying their shared nostalgia.

Servando's perceptions of these individuals (as communicated by N[yo]) are based on his rather swift reactions to the level of pleasure he can achieve in

Humboldt (1769 – 1859) was a German geographer and naturalist, who travelled worldwide but, most extensively, in America, producing texts on his travels.

⁴⁹ Jovellanos is a hypertextual character based on the historical figure Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744 – 1811), who presided over the *Junta Central* created against Joseph Bonaparte during the French invasion. In the text, Servando goes to see him to plead for help, but to no avail. The historical Jovellanos wrote several political pieces regarding national problems in Spain.

⁵⁰ Madame Recamier (1777 - 1849); the fictionalisation of this historical woman in *El mundo alucinante* involves her parties, during one of which Servando has occasion to be introduced to many of the fictionalised historical individuals of the day in Paris. She appears as a character, but also functions as a narrative device whereby the encounters between the other characters can take place.

⁵¹ Benjamin Constant is hypertextualised (rather unfavourably). The historical Constant was a French writer (he wrote the psychological novel *Adolf*) and politician (1767 – 1830), and a friend of Mme. de Stael.

⁵² Lucas Alamán, also a fictionalised historical figure, becomes a friend to Servando. The real Alamán (1792 – 1853) was a Mexican historian and politician.

their company, regardless of the mutual political interests he might have with them. It is important to note, also, that the names of these characters impact on a 20th or 21st century reader very differently than they do on Servando, who is, of course, their contemporary and their equal in intellectual terms. Alejandro de Humboldt (called “el barón” – the historical Humboldt’s nickname – by those at the party) is clearly pro-Independence for the American nations and, at the party, it is he who inspires Bolívar. Simón Bolívar appears, somewhat dismissively described as “otro joven muy altanero, rebelde y orgulloso, un tal Simón Bolívar” (p.129); it is by dint of the fact that he is Simón Rodríguez’s⁵³ disciple that Servando takes to him as a friend. Servando is reacting to them as individuals he meets at a party, with none of the gloss and reverence such a gathering of minds evokes after 2 centuries of renown. The focalizer here is clearly Servando: he observes the actions of the guests around about him (such as Mme. Recamier and Benjamin Constant’s retreat to the upstairs room), and sees individuals as they come into his sphere: in this way, he observes Bolívar as he listens to Humboldt, seeing the young man’s attitude to him. Like the fictionalised Servando himself, these characters are depicted as human, not as celebrities. Servando tells Cornide and Filomeno that he has been to see Jovellanos for help, but that Jovellanos is a mere victim of Godoy; he makes reference to having seen Jovellanos kiss Godoy’s feet (pp.55 – 56). Blanco White receives equally irreverent treatment: in *El mundo alucinante*, Servando documents the presence of “ese iracundo” in anti-monarchic conspiracy activities.

All these characters have been characterised in such a way as to fulfil a function (some larger than others) in advancing Servando’s action and evolution. Madame de Stäel captures Servando’s attention and engages in some literary banter with him. She appears as an attractive woman, notably unpretentious, is well-educated and culturally aware. Servando enjoys the witty exchange with her and, for a time, takes pleasure in their game of humorously swapping references to well-known texts. Madame de Stäel quotes Rousseau to Servando in a jocular exchange: Rousseau’s work is described as: “esa nueva Biblia.”. So the reference is intertextual (quoted directly) and also hypertextual: the segment from Rousseau’s text is taken out of context and then transplanted into a fictional context, quoted by the fictionalised character of Madame de Stäel. She and Servando carry on exchanging sage quotations from this modern

⁵³ Simón Rodríguez is fictionalised under his own name and under the alias Samuel Robinson in the text. The real Rodríguez (1771 – 1854) was a teacher from Venezuela and taught Simon Bolivar, accompanying him on some of his trips to Europe. The historical friar did meet Simón Rodríguez, in Paris.

bible; he tires of this after a while and loses interest in her, finding that she lacks intellectual imagination. This is surely a departure from the image of Mme. de Staël history generally provides: for her to lack imagination (or, as is implied by her persistent reeling off of references to Rousseau, a compliant acceptance of the accepted literary fashion) does not fit at all with her historical legacy as an innovative and influential author and exponent of the Romantic movement. It is also significant that she is a woman, and an attractive and charming one at that, and Servando is threatened by sexual tension or promise wherever it arises in the text: while it may be that he simply tires of joking with her, it is also plausible that he becomes uncomfortable as their conversation becomes more intimate and relaxed. This theory is poignant when we consider it in conjunction with Servando's reactions to other sexual encounters in the work, which we will explore further ahead in this chapter.

In a distortion of history, in the novel, it is the fictional character Orlando⁵⁴ who devises a meeting between Servando and the dissidents who will help him return to Mexico to seek the nation's independence: she arranges for him to meet Padre White, who knows of Servando's life so far and has respect for him. White, in turn, introduces Servando to Javier Mina⁵⁵. White and Mina converse with a kind of deranged hilarity: their conversation is punctuated with their repeated outbursts of raucous laughter "¡Ja! ¡Ja!" (p.161). They vie with each other to see who has done away with the greater number of undesirables and so is the better revolutionary. In the narrative, White has taken an English name and identity (no longer José Blanco) in venomous rejection of his Spanish past. It is a parody on his real name (Blanco White), of course, but in the fictional context it adds to the depiction of the lunatic rebel zeal of White and Mina. They know of Servando from his bungled attempts to kill the King and the Pope. The standing of these two historical heroes is very much undermined in this depiction of them: vigorous revolutionaries they may be, but certainly their depiction in the novel reveals them to be absurd and trigger-happy, even ignorant.

While in Bayonne, Servando meets Simón Rodríguez (a.k.a. Samuel Robinson in the narrative) quite by accident and in rather unlikely circumstances. He is one of the servants (a cook) in the palace of the Jewish

⁵⁴ I will explore the character of Orlando in *El mundo alucinante* and her relationship with the hypotextual Orlando of Virginia Woolf's novel later.

⁵⁵ Javier Mina is the fictional character who is introduced to the friar by Padre White in the text; he recruits Servando for the American invasion. The historical Javier Mina (1789 – 1817), known as "El mozo", was a Spanish freedom fighter who fought against the French invaders and against Fernando VII, before going to Mexico to join the struggle for independence.

woman, Raquel, and has been there ever since he suffered the same imprisonment as Servando while Raquel endeavoured to win his hand in marriage. Rodríguez is another hero of American history but his heroism, too, is greatly subverted in the text. The composure one might expect of a historical figure is certainly not applied to him. His identity only comes to light when he exclaims “¡Oh, libertad!” (p.120) and recites whole passages of the *Contrat Social*⁵⁶ to Servando. The relationship between Rodríguez and Servando is genuinely historical, but greatly hypertextualised in *El mundo alucinante*. In this friendship, historical realism is very much subordinated to narrative function: Rodríguez operates as an actor, conveniently advancing the magical action involved in transporting the friar from Raquel’s mansion to Paris, but he is also the contact point between Servando and the intellectual elite of Paris and, in particular, he facilitates the introduction of the hypertextualised Bolívar. This moment of unmasking, when Servando deduces Rodríguez’s identity due to the text he recites, parodies the social theory prevalent at the time in portraying an intellectual period in which everyone has read Rousseau and is fixated by him, so much so that both Simón and Mme. de Stäel can recite his texts off pat. However, at the same time, this episode calls into question the notions of individual liberty and common purpose. *Le Contrat Social* appears only as a motif, with one exclamation quoted directly here (“¡Oh, libertad!”), but its preoccupation with individual liberty versus the subordination of liberty for the common good still enter the complex of contamination (multiple hypertextual relationships).

So, the historical figures who undergo hypertextual treatment fulfil certain functions in the narrative: they build on the characterisation of the friar, with all his human failings and emotions, while erasing the glorification process their historical counterparts have undergone with time (thus exposing the veneer that is the glory provided by historical description). Furthermore, they are a vehicle to introduce ideological concerns to the narrative, that is the questions surrounding individual and collective freedom. These concerns, we will find, are the same ones that are thrown into question by the friar’s life itself as it is exposed in Arenas’s prose work.

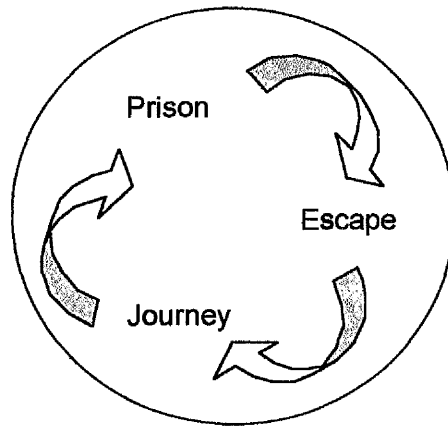
⁵⁶ Written by J. J. Rousseau in 1762; *Le Contrat Social* is the book of inspiration for the intellectuals in Europe in the text (both the American characters, Servando, Rodríguez and Bolívar, and the Europeans, Madame de Stäel and her friends).

4. Hypertextual relationships

4.i Primary hypotexts: the relationship with the historical Fray Servando

In considering the character of Servando as a fictionalisation of the historical friar, we must consider the life of the man as well as his publications, which are the primary hypotexts on which *El mundo alucinante* is based. The “real” Servando, indeed, was a prolific chronicler of his life and there is evidence of more than one of his texts as hypotexts for Arenas’s novel: the *Apología*, the *Memorias* and his *Carta de despedida a los Mexicanos escrita desde el Castillo de San Juan de Ulúa*. The *Apología* mainly centres around the colourful cycle of escapes undertaken by the friar, including an escape attempt using an umbrella as a parachute, and describes various strange experiences, among them his refusal to marry a beautiful Jewish woman and unfavourable descriptions of the countries he travelled through and of the licentiousness of the Spaniards and illiteracy of the clergy. The *Carta* attempts to establish a theory for the interpretation of hieroglyphics to prove the Christian essence of precolumbian Mexico. Given that the texts are themselves autobiographical in nature, we cannot overlook the treatment of the historical figure of Servando as he appears in commentaries on his life (external to his memoirs) under the fictionalisation of *El mundo alucinante*. We will need to consider, then, both the hypertextual relationship between the novel and the various primary hypotexts, and also the relationship between the implicit hypotext that is the historical data surrounding Servando and the hypertextualised friar.

Our assumptions and our points of reference are subverted and contradict themselves progressively throughout the text. In the midst of all this, though, the basic actional sequences of the hero remain constant. The nature of his hero status is what is revealed through his actions. Servando’s unlikely exploits in *El mundo alucinante* bear little resemblance to the life story depicted in the “real” Servando’s texts, except for this basic scheme of the action. The sequence of action is circular: Servando moves from one prison to a new prison, from escape to recapture and, at each stage, he has a purpose which is misunderstood by others. So his cycle is a vicious circle:



On this frame is built a series of explorations of geographical locations, all of which have historical resonances, with specific connotations for American history. This actional sequence is our most solid link with the life story of the real Servando and later I will examine how it is hypertextualised in *El mundo alucinante*. On a structural level, the narrative's descriptions, references and even the actions that occur in Viceregal Mexico and Madrid are the same as those in Paris and London (their opposite pair in the novel's spatial framework), or in Rome and Lisbon. The same elements are recapitulated, creating an association, a code: the general description of the city; then its urban and social organization and customs; the hero's sufferings in an adverse and labyrinthine world; moral criticism, condemnation and final, absolute negation that renders the whole city a negative and impossible place.

Approaching the text via the structure of the narrative in this way, I hope, will guard against falling into the trap of manipulating associations between *El mundo alucinante* and other texts or, indeed, forcing associations between different segments of the narrative itself, in a study that would be more imaginative than analytical. To that end, I have applied a model (discerning the sequences of the action) to the text in order to extract the key sequences and functions. If we look at the novel as a complete unit, the sequence of action is the same – circular: Servando's itinerary takes him from his native America to Europe (through pirates, dangers and adventures of all kinds), where he is pursued, travels to escape pursuit, is still pursued, keeps travelling, and so on, to then ultimately return to Mexico amidst similarly tumultuous activity. He is initially persecuted as a result of his sermon, engendering the fantastic undertakings which follow; he then descends into melancholy (usually following his incarceration), producing the reflective, solemn discourse on the limitations and difficulties of life and on the injustice that has put him where he

is. From this point on, his multiple prison escapes compound his original crime. His original quest is for vindication following his sermon: his pleas are lost in the maze of the Spanish court's bureaucracy. From here, his aim, while consistently urgent and passionate at each stage of his journey, is not the same. At each stage, he encounters an injustice, suffers persecution and descends into melancholy reflection on the situation but his preoccupation moves from one concern to another, all of them heroic in some way: from theological argument (the adaptation of one culture's mythology to incorporate it in the conquering religion's) to anti-monarchical protest, to a desire for independence, to republicanism and, finally, into delirious thought. While the different narrators offer varying motivations behind Servando's actions and, in many cases, the secondary action ("how the main action came about") is different, the basic scheme of the action does remain constant. The actional sequences of jail-escape-jail are a no-win cycle for Servando. He expresses this thought himself (N[yo]):

Es que no hay salida. Es como si a cada momento fuera enterándome de lo inútil de estas huidas. Y, sin embargo, me digo: haz todo lo posible. Y lo hago. Pero lo peor es que nunca se sabe dónde termina el límite de las posibilidades. (p.84)

So the hero chooses to remain in the cycle, yet he views his situation fatalistically (he will never be free of it) and pro-actively at the same time. The actional sequence jail-flight-jail-flight-jail (and so on interminably) is constant, but the rest of the action follows its own, fantastical logic. For instance, the friar drowns when the Nueva España is sunk by pirates: he sinks because his belly is full of iron chains but, as he sinks, he swallows a bellyful of water and so floats back up to the surface and vomits up the chains, conveniently saving him from certain death.

The actional sequences, of course, are largely extracted from the *Memorias*, hypertextualised in the novel: the most basic skeleton of Servando's life story is intact. The day after the real Servando's sermon, charges were brought against him and within a few days he was placed under house arrest in his own cell in the Convento de Santo Domingo: the year was 1795, the year that would see him begin his cycle of trips, tribulations and escapes. We know that he travelled from Mexico to a convent in Burgos, Spain. His first escape (around 1801) would take him to France. Documentation exists to say he had theological discussions with rabbis in a Bayonne synagogue. From Bayonne, he travelled to Paris, where he did meet Simón Rodríguez. He worked as a teacher of Spanish and, according to the *Memorias*, he translated Chateaubriand's *Atala*; apparently, his translation was stolen and published by an impostor. The

fictional Servando's escapes are anything but neat. He frequently leaves disaster in his wake, such as when he escapes from Caldas, the whole convent is held as a result; traces of Servando's skin are found on the walls, so it is deduced that he was not aided in his escape and "only" seventeen friars are burnt at the stake as punishment. The hero Servando seems perpetually to find failure in triumph⁵⁷. He (N[yo]) reflects on this question: "me quedé pensando en esas futuras derrotas, las que siempre acaecen después del triunfo." (p.96). He must keep going, however: regardless of his heroism or tenacity, he has a fundamental function to fulfil in the narrative (he is the only principal actor).

Hypertextual relationships between this narrative and its hypotexts (including its broad hypotext of historical documentation) are the only remaining (un-subverted) concrete point of reference in the text. In the varying perceptions provided by the narrators, the only referentiality left at all watertight is the hypertextual one. It is, of course, based on narrative subversion in itself, but the hypotext in question can nevertheless be discerned and the relationship revealed. Obviously, as in any hypertextual analysis of a text, I must show that hypertextual relationships are a generating principle in the work in question, and not just a symptom of the transtextuality inherent in any and every text. Therefore, the novel must allow (if not require) the reader to identify a determined body of hypotexts; the identity of the hypotexts must be revealed in some way. The relationship must be palpable, either via imitation or transformation, in whatever shape or form. The hypotext may be one text or, as is the case with *El mundo alucinante*, a body of texts, some of them principal hypotexts (Servando's *Memorias* and *Apología*) and others secondary. In the case of a relationship with multiple hypotexts, although each underlying hypotext may only have a part to play, it is still integral to the macrostructure of the hypotext as a whole. In this case, various secondary hypotexts play a part, including Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. In looking at the hypertextual relationships at work, I will consider three levels, broadly speaking: lexical, syntactic and semantic, using Genette's methodology to approach the relationships. Given that so much has been created in the narrative to subvert and undermine historical realism, it will be important to bear in mind how much of the body of hypotexts is allegedly historical in nature, is controversial in some way or is of dubious veracity. The historical Fray Servando insists on the predominance of liars and charlatans in the world. This is a concern which permeates the *Apología* and the *Memorias*; he literally spent his life writing against his enemies and vindicating himself. The overall

⁵⁷ This is a notion I will discuss with regard to *Viaje a La Habana* in Chapter 4.

relationship between *El mundo alucinante* and the historical Servando's writing is collective and overlapping, then, and we will have to approach it on an ideological level as well as a purely textual one. The context of writing the hypotexts will have to be taken into consideration as well as the two basic Genettian considerations of transformation and imitation.

The era, context and persona of Fray Servando are treated hypertextually, starting with the (fictional) modified context for the production of the fictionalised memoirs: the writing is transferred to the 20th century, despite being narrated in present tense, in real time. The beginning of this hypertextual connection is the addition of a new dimension to Fray Servando's narration, when he is fused with the present-day narrator, N[yo]. Of all the possible bibliography by and about Servando, and despite the fact that more than one of his texts is explicitly used, Arenas chooses the *Memorias* to figure most prominently. The memoirs, even hypertextualised, would appear on the surface to adhere to an autobiographical format and spirit. However, Servando's life is now contained in a text contained in *El mundo alucinante*. The text undergoes a fairly radical title change from the hypotext, from the *Memorias* of the individual Fray Servando to *El mundo alucinante*, a whole world that is *alucinante*, the notion of "el mundo" being non-personal and collective. Both the *Memorias* and the *Apologia* are the creations of a well-read author, attacking a less well-read (and therefore ignorant and uneducated) body of enemies who have failed to see the point. Their failure to understand causes his life to turn out as it does. This combattant attitude is more perceptible in the *Apología* than the *Memorias*, but still vindication is very much the motivation in both works. The real Fray Servando is still the conscience of the novel in that respect: his spirit of struggle and imaginative genius underpin it and Servando's militant self-defence is central to his relationships with secondary characters and his reflective passages.

At this stage, we should look again at a group of paratextual indices which are relevant to this point in the study: the footnotes. The footnotes to the text add a further dimension to the conflict between history and fiction. They virtually all function as credits for the source texts for quoted portions of text (intertextual pieces) in the narrative, and they reflect a limited but effective bank of documentation. Again, I concur with Rodríguez Ortiz's calculations of the incidence of the various types of footnote, which he lists as follows: 13 are from the *Apología*, 15 from other contextual documents and texts, 5 are paragraphs quoted from Fray Servando's speeches or letters, 2 quoted pieces of text

(intentionally or otherwise) do not carry footnotes⁵⁸. Omission of these credits would scarcely have affected the personality of the novel and would not have affected the action, so their inclusion in the novel is curious. They draw attention to the fact that much of this quoted text is quoted from the individual (Servando) who is already (allegedly) narrating part of this novel (on a fictional level), so we are made aware that, while N[yo] is Servando and vice versa, this is not the memoirs but the novel. The veracity of source texts is called into question when the same footnote format is used to cite Fray Servando's supposed (entirely fictitious) diary as a source. We are drawn back to the prologue letter and reminded that Servando also exists in those interminable library books. Whereas we might expect a footnote of this kind to corroborate something in the narrative or substantiate a point, here the effect is to undermine the veracity of the text instead. As I have mentioned, some of the footnotes credit text about, rather than by the historical Servando. When Servando (N[yo]) speaks of Chateaubriand, his description of his speech is quoted from Artemio de Valle-Arizpe's text *Fray Servando* (see *El mundo alucinante* p.127). We are thus presented with another perception of the friar, although the section of text quoted tells us nothing whatsoever about Servando: it is purely a description of someone else's speech. What it does, much like the quotations mentioned above, is distance us further from any accepted image of the friar and subvert the linearity of the narrative once again. Similarly, Simón Rodríguez's character traits are crowned with a quotation from Germán Arciniegas's *América Mágica*, credited in the footnote (p.125). Rodríguez receives the same treatment here as Servando, except that the effect is to highlight his fame and significance in history: this time, the text refers to him directly, to his noblest character qualities.

It is significant that an autobiographical work has been selected as the main hypotext: a memoir, after all, requires and presupposes a preoccupation with the self. This is surely the perfect setting for reflections such as the fictional Servando's observations and reprocessings about himself and his actions and his condition. In certain respects, *El mundo alucinante* is relatively faithful to Fray Servando's texts. On a descriptive level, it follows the chronology of his text with some loyalty, in as much as it follows the logical sequence of events of any biography (childhood, adolescence, maturity and old age, in that order). It follows the basic ideological development of the man (his chief concerns in life evolve in the same sequence as they did in his memoirs: theology, antimonarchism, etc.). Free use is made of the *Apología* and the

⁵⁸ Rodríguez Ortiz, p.70

Memorias as hypotexts, however: language is not consistently imitated (and is distinctly 20th century in places), monologues and erotic adventures are invented, an entirely new verbal structure is intricately crafted using contrasting visions. The aim is not to tell the true life story of the friar, but an imaginary life.

The choice of autobiographical texts as the principal hypotexts for the novel and the fictionalised autobiographical nature of the hypertext itself require a nod to the characteristics of autobiography as a genre. Firstly, we must consider the distinction between “autobiography” and “memoirs”. For the purposes of establishing whether there is a different treatment of the friar’s writings and the body of historical text regarding his life in the hypertext, I have taken Perla Rozencvaig’s distinction between the genres as my reference point: she distinguishes autobiography as centring upon the individual, while memoirs centre upon the individual and his world. Many theories exist on the definition of these two genres, but my concern here is simply to provide a framework for exploring this aspect of the novel’s transtextuality: for my purposes here, then, this simple contrast is sufficient as a starting point. I shall consider whether the fictionalised work falls into one or other of these descriptions and whether, at any point, a preoccupation with self (inherent in both genres) lapses into vanity or self-obsession at any stage.

In accordance with the spirit of Genette’s proposed approach to transtextual relationships, I have chosen to begin with the most tangible contact with the hypotexts: the intertextual relationship sustained by *El mundo alucinante* with the *Memorias* and the *Apología*. Quoted text from the *Apología* is even underlined by the inclusion of footnote references to the source text. The quoted text appears in italic type, such as on p.112 (Chapter 17), where no less than four quoted excerpts from the *Apología* appear, along with the appropriate footnote reference. On the following page (p.113), a footnote reference is made to the *Apología*: not a quote within the main narrative, but a quoted piece contained in the footnote, to substantiate the veracity of the preceding fragment of narrative in the main text. It is clear that the inclusion of these intertexts here is part of a play on the veracity of an account of events contained in a memoir such as this. The footnotes and quoted text on these two pages refer to the itinerary followed by the friar, according to his own testament in the *Apología*, i.e. that he travelled via Hostiz, then, Baztan, Cincovillas, Ordaz, Añoa and then Bayonne. This, then, is the “certified” (hypotextual) route. Furthermore, the intertexts set the timeframe (Good Friday, 1801) and the historical/political setting in France at that time (the turbulent republic, governed by the Consuls, the first Consul being Napoleon Bonaparte). It appears that we have been

cossetted with concrete, immutable information, in the sense that, conventionally, where an individual's written testament catalogues events by place and time, that framework is generally undisputed. On the page immediately following, however, the information is very roundly disputed, with the effect that the reader is left with no supreme version of "what actually happened" at all: N[tú] bluntly contradicts the itinerary:

Jamás has estado en Madrid. Jamás has atravesado los Pirineos. Ni has pasado por todos esos lugares que mencionas y criticas. Bien sabes que el puente levadizo te lanzó de un golpe por los aires hasta Bayona. (p.113)

The inverosimilitude involved in a friar being catapulted all the way to Bayonne by a bridge is neither here nor there in the context of the novel: nonetheless, we are faced with a conflicting account of events which refutes the testimony of the real Servando as he recounts it in his memoirs. The militantly insistent tone of N[tú]'s affirmations belies the utter absurdity of its content, not only contradicting N[yo] but also Servando the historical figure himself.

4.ii Fray Servando and Odysseus

Fray Servando, the historical figure, is undoubtedly a hero of America's history. The hero of *El mundo alucinante*, however, is not a hero in quite the same mould. While he does possess certain heroic traits, he also displays some character qualities that make him altogether more human and flawed than, say, the homeric concept of the hero. Nevertheless, Servando (N[yo]) does come to liken himself to Odysseus on one occasion in the novel. The disparities and the constants between the two figures will be my starting point in looking at Arenas's hero. Inside Borunda's cave, Borunda puts Servando's head into his cavernous, bat-infested mouth; Servando recounts his thoughts at that moment: "Aquí moriré sin haber dicho el sermón, pensé, y recordé a Odiseo y sus penalidades con el cíclope" (p.27). Certainly, Borunda has a great deal of the ugliness and horror of a homeric monster about him but he, like Servando, also shows accessible, human emotions (disappointment that his manuscripts have never yet made it to publication, for instance). His cave, a frightful cavern furnished with a carpet made of bat-droppings and furniture made out of bat cadavers, is described as possessing "la oscuridad del laberinto" (p.27). The analogy is not a direct parallel, evidently, and there is some mixing of the homeric myths, but the hypertextual relationship here is global: all of Homer's

tales transformed as an element of the whole novel. While Servando does not slay or even outwit monsters during his quest, instead seeking out strange beings like Borunda and the witch woman to help him, he does escape capture repeatedly.

Servando's quest, in the best traditions of Homer, is to clear his name and prove (or at least vindicate) himself. The mission (his motivation) may not remain constant (as we have seen, Servando battles for a specific political cause appropriate to the moment as he develops) but there is a mission throughout his life. The task of the homeric hero is political and moral. Servando tells the bruja in Chapter 15 that his mission is Mexican independence: "podré yo al fin trabajar en lo que constituye mi fuerte y mi mayor anhelo: *la independencia de mi tierra*." (p.99). According to this statement – perfectly defensible, when we consider that the real Servando did, indeed, take a hand in securing Mexico's independence – this hero's task is also political and moral. This fits with the Servando we find in historical texts but does not chime with most of the reflective passages narrated by N[yo]. Moreover, Servando (the fictionalised one) has not come to see the witch to seek advice on achieving this goal for Mexico, but to ask her advice for himself, to get out of the cycle of persecution he is in.

The labyrinth motif also appears in Chapter 18: Servando is captive in the suspended gilt cage where Raquel has imprisoned him. Touched by the friar's sadness, the cook (who later turns out to be Simón Rodríguez) frees him from his cage, only to reveal that the whole palace is a maze of cages within cages: some 2000 interwoven cages in all. Throughout the novel, there is an architectural profusion in the settings for each scene: there are palaces full of statues that collapse; there are jails encrusted on top of other jails; labyrinthine city streets, etc. There is surely a morbidity about these settings, but also a certain dementia. The prisoner survives but cannot crack the logic of any of his prisons or their societies. Servando's Odyssey is a test, though, regardless of whether he achieves his objectives. The obstacles placed in his way become higher and wider but still his sequence persists: prison-escape-prison-escape, etc. Whether we see him as a triumphant hero or a failed one depends on where we choose to stop the train: even after his death there is, as we know, room for different perceptions. At the very least, he is both a triumphant hero and a frustrated dissident at the same time. His mission may change, but the basic structure of Servando's action is constant. He has a task to fulfil, but there is an obstacle. Like Odysseus, Servando needs to return to his homeland with "something" (be it his good name, a strategy for political reform or whatever). He does fulfil elements of the homeric heroic text: a mission to complete;

suffering the anguish of separation from the homeland; an element of purification in his journey (vindication); combat. His adventures certainly have the fantasy and colour of the *Odyssey* but, unlike Odysseus, Servando does not manage to survive his tests to then find peace at home. Instead, he returns to Mexico, now independent, still without a parish and still as bemused by the society he finds. After his trials and years of peregrinations, he finds only new difficulties and reasons for dissatisfaction. So, on a transformational level, some relationship does exist between the *Odyssey* and the novel. It would be spurious to suggest that *El mundo alucinante* was a hypertextual reworking of the *Odyssey* (or the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in conjunction, come to that), since there are many patterns of hero we could have taken to extract a comparison. Owing to the explicit references to homeric textual elements such as the labyrinth and the Cyclops, though, it is possible to affirm that a comparison has been drawn between the two heroes at certain points in the novel, wherein Servando appears implicitly as a hypertextual version of Homer's hero: some of the hypertext, then, transforms the hypotext on a macro level. We will keep this relationship in mind to consider later, in conjunction with the other hypotexts.

White and Mina are the anti-heroes of revolutionary struggle in the narrative. Servando, however, is also very much a revolutionary figure both in the hypotexts and in *El mundo alucinante*. Servando's *Memorias* were written in prison (first published in 1819), and his focus is centred on his political convictions and on the role he played in shaping Mexican government then. The Servando of Arenas's novel, though no less dynamic and involved in an equally fierce struggle, is a great deal more concerned with his personal struggle than with the political one. Still a hero and still a revolutionary figure, Servando in *El mundo alucinante* undergoes a subversion from his incarnation in the texts of the historical friar: he is still revolutionary in a generic sense (he is revolutionary in his outlook and attitude to existing authority), but he is not the revolutionary figure of the entries in historical works in the sense of a worker for the cause. His actions, on a basic level, may be much the same, but his motivation and his chief preoccupations are personal and do not chime with the image of the hypotextual Servando. Arenas's friar loses his self-control several times and sinks into depression even to the point of longing to die. In short, Arenas's Servando is a flawed hero. He does not glorify his victories but does dwell on failures (both his own and those of his country's political machinery). His heroic quality lies in his ideals sustaining him so that his (N[yo]'s) writing (transfigured as it is by the contradictions of the other narrators) can continue to advocate better things. Representations of dissidence and revolutionary spirit in the novel subvert conventional codes. In chapter 16, the underground, smuggler

clerics protect Servando during his journey to Pamplona. While their willingness to shelter the dissident friar might suggest political struggle, their main activity is contraband and their preferred topic for discussion is the market value of the wine they smuggle. Servando speaks at Hernán Cortés's reburial ceremony: although this is a documented action undertaken by the real friar (like so many in the novel), still the fact that it is included and described at some length in the fictionalised memoirs invites scrutiny in the light of the scepticism and self-analysis that characterise the hypertextual priest. Hernán Cortés, too, is a hero of History, but not America's history: he is the conquering hero for Spain and the Inquisition, the very objects of Servando's contempt throughout his travels in the novel.

The dream of a revolution is personified in Fray Servando, but his dream is crushed by the institutionalisation of the Republic just after independence. Both the real and the hypertextual Servando hold an aim for their country that is utopic. In *El mundo alucinante*, revolutionary activity is bustling in Europe, not least among Americans living in the Old Continent. England is the epicentre of revolutionary plotting and everyone seems to be planning one. What Simón Rodríguez imparts to his pupils in Paris is not philosophy but "esa nueva visión del mundo" (p.124). He inspires, but he also indoctrinates and, notably, Servando (N[yo])'s account of these proceedings makes reference to Rodríguez hammering his point home, but makes no comment on the content of his lessons or what his "point" actually is. Mme. de Stäel, who captivates Servando in Paris, is clearly pro-revolution and pro-Independence for Mexico. However, she too seems to have a gung-ho attitude to war and the violence involved in political struggle. She tells Servando: "aquí una vez se le cortó la cabeza a un Rey [...] (y aquí su voz se alzó ligeramente, casi con pasión) en cualquier momento puede volver a suceder." (p.131). She invests in gunpowder, expecting the empire and the Bourbons to fall. Still, she ruminates with Servando on the purpose and success of revolutions: in France, Revolution has been twisted from the original ideal but, if they had held fast to its principles, she wonders, would that have brought the people happiness? And could one live without an elite? Come to that, are the elite in fact more wretched than the wretched? The two ponder these questions, and she gives Servando a gift of a red flag bearing the Marseillaise. While he joins in with discussions on revolution (with Mme. de Stäel, and with White and Mina), Servando does not, however, lead the pack: he follows the discussion, but he does not initiate it.

As a fictionalisation of the historical hero, Servando affords the text the illusion of lustre, glory and realism. But his exposed obsession with his self accentuates the controversy surrounding this figure, making him more distant

but, at the same time, more palpable. He is not an immaculate hero, but is as capable of mistakes as the next man. His roles are equally undefined (priest, creole, anti-cleric), muddled even further by the fact that his characterisation in the novel hinges on his mental reflections as strongly as on his heroic deeds. If he is a revolutionary, then he is a revolutionary in flux, constantly questioning his own stance on what he sees. Arenas's Servando is an activist, but is also a polemicist and a satirist. In Servando, we are presented with a hero who is not without feelings of fear and trepidation: he is a hapless but human hero. He does assume the gentlemanly quality of the righter of wrongs (initially, wrongs against himself, latterly, against society), and it is in this capacity that he actively enters the debate on American Independence⁵⁹. The hypertextual Servando's task is concerned with reconciling the community with something it has lost: its preconquest self.

4.iii Servando and sexuality: seeking but not finding

Unlike the real Servando's texts, Servando's struggle is twofold in the novel: on the one hand, he battles as an American and dissident against the falseness of the Church and the Viceroy and, by implication, against his own initial acceptance of the Church's practices; on the other, he battles against himself on a sexual level and an expressive level. An internal struggle in Servando pervades the novel whereby Servando fights the temptation to fall from grace into literature or sex. He says of his struggle:

tenía que sobrellevar muchas batallas para no sucumbir. Pero la más terrible y más dura era la que sobrellevaba conmigo mismo. Entonces, con más furia, abría los libros y me ponía a dar brincos en la celda y veía cómo demonios tramoyistas iban apareciendo en cada rincón y me brincaban a las manos y me bailaban delante de los ojos gritándome: Cae, cae, cae'. (p.31)

So the struggle in Servando's head is intense; it requires enormous discipline on his part to resist the demons who urge him to "fall". The conflict in Servando is accentuated by the conflict between the narrators (in particular, the passages where N[tú] adopts an accusatory, despairing tone towards the errant friar and N[yo], in turn, internalises his traumatic experiences. It is a struggle not to fall into sin.

⁵⁹ See *El mundo alucinante* pp.145-146

Servando's tour through the King's gardens in Chapter 14 is unmistakably a hypertextualisation of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and it is during this visit that Servando reveals a great deal about this internal conflict. He is led through the *Tres Tierras del Amor* by *el muchacho* (his identity as the King is not revealed until after the tour of the three *Tierras*), as Dante was guided through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise by Virgil and then Beatrice. As in the *Divina Commedia*, the structure of this system of universes is based around the number three (the Trinity), and the three *Tierras* have classifications as to which souls are to be found there and what is the physical context specific to that level. In such a short space, a great number of elements from the *Divine Comedy* are condensed into the text. The young man who guides the friar is labelled only as his function; otherwise he is anonymous. He leads Servando through the *Tierras*, with their phantasmagorical goings on. They witness the drug addicts, who have their heads in the ground, then the nonconformists, who pass from the freezing pool to the boiling pool, dying in the process. Servando, like Dante (the character of the pilgrim Dante in his *Divine Comedy*), expresses a feeling of wanting to join certain groups of souls, according to his own weaknesses: Servando feels an affinity with the nonconformists. After this point, they enter the three *Tierras del Amor*.

Each *Tierra* has its own advantages but none of the three is perfect: they will not be travelling through Paradise. According to the young man, everyone belongs to one of the three *Tierras del Amor*. The way into the *Primera Tierra* is ablaze and a huge negro man appears out of the flames. He is their agent of transport between the *Tierras*, hurling them across to the other side of the flames. This brings them to the first *Tierra* itself: it is a sea of semen, where virile young men and desirable young women make love constantly until they fall dead and drown in the semen. Servando accidentally swallows some. From here, the negro throws them into the *Segunda Tierra del Amor*, a semidamp, gloomy sand dune. As soon as they arrive here, furious women assault Servando and the *muchacho* until they leave: this is where the lesbians are. They also make love to the death. The negro once again hurls the two men on to the next *Tierra*: he throws them through a bank of clouds, causing an electrical storm. The *Tercera Tierra* is pleasant: it is made up of pillows and a musician plays. Servando enthusiastically tells his guide that he likes this place. The friar is comfortable here and shortly falls asleep. He wakes to find himself being fondled by a man who appears to be uttering a strange prayer. Servando flees and escapes by hiding in the pillows. This is a clean place, where the semen flows along deep channels into the sea, where there are white seagulls. While

they are in this third *Tierra*, Servando affirms: “estimo que el placer no conoce el pecado y que el sexo nada tiene que ver con la moral.” (p.90).

Servando's attraction to these *Tierras del Amor* and his positive response to them conflict with the rejection of sexual activity he has shown elsewhere in the text (such as the advances of Raquel and of Padre Terencio). So there is a turnaround here, at least momentarily, from the struggle to resist temptation which Servando has expressed. In the third *Tierra*, the inhabitants are all men making love. Despite all the harmony in this place, something seems frightening to Servando, unlike his guide, who participates in the activity in both the first and the third *Tierras*. The men in the third level fuse together:

las parejas se iban disolviendo y cambiando de miembros. Así que aquel amor era poco duradero y terminaba, como siempre, colmado por el hastío. Hasta que llegaba la melancolía, como una especie de tristeza suave (p.90)

Only in the third *Tierra* does Servando make such an emotional observation. Although he initially expresses a liking for this level, in the end he likes none of the three *Tierras*. Unlike the *Divina Commedia*, these levels centre only around sex. The *Tierras* only show negatives: there is no reward, no “heaven” for the righteous here. Furthermore, as Filomeno and Cornide point out to Servando later, the King (the young man) did not show him the land of the irreverent, the land of the wronged-against or the land of those who will take over the world. The effect of Servando's reactions to the *Tierras*, however, does not leave us with the impression that this was a cautionary lesson, as the journey was for Dante; rather, it was a journey of discovery (self-discovery) for him.

Servando's ruminations allude to some potentially private and very much darker aspects of our hero, for instance his dubious virility and sexuality through his frequently expressed fear of rape and sexual encounter. The action (such as his rejection of women's advances) gives some clues to this, but his reflections elaborate and define them. Something of a pattern takes shape: he flees from what he seeks:

Y te retiraste solo, como te has de ver toda la vida: siempre en busca de lo que huyes. Pues bien sé yo que tú deseas lo que rechazas [...]. La infatigable búsqueda, la constante insaciedad de lo encontrado.” (p.26)

N[tú] affirms here that Servando desires what he rejects, and flees from what he seeks. He is in conflict, then, between his self-repression and his authenticity. *Orlando's* presence as a hypotext in *El mundo alucinante* plays a significant role in the ideological mechanism at work in the hypertextuality of the novel as a

whole. The apparent simplicity of the inclusion of Orlando as a character belies its significance. Orlando, here, is a hypertextual reconstruction of Virginia Woolf's character, caricaturised in *El mundo alucinante*. The parody at play allows Arenas to better bring out the contradictions of this "self", dissolved as she is into various incarnations. Arenas is clearly quite intimately familiar with Woolf's novel. Orlando, too, seeks something she will not find. The hypertextual treatment of Orlando in the novel is not restricted to the character of Orlando; the hypotext is the complete novel *Orlando*, hypertextualised in the whole novel *El mundo alucinante* (on an ideological level) and sections of it (on a syntactic level). In other words, the character Orlando is reworked in the figure of Orlando as she is characterised in Arenas's novel; passages from *Orlando* are imitated and transformed in passages from *El mundo alucinante*; and thirdly, on a semantic level, Woolf's text forms part of the complete hypertextual relationship between *El mundo alucinante* and its body of hypotexts. Woolf's Orlando crosses time, space and biological law to become a character who makes it possible to denounce a society through humour and language, a society in which women are disadvantaged, especially when they aspire to create and be fulfilled. Arenas's treatment of her reworks this: she reinforces the rebellion against and denunciation of the established order; at the same time, significantly, she alludes to plurivalent sexual identity and unconventional sexuality and its rebellion against an order that wishes to silence this minority.

Woolf's young Orlando starts out from a privileged position (a favourite of Queen Elizabeth 1st) and this allows her access to the monarchy and aristocracy in life. Her poem is the product of 300 years of work and literary evolution. In Arenas's novel, on the other hand, N[yo] finds his alter ego in a book of Mexican history and, more prominently in the person of Fray Servando. Orlando is constantly tagged with the qualification "rara mujer" in *El mundo alucinante*. She is a caring character, though and the effect is more fond than insulting. Fundamentally, Arenas brings together Servando and Woolf's Orlando, creating a connection between the friar and English society of that time. So Servando, with all the complexity of his kaleidoscopic self confronts the plurivalent aspect of Woolf's Orlando (her biology and sexuality) through the hypertextual Orlando. Both she and Servando seek some harmony in their identities and, significantly, in their respective sexualities, but neither achieves this. Servando subordinated his sexuality when he took his vows, electing the collective identity of the Roman Catholic priesthood over the individual identity his sexual realisation would have implied.

5. Conclusions: The “I” in the mirror

Plurivalent characters – especially those with multiple identities – populate *El mundo alucinante*. It is not only Servando whose identity is already multifaceted: Quetzalcóatl himself (Quetzalcóatl is a deity embodied as a feathered snake) is a crossing point between the universes of land and sky: he harmonises the two. Samuel Robinson/Simón Rodríguez introduces himself to Servando using both names: “yo soy ahora el gran Samuel Robinson, que en otro tiempo fui el sabio Simón Rodríguez.”. His identity, then, is in the same predicament as the fictionalised Servando’s: he has fused a former identity with a current one. He is one of the many kaleidoscopic and hypertextual characters in the novel who play on plurivalent identities. Simón Rodríguez of Caracas has abandoned his American identity and anglicised himself as Samuel Robinson. Fray Servando as we might know him – the historical figure we may have encountered in his writing and in the history books – is humanised in his fictionalised persona. He is endowed with flaws and negative emotions and a certain clumsiness that distance him from the heroic but arid definitions the prologue’s narrator (N[yo]) must have encountered in those *bibliotecas infernales*. As Eduardo G. González points out in his study of *El mundo alucinante*:

siguiendo el ejemplo de Reynaldo Arenas en su novela *El mundo alucinante*, conviene dejar al fraile dentro del *Gran Panóptico* para que, tanto su figura como el gran ojo que la asedia desde todos los rincones, puedan multiplicarse en libertad aprisionada.⁶⁰

Literature, history or any verbalised version of any “fact” is a hosepipe effect. Its mutation and transmutation is unavoidable and the individuals implicated in this process of immortalisation have no control over it. *El mundo alucinante* plays with the notion of authorship: it is impossible to distinguish the sole author of a text. Borunda gives us only a vague authorial reference for the “Clave para los Jeroglíficos Americanos” on which he bases his arguments for Servando’s sermon: the author he cites is called Cid Hamete Benengeli, an exercise in multicultural confusion in itself.

The final chapter of the novel synchronises times and spaces, not to mention cultures and even identities (these two we will examine later, in Part 5) on many levels. In a bizarre return to where the friar’s trials began, the poet José

⁶⁰ Eduardo G. González, “A razón de santo: últimos lances de Fray Servando”, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 92-93 (1975), p.593

María Heredia⁶¹ and a now elderly (and somewhat bemused and world-weary) Servando attend the procession to celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe but also, the same night, they go to the *culto de Tomantzin* in old Tenochtitlán. Place and street names resonate just as loudly as character names in *El mundo alucinante*: the vast majority are plays on their historical counterparts (Heredia, for instance), and it is vital to keep in mind that, although we are working with a hypertext of a collection of autobiographical works, we are moving in a fictionalised world and each name that chimes with a previous time and place also stands out as being a hallucinatory retake of that place or person. This final chapter is a riot of such resonances, evoking a plethora of former times and situations, replanting them in another context and thus fusing the multitude of settings it evokes in one carnivalesque scene. Heredia and Servando find themselves in a multigeographical paradise of flora and fauna: “Inmediatamente bajaron la gran escalera y se internaron en los jardines poblados de aves de todas las regiones...” (p.210). Servando and Heredia’s travels that night have them returning to the two rites – precolumbian and Roman Catholic – in a mesoamerican melting-pot paradise. It is at the same time a symbiosis and a reconciliation; the reconciliatory aspect, however, has a sting in its tail, since the object of much of the festivities is the prison-weary Servando himself, victim of society’s wrath when he dared to suggest such a fusion in his outspoken youth.

Paradoxically, it is the dissident, the revolutionary Servando himself who brings about the reconciliation of these universes, even though the manner in which it has come about has not been of his own design; his tragedy is that he may have become the hero, but he has had no control over the manner of hero he has become. Although Mexico has its independence and the two cultures have, at least superficially fused, Servando has not realised his missions in life: at no stage does he reflect on his life’s successes or celebrate his fame, but he laments his unwitting downfalls at every stage. His ultimate aims in life, though, are perhaps unattainable. He reflects on them in this final chapter: “Pensó que el objetivo de toda civilización (de toda revolución, de toda lucha, de todo propósito) era alcanzar la perfección de las constelaciones, su armonía inalterable.” (p.215). The hero’s task is idealistic and impossible and there is a certain recognition that Servando may have been chasing rainbows all this time; nevertheless, the drive for “perfection” is surely constant in the motivation of heroes throughout history. It is significant that he craves the “absolute” – “la

⁶¹ The fictionalized poet José María Heredia is a companion to a now elderly Servando when he returns to Mexico after all his life’s wanderings. Together they attend the procession in the final chapter of the work. The historical Heredia was a Frenchman of Cuban origin (1842 – 1905).

perfección, la armonía inalterable” – since these are concepts that, history has shown us, cannot exist (except perhaps in the constant and distant stars), when history itself mutates and distorts events and individuals over time. In this final chapter, we are faced with the inescapable feeling that our historical figure, our hero Servando may not have been who we believe him to have been; his motivations are based on the assumptions of others (the streets named after him in his absence are testament to that) and the persona we have attached to him may not be based on anything more than legend.

Like the ghoulish exhibition of his remains (Servando’s remains were sold in Argentina and travelled the world even as far as Europe as part of a circus show about the Inquisition), Fray Servando’s persona is up for public consumption and hypertextual reprocessing; as always, it is outside his control. So, unlike the homeric hero, Servando does not receive his reward of peace at the end, but is forced to accept his public persona (the collective purpose for his life). The cycle of his life and fame will continue: it has done already, projected into N[yo]’s present time and now, in this novel, perpetuated in ours. His history may constantly be altered and distorted, but he has become timeless. Rather than one “I” looking into the Other in the mirror, Servando, in this novel, has been reflected and rereflected to the point where, by the end of *El mundo alucinante*, we still do not have a tangible grasp of one characterisation or one lifestory. He has never had the opportunity to embrace his individual identity: when he is finally faced with his Other, in the shape of the public hero Fray Servando who looks back at him from the street name and the public adoration, it is already almost the end of his life. In a sense he has come full circle, since he has received the vindication he sought, but the journey has led him to an alien place where he does not recognise himself or his home. Like the narrative of Arenas’s work, and as we have experienced with disconcerting immediacy through the reading process involved in the multiple versions, Servando’s image has been filtered by generations and varying contexts, each with a different perspective to add to the multiplicity of manipulated reflections of the man.

CHAPTER 3

Narrators and Heroes: *La Pentagonía*

“Lo que resulta más alarmante, --reconcuño al final de la relación diaria, --es que el número de depravados criminales susurrantes en vez de disminuir con la persecución, parece aumentar.”¹

1. The structure of the pentalogy

1.i Introduction

Arenas's *Pentagonía* is a composite work, comprising five novels, each with its own set of characters and actions; it is declaredly a quintet in as much as the author has described this *tour de force* as his major piece of narrative work, created over the length of his adult life and intended to be read as a single unit². In setting the whole work in the context of its production, we should consider the conditions under which the texts were not only produced, but also the process they underwent in order to finally go into print. As yet, the *Pentagonía* has never been published as a single volume or even as a collection of texts by one publisher. *Celestino antes del alba*, Arenas's first published novel, went into print in 1967; *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* in 1980³; *Otra vez el mar* in 1982⁴; and finally, both *El color del verano* and *El asalto* in 1991 (both in

¹ Arenas, Reinaldo. *El asalto* (Miami: Universal, 1991), p.99

² For Arenas's comments on his *Pentagonía*, see his memoirs: *Antes que anochezca* (Madrid: Tusquets, 1992).

³ The first edition of the original Spanish version of *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* was published after the French translation of the work: Arenas, Reinaldo. *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1980); Arenas, Reinaldo. *Le palais des très blanches mouffettes*. Tr. Didier Coste (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975)

⁴ Arenas, Reinaldo. *Otra vez el mar* (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, 1982)

Miami)⁵; The dates of writing the novels are significant, since my study of the narrative will bring into question the notion of history as a perception of the past. When we come to look at the treatment of Cuba's past, present and future in these terms, we will need to keep in mind when "present" is, i.e. the time of writing the texts. The timespan involved in the production of the quintet as a whole will lead me to touch on the question of the promise suggested by Cuba's victorious Revolution and the divided perceptions of it in subsequent years. Again, my study is a purely textual one and I will be considering these questions as they are treated within the confines of the narrative. It is perhaps because the *Pentagonía* reached completion and publication piece by piece (and bearing in mind that the final two novels have been in print only since 1991) that so very little commentary has been produced on the pentalogy as a single entity. Substantially more studies have come into print regarding *Celestino antes del alba*. Only 22 years of age when he wrote the novel⁶, Arenas found himself the subject of several articles in appreciation of his work following the award of the national prize for a novel in 1965 ("Primera Mención" in the Concurso Nacional de Novela Cirilo Villaverde awards) and the book's subsequent publication in Havana in 1967⁷.

Since then, interest in *Celestino antes del alba* has been somewhat inconsistent (perhaps due in part to the fact that no further reprints of the book were produced in Cuba and it became unavailable to the Cuban public, except through library loan from the José Martí National Library, Havana), but various studies have appeared in print overseas, not least Perla Rozencvaig's substantial and thought-provoking section on *Celestino* in her book *Reinaldo Arenas: narrativa de transgresión*⁸. The majority of later research into the works has considered the carnivalesque and the notion of fantasy as they are revealed in the texts⁹. Until now, the practice has been for scholars to consider one of the *Pentagonía*'s texts as a single unit of writing (or, in the case of Félix Lugo Nazario's

⁵ These novels, like Arenas's memoirs, were published posthumously: Reinaldo took his own life in 1990, while in the advanced stages of AIDS; Arenas, Reinaldo. *El color del verano* (Miami: Universal, 1991); _____, *El asalto* (Miami: Universal, 1991)

⁶ Arenas was born in 1943.

⁷ See: Barnet, Miguel, "Celestino antes del alba", *La Gaceta de Cuba*, 10 (1967), 11-12; Lihn, Enrique, "Celestino antes del alba", *Granma*, 14 September (1967), 5; Diego, Eliseo, "Sobre Celestino antes del alba", *Casa de las Américas*, 45 (1967), 162 – 166.

⁸ Rozencvaig, Perla, *Reinaldo Arenas: La narrativa de transgresión* (México: Oaxaca, 1986)

book *La alucinación y los recursos literarios en las novelas de Reinaldo Arenas*,¹⁰ three of the five novels in separate sections of his study¹¹). For that reason, I have chosen to approach these novels as a complex of five elements. I have based the study of the quintet on the same principles and approaches as the overall hypothesis of my thesis: that is, I will approach the pentalogy from a structuralist standpoint as a means to considering the interaction between the levels of narration. These are dense and complex, not to say mostly lengthy novels¹² and, while I would have liked to produce an exhaustive study of the narrators and transtextual relationships in each work, and then, consequently, consider the collection as a whole, clearly the parameters of this study do not allow for such a long, two-fold type of study in a single chapter of a wider thesis. I have therefore explored the *Pentagonía* as a construct of five novels, each beginning again with a new setting and characters, but each, nonetheless, a piece in a greater whole.

The *Pentagonía* is not a series of novels charting a single group of characters. The works do, however, follow a certain continuity of setting and chronological sequence in as much as they are set in Cuba and in a sequence of time settings from the unspecified time frame of *Celestino antes del alba*, through the Batista years (*El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*), to the period covering the Revolution (1958 – 1970, in *Otra vez el mar*), the following 29 years (*El color del verano*) and, finally, the future in an unspecified year (in *El asalto*). The central of the five novels (*Otra vez el mar*) highlights the geographical setting of the pentalogy with its subtitle: *Otra vez el mar: una novela de Cuba*. The subtitle is a device which we will look into in further detail later in this Chapter, along with the other paratextual devices used in the construction of the novels and the collection. On a superficial level, then, what links the *Pentalogía* novels is

⁹ See for example: Cacheiro, Antonio, "El mundo alucinante: History and Ideology", *Hispania*, 79 (1996), 762 - 771

¹⁰ Lugo Nazario, Félix. *La alucinación y los recursos literarios en las novelas de Reinaldo Arenas* (Miami: Universal, 1995)

¹¹ Lugo Nazario's study explores *Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and *Otra vez el mar* from the *Pentagonía*; his book also considers *El mundo alucinante*, however, and peripherally makes more general reference to Reinaldo Arenas's prose work.

¹² The 1991 Universal edition of *El color del verano*, for instance, comprises 446 pages in excruciatingly small, tight print.

their national setting (Cuba)¹³ and the passage of time through the five narratives: we begin in an ahistoric setting with *Celestino antes del alba*, where there are no calendar time reference markers, other than the abstract setting of childhood as seen by the (unnamed) young boy who is its narrator; *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* follows, bringing with it a different set of characters (a new protagonist and group of narrators), but is set in Cuba under Batista's rule and its protagonist is an adolescent narrator; *Otra vez el mar* (the central piece in the five texts) is then set in the subsequent period in Cuba's history – an adult narrator/protagonist and another narrator relate the work, set in Revolutionary Cuba, between 1958 and 1970; in *El color del verano*, we find the Cuba of the future (between 1970 and 1999)¹⁴; the final novel of the collection, *El asalto*, is narrated by an adult narrator confronting a desolate, perhaps apocalyptic future¹⁵. As we will see, the narrators of the novels are different each time, but in each case the protagonist does follow the chronological pattern of a character who, albeit under a different identity and characterisation, ages with the progression through the pentalogy, from the boy in *Celestino antes del alba* to the much older man in *El asalto*.

As affirmed in the introductory note to the Ediciones Universal edition of *Celestino antes del alba*¹⁶, the editions of this novel published since its production have been many and various. In response to this problem, Arenas was consulted to produce a revised edition, authorised by the author, for Editorial Argos Vergara (Barcelona) in 1982: this edition appeared under the new title *Cantando en el pozo*. The Ediciones Universal edition I have taken as my text for reference and for study, published in 1995, is faithful to this authorised version in all but its main title (*Celestino antes del alba*), the title under which the first edition of the novel was published in 1967 in Havana¹⁷. I

¹³ However, I must point out that the setting is implicit for much of the narrative (especially so in *Celestino antes del alba*) and is perceptible, in places, only through regional vocabulary in conjunction with references to descriptions of the land.

¹⁴ The notions of "present time" and "future time" are a point I will return to for discussion later in this Chapter, when we will look closely at the hypertextual relationship the pentalogy plays out with the history of Cuba and with the expectations for her future according to the press and propaganda of specific times

¹⁵ Whether the overriding image of the future of the Island is indeed an apocalyptic one or whether the narrators and protagonists of the pentalogy as a whole leave us with an apocalyptic or despairing view or a hopeful one will be my concern in part 5 of this Chapter.

¹⁶ Arenas, Reinaldo. *Celestino antes del alba* (Miami: Universal, 1995); for introductory note, see this edition pp.5-6

¹⁷ Arenas, Reinaldo, *Celestino antes del alba* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1967).

highlight my choice of edition for the text, since the question of the novel's title will be relevant to the first stage of my approach to the pentalogy, i.e. my exploration of the structural division of the texts in the collection, and of the paratextual devices employed to denote this structure. It is worth bearing in mind from the outset that all of the novels comprising the *Pentagonía* were written meticulously, according to Arenas's account of his efforts to smuggle his texts out of Cuba, prior to his exile, as described in his memoirs *Antes que anochezca*: he recounts the circumstances of the creation of *Otra vez el mar* over several chapters, expressing his tenacity in rewriting the work a third time after the previous manuscripts were destroyed¹⁸. These are intricately constructed works, then, as *El mundo alucinante* is¹⁹. Of course, Arenas's memoirs only serve here to introduce the pentalogy: as with *El mundo alucinante*, I shall be approaching the work from a purely textual point of view and, again, authorial voice remains outside the focus of the study. Once again, I intend to examine the work from the text itself, in the hope that it will reveal the voices at work in the narrative. Much of the debate surrounding these five novels already explores the relationship between the life experience of Arenas the author and his novels; this textual and structuralist analysis is my, rather different contribution to the expanding discussion.

For the sake of brevity, I have provided a somewhat condensed outline of characters for the five works in this chapter. Unlike Chapters 2 and 4, I have not produced an exhaustive catalogue of paratexts or complete scheme of narrators for each of the five novels in this chapter. Rather, I shall deal with all of the novels collectively, having recourse to structural outlines and such like for illustration. While it would be fun to produce a thoroughly exhaustive picture of the construction of the pentalogy (and to catalogue and explore each and every device at play in the five pieces), it is not strictly necessary for the purposes of this approach to the quintet as a whole and, frankly, would occupy several chapters on its own. Similarly, a detailed account of the action and character entries in each of the works is not needed, so the outlines in this chapter are broadly painted and are intended to provide a context for the analysis. For the purposes of

¹⁸ The existing manuscripts of Arenas's works, including the various manuscript versions of the texts Arenas produced before his final revisions, are held in the Firestone Library collection, Princeton University, New Jersey.

¹⁹ As is *Viaje a La Habana*, as we will see in Chapter 4.

this chapter, I have slightly adapted the system of reference for sections quoted from the text that I have used in Chapters 2 and 4: this chapter refers to five texts for study, and so I have listed page references with an abbreviation of the novel's title, followed by the page number for the edition consulted²⁰. Once again, sections of text I have quoted appear as far as possible as faithful reproductions of the typeface and paratextual systems used in the original. Any italic type or other variations in the text appear in the original, unless otherwise noted after the text²¹.

In the first section of this chapter, then, I have approached the paratextual devices evident in the texts and the construction of the pentalogy. I have begun by considering these concerns as regards each individual novel: *Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, *Otra vez el mar*, *El color del verano*, and finally *El asalto*. I will follow these initial considerations with an examination of the structural and paratextual devices as they interact between the five component novels. As we will find, the paratextual devices present in the work will direct us to consider the next most tangible transtextual relationship in Genette's scheme: the intertexts²². Intertextual relationships abound in the pentalogy (as we will see) and require us to look into their relevance to the narrative. Then, in part 2 of the chapter, I shall look at the narratological structure of the works, at the narrators of each novel and at the relationship between the narration of the five component works. In part 3 of the chapter I will be concerned with history versus fiction, that is the hypertextual relationship the pentalogy sustains with Cuba's past (*Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and *Otra*

²⁰ The editions I have used for reference are: Arenas, Reinaldo. *Celestino antes del alba* (Miami: Universal, 1995); Arenas, Reinaldo. *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1980); Arenas, Reinaldo. *Otra vez el mar* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1982); Arenas, Reinaldo. *El color del verano* (Miami: Universal, 1991); and Arenas, Reinaldo. *El asalto* (Miami: Universal, 1991). I denote page references from the texts using the following acronyms: CAA (*Celestino antes del alba*); PBM (*El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*); OVM (*Otra vez el mar*); CDV (*El color del verano*) and EA (*El asalto*), followed by the page number from the relevant text.

²¹ I have insisted rather heavily on clarifying this point and I have reiterated it at various intervals during my study – a bit “belt and braces”, perhaps, but I am mindful that it can be confusing for a reader to encounter such graphic variations in quotations included in a doctoral study, since different researchers use different means to highlight elements of the text. It is vital to the paratextual portions of my study that the appearance of Arenas's texts should be illustrated and considered, and I am concerned to make the origins of the paratexts clear, even at the risk of labouring the point.

²² Again, this concept of “intertext” refers to the classification proposed by Genette, outlined in the theoretical framework explained in Chapter 1, i.e. explicitly quoted text from an external source.

vez el mar), present and future (*El color del verano* and *El asalto*). The heroes of the texts, between them, display dissidence, tragedy, hope and resurrection; in what measure the heroes of the work embody these notions will be explored. I hope to establish what the protagonists have exposed so far as regards “who the heroes are” in the novels we have been examining. As we found with the various narrator identities in *El mundo alucinante* in the previous chapter, in the *Pentagonía* too we will be confronted with an “I” in the mirror in each work: intratextual relationships between the protagonists of the five novels, then, will require analysis and this will be my concern. The narrators and the protagonists of the novels are inextricably located in the time and space frames of their texts, however, I shall come to connect the revelations from our study of the narrators and the protagonists with the findings of the structural (and paratextual) analysis of the first section of the chapter. In the light of these studies, I will then draw my conclusions on the narrators and heroes of the *Pentagonía*. As we will see, this is a weighty collection of dense and structurally complex texts; I have endeavoured, therefore, to illustrate how this complex structure operates and to what effect. The reading process for the pentalogy is no less vertiginous and challenging than in *El mundo alucinante*²³, and I hope my study in this chapter can go some way towards communicating the carefully structured text designed to produce that process.

1.ii Synopsis of the characters in the texts comprising the *Pentagonía*

I have outlined below, in broad terms, the characters who appear in the works of the pentalogy, in the order of the texts in the *Pentagonía*. I have left my outline rather general, and it is intended to provide some orientation and a context for my approach to the texts and to facilitate a reading of the study presented in this chapter.

²³ Or, for that matter, *Viaje a La Habana*, as we will see in Chapter 4.

Celestino antes del alba

Narrator (young boy): the narrator (and protagonist) of *Celestino antes del alba* is an unnamed young boy. He narrates continually and from the outset. The other characters are described in relation to him (“primos” = his cousins, and so on). He is the only remaining offspring of his impoverished, rural family. He lives with his mother, aunts and grandparents in the family’s decrepit farmhouse among their maize fields. He is naughty, as children are (throwing himself off the roof at his grandfather, for instance), but is not malicious, except in retaliation to the aggression and violence of his grandfather against him, or against his friend and cousin Celestino, in the accounts of their past. His relationship with the land and nature around him is harmonious, contrasting painfully with the discord between all the family members (except between the boys). He adores his cousin Celestino. Celestino is the narrator’s cousin, also a young boy, though he appears to be a little older than the narrator (or at least assumes the role of the “big brother”, the leader of the two). He is the only named character in the text, with the exception of one of their cousins (Eulogia), and the only central actor to be denoted by a proper name and not by his blood relationship to the narrator and the family. Celestino is dead in real time, but appears throughout the work as an active character, through the imagination and retrospective narration of his living cousin. The two are inseparable from the moment Celestino comes to live with the family following his mother’s death. Celestino is illegitimate. He was, in life, the black sheep of his family and has been both the downfall of his grandparents and yet his cousin’s salvation as his only friend and ally. His adult relatives consider him insane and despair of him with a zeal equal to Celestino’s passion for his poems; in that regard, Celestino is the dissident among the characters and he suffers the consequences for his rebellion. He writes his poetry obsessively, wherever he can; this means, in the poverty of this family home, that he carves his poems into the trunks of the trees around the house. The grandparents, like the narrator, are illiterate. Celestino is seen as an idiot, a freak and a dangerous child, such that his grandfather pursues him to make him stop and chops down any tree on which he carves his poems. This continues until the only tree left that has not received the wrath of the grandfather’s axe is the one from which the old man finally hangs himself. Nevertheless, Celestino never does “learn” to stop his writing: the more the old man

persecutes him, the more he perseveres. Celestino inspired his young cousin and becomes his hero. The two boys play together, the narrator keeping a watch out for their grandfather while Celestino carves his poems into tree (and latterly, bush) trunks; they even have to share a bed and huddle together through storms, angry grown-ups' fury and sadness. Celestino ultimately dies of a fever.

The narrator's mother is the object of his affection and protective instinct, but also (and more frequently) of his violent fantasies (as are his other adult relatives). She was abandoned by the boy's father after just a few days and returned, in shame, to raise the boy with her parents and (also abandoned) sisters. As a result, she has no authoritative role. She is exceptionally aggressive (like the other adults) and violent towards her son and his cousin. She (like her sisters) suffers as a result of her abandonment by her child's father. In the narrator's imagination (and in his narration) she oscillates between her tender, proud, maternal incarnation as the mother he imagines and for whom he can feel affection, and the diabolical figure who cuffs him for dropping the water buckets or shirking his chores. She appears more than once in the novel at the bottom of the well, where her son runs to look for her when he is told she has thrown herself into it. She is the object, at the same time, of her son's compassion, of the love and warmth he would like to give her, and of his disappointment, terror and loathing.

Abuelo is the narrator's maternal grandfather. His tragedy in life has been his lack of sons (he has only daughters) and the failure of his female offspring to marry or to remain married: as a result, he has remained the patriarch for the family in its entirety. His violence and fury towards his family (and his wife and grandsons in particular) is extreme: he rows with his wife constantly and is physically violent towards her. He hounds Celestino, taking an axe to whatever tree he carves his poetry on, until no trees remain. *Abuelo* is the figure of fear in the narrator's consciousness and it is he who inhabits the boy's nightmares, axe in hand.

The narrator's maternal grandmother is as violent and bloody-minded as her husband, to the extent that, although she and her family are already almost starving, she secretly kills the maize plants just before the vital harvest to spite her husband; as a result, the harvest fails and the family do go hungry. Intolerant and vicious with her grandsons, she is equally intolerant of her daughters: for their mother, they have been a curse in her life

and she perceives them as failures. She is, unquestionably the matriarch (she, not the narrator's mother is the female in authority as regards his upbringing), but is constantly at loggerheads with her husband: it is a power struggle between the two of them.

Los primos muertos are the narrator's (and, consequently, Celestino's) cousins, all dead now and so, like Celestino, frozen in childhood. They, along with Celestino, are the narrator's companions (he has no living companions at all; his older relatives never, ever show him companionship, play with him or share joy with him): they gather in his imagination on the roof of the house to sing songs and to plot how the narrator will kill their grandfather. They are not named or described: we are not told how many primos muertos there are (but they sing in chorus, so we can assume there must be more than two at least) or which aunts have borne and lost them, or indeed how they all died. The aunts, like the narrator's mother, are the victims of men who abandoned them in one way or another. They, like the mother, have returned in shame to their parental home and so have relinquished the role of authority in their own lives. Like the other relatives, they work the land to survive in this excruciatingly harsh environment. They lament their misfortune in life but do not participate in the action of the text except peripherally to the narrator, Celestino, the mother and grandparents.

Eulogia is the only cousin to have a name. Moreover, she is the only one whose characterisation is fleshed out with details surrounding death and the last days of her life. The only information we have about her, though, is this tragic account: there is no description of her personality traits. We are told that she goes out one day from the family home to find firewood and never returns: her grandfather raped her (there is also an allusion to previous rapes, though it is not clear who the perpetrator of these attacks has been) and she takes to the hills to hang herself.

El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas

All the characters from *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* narrate portions of the text. Fortunato is the protagonist; he is an adolescent who is restless and desperate to escape from his beastly family; Fortunato writes prolifically, using his grandfather's reams of paper; he decides the only way out of his unbearable situation is to run away and join the revolutionary rebels; he does, but must find himself a weapon in order to join

them and, when he attempts to steal a rifle from one of Batista's soldiers, he is caught and later hanged. Onérica is Fortunato's mother; she is absent, since she has gone to the U.S.A. to live, where she is a nanny to another family's children; she narrates only through fragments from her letters to her son. She is now obsessed with Misael, who abandoned her and their son, Fortunato. Digna is Fortunato's aunt; she has two children (Tico and Anisia), but has been abandoned by her husband. Adolfinia is Fortunato's maiden aunt. She is at the same time grotesque and pathetic, she dreams of being beautiful and of being adored by a man. She kills herself by setting herself alight following one last, failed attempt to find a man to whom she can lose her virginity. Celia is generally thought by the family to be mad. She is obsessed with the death of her daughter, Esther, who poisoned herself, aged 13. Polo is Fortunato's maternal grandfather; he is an immigrant from the Canary Islands who came to Cuba to make his fortune; his unfortunate fate was to produce only daughters, and they, as it turns out, have all been left single or abandoned by their menfolk; Polo is a broken, silent man. Jacinta is Polo's wife but, in contrast to her husband, she is loud and prays and blasphemes with equal enthusiasm. Esther (Celia's daughter) is dead, but she speaks with Fortunato; she committed suicide at the age of 13 and so is frozen, like her cousin, in her adolescence. Tico and Anisia are brother and sister, (Digna's children) and were abandoned by their father. They are the exponents of childhood in the novel, as distinct from adolescence.

Otra vez el mar

Héctor is the protagonist and second narrator of the work, Héctor is a grown man and the husband of the first narrator. The five characters (Héctor, his wife, their baby son, the older woman and her adolescent son) find themselves together at the seaside for 6 days' holiday: the narration centres around those 6 days and the perceptions, thoughts and dreams formed by the two narrators during those days. Héctor is the only character to have a proper name. Héctor's wife is slow, careful and sensitive, yet she also displays vulnerable human qualities: curiosity, jealousy, insecurity and a certain nostalgia for something she cannot define. The older woman is a simple, domestic, rural woman of around 50 years of age. She is the mother of the adolescent and lives to care for and nourish her son; she tends to see things at their simplest; although she is gentle, family-

orientated and asks for very little in life, her “settling for the bare minimum” in life makes her seem all the more pathetic. *The baby boy* is the 8-month-old son of Héctor and his wife; the baby is a symbolic character, embodying hope, expectation and questioning with his wide eyes. *The adolescent* is the older woman’s son; he is fundamental to the action and to Héctor’s journey of self-discovery, even though he does not narrate; he is Héctor’s Other, the ego he has to face reflected before him; for Héctor, the young man is the mysterious friend, at the same time an angel and a devil, beautiful and dangerously desirable.

El color del verano

The characters in *El color del verano* are too abundant to catalogue exhaustively: part of the fun of the work is precisely the absurd number of extraordinarily colourful, theatrical and often grotesque characters who appear. I have outlined only those characters to whom I will make reference in my study: with the exception of the fictionalised “real” individuals I mention below, along with Fifo, all of them populate the frantically erotic but desperately repressed world of *La Tétrica Mofeta* and his peers, and participate in the adventures of the group in Havana. *La Tétrica Mofeta*, a.k.a. Reinaldo, is the protagonist in the work, the character goes by both names. He is both a homosexual and an obsessive writer (he even obsesses about his precious manuscript as he is dying). Like the other gay male characters, he frenetically seeks out sexual encounters. Sakuntala is another gay man, who patronises Reinaldo with his intellectual superiority, sometimes correcting his narration. *Venus Eléctrica* is an Italian homosexual; he is turned into a walking electric execution machine by the Oslo Academy of Sciences²⁴. *La Glughú* is another gay man and friend of *La Tétrica Mofeta*; like the others, he is distraught because of his fading youth. *Santa Marica*, a.k.a. Cortés is known as the patron saint of queers and a martyr of the homosexual world, Cortés dies a virgin (and so no-one can ever prove that he was homosexual); the other gay men seek to have him canonised and offer prayers to him. He is grotesquely ugly, with huge, repulsive teeth (although he is a dentist). Tedeoro is permanently joined to Volume 27 of Lenin’s Complete Works; his sex drive is so

²⁴ I will discuss this rather bizarre undertaking further ahead in this chapter.

powerful that he even comes back from the dead several times to seek out a man for sex. Virgilio Piñera is a fictionalisation of the real individual (renowned writer and dissident homosexual of 1960s and 70s Cuba, and the real Arenas's great friend and mentor). José Martí²⁵ is a fictionalisation of the real historical figure, the national hero of Cuba. José Lezama Lima appears as a fictionalisation of the real individual (renowned writer and dissident homosexual of 1960s and 70s Cuba, and Arenas's great friend and mentor; also a great friend of Virgilio Piñera). Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda appears as a character, a fictionalisation of the real individual. Fifo is the dictatorial leader of the State; he is bisexual but is the only character who is unable to engage in active and passive sex with men, even though (whether or not he denies it) he would be happier if he could.

El asalto

The narrator is unnamed, male and mature: though we are not told his age in years, his status as a senior (and much-feared) Counterwhisperer in the repressive authorities of the State has been achieved over time. Also, he is determined to track down his mother before she dies, so it is fair to assume that he will be a man at least in his late thirties, or probably older. He is unnamed in the narrative, though in this society names are now obsolete and forbidden: people are classified by number. The narrator is known to fellow-Counterwhispering agents as the "cruel one"; defined by his activities for "the good of the state", he continues with his persecution of the public for the crime of Whispering with zeal and indiscriminate cruelty. All verbal communication is forbidden (hence the prohibition of Whispering; the crime is punishable by death or, worse, Total Annihilation²⁶). The narrator has an overriding fixation, though, and it is not to uphold the principles of the State: his driving force is his obsession with killing his mother before she dies of natural causes and thus denies him the possibility of killing her himself. He must kill her, before he metamorphoses into her. His aggression and condemnation-happy pursuit of whisperers is merely an outlet for his fury and violence against his mother. He undertakes a tour of every residential area and every penitentiary on the Island in search

²⁵ José Martí (1853 – 1895), poet, lawyer writer and vehement supporter of Cuban independence. Martí was fatally wounded at Dos Ríos in 1895. He distinguished himself as a founder of Modernist poetry, and also as a dramatist, novelist, essayist and political writer.

²⁶ I will discuss the punishment involved in Total Annihilation later in this Chapter.

of his mother; he obtains permission from the High Secretary (“el Gran Secretario”) to undertake the hunt for her based on his allegations that he has reason to believe his mother is heading a Whispering movement in the country. The High Secretary is the second-in-command to the Représident (“el Reprimerísimo”) himself, and is extremely powerful and shrewd; he is also the narrator’s commanding officer, and it is he who permits him to carry out his search for his mother; he is a figure of authority, menace and control. The Représident has been the head of state for many decades and has reshaped society beyond recognition to create a state where vocabulary has been reinvented and even sexual intercourse may only be carried out under observation, with the appropriate permit and for the permitted time. He is elusive in that he is above contact with the public or the lower ranks.

The narrator’s mother is also the narrator’s prey. Until the closing pages of the work, she is a shapeless, undefined character: all we know of her is his hate for her. With the final scene the identity of the elusive mother is revealed: she is the Représident. The woman (unnamed, of course) appears when the narrator happens to meet her during his travels around Cuba; they make eye contact (which is not permitted) and run into each other on two more occasions; ultimately, she tries to seduce the narrator and he, repulsed by sexual behaviour of any kind, kills her. The man without language is a fellow recipient of a medal at the Représidential anniversary celebrations. He and the narrator wait together to receive their awards, which is long enough for the narrator to discover that the man is to be given a medal for entirely forgetting language (except for the stock phrases permitted by the authorities).

2. Paratextual devices

As we discovered with *El mundo alucinante*, the inclusion of graphic changes in the text, quoted segments from external texts or, indeed, titles and subtitles in Arenas’s narrative is not arbitrary: this is certainly suggested by the intricacy of the paratextual systems employed in the *Pentagonía*. The five novels do not, as we might expect,

maintain a rigid stylistic continuity. Chapter title systems are totally different, as, indeed, are the overall titles of the novels: there is no consistent element to the titles of the five works and their respective subtitles (where these exist). As isolated phrases on paper, the titles of the five novels bear no evident relationship to one another:

1. *Celestino antes del alba*
2. *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*
3. *Otra vez el mar: una novela de Cuba*
4. *El color del verano o nuevo jardín de las delicias*
5. *El asalto*

They refer to a character (Celestino), to animals and a palace, the sea, seasons and nature, Cuba and, finally, to violence. On this level, there is nothing to connect the action or the characters, or, for that matter, the ideology of the novels. There is no consistent system to suggest that these five works form a single collection, or that they will treat a succession of time settings in (approximately) the same geographical setting. Even if we were to consider *Celestino antes del alba* with its revised title *Cantando en el pozo*, we could make the same affirmation. So far, then, we must rely on the various editors' notes (each of the editions I have used for reference has one to the same effect) to infer that the novels conform the pentalogy at all, unless the reader has some prior acquaintance with Arenas's memoirs. In the case of *El color del verano* and *El asalto*, Arenas's original manuscripts of the novels were sent to the publishers along with an introductory note, penned by the author, describing the pentalogy and loosely summarising the content of the novels²⁷. Such notes and external texts do not fall within the scope of our considerations for this textual study, though, since they do not form any part of the original narrative text for the pentalogy. In other words, if we were to read the *Pentagonía* as a freestanding collection of text (and if the editors' notes were to magically disappear), with no other awareness of Arenas to condition our reading, nothing on a titular level would tell us that these novels are in any way connected. So we keep reading: if we were to read the novels in sequence, we would first be confronted by the somewhat fragmented format of *Celestino antes del alba*: the narrative text itself is

²⁷ For the complete author's note, see back cover of *El asalto* (Miami: Universal, 1991)

barely broken up (it does not, for instance, divide into subnovels as *Viaje a La Habana* does²⁸).

The novel is fragmented by a peppering of intertexts throughout the narrative: these appear on separate pages, apparently distributed randomly (but always one at a time) throughout the text, not at regularly counted intervals nor with any indication at the start of the text (such as a table of contents) to present them or to state their function. They simply appear, without warning or preamble or explanation of the quotation's relevance, and credited to the appropriate source. I will look at the nature and sources of these intertexts in due course. Before we enter into the main narrative (with these interruptions), though, we are first confronted by a rather lengthy collection of pretexts: a dedication²⁹, followed (on a separate page) by the first two of three intertexts, credited to Oscar Wilde and to Jorge Luis Borges, respectively: "Pero ninguno se atrevía a mirarlo a la cara, porque era semejante a la de los ángeles."; "Amanecerá en mis párpados apretados."³⁰. On the following page appears a complete poem quoted from Federico García Lorca. The intertexts here demonstrate a preoccupation in the text with intertextual relationships and with the game involved in the reading process particular to directly quoting a section of text, credited to its source, for the reader to then associate with the narrative itself. The text quoted from these three authors demonstrates a familiarity with external texts which will be borne out by the further development of intertextual techniques later in the work. In order to appreciate the reading process created by *Celestino antes del alba*'s structure, it is necessary to consider these devices as they condition the reader at each stage in the reading experience. So, when the reader encounters these intertexts prior to reading the narrative (i.e. having read only the title of the novel), the texts still resonate with respect to the undoubtedly enigmatic title of the work: Celestino, of course, is the name contained in the title; as yet we have no indication of who Celestino might be or what relevance the dawn should have to his characterisation and the action. The section of text taken from Oscar Wilde, though, echoes his name: "Pero ninguno se atrevía a mirarlo a la cara, porque era semejante a la de los ángeles" (p.9): the face that cannot be viewed is too celestial to be looked at, recalling the celestial

²⁸ See chapter 4 part 2.

²⁹ "Para Maricela Cordovez, la muchacha más linda del mundo", p.7.

implications of Celestino's name. As we will discover during the course of the narrative, the other characters are threatened by his "otherness": Celestino embodies qualities that are alien to them and as a result, they fail to see him for who he is. The text from Jorge Luis Borges also recalls the title of the work. The text is as follows: "Amanecerá en mis párpados apretados" (p.9). Just as the previous intertext took up the first element of the title (Celestino), this second one echoes the second element: the dawn. It links the dawn with imagination, at the same time marking the difference between the dawn in terms of realism (the dawn you see with open eyes) and of imagination (the unreal, imagined dawn seen in the mind, with the eyes closed). The notion of fusing the imaginary with the real, as we will see later, characterises the narration of the text.

Following the intertexts, on the next page, we begin the narrative proper, without chapter division or titles of any kind. The narrative proper is continual and does not break off to include the intertexts, which appear on separate, right hand pages. They are not evenly spaced through the text, so they are not a divisional mechanism to separate sections of the text. Their function, then, is not structural but intertextual. The first quoted segment of text appears on p.21 (without warning of any sort: the narrative text on the facing page continues uninterrupted over the page, after the intertext). From there on, intertexts are sprinkled through the narrative. In Appendix 2, I have quoted the intertext and catalogued it along with the source to which it is credited in the novel. As we can see, the intertexts are plentiful and, apparently, random in their choice of source and the position of their insertion in the text, in as much as they are not linear, do not belong to a single genre or source and do not appear at regular intervals. Apparent randomness is in fact unlikely to be arbitrary in Arenas, and we will look at these intertexts again in a moment, in conjunction with the other novels. For the moment, though, let us consider the effect of such a number of intertexts spread throughout the novel on the reader's experience of the narrative. It jars with the child's narration to be interrupted by segments of intertext quoted from such a diverse (and apparently unrelated) range of sources, from "Mi tío loco Faustino" to Rimbaud, from Shakespeare to Sophocles, and from the contemporary Cuban writer Eliseo Diego to the Bible. It is disorientating in the extreme, and more so due to the fact that the narrative continues uninterrupted from the foot of the

³⁰ Attributed to "Wilde" and "J. L. Borges", respectively, both p.9.

preceding page onto the page following the intertext as though the quoted piece were not there at all: the narrator, then (the unnamed young boy), does not display any awareness of this device and the narrative makes no reference to it. We are not given any warning or explanation regarding the insertion of these quotations and are left very much to question and interpret them as we will. As we will see further ahead, they do play a role in the relationship between the novels of the *Pentagonía* as a whole.

El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas is also characterised by its architectural nature. Paratextual devices in the text continually break with typographical conventions, such as titling systems, format, columnisation and changes in print size within the main narrative, introduction of italic type and indentation of the text. Like the other texts of the quintet, it is a highly visual work. The title itself is enigmatic and magical: it embodies a contradiction in juxtaposing the palace (“El palacio”) and the skunks (“mofetas”). Skunks are incongruous as the inhabitants of the palace of the title and, indeed, there are no skunks present in the work in a literal sense. It would appear, on the surface, to be a nonsense title, constructed to mislead: certainly, the initial effect on the reading process is one of confusion and fantasy. The skunks of the title are not only personified but are elevated to royal, human status, qualified further by the magical, physical description of the creatures: they are not simply “mofetas” but “blanquísimas mofetas”, conferring on them an ethereal, pure quality which takes the incongruity of the title to a level of fantasy. At the same time as the opposing images elevate the animals to regal positions, it could be argued that the palace is downgraded: it may be a palace of magical beings, but the fact is that they are skunks, with all the repulsive associations the image of a skunk calls to mind (with the foul-smelling liquid it secretes when it senses danger). The title produces a sense that all is not what it seems and its contradictions are challenging to the reader.

The novel is subdivided into three “Partes” (*Primera*, *Segunda* and *Tercera*): the *Primera Parte* consists of one chapter, enigmatically entitled “Prologo y epílogo”. The title of this opening chapter subverts chronology as well as literary convention, since prologue and epilogue, like alpha and omega, would conventionally include “everything” (all the narrative text) between them. One chapter title, then, includes the beginning and the end, perhaps a circle rather than a finite ending (since we are at the beginning of the

work). Linear sequence has been subverted and, with it, the time lapse we would normally expect between the prologue and the epilogue. The narrative of the Prologue/Epilogue continues this contemporaneousness: the characters' obsessions are iterated almost simultaneously, patchworked together without separation. There is no extradiegetic narrator here to herald the introduction of a new character's narration; the next voice simply narrates a section of the text, and it is not clear at this stage whose voice is whose.

The Segunda Parte is subtitled "Las quejas de las criaturas", subdivided again into 5 chapters called "Agonías" and listed by number (*Primera agonía, Segunda agonía*, etc.). On the surface, these titles would seem to be purely negative, even suggesting a victim status among the "criaturas", since their text is largely made up of their complaints and their sufferings. The effect is heightened by the repetition of the title "Agonía". The Tercera Parte breaks even this convention and comprises two elements: the first, a play, is listed as "La función", followed by the second, which is the sixth and final "Agonía". The sequence of the textual structure is broken by the interruption by the play before the sixth and final "Agonía". A play in the middle of such extended "suffering" clearly breaks with convention. The title of the second part of the text conveys that the "creatures" are not simply complaining about particular questions, but they are defined by their complaining ("hablan las criaturas de queja"). It is not until further ahead in the main narrative that this complainant stance is qualified and clarified, when the text explains:

Pero qué era Dios para ellos. Dios era, ante todo, la posibilidad de lamentarse – la única gran posibilidad. Dios les ofrecía la oportunidad, que todo hombre necesita para no llegar a ser monstruo absoluto, de ser a veces niños: criaturas de queja, de enojo y de llanto [...] (PBM p.171)

According to the narrative, "lamentarse" is far from being the act of a victim, as we can see from the qualification in the text above: it is described as the only great possibility open to these individuals and goes hand in hand with a conscious decision to allow themselves to experience complaint, anger and tears. Far from undermining them, then, the "quejas" undertaken by these creatures ennoble them and reveal them to be proactive. Similarly, the "agonías" which define their collective narration turn out to be very far removed from the paralysing agony one might associate with the term. "Agonía" appears

in the narrative as an essential life force for these characters: “Atrevesar el mar, palpar otras etafas, otras agonías. He aquí algunas de las cosas necesarias, imprescindibles, para que luego tengan sentido las invenciones.” (PBM, pp.88 – 89). So, for these characters, suffering is a necessary part of life and a spur to “invención”. The implementation of the word “agonía” to denote the chapters also evokes the title of the quintet itself: la *Pentagonía*. The notion of agony or suffering as it is treated in the text here, then, is pertinent to the work as a whole. *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* is a collage of incongruous elements, collectively subverting the norms associated with their usage. Interspersed through the narrative are segments of text, apparently taken from newspapers and from the beauty advice section of a woman’s magazine. These sections of text appear in smaller font, giving the impression that they are clippings from the press, cut and pasted directly into the narrative text. They seem to be pieces stuck into a scrapbook or an album, amongst the snapshots of narratives told by the family members, which gives the impression that these pieces are objective, like press reports, in contrast to the narration of the family members. They also link the family to their setting in the collective society: these are (apparently) texts for mass consumption which will have found their way into thousands of family homes, connecting the members of this family with the community of this time and space and with their collective experience of their circumstances in Cuba at that time. Press cuttings, then, mirror the collective experience of their reading public.

The device of inserting a play within a novel opens yet another textual possibility for Arenas, freeing him from the confines of literary convention. The play is a phantasmagorical drama where the characters of the narrative act out their individual obsessions in an intensely macabre scene. The play observes the conventions of stage directions and dramatic script, but is misleadingly titled and its literary convention is flouted: through the text of the “Función”, there are footnotes to the text, crediting the sources of the quotations used. So the play does not adhere to the conventions of theatre, whereby every part of the text has a function in the performance, whether as the script for interpretation on stage by the actors, or the stage directions to be visibly translated into movement on the stage. Footnotes, clearly, have no place in these conventions. The structure of the work is confounded even further by the inclusion of an index for the

novel: the index lists all the sections of the text I have mentioned so far, but ignores completely a fundamental and entirely incongruous level of the narrative: the three sections of text which appear at the end of each of the three *Partes*, all entitled “La mosca”.

Otra vez el mar is composed of two parts (“Primera Parte” and “Segunda Parte”), subdivided into 12 segments: 6 “Días” and 6 “Cantos”. From the denomination “Días” one would assume that the text of these sections would in some way conform to the suggestion of a sequence of days’ events, perhaps as diary entries or some kind of testimonial text. Furthermore, it would seem from these chapter titles that their content would refer to the daytime, and not the night. These reference markers turn out to be as disorientating as those Arenas has used in *El mundo alucinante*, however: the account contained in the “Días” consists of imagination, reflection and memory of a much more distant past than might have been suggested; moreover, la mujer’s most personal time of day is in fact the dusk (nightfall, not day). What we see on the surface levels of the text belies what is contained in the thoughts of her narrative, then, just as her outward appearance as the modest wife belies the erotic contents of her imagination. It is also poignant that the titling systems of the first and second parts of the novel should contrast as they do: while la mujer’s half of the narration is subdivided into “Días”, and these are numbered with the ordinal reference before the word “Día” (“Primer día”, “Segundo día”, and so on), the second half (Héctor’s narration) is the mirror image of this format: the numerical part of the title follows the word “Canto” (“Canto primero”, “Canto segundo”, and so on). So their respective narrations are juxtaposed: the adjectival position highlights a mirroring effect between the two *Partes*, as though one character’s account were being reflected in a mirror. The titles used are highly unconventional in a 20th century prose work: “Días”, then, suggests a text of the character of a journal of some kind, while “Canto” (reminiscent of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*) suggests a lyrical quality in the text and, perhaps, a poetic format. While neither text delivers on the stylistic implications of the terms, there is still a marked difference between the concerns conveyed by the two characters in their respective texts: while la mujer is more concerned with the events and circumstances which took place, or may take place in the future, her husband is, indeed, more concerned with expression. As if to further subvert

convention, following the Cantos of Part 2, there is a section of the text entitled “Notas”: this title appears to be an anomaly in a work of narrative fiction (Notes would be more conventionally accepted in a non-fictional work).

The paratextual devices, then, provide some rather mixed and disorientating messages to condition the reader’s initiation of the narrative. Much as with *El mundo alucinante*, the reader is being challenged to read deeply into the potential misguidance of these markers in the text. In any case, the reader’s curiosity is incited. The subtitle, as we have seen, situates the novel from the outset in a recognisable geographical setting: Cuba. Still, it is important to observe that the subtitle does not state that this is a novel “set in Cuba”, but rather that it is a novel “de Cuba” – of Cuba, about Cuba, and/or from Cuba. There is a dedication, to Jorge and Margarita Camacho, thanks to whom, we are told, *Otra vez el mar* did not have to be written a fourth time. I have kept to my principle of eliminating authorial presence, except where Arenas is fictionalised in the text itself, so I shall not elaborate on the creation of the novel in this section of my study. However, this aspect of the textual production does appear as a fictionalised part of the action in the next work of the quintet, *El color del verano*. Preceding the narrative, we find a quotation from Octavio Paz: “La memoria es un presente que no termina nunca de pasar” (OVM p.7). Even before we begin the narration, our reading is conditioned by an observation on memory which negates the conventional concept of the sequence of time. Indeed, memory will be the axis of the narration of the work: the two narrators each have their own memories and their own versions of the collective experiences they have shared as husband and wife.

In *El color del verano*, the subtitle to the novel is in fact an alternative title: *El color del verano o nuevo jardín de las delicias* suggests an “either or”, rather than the hierarchical structure of a main title followed by a subtitle (which usually has the function of clarifying or expounding on the main title’s descriptive scope). The “jardín” and “delicias” of this title resonate with notions of abundance, pleasure and fruitfulness, even evoking images of the Garden of Eden. The underlying suggestion planted in the reader’s mind as we open the novel, then, is that the narrative will relate to a paradise, a

concept roundly contradicted by the experiences of the gay men³¹ who suffer the repression of the less-than-utopic society depicted in the narration of the Tétrica Mofeta. However, the Island (Cuba) is a potential paradise, even if that potential is not, and perhaps never can be realised: in the final chapter (entitled “Historia”), Cuba sails away (the whole island, population and all) to seek a new and better location where the country can blossom and be free; bickering sets in among the citizens as they engage in a power struggle, until Cuba comes loose from its moorings (it was not attached to any kind of platform) and sinks to the bottom of the sea. The potential was there to create a new Eden, then, but human greed prevented it from being achieved. Figuerova, though, thinks he has found Nirvana in the abundant numbers of gay men he can have sex with, even in a society which forbids the activity: he does not like straight men, just “pájaros” (queers), and it seems Havana is choc full of them, despite the fact that (in theory) no queers are allowed under Fifo’s regime. The Eden Figuerova has found (or thinks he has) is fraught with irony. The “jardín de las delicias”, then, is a space where the body can and does succumb continually to lust. This desire and the game of carrying it out as far as possible is as much the pursuit of the persecutors as it is of the persecuted. The text begins with a section of dramatic text, rather in reverse order to the structure of *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, then moving into prose narrative in the second chapter of the work. The play is entitled “La fuga de la Avellaneda en un acto (de repudio)”, evoking an immediate reference to the hypertextual treatment the historical figures will receive with their characterisation in the text. Notably, Avellaneda, José Martí, Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima – the great and glorious writers – are the only characters who do not undergo a name change from their “real life” personae. Arenas himself figures as a character in the text (a fictionalised version of himself), but he also goes under the nickname of “La Tétrica Mofeta”.

El asalto, too, makes use of paratextual devices in its structure. It does not avail itself of the same colourful, diverse techniques as do *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and *El color del verano*, since this is a single narrative, subdivided into chapters, which in turn are titled and numbered in sequence: “Capítulo I, Vista del Mariel”,

³¹ I refer specifically to the gay male characters in the work described as “pájaros” (queers) in the text, i.e. La Tétrica Mofeta and his companions.

“Capítulo II, De lo que le avino a Don Quijote con una bella cazadora”, “Capítulo XX, El sueño de Víctor Hugo”, etc. The orderly, sequential structure of the chapter numbers, though, is confounded by the titles of the chapters: these appear to have no relevance whatsoever to the narrative content of the chapters themselves (Chapter XX, for instance, has nothing whatever to do with Víctor Hugo) and there is no discernible cohesion between them. It is the same kind of apparently haphazard grouping as we encountered with the intertexts placed at intervals throughout *Celestino antes del alba*. Similarly, the titles of the chapters in *El asalto* cover a large and diverse range of external references (Don Quijote, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Los cuatro dioses del cielo según los chinos* and Peter Pan, to name but a few). As with the intertexts of *Celestino antes del alba*, the titles of this text conform to a convention intended to orientate the reader, but as a unit and in conjunction with the narrative of the chapters, they are baffling and disconcerting. At the end of the work (immediately after the end of the main narrative text) appears an “Índice”, listing the chapter numbers, titles and the sources of the text used in the title. This apparently conventional device, which one would assume is in place to provide guidance and a concrete system of reference for the reader, also turns out to be a false friend. The references contained in the index are not all they seem and, indeed, four of the references in the index of chapter titles are credited to and quoted from texts by Arenas:

Capítulo XXIII. De la visita del fraile a los jardines del Rey. (Reinaldo Arenas, El mundo alucinante).

Capítulo XXVIII. Prologo y epílogo. (Reinaldo Arenas, El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas).

Capítulo XXXIX. La Gran Parca, la Parca la Parquita y la Parquilla. (Reinaldo Arenas, El color del verano).

Capítulo XL. Último final. (Reinaldo Arenas, Celestino antes del alba) [EA pp. 144 – 146; all Arenas’s italics and underlining]

Even on a purely intertextual level, then, there is an explicit relationship between the works of the *Pentagonía*. It is evident that there is a self-referentiality at work in the *Pentagonía* (extending to another text by the same author, *El mundo alucinante*). Even within this component text of the quintet, though, the text is autoreferential in character: the final chapter of the work is entitled “*Capítulo LII. El asalto*” (the same as the title for

the novel), but this is not credited to the author as Arenas's other texts are in the index . At the end of the main narrative, a phrase appears announcing the ending: "Fin de la Tetragonía"³² (EA p.141), alongside the dates and places of writing the novel: "La Habana 1974" and "Nueva York 1988" (both EA p.141). So the references citing the author and source text for the quotations from the *Pentagonía* novels, in conjunction with this reference to the quintet of works, of which *El asalto* is the last, reveal a self-referential character in the work.

However, as we have discovered, there is an adventurous, not to say thorough use of many and varied paratextual devices in these five texts and, evidently, the techniques are specific to each work. The relationship between the systems at work in the individual novels reflects the context in which the work is set and from which the narrator or narrators speak. In the case of *Celestino antes del alba*, it seems extraordinarily incongruous at first that there should be such a variety of intertextual references interspersed through a text narrated, as it is, by an illiterate young boy. It is precisely this apparent incongruity that is so revealing, however. While none of the characters in the work except the hero (Celestino) can read or write, the text flashes up examples of the diversity of language and expression at irregular intervals throughout the reading. Subliminally, the intertexts are underscoring the value in Celestino's struggle: language is lifeblood. The intertexts are not all taken from literary sources, however (see Appendix 2), but are credited to family members in some instances (*mi abuelo, una de mis tías, mi tío loco Faustino, mi madre*, etc.). It is unclear who the voice behind the quotations can be said to be: logically, of course, we could say that the boy narrator of the narrative is the narrator who credits these phrases using the possessive pronoun ("*mi*" *abuelo*, "*mi*" *madre*³³), but that poses a question: are we to assume that the other intertexts have no narrator (they are not part of the verbal narrative text, so they need not have any narrator other than the author), but that these personal references can be attributed to the boy? Or, conversely, is there some game at work in precisely this method of attributing the intertexts? It is clear that the reader is not to be given any information in a direct fashion that does not involve some challenge and, it would seem, we are to be left with a feeling,

³² In *Antes que anochezca*, Arenas never refers to the quintet as the "Tetragonía", but always as the "Pentagonía".

rather than a description or an explanation, that expression (as reflected in the intertexts) can take many forms.

The chapter titles of *El asalto* are also seemingly discordant with the systematic austerity and formality of the narrative and its sequential structure and linear action³⁴. However, as we will find further ahead in our examination of the work, the multicultural and inconsistent nature of the titles is in fact more incongruous still when considered alongside the attitude to such works and sources as are evoked in the titles in the Represidential State in which the work is set: not only books, but language itself is banned in this society. Indeed, expression of any kind (whispering, even) is punishable by execution without trial (trial does not exist). The juxtaposition of the titles with this aspect of the narrative, though, serves to highlight the absurd extremity of such a society (what if each and every one of the chapter titles represented a field of expression that had been unilaterally wiped from the public's consciousness?). Each chapter title, indeed, serves to symbolise an aspect of linguistic or literary expression: Victor Hugo³⁵, Cervantes³⁶ and Homer³⁷ evoke particular cultural periods and genres of writing, not to say the cultural heritage of their respective countries. Titles such as "Acerca de mis películas" (EA p.126), and "Capítulo el capítulo" allude to artistic forms of expression such as film, criticism and literature. The titles evidently step outside the consciousness and experience of the narrator of the work, since he has inhabited a world where language itself is a capital crime, never mind such modes of expression as film (suggested by "acerca de mis películas") or prose writing (suggested by the mention of chapters), or indeed literature of the periods and forms evoked by many of the chapter titles. They stand in striking contrast to the stark, joyless society the narrator of *El asalto* knows.

³³ See Appendix 2.

³⁴ I will discuss linear action and narrative in *El asalto* in part 2.v of this chapter

³⁵ See chapter title: "Capítulo XX. El sueño de Víctor Hugo. (Aloysius Bertrand, obra citada)" (EA, p.43) [Arenas's italics]

³⁶ See chapter title: "Capítulo II. De lo que le avino a Don Quijote con una bella cazadora. (Miguel de Cervantes, El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha)" (EA, p.7) [Arenas's italics and underlining]

³⁷ See chapter title: "Capítulo XII. Principálía de Menelao. (Homero, La Iliada)" (EA p.29) [Arenas's italics and underlining]

2. Narrators, narratees and protagonists in the five novels

2.i The narrators and their settings

Celestino antes del alba is narrated by the child narrator who is Celestino's cousin. The narrative is non-linear and is made up of flashbacks and embroidered memories, interspersed with fantasy and observations in real (present) time. Nowhere in the text is there any reference to concrete time markers such as date, year or a historical event which might situate the action in a specific temporal setting. To that end, it is an atemporal setting, where the only context is the rural cuban location and the primitive living conditions endured by the family. The boy does not attend school (indeed, there is no mention of any schooling in the experience of anyone except Celestino and all the other characters are illiterate), so we can deduce that the setting is prior to the universal availability (and obligation) of primary schooling. Proportionally, action in the present (narrated in real time) is very little compared to retrospective and fantasy narration by the boy. Realism in the action narrated lapses into magical action at the drop of a hat and, logically, with childlike simplicity. When the narrator beheads a lizard (realism), he continues narrating without a break to describe how the headless lizard continued to live and to taunt him; similarly, when he observes the clouds overhead, he tells how two clouds crashed into each other, smashing into tiny pieces, which fall to earth right onto the house, razing it to the ground and decapitating his grandfather in the process. The boy lapses between the narration of the action and the narration of his fantasy. He recounts how he and Celestino sit out a storm together, then lapses into how explaining how he loves when it rains because, when it stops, flocks of birds come out and make so much racket that Celestino can hardly hear him talk: he has slipped from narrating the action of sitting out the thunder storm into abstract reflection on the rain and into fantasy (for birds to be so loud as to be deafening breaks with the realism of the two boys waiting for the storm to pass). He then breaks the flow of his narration, announcing that, actually, he did not see any of those things (the rain and the birds), and apparently returns to the narration of the action where he left off: only that he has taken the narration into fantasy, and continues by telling how a thunderbolt came and told the boys to watch out or it would

sizzle them. He continues in this stream of fantasy and describes how his mother then appears, turns into a fish, and, feeling sorry for the poor, frightened boys, she gets into bed with them to comfort them and keep them warm. He takes the fantasy to its logical deduction: she cannot keep them warm because she is a fish and so is too clammy, so she dives back into the rising water and swims away.

The unselfconscious, smooth progression from the realm of reality into that of fantasy is consistent with a child's imagination. It is not unusual, of course, for a child to have imaginary friends (a dead cousin, say), or for his playthings to be the elements of nature he finds around him, particularly in a situation where he has no playthings, no toys or possessions of any kind and must, therefore, rely on his own head to provide games and stimulation. Much of the narration, then, is a mental and imagined focalization of the world by the child narrator. His focalization crosses maniacally between the real and the magical, such that the borders between the two worlds are blurred; visually, the crossover between the real and the imagined is almost rhythmic, and the descriptions are as visual as they are challenging. For example, his mother splits the narrator's head in two and one half of it dances tauntingly in front of her; from this fantasy, the narration cuts to everyone dancing in the roof of the house³⁸. The two scenes are connected with lexical continuity, continuing the vocabulary from the first scene into the next as well as the dancing motif: the paragraph ends from the first scene as follows: "La otra [mitad de mi cabeza] se queda frente a mi madre. Bailando. Bailando. Bailando." (p.14) The narrator's stream of consciousness leads him to stay with the "dancing" image and transfer to the beginning of the following paragraph with the same word ("Bailando"), but altering the actors: "Bailando estamos todos" (p.14). The next paragraph again picks up the dancing motif, beginning with the same word again and shifting the location: "Bailando yo sobre el techo" (p.14). He narrates with a childlike, stream of consciousness logic, without differentiating between the world of fantasy and the world of reality. The narration flows as idle imagination does, with his mind wandering from the real into the unreal and back again. Figures such as the dancing image are hammered home through insistent and visual repetition. The images of crosses (from the cemetery) and hatchets (abuelo's axe) are treated in this way: they are the images that haunt the narrator's nightmares and his

repetition of them exposes his obsession, his mind focussing as it does on the image of these objects alone: the bare image, without any action taking place, is enough to occupy his thoughts for the duration of the repetition in the text. The repetition serves to drive home the symbolic resonance of these two figures: violence and death.

The opening of the text involves a play on tenses; the narrator tells us first: “Mi madre acaba de salir corriendo de la casa” (p.13) (present tense). He then re-positions the action in the past tense: “iba gritando que se tiraría al pozo” (p.13). He then moves back to the present tense: “La veo flotar sobre las aguas verdosas” (p.13). Although the tenses change, the action is all fantasy and remains in sequence. The effect of mixing the tenses, though, blurs the parameters of the time setting, establishing the same “vertigo” effect on the reader as in *El mundo alucinante*: is he narrating an event in the past or is he observing, narrating in real time? As in the rest of his narrative, the past and the present coexist, the recounting of the times when Celestino was alive (he is now dead) is conducted both in present and past tenses, such that the temporal setting is unclear. It is in his narration itself that the narrator reveals his age: although we could deduce that he is a young boy through his status in the family and the comments and instructions his relatives direct to him, the form of his narration is childlike, as are his concerns. He constantly “observes” magical goings on, but they are based on the games of a child, such as tormenting the gheekos around the yard and throwing things off the roof of the house. The reading process is one of befriending a child and is all the more intimate and heartbreaking for being so. The reader is taken into the confidence of this little boy with his narration of the monstrous thoughts that populate his head, the childlike euphoria he feels from simple things like dancing and laughing for no reason, and the secret thoughts he has (like the affection and compassion he would like to express to his mother but feels he cannot) which he does not confide in the adult characters.

He is entirely alone in the cruel world of his family home: he relies on his narration to keep his companion Celestino alive, and on his imagination to reincarnate his cousins and personify the animals and objects that pass as his toys and friends. Even the animals, though, have a violent and cruel relationship with the boy, and there is no escape into a joyous place, even in his thoughts. The lizards he plays with (and not always

³⁸ see CAA p.14

gently, at that) make him cry, because he is convinced that they hate him; he responds in pain: “¡Cabronas! les digo, y me seco los ojos” (CAA pp.13 – 14). In his imagination, which is his playroom, his games can be fatalistic and reflect the lack of affection and reaffirmation he receives in his real relationships. The animals are not, as one might expect from a small boy, his friends and companions: they are all he has to rely on as company, but he perceives them as a threat and an enemy. Violence is ever-present in his imagination: when he torments a lizard and cuts it in half, he tells us that one half runs away, while the other half spasms on the ground in front of him³⁹.

His dead cousins are very much alive to the narrator, and he does not recognise the boundary between life and death. The conventional, adult notions of death are anathema to him. When his mother takes him to the cemetery to visit his cousins’ graves, he has not grasped her concept of the grieving and the tombs. He asks her: “<<Para qué tantas cruces>>” (CAA p.15). He is unaware of the Christian and macabre connotations of the crosses, and the sadness attached to them. To him, they are incomprehensible as is the idea of sadness during this outing: as far as he is concerned, they are simply going to visit his cousins, not to mourn them. His mother cries openly, but the narration still undermines the conventional graveside tears: “mi madre [...] lloraba a lágrima viva y se robaba una corona fresca de una cruz más lejana.” (CAA p.15). Had the narration of the novel been solidly violent and phantasmagorical, the childlike quality and the subversion involved in the reading process could not have functioned as they do: it is the inclusion of black, ironic humour in the narrative that infuses the text with dynamism and prevents the reader from becoming complacently comfortable with the course of the narration. Despite her tears, then, his mother sinks into thieving from another grave. She explains the presence of the crosses to him in adult and conventional terms, but her son misunderstands, interpreting her explanation literally. She tells him the crosses are there: “para que descansen en paz y vayan al cielo” (CAA p.15). He describes his response to her explanation: “Yo arranqué entonces siete cruces y cargué con ellas bajo el brazo. Y las guardé en mi cama, para así poder descansar cuando me acostara y no sentir siquiera a los mosquitos.” (CAA p.15) So he has taken his mother’s comment word for word and hopes to “rest in peace” by enjoying a good night’s sleep. Humour aside, though, this

³⁹ See CAA p.14

reveals the gulf between the concepts of the narrator and those of his adult relatives. His grandmother finds the crosses in his bed and scolds him, not (as one would expect) for defacing the cemetery and disrespecting the dead, but because there is a firewood shortage. She takes the crosses from him to burn as fuel. The notion of grief and Christian death may be part of the adults' culture and consciousness, but their poverty overrides them, even to the point of leaving graves unmarked. So, as children do, the narrator takes adult utterances literally: he hears the words, but does not process them as the speaker intends and so the communication breaks down between them. When his grandmother curses him, saying "mejor sería que te murieras" (CAA p.18), he is aware that her tone is angry, but is not hurt by it: for him, death means being with his dead cousins and so is an attractive prospect. The remark does not hit home, since he agrees that death would be a better situation for him.

In *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, all of the characters from Fortunato's family narrate the text at intervals. Their narration is mixed up through the text and appears without any denomination of who is speaking, i.e. there is no exodiegetic narrator to affirm who speaks in terms of "...Fortunato said.", for instance. As we will discover, the discernment of who speaks when is a process the reader undergoes gradually. There is no linear advancement through the multiple narration of the same or overlapping events: the situation of the characters remains static, but the characterisations mutate constantly, as the collection of perceptions increases. Tico and Anisia narrate through the riddles that are their favourite game. The riddles befit their contradictory and enigmatic characterisation: they are at the same time children and, as such, possess a childlike wisdom that is lost on entering adulthood, yet their games and riddles are cruel. They are a fusion of opposites, both innocent and wise and both innocent and cruel.

The title of *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* is referred to only once in the narrative of the novel in a direct fashion, in a comment by Esther. She says:

Nos elevamos y no elevamos hasta que creemos estar elevados, y caemos, como siempre en el Palacio de las Blanquísimas Mofetas, donde todos, alineados en el gran salón y provistos de largas garrochas, nos están aguardando para comenzar, otra vez, el espectáculo. (PBM p. 257)

According to Esther, then, it is human nature to aspire to something and believe that one is reaching it, only to realise that it was the wrong road and leads always to the same place. It is the inevitability she attributes to this process that is most revealing about this family: life is a drama which recurs over and over again and unavoidably leads to the Palace of the white skunks and not to the dizzying heights the characters sought to scale. Indeed, these characters do play out their aspirations, quite literally, uncovering the tragically illusory nature of their unachieved aims. The Palace is a motif that recurs in Adolfina's fantasies, but the palace she envisages is the sumptuous palace where she will live in luxury and adoration: "Yo, Adolfina, la mujer más bella del mundo. Regreso ya a mi palacio rodeada de un enorme coro de príncipes" (PBM p.252). The palace of Adolfina's fantasies is filled with princes; according to Esther's warning, the palace of princes will turn out to be a lie: Adolfina, like all of us, will end up in the palace populated by the white skunks. Indeed, during the play, a chorus of princes does appear; however, so does a chorus of beasts. Even the chorus of princes, while they do sing and hover around Adolfina, they lift her skirts to expose her burned, disfigured legs: the notion of Adolfina, the most beautiful woman in the world in her palace of princes has been grotesquely subverted to underline her disfigurement and suffering. The play, then, is set in the Palace: it is a palace of dreams, but not in the sense of a scene of unimaginable luxury, rather it is a setting where the characters' dreams and ambitions and obsessions are acted out. Esther and Fortunato encounter a castle during the play, and they link arms to go inside together. Esther comments: "En otros tiempos dicen que éste era el lugar ideal para los sueños" (p.290). The castle, then, is no longer the perfect place to dream: it was once and remains of the past, but it can no longer deliver on the dreams. Indeed, when death appears – the end of life, not the character of Death personified, who is menacingly present from the opening line of the work – the castle vanishes.

No explicit connections are drawn between the juxtaposed accounts of the narrators, nor is there any hierarchy applied to their versions (no particular narrator is favoured over the others). The narration has a simultaneous, immediate quality: even if a retrospective appreciation of the events narrated reveals that events did not occur at the same time, the simultaneous narration gives the effect that they do. For instance, Fortunato does not venture forth to steal a rifle on precisely the same night as his aunt Adolfina goes out to

make her final, desperate attempt to lose her virginity but the episodes are narrated in tandem and rain falls on both Fortunato and Adolfinia, giving the illusion of simultaneity. Adolfinia looks through her photograph album and hankers after the abolition of time. Indeed, time in the novel is all but erased; events are recounted by the narrators like photographs in an album: each character has a particular point to dwell on, and the occurrences they narrate appear as snapshots transposed onto the present and devoid of any sense of the linearity of time. Repeated narration of the same events by different narrators (or by the same one) undermines the presence of time as sequence in the text, since the retelling of events subverts the linear quality of the action. The chapters of the narrative are “agonías”, after all, and suffering is emotional rather than actional. The recounting of an occurrence by more than one narrator exposes the different impact that event has on different characters.

Otra vez el mar begins at the end of the six days by the sea when Héctor and his wife (the second and first narrator of the work, respectively) leave the beach. Both characters begin to speak from this point in time, though the narrative is divided (as we have seen) into two entirely separate narratives, with Héctor’s account following his wife’s. They speak, remember, imagine and reflect, mixing real time (the moment of their narration, that is the time as they are leaving the seaside) with their flashbacks and ruminations on what the future may hold. In this way, though the actional time is very short, the narration lapses between the timeframes of childhood, adult memories, fantasy (which has no time frame), future, and recent past. Their narration sets out from the experiences of the six days by the sea or, at least, their differing perceptions of and observations regarding what has happened. Héctor’s wife narrates in the present tense throughout Part 1: her narration leaps between actional timeframes, from memory to more distant memory and back to the present, the future, and so on, and yet the narration is recounted in the present tense. This erases the boundaries between these time frames and gives her narration a sense of immediacy and timelessness. Nightfall is the time of day when her emotions can blossom: it is at dusk that she can give into her feelings and she experiences joy and peace, detaching herself momentarily from her conscious ruminations and her memories and allowing her to simply feel and become an integral part of the nightfall. The wife’s dreams include female mythological figures, notably a hypertextualised Helen of Troy,

who appears in the work imbued with an intense sexual appetite, in stark contrast with the wife's abstinence and modesty. Night, then, is her time and it is charged with the erotic implications she does not live out beyond her fantasies. Her suffering is evident: she appears to be trying to live, seeking to live but not quite managing to.

El color del verano is the first text in the pentalogy not to be narrated by members of one family. *El color del verano* narrates the adventures of a plethora of extraordinary characters⁴⁰: their experiences are erotic, for the most part, and the action centres around the events which befall a group of "pájaros" (gay men), all of whom are obsessed with sex and with their lost youth. It is a riot of bizarre undertakings, many of them macabre: they are humorous but, at the same time, they expose the impossible repression of the society in which the "pájaros" attempt to live sexually and (for La Tétrica Mofeta/Reinaldo) intellectually fulfilling lives. The work is vibrant with absurd and phantasmagorical events, such as the character Venus Eléctrica's experience: he (he is a gay man, an Italian) is converted into a walking electrocution machine by the Oslo Academy of Sciences, who make him an international spy and insert high-voltage cables in his rectum, to shock and thus execute any man who attempts to have relations with him. The description is outrageous and laced with black humour but, the fact remains, he illustrates to what extent homosexuals are persecuted. Not only is a system in place to entrap and execute them instantaneously, but a homosexual such as Venus is considered so inhuman as to qualify as a tool for execution. Subversion of concrete references is at work in this novel as much as in the others. Tedevoro, we are told, has an enormous sexual appetite, so much so that he comes back from the dead to look for sex: however, the narration tells us that he returns from "la tumba o el mar cinco o nueve veces" (p.198). Not only is it unclear where he is buried (in a terrestrial grave or at sea), but the number of times he has repeated the process is confounding. Five or six times would be a logical description for a vague number, but five or nine is just disorientating. The narration is extraordinarily dynamic, leaping as it does between realism and the absurd, between intrigue and nonsense text, such as the chapters with onomatopoeic titles which

⁴⁰ For the absurd quantity of characters in the text, see the cast of characters ("intérpretes principales"), CDV pp.11 - 13

contain no action and do not add to the character development, but play with the sound and rhythm of language⁴¹.

There are two very significant paratextual devices in *El color del verano* which I have not yet considered, and I have elected to explore them now due to their bearing on the reader's introduction to the setting of the work. The first of these is a section of text which appears prior to the dramatic text ("La fuga de la Avellaneda", CDV p.10): it is a paragraph of narrative addressed in the following manner: "al juez" (CDV p.9). So we are confronted right away with the identity (or at least the title) of the narratee for this section, the judge. The text is signed "El autor", and so we have an endodiegetic narrator (the author) and an endodiegetic narratee, the judge. Incongruously, the text of this paragraph opens with another direct address to its narratee, as follows: "¡Un momento, querida!". The conventional expectations planted in a reader's mind by the initial title "to the judge" suggest formality, sobriety and even reverence, but these are negated by the opening phrase, which is colloquial, intimate and (as we will come to appreciate in the light of the sheer number of queer characters in the narrative) potentially camp. The informality of the text continues in the "tú" form of address (hardly likely to be used when addressing a judge conventionally). The text warns the "judge" to be aware that the pages she is about to read is a work of fiction and therefore the characters therein are only fictional; it would therefore be inappropriate for the "judge" to proceed (as the "author" narrator alleges) with the intention of having the author imprisoned as a result of the work. The author-narrator's final comment in this section reminds the "judge" that the novel is set in 1999 (the future), and so it would be unjust to charge the writer as a result of something fictitious which has not even taken place; in the narrator's words, "sería injusto encausarme por un hecho ficticio que cuando se narró ni siquiera había sucedido." (CDV p.9). By implication, if the narratee is the individual about to enter into the following pages, then the warning is directed to the reader: so far, then, the accusatory nature of the narrative makes for a disconcerting reading process. Following this text is the cast of characters to be involved in the play. Before the text of the play itself, though, a further warning appears which reinvents the reader as a member of the fictitious theatre audience (transposing the reader from the dubious role of "judge"). The section of text is entitled

⁴¹ See for example chapters entitled: "Abre obra obre ubra" and "Bra, bre, bri, bro, bru"

“Aclaración importante a todo el público” (CDV p.14) and, indeed, it does conform to the formal conventions of a warning to the public one might find in a theatre programme. The contents of the notice are highly disturbing, however: the text explains that during the performance one member of the audience will be shot dead, and that the spectator (the narratee) must undertake to sign the form below accepting his own responsibility for the event, should he/she be the unfortunate individual to suffer it. At the foot of the page, the indicated spaces appear for signature, name and address. Unsettling as the nature of the “aclaración” undoubtedly is, the effect of this device in the text, along with the text directed to “the judge” is twofold: on the one hand, the function of the two sections of text is to condition the reader’s perception of himself in relation to the text, characterising the reader first as the author’s adversary and, then, as a member of the public audience about to see, rather than read, an imminent performance; secondly, these techniques indirectly but emotively set the scene for the upcoming text as an extraordinarily threatening context, where a reader’s habitual attitude to a text is likely to be censorious and where taking a bullet is a risk one might reasonably weigh up on a trip to the theatre. These are the processes shaping the reader’s perspective of the text at the outset, and they make for a wary, if not incredulous entry into the dramatic text which begins the work. There is an element of interaction involved, then, in challenging the reader/audience member to take a risk in embarking on the text: rather like an inquisitive child being told not to open something dangerous, the reader is undoubtedly going to take the risk he has been warned about, now that his curiosity has been incited. Indeed, the world of *El color del verano* is fraught with threats for the gay characters who inhabit it.

The construction of *El asalto* is notably more sparse and austere than that of *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and *El color del verano*, in that it is a single, complete piece of narrative text (no theatrical text is included or visually striking blocks of repetition), but there is a play on literary convention at work in the text: the narrator (the Counterwhisperer) recounts his text in a businesslike fashion, in keeping with the role he has taken on and with the rigour of the social control in the State. The text is ordered and sequential, following (unusually for Arenas’s texts) a linear narration of the action, like a log book or journal, with the events of each period charted and described in order and in the present tense. His formal narration conveys his ice cool (cold, even)

persona. However, cracks occasionally show in the discipline with which the character narrates: he repeatedly lapses into whispering himself as he goes about his daily business and, when the stress of searching in vain for his mother, his frustration shows in his narration. While searching for her at the penitentiary, he inspects the prisoners and incites one of them to look at him: his narration of this episode shows a momentary breakdown in his composure: “Yo, entonces, para seguirle el juego, o para fatigarlo, o para prolongar su agonía, o para entretenerme, o váyase usted al diablo, me coloco un poco más adelante y lo observo.” (EA p.81). When he tires of the formality and the justification, the narrator slips into emotional outburst, saying “o váyase usted al diablo”: the composure is not perfect, therefore. As we can also see from the segment of text above, the question of multiple possible versions of events and of the motivation behind an individual’s actions is a prime concern here. Even the narrator cannot categorically say what motivated him to entrap this man; he offers various possible interpretations but, even for his own motives, he cannot discern which is correct. The multiplicity of perceptions and the distortion applied to an individual’s reputation has reached mad proportions: execution orders are handed out, and carried out, without trial and on the whim of the Counterwhisperer; to be seen to be motivated by the doctrines and misteachings of the regime is the only important thing.

2.ii Communication and expression

Successful dialogue is painfully lacking among the characters of the works, despite the obsession with self-expression demonstrated by their protagonists. They suffer the misconceptions of other characters (and the terrible results of those misconceptions), yet they do not succeed in expressing themselves in such a way as to be heard. By the same token, for all their valiant efforts (and, indeed, they are valiant and even heroic) to express themselves in language no matter what, they are existing in a context that does not hear them or permit them to assert their own voices.

In the context of the narrative in *Celestino antes del alba*, the boy narrator’s wild imaginings provide the raw emotion that comes from stream of consciousness narration

and exposes the isolation and bitter reality of his world, where no adult actually engages in dialogue or verbal exchange with him. The only two-way conversations in the text (where one interlocutor hears and processes the expressions of the other, then responds, and so forth) are imaginary, or take place between the two boys: the conversations between Celestino and the narrator qualify as real in the sense that the narration recounting these discussions is retrospective, but does not imply unreality; the other dialogue is between the narrator and his imaginary mother (the gentle one of his dreams, who strokes his hair and talks to him softly), or between the boy and some imaginary or non-human being (a personified lizard, for instance). Like the narrators of *El mundo alucinante* (and, as we shall see in Chapter 4, like the narrators of the three Viajes of *Viaje a La Habana*), the characters of *Celestino antes del alba* do not communicate, despite their need to speak and be heard: Celestino's poems are there in graphic clarity on the tree trunks all over the family's land, but no one else can read them (they are not able to read), and will never read them once they have been eliminated by the swing of *abuelo's* axe. Indeed, the grandfather's assumption is that the poems will be of some negative value: he cuts down the trees that bear the writing in the belief that the poems will be either frivolous or dangerous. In any case, whatever they do say, we will never know, since not even the sympathetic Narrator can read them. Even though he defends Celestino as he writes, the narrator is not defending the poems themselves, he is protecting his cousin from harm. Even the boys, despite their relatively successful communication, reach an impasse when they attempt to broach deep feelings in conversation. Lying in their bed, the narrator asks Celestino "¿Tú nunca lloras?", to which he responds "¿Qué sabes tú?" (CAA p.69). This response by Celestino is repeated in the text when the Narrator speculates about the emotions of another individual: Celestino hears his assumptions and challenges him: "¿Qué sabes tú?" (p.69). Indeed, the presuppositions formed by the characters of the text with regard to one another, and their inability to express what is really in their minds, are the key to their downfall. Even his mother is the recipient of her son's compassion and tenderness, if she only knew it; but it is neither expressed to her directly, nor acknowledged by her, and so the stalemate continues and she scolds and he fears her scolding.

The narrator, indeed, is the recipient of often partial or unclear information from the adults: he has to draw his own conclusions when he is told only half the details; from there, he assumes (often wrongly) the reactions of the other characters as he perceives them to be most logical. For example, he narrates with heartbreaking innocence the story of Eulogia's death. He introduces "what happened" by stating that she simply went out one day and never came back with the firewood she ostensibly went to fetch⁴². He narrates (retrospectively) his observations during that waiting period: he sees abuela crying and telling him that abuelo will surely hang himself if Eulogia is lost. The narrator processes this information as a child would, though: he hears the old woman's statement but does not reflect on her pain or the pain she assumes will come over her husband. The boy's comment is that he would be glad if abuelo did hang himself. Being a child, he has not projected ahead to what might happen or might have happened to Eulogia that would cause such grief in their grandparents. On a narrative level, though, this poses the question: whose perception of the situation is the most appropriate? We are then told – and only then, one page after the presentation of the waiting time – that he saw Eulogia crying as she came out of abuelo's bedroom and left for the hills. The narrator observes that "Si ella no fuera tan boba como es no hubiera dejado que abuelo se le encaramase encima, como lo hizo. Pero ella es la esclava de la casa y todo el mundo se le encarama encima." (p.25) He goes on to say that he knows fine well that she was found hanging from a tree, despite the stories the adults have fed him since about her "going missing" in the hills⁴³.

Expression and communication are key in the work, then, and the fate of the hero (Celestino) centres around both of these. Misconceptions regarding Celestino's character (he is very clearly not simple, as the family believe, indeed he is highly perceptive) lead to his persecution for his writing; he needs to express himself in words but the words are not received and understood by another interlocutor in this brutal and bestial context. In the end, Celestino dies and passes into the same situation as the other cousins, that is the immortality of the narrator's imagination. In that context he will continue to etch his poems and express himself: he is already doing so in his cousin's narration, since he is

⁴² See CAA pp. 24 - 25

⁴³ See CAA p.25

already dead in real time when the novel begins. He has won, then: both the grandfather and Celestino are dead, but the boy will continue with his language.

In *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, despite the multiplicity of voices speaking in the text, however, there is no dialogue: indeed, there is an evident lack of communication between them. It is poignant that the characters – members of the same family and residents in the same house (with the exception of Onérica, of course) – do not achieve communication with each other; they are part of a collective in the sense of family and of the Cuban community, yet they are isolated in their failure to express themselves, just as they are isolated from the rest of the world in the changing context of Cuba. The coexistence of so many voices on the page, each with its own obsessions and suffering to reveal, poses the question of what might have been for this family, if they had only been able to communicate with one another. As long as their perceptions of themselves and of their pain go unsaid, to all intents and purposes, their perceptions do not exist.

The circularity (beginning and end) suggested by the title *Prólogo y Epílogo* is reflected in the encapsulation in its text of the obsessions each character carries, narrated in the present tense to create a sense of immediacy and contemporaneity. The circularity also suggests a failure to reach any destination other than the starting place as regards the narration by the character narrators. Recounted in the Prologue/Epilogue are the obsessions which will ultimately lead them to the downfall that is the play they perform in the palace of the white skunks. They are condensed in this section of the text: Adolfinia slams the bathroom door, the bottle of alcohol (which she will use to set herself on fire) already in the room. She carries a box of matches jammed under her breasts, underlining the preoccupation that will drive her to take her life – she is a spinster who cannot bear the loss of her youth and beauty⁴⁴. Onérica's letter to her son Fortunato appears; she evokes the naked Misael, the man who seduced her and who occupies her mind. The grandfather does not speak and the grandmother prays. Fortunato writes and expresses his wish to see the sea; he goes to the seaside but is unimpressed by the experience⁴⁵, and his increasing frustration convinces him that the best thing is for him to

⁴⁴ See PBM p. 13

⁴⁵ See PBM pp. 16 - 17

join the rebels, for which he will need a firearm. Esther gets upset with her mother and laments the fact that Baudillo, the young man she is attracted to, has paid her no attention. Tico and Anisia play their riddle games and laugh uproariously with one another. The reflections by the characters are intimate, emotional and essentially unexpressed processes: they all seek something in their lives, elusive as it is, but the internal struggle it involves is not visible to the outside world. While they narrate their needs to a narratee, the narratee is exodiegetic (and therefore does not “hear them”, since such a narratee does not exist on the same fictional level as the character narrator), they do not express them through dialogue with another character.

For both Héctor and his wife in *Otra vez el mar*, the moon and the sea are key motifs in their narration: these elements of their surroundings, along with the landscape and nature in more general terms, are humanised. The wife talks to the trees, to the sea and to a seagull. Her dialogue, then, is directed towards beings which cannot answer back and (on a realist plane) cannot process what she says. Even so, her words connect with her physical context, even if they do not connect with her husband, whose perceptions of events seem to be so out of kilter with her own. The narration recalls to mind the quotation from Octavio Paz which appears prior to the opening of the text: “La memoria es un presente que no termina nunca de pasar” (OVM p.7). For both these narrators, it is the case that memory fuses with present time and their narration of their recollections reestablishes them in the present time. Even so, there is no communication between these two (a situation made more poignant when we consider that they are supposedly husband and wife), only their two, entirely separate pieces of narration. While they do narrate, they are not heard.

The “pájaros” of *El color del verano* are as misunderstood and as persecuted as is Celestino in the first work of the quintet. There is no possibility for them to express themselves except through their sexuality: sexual intercourse is the only dialogue they can have in which to express themselves in this sexually repressive society. Where their sexual persuasion cannot be voiced in language, they can only express it in practice. La Tétrica Mofeta’s verbal expression on paper (his manuscripts) is his attempt at communication with the outside. It fails, his manuscript pages in bottles drowning with their creator. Even the island itself sinks when its inhabitants descend into bickering;

when argumentative dispute takes hold, successful dialogue loses its grip and the potential paradise sinks into the ocean.

In *El asalto*, of course, the notion of non-communication is taken to apocalyptic extremes: use of language is punishable by death. Conversation is unthinkable. The lack of verbal communication, both in terms of speaking and of listening, is inhuman. Quite literally, the human race in the Represidential state has been transformed into a society of animals: the citizens (to whom the narrator refers repeatedly as beasts) have lost the fundamental gift that separates man from the animal kingdom – language. They exist like animals in a battery farm, herded from one task to another, artificially kept awake or asleep as required, and without verbal exchange with one another of any kind, except when required by the state to recite the authorised phrases. In this inhuman context, the narration exists in the text of the Counterwhisperer, but the only verbal dialogue even he can undertake is formal and dishonest⁴⁶ and takes the form of his exchanges with the *Gran Secretario*. The only occasion on which spontaneous conversation occurs is when the narrator encounters the woman and she attempts to seduce him: even this potential for communication and openness is annihilated when he kills her.

Despite these situations of extreme repression and the continual failure of the characters to achieve communication, the narration of the *Pentagonía* remains. For all the heroes (the speakers) die in the first four texts, they are reborn in their next incarnation in the following text, only to reignite the passion for the spoken and written word displayed by their predecessors. So, while there is a failure to communicate, there is also a struggle – to the death – to do so.

3. The “I” in the mirror

The cycle of the quintet illustrates five different heroes. The constants between the ostensibly separate characterisations, however, are very marked and deserve investigation. Celestino is a dissident poet in a barbarous and primitive setting. He lives

⁴⁶ The narrator lies about the motivation behind his search for his mother, telling the High Secretary he suspects she may be the leader of a conspiracy, when in fact he wants to kill her for his own ends.

in a world where human frailty is despised, yet he continues to struggle despite his own fragility. He has a proper name, unlike the other characters but, conversely, does not have a role within the family: he does not keep to the chores he is directed to carry out on the farm and does not have a living parent for whom he can be “son”. In *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, similarly, the narrator (Fortunato) struggles for recognition as an individual and a vibrant, rebellious youth under the dictatorial rule of Batista’s authorities. He, also, struggles to keep writing and to find his role: he can only see one way out of the deadlock of his current existence at the family home: to join the uprising. Even that, however, does not provide him with the role identity he craved. In a state undergoing its process of Stalinisation, Héctor (in *Otra vez el mar*) does not find the means to write down his text in the same way as Celestino and Fortunato, but despite the apparent end for creative hope heralded by this new era, he does succeed in thinking his narration and imagining it. Amidst the wildly rebellious (not to say frenetically promiscuous) youth of Cuba in the future years from 1970 to 1999, madness seems to have taken hold of the country and its dictatorial leader. The youth, and our hero, though, do express themselves in perhaps the only way they can: erotically. Where written language is not possible, the heroes still find a way to release imagination. The expressive drive of La Tétrica Mofeta triumphs even in death, however, since his final thought is only for the rewriting of his manuscript. If we have read the first four of the *Pentagonía*’s pieces, we will be aware even at this point that his drive to communicate via his written words will not die here, but will be carried on in another, different embodiment in the final of the component works. While this study insists on its textual perspective, it is significant that the real Reinaldo Arenas’s manuscript of *Otra vez el mar* barely survived its repeated destruction, but his tenacity and determination saw it finally reach publication in Spain in 1982: his first manuscript (which he began writing in 1966, according to his great friend Roberto Valero⁴⁷), was destroyed in 1971 by Aurelio Cortés⁴⁸. Arenas set about rewriting the novel, but the second version was destroyed by

⁴⁷ See: Valero, Roberto, “*Otra vez el mar* de Reinaldo Arenas”, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 142-143 (1991) 355-6

⁴⁸ Again, see: Valero, Roberto, “*Otra vez el mar* de Reinaldo Arenas”, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 142-143 (1991) 355-6 Arenas also makes reference to this event in *Antes que anochezca*; Aurelio Cortés confirmed to me, during our interview in 1998, that he had indeed destroyed the

the authorities following his arrest in Havana in 1974⁴⁹. Nevertheless, he persevered and his third version of the manuscript did finally go into print, hence the dedication that opens the novel *Otra vez el mar*. In *El asalto*, too, the hero narrates (and even gets away with his own whispering, either under his breath and out of earshot, by blaming the uttered noise on the closest possible victim, or simply by dint of being above suspicion) despite the extreme cruelty and the apparent death of all language not authorised and sanitised by the state.

Far from being apocalyptic in their ideological message, the works expose the desolation of the setting for each narrative with all its cruelty and macabre intolerance, but then reveal the triumph of the hero over even this kind of agony and repression. Though the hero of each work dies, he is reincarnated in the subsequent piece of the cycle under another name but with the same constants of purpose and, largely, the same search in hand. All the heroes are rebels with the same objective: to narrate, sing, communicate the language of the oppressed. Like Homer, they are to be the bard of their time and situation, yet they are at the same time also timeless. The struggle of each transcends his setting. The narration they leave behind is immortal and is, just as the annals of accepted History are, both the testament and the heritage of the human race. Theirs is a song of hope and survival, a song of triumph as individuals who overcome in a collective repression.

The “pájaros” of *El color del verano* mirror one another and yet, individually, they are all confronted with their Other. La Gluglú is forced to confront the reflection of his aged self in the mirror; he is so devastated by the image before him that he kills himself by swallowing a load of keys, while offering up a prayer to Santa Marica. The queer characters in *El color del verano* are not idealised: they are simply human, and are living (with all their human failings) in a society that is not conducive to human contact. Their struggle to express themselves as best they can under these circumstances ennoble them in the text. Despite no end of repression and marginalisation, they persist in expressing their sexual desire: Tedevaro’s sex drive is so strong that, even once he is

manuscript, although he maintains that he did so out of concern for his own welfare, not out of spite, as Arenas suggest in his depiction of the episode in his memoirs.

⁴⁹ He was convicted of corrupting a minor, a charge he vehemently denies in his memoirs, insisting that the young man in question was of age.

dead and buried, he comes back from the grave several times to look for a man to satisfy him⁵⁰.

A carefully crafted intratextual relationship is evident between the novels of the *Pentagonía*. In *Celestino antes del alba*, the authoritarian ideology of the setting contrasts with the anarchic narration and imagination. By contrast, the rigid structure of *El asalto* contrasts with the anarchic repression administered by the individuals in positions of power. So the world inhabited by the heroes is defined by violence, intolerance, repression and, notably, ignorance. As I hope to have demonstrated, it is when the communication is non-existent between the characters that the violence and aggression erupts and persists; from that point, it is a vicious circle to which the heroes of the prose works I have explored are testament. Celestino's poems go unread and so he is condemned for writing them as though they were something "subversive", yet neither abuelo nor any of the other characters can actually read the words to know whether they are subversive, or harmful in any way. The more they persecute him, the more he writes, and the less they understand or listen to him. Similarly, the citizens of the represidential society in *El asalto* are forbidden from whispering (let alone talking) on pain of death: by law, there can be no free expression, and so the citizens live as animals do, without the gift of speech. They live as animals and are treated as such: no communication can or does take place between the public and the authorities; thus, the Counterwhisperer who is the hero of the work goes misconstrued as a tyrannical, bloodthirsty and "effective" upholder of represidential law, when in fact he is human and individual in his motivation for the crusade he undertakes.

The closing scene of the quintet is the victory of the narrator (the counterwhisperer who, nevertheless, cannot help whispering) over the most extreme of dictatorships in the collection. He triumphs through asserting his own identity against his Other, that is his mother and the Representant who has all but destroyed the country's freedom. Victory secured, the narrator makes his way to the sea, symbol of freedom throughout the pentalogy.

⁵⁰ See CDV p.198; we are told that he undertakes this exercise "cinco o nueve veces".

CHAPTER 4

“Supe (o intuí)”: narrators, protagonists and perceptions in *Viaje a La Habana*

"Supe (o intuí) que no podía quedarme ni un minuto solo con aquella mujer..." ¹

1. Structure of the text

1.i Introduction

As with the six novels we have explored in the previous chapters, in this chapter I hope to establish how the reading process is conditioned by the structure of the text in *Viaje a La Habana*; as we will find, the process is no less vertiginous and challenging here than it was with the novels of the *Pentagonía* or with *El mundo alucinante*, and, not dissimilarly, it is the stratification of narration in this work which gives rise to the non-linear nature of the narration. As a consequence, these give rise to the characterisation of the narrators and protagonists themselves. Once again, we will be faced with the hypertextual treatment of History and its heroes and villains; as we will see, we are faced with a worrying disparity between the versions of events offered by the various narrators and characters. *Viaje a La Habana* is a very

¹ Arenas, Reinaldo. *Viaje a La Habana* (Miami: Universal, 1990) p.89. from: *Texto de Ramón Fernández, Segundo Viaje*. I will refer to this segment of the text further ahead in this chapter.

different animal from the texts we have explored so far, however. It is a compact text, yet over the course of its 153 pages, it recounts three subnovels (called *Viajes*, as we shall see), each of which commands a body of extra-textual references and texts, hypertextualised in the novel. Each *Viaje* is told in an entirely different style (playing on the particular genre or genres it hypertextualises) and, at first glance at least, its action and characters bear no connection to those of the other Journeys.

Viaje a La Habana has received far less critical interest, as yet, than *El mundo alucinante*, *Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and *Otravez el mar*; perhaps this is due to the more recent publication of this novel². To date, I have found only one article on this specific work³; elsewhere, comments have been peripheral to a study of a different body of text, or have considered *Viaje a La Habana* only as an illustration of aspects of Arenas's writing evident elsewhere in his fiction. I have no doubt that this situation will change in the near future, however, as interest in Arenas's prose work continues to broaden and his texts become more widely available. I offer this Chapter of my study, then, as a contribution to this relatively young area of the critical debate on Arenas's works.

Despite the relative lack of critical publications on *Viaje a La Habana*, I selected it as one of my texts for exploration in this study for three main reasons: firstly, I felt that a later novel, outside the *Pentagonía*, written during Arenas's later years in the U.S.A. would complement my approach to his second novel (*El mundo alucinante*) and the result of a virtually lifelong writing process (the *Pentagonía*). While my study is not a comparative analysis of the development of Arenas's work over time, it seems appropriate to select a broad base of texts for study when considering any aspect of the writer's technique. In that sense, I felt that *Viaje a La Habana*, as such a compact work comprising (nevertheless) a number of characterisations and sequences of action would complement Arenas's *obra maestra*, the *Pentagonía*. Secondly, *Viaje a La Habana* begs to be explored from a structural perspective since it is, in itself, a composite of three subnovels in one novel, with the multiplicity of narrative voices this particular three-fold novel embodies: I felt that this work might reveal some exciting techniques involved in its construction and its autoreferentiality⁴. Lastly, in discussing the reading process induced by all the texts I have approached, I wanted to

² *Viaje a La Habana* was first published by Universal (Miami) in 1990; the edition I have consulted for reference is the first reprint: Reinaldo Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* (Miami: Universal, 1995)

³ Soto, Francisco, "<<Mona>> de *Viaje a La Habana*: hacia una lectura fantástica", in: *Reinaldo Arenas: recuerdo y presencia*, ed. Reinaldo Sánchez (Miami: Universal, 1994) 169 – 182.

⁴ Happily, the structuralist "road into the text" I chose for the study has indeed opened up avenues for exploration as regards the various narrative voices which operate here. As I commenced my study, I hoped to establish the hypertextual relationship(s) *Viaje a La Habana* might sustain with itself (its intratextual relationships) and external texts (its hypertextual relationships in whatever other form these might take); as I hope to show over the course of this

communicate as far as possible the fun of reading these works, as well as the intellectual challenge involved. *Viaje a La Habana* is a riot of styles, infused with humour, irony, suspense and denouement⁵.

I have approached the text by first exploring the paratextual techniques involved in its composition. Then, in part 2, I will consider the narrators of the three parts which conform the work, firstly from the perspective of the classification of the narrators (whether they are also actors in the text) and, subsequently, in terms of the characterisation and function of the voices in the text, and the relationship between the narrators, the protagonists and the narratees. I have then concentrated on examining the dissent and contradictions between the voices of the narrators in the *Segundo Viaje*⁶. The interaction between these voices is remarkable in its complexity, and I have explored this point in detail. This will lead me to consider the treatment of the "I" in the mirror (a notion I have discussed in the previous chapters) in *Viaje a La Habana*, in each of the three Journeys. Finally, I will draw my conclusions on the destination to which the characters travel over the course of the text. As always, I have quoted excerpts from Arenas's text as faithfully as possible, and so any variations in the typeface (italics, spacing and so forth) are as they appear in his text unless otherwise noted.

1.ii Paratextual devices and the structural division of the text

Using a similar technique to the title structure of *El mundo alucinante*, from an initial glance at the full title of the novel, "*Viaje a la Habana (Novela en tres viajes)*", the reader is instructed to connect the three pieces of text in his own mind. Although no more explicit guidance is given as to how exactly they are to be related, before even the first page of narrative proper has begun we are faced with the fact that there are to be three *Viajes* which interconnect, in some way, to form one *novela* and a single *Viaje a La Habana*. *Viaje a La Habana: Novela en Tres Viajes* is, by its own declaration, a collage constructed of at least three parts and therefore some intratextual link exists between its sections. Whether a common thread runs

Chapter, a web of such relationships is evident.

⁵ Each of the *Viajes* builds to a climactic end which, in each case, involves a revelation or unmasking: Eva is confronted at the final moment by Ricardo's revelation that he is leaving her for the young man; Ramón's exquisite young woman turns out to be a haggard Leonardo da Vinci; and Ismael's young lover, Carlos, is revealed to be his own son, Ismaelito. In part 4 of this Chapter I will examine the "destinations" of the *Viajes* and what the resulting revelations mean to the characters.

⁶ As we will see, the work is subdivided in to three components, entitled "Primer Viaje",

through the three Journeys as regards the action remains to be seen, as does the question of any common allegory, but, from the outset, the subtitle asserts that there is some thematic purpose behind the novel's multiple facets. We must, therefore, establish where and how this collage functions, based on the components (the sections of text and, as we will see shortly, the different narrative voices which recount them) that make up the whole. This initial division of the text into three Journeys is significant in that it leads us to consider the other paratextual devices employed in the novel; since one indication has been given (a title and subtitle) which advises the reader that another structural device in the text is important (its three separate components that form the whole work), it is all the more likely that other paratexts will also be significant and interconnected. For this reason I will approach *Viaje a La Habana*, initially, by investigating the separation and different narrative levels of the text. As a preliminary means of breaking up the novel into its various sections, I will look at the paratexts themselves. From there, I will try to examine the narrative voices that operate in each stage of the text and the relationship that exists between them. This, I hope, will provide some insight into where the *Viaje* leads.

Various paratextual devices are used to denote the composite nature of *Viaje a La Habana*. I have illustrated these in a broad outline in Appendix 3.i, beginning with the main title of the novel and working inwards, noting the internal divisions of the text and the paratexts used. I have structured this outline differently from the one I constructed for *El mundo alucinante*: in my approach to *El mundo alucinante*, I was concerned with the subversion of the lineality and sequence of the narration and with the experience of reading the text in a linear fashion; *Viaje a La Habana*, as we shall see, is structured quite differently (not least in as much as it is a composite of three sub-novels) and so I have taken the overall paratexts (those which apply to the complete work) as my outer level, and the paratextual devices applying to the three sections within it as an inner one, and so forth. So we find, as we have already seen, an umbrella title for the novel, the subtitle of which dictates how the next level of the text is to be structured, i.e. that the single *novela*, thereafter, separates into three *Viajes*. Then, on a separate page, we are presented with a dedication: "A Delfín Prats, mi fiel lector de los años setenta"(p.5). So far we have remained outside the narrative of the novel itself, that is to say, up to this point we have not entered the verbal narrative of the novel at all. The dedication, to all intents and purposes, is by Reinaldo Arenas to Delfín. All three *Viajes* end with the annotation of the date and place of writing. So on an external level, the novel has one collective voice which permeates all three Journeys, albeit on the detached level of an exodiegetic narrator or, rather, of an indeterminate voice outwith the verbal narrative itself.

"Segundo Viaje" and "Tercer Viaje".

We will reconsider the setting in time and place as stated at the end of each *Viaje* in due course but, for the moment, let us take note of the fact that none of these dates correspond with the settings as stated by the narrators of the *Viajes* themselves, so we must assume that this information relates to a level of the text outside the fictitious plane of the discourse. However, the three Journeys themselves, as they appear in the overall title, are not specified: they are simply the components, the three *Viajes* which go to make up a single novel, the complete *Viaje a La Habana* at this stage. Certain paratexts appear in all 3 *Viajes*, denoting time and place. The three Journeys themselves are numbered and individually titled. They are labelled, first of all, in chronological order (*Primer viaje*, *Segundo viaje* and *Tercer viaje*). The fact that there is a first, a second and a third Journey suggests a certain sequential order to the events they contain: I will return to this question later but, for the moment, let us concentrate simply on the fact that time in itself, chronological sequence or periods of history, has been highlighted, the reasons for which invite further investigation. Following the dedication, the first *Viaje* is labelled with its number in both numerical and sequence form (*I: Primer viaje*); on the following page its title proper appears (*Que trine Eva*), and, on the next page, the narrator changes and the narrative text itself begins. At this point, as in the other two *Viajes*, the level of narrative changes and the complete novel divides into its three parts, each with different narrators or sets of narrators. The second and third Journeys follow the same formula as regards their numbers and titles (*II, Segundo viaje, Mona*; *III, Tercer viaje, Viaje a La Habana*) but, on the page following their respective titles, in each case, there follows a quotation (see outline). From this point in both the second and third Journeys, the narration becomes more complex than in the first, involving more than one narrator and various paratextual devices.

The second Journey involves the greatest concentration of paratexts and, indeed, the largest number of narrators of the three *Viajes*. As in the third Journey, we have a quotation, in this case an excerpt from Leonardo da Vinci's *Cuadernos de notas* ("*Estoy plenamente consciente de que al no ser un hombre...*") (p.59), following which the main narrative of the Journey opens with Sakuntala's introduction to the testimony (*Presentación de Daniel Sakuntala*). This, in turn, is followed by the *nota de los editores* (by the editors of the year 2025). Then Ramón Fernández's testimony begins, peppered all the way through with footnotes by Sakuntala, the editors of the year 1999 (Lorenzo and Echurre) and the unnamed editors of 2025 (see outline). Ramón's manuscript also contains the occasional break in the text, where two paragraphs are separated by a space of a few blank lines. So there is visual evidence of the separation between the voices of this Journey in as much as the commentators' footnotes are graphically set apart from the main text of the testimony; they exist in a separate section from the testimony itself and, certainly in a visual sense, form their own clusters of text

below the footnote dividing line. Whether this format should have some bearing on the content of these sections of the text we will investigate further ahead.

The bulk of the third Journey appears, on the surface, to adhere to much the same format as the first, in as much as the main narrative seems to be one uninterrupted text. Aside from the differences in the narrators of each of these two Journeys (which we will look at shortly), however, there is a marked difference between the two *Viajes* from a purely paratextual point of view: the third Journey makes use of italic type throughout the main narrative. These sections are not set apart from the text in plain type but form an integral part of it, and account for a large proportion of the text on each page. The text of the first Journey is produced in uniform plain type virtually from beginning to end. Furthermore, like the second Journey, the third opens with a separate piece of text which is visibly set apart from the subsequent narrative. Here, the opening text is in letter form and, therefore, is constructed in letter format with the appropriate headers of date and place. The *Tercer Viaje* also includes an opening quotation (see outline), quoted from the Condesa de Merlin: her text highlights a conflict between the past (memory), which is living, and the present (a pile of rocks), which are lifeless. As we will find, this opposition between memory and present is at the forefront of Ismael's⁷ mind. The three *Viajes* are quite evidently separate entities in their own right, then, each one with its own format and visual structure. It remains to be seen how far these paratextual techniques are related to the narratological scheme of the novel and, in turn, what they reveal about the thematic content of the work. For this reason, we will refer back to the structural outline of the novel in later chapters but, for now, let us keep in mind that we have been presented with a fragmented text of complex and meticulous structure which, nonetheless, is intended as a single unit.

2. Multiple voices in the three Journeys: narrators and actors

The structure of the three Journeys becomes more complex still when we come to apply Serrano Orejuela's methodology in examining the narration of the *Viajes*. As we can see from

⁷ Ismael is the protagonist of the third Journey and one of its two narrators (the other is exodiegetic, as we will see). He is a Cuban living in exile in the USA, having suffered the ignominy of persecution, arrest and conviction for homosexual acts. His wife Elvia and their son Ismaelito, now estranged from Ismael, remained in Havana, and they family have not seen each other since Ismaelito was tiny; he is now grown, and his parents are middle aged. Ismael returns to Cuba to see them, in the hope that he can vindicate himself by showing that he has

the narratological outline in Appendix 3.ii, the novel divides into each section of narration (where the respective narrators “speak”) very much according to the divisions in the text made evident by the paratexts. Simplistically speaking, then, the voice of each narrator is visually highlighted by some change in the graphics of the text. This precision is quite unlike the confusion of stratification we encountered in *El Mundo alucinante*, though the conflict between the narrators and their versions of events is no less ardent, as we will see later. To classify the narrators in broad terms (see Appendix 3.ii), in the first Journey it is Eva⁸ who is the sole narrator (autodiegetic narrator) of her account of events; her text is directed to a specific “you”, to her husband Ricardo, and so the narratee (who is autodiegetic) is Ricardo. Eva’s narration is a single, continuous piece of text, as is represented by its continuous plain type, and it is worth noting that she at no time hands over to another narrator.

Not so the second Journey, however. Here, the first narrator who speaks is Daniel Sakuntala⁹ (paradiegetic narrator), followed by the editors of 2025¹⁰ (exodiegetic narrator). Their introductory words give way to Ramón’s¹¹ testimony (he becomes the third narrator, autodiegetic), which is periodically interrupted by footnote sections where the first and second narrators take over, as well as the fourth narrator (exodiegetic), Lorenzo and Echurre¹². For the moment, and only for the moment, I have classified the editors of 1999 and 2025 as exodiegetic narrators; whether we should class them as participants in the action of the second Journey or not is a debatable point, though, and it is one I will address in greater detail later in this chapter, when we come to look at the tone and content of the footnotes these narrators provide. For this reason, I shall describe the narratees of their texts only initially as exodiegetic

become a success in exile; he has not.

⁸ Eva is the narrator of the whole Journey. She is Ricardo’s wife, and the couple live in Havana, where they perform live shows, dressing up in outrageous costumes, despite the fact that this is prohibited and their behaviour is strictly forbidden. They undertake a journey the length and breadth of Cuba, giving performances.

⁹ Daniel Sakuntala has been a friend of Ramón’s and has offered to take care of Ramón’s text in the meantime, while his friend is in jail, and to submit it for publication. He cannot resist passing comment on it though, and the text is scattered with his editorial footnotes, along with the introductory note he has attached to it.

¹⁰ The editors of 2025 are the commentators who insert their observations into Ramón’s text. They are commenting on his text in the year 2025, of course, well after his death.

¹¹ Ramón Fernández is the protagonist in this Journey and the main narrator of the piece. He is interrupted, however, by the footnote comments of the various editors (see below). He is a Cuban exile, living in the USA (in New York) and is detained by police following an alleged incidence of vandalism: Ramón is accused of slashing Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of La Gioconda (Mona Lisa). Ramón protests his innocence and pleads for protection right up until he is found dead in his cell. The text of the *Segundo Viaje* is (ostensibly) Ramón’s statement and testimony explaining the recent events that have befallen him, namely that he has met a wonderful woman and has fallen for her. She is not all she seems, however, and turns out to be his downfall.

¹² Lorenzo and Echurre are the editors through whose hands Ramón’s testimony passes after Sakuntala. His text does not reach publication even within his generation’s lifetime: Lorenzo and Echurre add their footnotes to the testimony in the year 1999.

(again, see Appendix 3.ii). The paratextual distinctions on the text of the third Journey also distinguish between its two narrators, that is to say, the narrator of the plain type portions of the main narrative is the Journey's second narrator (exodiegetic) while the italic sections correspond to Ismael's narration (making him the third narrator, and autodiegetic).

The third Journey's first narrator is Elvia¹³, autodiegetic narrator of the letter which forms the first part of the Journey's text. Her narratee (also autodiegetic), of course, is Ismael (to whom the letter is written and addressed). The second and third narratees I shall classify as exodiegetic for now but, as we will see further ahead, these narratees must be explored in more depth in order to identify them and to fully appreciate the boundaries between the narrator of the plain typed sections and the narrator of the italic typed ones. For now, at least, we have gone some way towards constructing the scheme of the novel's narrators and their narratees, in as much as we have an overview of the number and sequence of narrators (and, by implication, narratees) and the portions of text which correspond to them.

It is evident from the division of the text, then, that there are several voices narrating this novel as a whole, yet it is the second Journey which highlights this point most insistently. The footnotes of the various commentators supply the opinions of each on the testimony written by Ramón Fernández, in which he recounts his experiences during the final days of his life. So we are presented with not only Ramón's account of the events which took place but also the comments and remarks made by the other editors which modify his version of events to provide a different slant on the "facts", depending on which of these narrators we choose to listen to. It is here that the problem lies: if there is a selection of "versions" of what took place, refuting, at least in part, the testimony of the witness himself, can the "truth", the "real facts" of this case (or any other, come to that) actually exist, or is there only ever a version or an interpretation of the facts? Ramón states his intention to write down his story in order to leave a record of "what really happened". In his words: "lo único que puedo hacer es escribir; contar como fueron los hechos." (p.67). His testimony in itself, then, is his official statement; to all intents and purposes, what he describes is "what happened". He is, however, in jail charged with a crime, so it must be accepted that this is the version of events offered by the accused. Furthermore, according to many, including the police, Ramón is mentally unbalanced when he writes his manuscript. He is believed to have been depressed, to the extent that he apparently took his life¹⁴ almost immediately after completing his testimony; he was therefore, the press

¹³ Elvia (Ismael's wife and Ismaelito's mother) does not narrate and has little part in the action of the Journey, but her letter to Ismael appears at the beginning of the text. She has been married to a homosexual and has suffered the discovery of his sexuality and the public humiliation of his conviction and his exile, as well as the abandonment she underwent when he left for the States, leaving her behind to raise their son alone, without bitterness.

¹⁴ Ramón's death is mysterious indeed: official reports assume that he committed suicide, even though the police can find no feasible explanation for how he could have achieved this

and police assume, unstable. Yet they base this deduction, rather flimsily, on the bizarre and apparently impossible contents of the testimony itself. So whose "facts" are correct? Was Ramón mad or misunderstood? Despite the various voices providing comment on Ramón's case, there is no exodiegetic narrator in this Journey to answer this question for us; we must make up our own minds.

In his presentation of the testimony, Daniel Sakuntala places his friend's account in context. The commentary he provides is intended, he explains, only to clarify certain points; he has been most insistent that the text itself should be published intact: "Aquí está el texto al que sólo le he intercalado algunas notas aclaratorias. Ojalá algún día alguien lo tome en serio." (p.64). But do his notes in fact clarify or distort Ramón's version of what happened? Though the effect may be subconscious rather than intentional on Sakuntala's part, his remarks twist the text to suit his own perception of the "truth". He affirms that perhaps some day, hopefully, Ramón's account will be taken seriously but he is surely guilty of failing to respect it himself. Further distortions are made to the original manuscript with comments from the editors of the 1999 publication of the text (Lorenzo and Echurre) and, later, of the editors from the year 2025. Each group (and in one instance there is even dissent among the editors of the same year, i.e. between Lorenzo and Echurre) finds a different series of comments to make which ultimately produce a version of the "facts" that is doctored to suit the interpretation of each. In their introductory note, the 2025 editors comment:

[...] hemos respetado la ortografía y las expresiones de Ramón Fernández, así como las notas de Daniel Sakuntala y de los señores Lorenzo y Echurre aun cuando, a estas alturas, pueden parecer (o sean) anacrónicas o innecesarias. (p.65)

The collected comments of the footnotes and introductory remarks, for all Ramón's text may have been published complete, inevitably distort his account. By definition, once the editors (indeed, all the commentators involved) express their dissatisfaction with parts of the account (or of previous observations about it) which they believe to be "anacrónicas o innecesarias" the text is altered by their interpretation. Nothing, then, is hard fact, not even what aspects of the text are questionable: comments are to appear which may or may not be ("pueden parecer (o sean)") unfounded.

To that end, then, we must readdress our initial classification of the first, second and fourth narrators of this Journey and, therefore, of their narratees. In defining Sakuntala as a paradiegetic narrator we have recognised the fact that his narration engages him as a participant in the text he narrates but as a witness character rather than a vital actor. This is made evident

without the means to carry it out and no tangible evidence, such as a rope, substance or weapon, is found to support this theory. Ramón's body later disappears from the morgue without

by the grammatical structure of his narration (he does refer to himself in the first person and make reference to his participation in the events described) and does remain valid; but still, we must also appreciate that, as far as the nature of his narration goes, the question of Sakuntala's involvement in the action relates to the sections of text which he narrates himself, rather than to the complete *Segundo Viaje*. With that in mind, it must be said that the criteria Serrano Orejuela dictates for establishing the category of narrator of the text become less solid as indicators here. Our original definition of this first narrator (which is perhaps clearest in his first piece of narration, his introduction to the manuscript) still stands but it fails to recognise the implications of the footnotes, whose tone and, indeed, structure gradually alter as the *Viaje* progresses and his characterisation becomes more apparent. It is important to remain within the confines of Serrano Orejuela's methodology in examining this question, however; our assessment of Sakuntala is to be based on his participation on a grammatical level, regardless of the thematic content of the text. So my concern is with the fact that Sakuntala's footnote narration strays increasingly further from Ramón's text, such that, further ahead in the Journey, Sakuntala's narration barely includes a connecting reference to Ramón's account and concentrates, instead, on comments and references that deal with Sakuntala, not Fernández, and are rarely recounted in the first person. In these sections, therefore, Sakuntala becomes the protagonist (the actor who advances the action) in his narration, which would make him a autodiegetic narrator. All of this raises the question: where and how do we draw the line between Sakuntala the paradiegetic narrator and Sakuntala the autodiegetic narrator? For the purposes of this analysis of the novel, I do not propose to dissect the question to its full extent, only to uncover the complexity of narration that makes up *Viaje a La Habana* as a means to approaching the themes and questions the novel contains. Sakuntala, then, is both paradiegetic and autodiegetic, even though he masquerades as an objective critic and producer of metatextual footnotes.

The same can be said of the other two (groups of) commentators: we categorised both the second and fourth narrators (the editors of 2025 and of 1999, respectively) as exodiegetic. In view of the ambiguity involved in classifying Sakuntala, it is equally evident that these two narrators pose similar problems. The editors of 2025 do adhere to the basic principles of exodiegetic narration, in as much as their text remains detached (they do not participate in any way, shape or form in the action of their introduction or footnotes). Still, as with Sakuntala, we must look at the portions of text narrated by the 2025 editors and, from there, examine the nature of their narration. In the cases of both the second and fourth narrators, then, it is evident that neither is truly exodiegetic; while they do not advance the action in real time, they do shape the evolution of Ramón's characterisation (and their own) over the course of the text. True, the

trace or explanation.

footnotes they provide are ostensibly metatextual in character, but these footnotes remain within the fictional scope of the novel and are voiced through fictional characters. On that basis alone, the nature of their narration is ambiguous. Both these groups of commentators do participate in the action as it exists in the footnotes they narrate, if not in the testimony of Ramón Fernández, which gives rise to their commentary in the first place. Though metatextual in tone, and although they do not contain any clearly defined action as such, their footnotes do recount a subplot to the action of the testimony, namely the revelations about the events which subsequently befall the commentators (all three groups) themselves. Unquestionably, it is Sakuntala who is the prime actor in his own texts; similarly, it is Lorenzo and Echurre and Sakuntala or, more precisely, the rivalry between them, which is the core of the action of their footnotes, making Lorenzo and Echurre something between paradiegetic narrators (where they function as witness characters to Sakuntala's undertakings) and autodiegetic (where they recount their own actions and assert their own worth). The same must be said, to some degree, about the 2025 editors; yet their case is perhaps more difficult to categorise due to the greater detachment of their tone which, in turn, springs from the relative anonymity of their characterisation. As I have mentioned, we have to acknowledge some characterisation since we are given a setting for the editors' observations (the year 2025) which contrasts markedly with those of the previous commentators. This should not alter our deductions about their level of participation in the action, of course, but, nevertheless, it does affect how we are to take the degree of involvement of these fictional critics in the action they narrate. If we adhere strictly to Serrano Orejuela's methods, we must define this second narrator as exodiegetic but, to be fair, this is to ignore the fictional level on which their footnotes operate. To that end, it is more accurate to describe their narration as paradiegetic (since their texts, in turn, deal with their account of the actions of the previous editors and those of their generations). Whether we can infer that they participate as major players in the action of their own footnotes is a rather muddier issue and one which requires us to consider what we can and what we cannot describe as action in such brief sections of text. If we accept that the editors of 2025 are a paradiegetic narrator, we must also bear in mind that, if the ongoing arguments as to who among the commentators has the "true version of things" are to be considered as the action (or part of it) of the footnotes, then their narration is also autodiegetic, by extension, since they unquestionably take part in this debate.

I have strayed somewhat from the basis of Serrano Orejuela's theories, but it is clear that the number of narrators who have a voice in the second Journey cannot be neatly classified by their participation alone. It must be acknowledged that Serrano Orejuela's theories relate to defining the narration of a given piece of text, not to the classification of the narrator as a character, and so, to be true to his methodology, the only remedy for our text would be to

single out each individual piece of text as a separate unit and reappraise its narration; in other words, Serrano's method for analysis establishes the nature of the narrator according to the text itself, not to the character identity of the "person speaking". In any case, this would still leave us with the same preoccupation and, ultimately, the same outcome: Sakuntala narrates portions of text at intervals throughout the testimony and, through his narration of them, it becomes evident that he is narrating something light years away from the testimony of Ramón Fernández. Crudely put, the *Segundo Viaje* is an exercise in multiple voices and multiple levels of text and plot, and it will require us to explore how these voices and subtexts interconnect on a thematic level and a symbolic level in order to better understand how the collage functions.

2.ii Narrators, protagonists and narratees: voices in the text

The third Journey differs greatly from the second with respect to its narrator. The testimony of the witness Ramón, periodically interrupted by the running commentary of the various narrators, is replaced in the bulk of the *Tercer Viaje* by continuous narrative. The main narrator here (though not the first to appear) is exodiegetic but we should note, in particular, that despite the third person narration and the anonymity of the narrator, the tone of the narration is markedly less academic than the footnotes of the *Segundo Viaje*. As we have seen, although there is only one narrator throughout this part of the text, sections of the narrative frequently appear in italic type. This occurs when the exodiegetic narrator recounts thoughts, reflections or comments made by Ismael; in other words, it is a form of implied dialogue¹⁵ (even though it is largely unarticulated thought, not dialogue in a verbal sense) which appears following or preceding phrases like: "Desde luego, pensaba Ismael,..." (p.101); "Pero al menos, se dijo" (p.101). As the limits between the third person narrative and Ismael's stream of thought become hazier, it becomes apparent that, not only does the exodiegetic narrator concentrate a great deal on the reflections of the protagonist, but the protagonist's thoughts are largely turned in on himself. There is persistent repetition of phrases which denote introspection, like: "se sonrió", "se dijo Ismael para calmarse", "se repitió para animarse a si mismo", e.g.: "Pero ese no es mi caso, se decía, quizás para animarse..." (p.113); and "Soy, pensó, y no pudo evitar sonreírse, un marido ideal." (p.104). We can see from the reflexive "se decía", "para animarse" and "sonreírse" that Ismael's narration is self-referential and

¹⁵Since the sections of text that appear in italic type are Ismael's unvoiced thoughts, it would perhaps seem more appropriate to describe them as monologue, rather than dialogue; however, as I shall discuss later, the question of intercommunication with a listener is relevant here, so I have stuck to the term "dialogue".

internalised. The narrative voice, on the part of both narrators, reflects on Ismael himself. A kind of dialogue is taking place but it is an internal dialogue between Ismael and himself and between Ismael and the exodiegetic narrator. To that extent, it could be regarded as monologue but Ismael's observations go beyond the point of being asides: they form part of a wider argument in the text which I shall return to further ahead, that is the question of dialogue itself, of communication. Increasingly, the boundaries blur between the voice of Ismael and that of the exodiegetic narrator and, indeed, the distinctions between the voice of the italic type (Ismael) and the voice of the plain type (second narrator) are all but lost in places:

Yo he visto, yo he visto, yo sí he visto y he padecido, y como he sobrevivido, nadie me va a hacer un cuento a mí. *Ellos no saben nada, ellos no saben lo que les espera, ellos no saben de dónde vengo yo ni yo puedo explicárselo.* (p.113)

Here, no apparent change has taken place from one narrator to another but the typeface has changed nonetheless. Similarly, the exodiegetic narrator shifts, almost imperceptibly, from his third person narration about Ismael to first person narration (where the narrator is Ismael) on occasions such as the one which follows:

Y cuando regresara, cuando volviera a Nueva York, entonces estaría en el terror absoluto, pues ya sabría que aquel mundo, que nunca será su mundo, que no le pertenecía, y al cual él le era indiferente, era lo único que tenía. Es decir, el único sitio donde, como una sombra, podría seguir existiendo. *¿Por qué he venido? ¿Para qué he regresado?* (p.136)

The italic type here does correspond to Ismael's narration but the step from the exodiegetic narration of the plain type to Ismael's own voice, in italics, is immediate, to the extent that the narration is unbroken and a smooth link is made between the two voices, despite the change from third person to first. It is Ismael's thought processes that are expressed by the exodiegetic narrator in the third Journey, despite the paratextual demarcations that seem to divide the two voices. Indeed, we cannot, in all fairness, classify Ismael as a narrator at all according to Serrano Orejuela's methodology, since the sections in italic type are, strictly speaking, indirect speech, qualified by phrases such as "pensaba Ismael" (p.101). Yet neither do these sections entirely conform to the format of indirect speech, blending as they do with the narration of the exodiegetic narrator more and more as the Journey progresses.

So the graphic representation on the page makes this implied transfer from one narrator to another quite explicitly, but, increasingly, the boundaries between the thought processes and emotions of the character Ismael and the exodiegetic narration become blurred to the point that the two voices all but merge into one. As the end of the Journey approaches, in fact, even the paratextual demarcation disappears: "a la vista de todos, pensaba, aún soy, aún puedo ser, un sospechoso" (p.103). Here, the plain type is not substituted for italic, but the narrator, in

effect, is Ismael. As the *Viaje* progresses, the length of the passages of first person narrative (where the narrator is Ismael) mounts. A greater and greater number of lines in italic type follow a single marker phrase from the exodiegetic narrator (“pensaba Ismael”, etc.). His (or her) explanatory interjections become shorter and more cursory, while the extent of Ismael's narration grows. The relationship between Ismael's “quoted” thoughts and observations and the voice of the narrator who recounts them is not a precisely a metatextual one (i.e. the tone and function is not one of critical comment), as in the footnotes of the *Segundo Viaje*; rather, it is a harmonious continuation of the same chain of thought and the same perspective. Unlike the interjections of the second Journey, the narrative flows uninterrupted even where the voice is transferred. It is indeed a thought process, involving the recollections, reactions and decision-making that pass through Ismael's mind, and these instances are expressed as they would be in thought, in the language of continuous thought patterns. The exodiegetic narrator adopts the mode of expression, the tone or parlance that occurs in Ismael's mind. For example, when Ismael thinks back to his hellish imprisonment in El Morro jail, his thoughts appear on the page as his mind's eye visualises them:

Ismael evitó casi heroicamente cualquier contacto sexual, negándose a ello aún a riesgo de perder la vida. De modo que los presos llegaron a tomarlo por un loco y los argumentos que esgrimían eran contundentes: Si ahora que está condenado públicamente se niega a singar con los machos y cuando era un padre de familia lo hacía, es señal de que no solamente es una loca sino un loco, un tostao. (p.108)

Thoughts and memories are immediate and appear in the mind's eye as pictures; Ismael hears the inmates in his memory and what he hears is reproduced just as he remembers it, in the tone and terminology he recalls: “singar”, “tostao”, etc. Patently, the *Tercer Viaje* is focalized through Ismael throughout the narration of all three narrators. Despite the exodiegetic narration of the main text, even where Ismael's thoughts are not represented as dialogue, all of this Journey is focalized through his eyes. For instance, the main text opens with the view from Ismael's apartment window; yet it is not merely the view in a general sense, but rather Ismael's view of the outdoors as he looks out, scanning the snowy scene, over the parked cars, over Ninth Avenue, and so on, pausing to focus on certain things that catch his eye. Ismael's role as focallizer has substantial bearing on the relationship between these two narrators and, indeed, on the question of whether we can strictly classify Ismael as a narrator in his own right. This perception, both in the sense of the visual panorama and in a figurative sense (the emotional “slant” Ismael's vision provides on things) is a concept I will return to later on, when we come to look at the individual spheres of vision which operate in the Journeys, but for the moment let us concentrate on the verbal relationship between Ismael and the exodiegetic narrator.

As we have seen, it becomes ever more difficult to discern who is speaking between these two or, to put it another way, to detect precisely when and where each one hands over to the voice of the other. This is evident many times, such as in the following section of the text: “Ahí estaban las maletas repletas, los efectos eléctricos, el dinero, todo lo que pensababa entregarle a su familia. *Mi familia*. Y casi sintió deseos de reír al pronunciar esas palabras.” (p.130). Immediately, the narration passes between a reference in the third person possessive (“su familia”) to first person possessive (“*mi familia*”), as though only a brief second had passed for the stratification to take place. Here we do have the clear indication of the italic type that we have transferred from the voice of the exodiegetic narrator, who refers to “su familia” (“la familia de Ismael”), to that of Ismael himself, who repeats the point (“*mi familia*”). Nonetheless, it is a brisk jump from one narrator to the other and back again, and one which draws some continuation between “su familia” and “*mi familia*”, since the two phrases are so close both in space and in similarity. The thoughts that pass through Ismael’s mind, which make up the bulk of the third Journey, are a kind of dialogue - albeit one that takes place between a character and an abstract alter ego - which takes place between these two narrators. Certainly, there is as much conversational exchange between the two parties, in the sense of communication of ideas and response to them, as there is identification between them. The two voices almost fuse into one continuous line of thought but, at the same time, there is definite exchange between them; the character of the dialogue between them, then, is very much that of a mental discussion, of one person turning ideas over in his own head.

It is particularly poignant that much of the exchange which occurs between Ismael and Ismaelito¹⁶ involves a similarly internalised and reflective form of “dialogue”. If we compare the dialogue which appears between Ismael and the exodiegetic narrator and if we concede that this dialogue constitutes, in part at any rate, an internal process of reflection or an exchange between Ismael and himself, we must consider Ismael’s conversations with his son Ismaelito in the same spirit, that is, the dialogue between the older Ismael and his young self, reflected in the bearer of the diminutive form of his own name (Ismael-ito). In his conversations with Carlos/Ismaelito (both before and after the revelations regarding the identity of “Carlos”), Ismael thinks, he supposes, he even concludes but he does not ask or say anything with regard to the assumptions he is forming and has formed about his young lover/son. Ismael’s “communication” only takes place on an internal level and never becomes communication as dialogue with other people. In other words, in the case of Ismael, the narratee is also the

¹⁶ Ismaelito (who is introduced in the text as Carlos, before he reveals his identity to Ismael) is the son of Ismael and Elvia, and an attractive young man. He is conducting his military service in Havana when Ismael returns to Havana: the two men meet but Ismaelito introduces himself as Carlos and keeps his identity from his father until the end of the narrative, by which time they have become lovers.

narrator, since the only communication that takes place is internal and the only person to whom Ismael (and, by implication, the exodiegetic narrator too) directs his narration is to himself. In this third *Viaje*, quite unlike the first Journey, where only one voice (Eva) is heard, or the second Journey, where we are presented with many voices which, nonetheless, do not in fact successfully communicate with each other, we are presented with an exodiegetic narrator and an autodiegetic narrator who do communicate and do so to the extent that they virtually blend into one voice. Indeed, even the first narrator of this *Viaje* as a unit (Elvia, the narrator of the letter to Ismael), does achieve communication with her audience, in as much as Ismael receives, reads and successfully processes the thoughts she has expressed to him.

2.iii Dissenting voices: the *Segundo Viaje*

With this question of communication in mind, it is interesting to explore the narrative voices of the second Journey. Ramón Fernández's testimony is, ostensibly, a factual account of the events leading up to his arrest and imprisonment. Yet it passes through the hands of several individuals in the course of its publication and suffers the interpretation of each. At the time when Ramón writes his testimony, his declared intention is for it to be delivered to his friend Daniel Sakuntala so that he can arrange for it to be published. Ramón, therefore, can have no notion of the number of years that are to go by before Daniel's efforts to have the text published can finally be realised, nor of the particular background and bias of the editors who will comment on his testimony. As far as he is concerned, only his friend Sakuntala and the general public of 1980's U.S.A. are to be the judges of his account. He, as the writer of the original text, can have no idea of the perceptions of his future audience with regard to the events he has described. Also, it is important to point out that, although Sakuntala affirms that he and Ramón had been acquainted "since Cuba", and indeed refers to Fernández on more than one occasion as "mi amigo Ramoncito", Ramón's testimony remains precisely that, and not a letter or account addressed to or directed towards Sakuntala personally.

Sakuntala's closing comment in his presentation of the testimony hits on an important question: "Aquí está el texto al que sólo le he intercalado algunas notas aclaratorias. Ojalá algún día alguien lo tome en serio."(p.64). Indeed, perhaps some day someone will read Fernández's version of events and "take it seriously": it is evident from the comments of the three groups of commentators, however, that that day has not yet arrived. It is even more evident, in fact, that interpretations of events change radically with the times: there may be only a matter of forty five or so years between the times of writing the footnotes to Ramón's text but the perceptions of each "time" are worlds apart. This brings us back to the point I touched on

earlier with regard to the sequential order of the three *Viajes*: the concept of the march of time and of the quantity of time which has elapsed between each period in which the Journeys are set, respectively. This gulf is made more pronounced in the *Segundo Viaje* by the persistent annotation of the dates of writing the footnotes. In that sense, we do not follow a linear narrative in this second Journey but, rather, we are thrown around between one timescale and another, looking back at the events described with hindsight, then returning to the present time (to the present tense in Fernández's narrative, that is, to the time of writing the testimony in his cell), then into the past (his account of what took place), then forwards again to 1999, back to the late 80's, forwards to 2025, and so on. Somewhere in the middle of all that is the reader's present time. There is a starkly drawn contrast between the "time zones" themselves and, not least, between the perceptions held by each time's commentators. Like Sakuntala, the editors of 2025 find it necessary to include some clarifications of their own; their perceptions of what constitutes a relevant piece of clarification, of course, differs greatly from Sakuntala's. For all they state in their opening remarks that "hemos respetado la ortografía y las expresiones de Ramón Fernández, así como las notas de Daniel Sakuntala y de los señores Lorenzo y Echurre" (p.65), to what extent they have respected the integrity of the original text or of the previous comments is debatable. Even passing references to current affairs made by the 2025 commentators are revealing. Mother Teresa has committed suicide, Cuba has been taken over by a coalition of Jamaica, other Caribbean Island states and the U.K., and so forth: surely times have changed drastically since Fernández was alive and wrote his testimony, then.

If the world, and in particular Ramón's homeland, have undergone such upheaval, then the perceptions held by the majority of U.S. residents, including the 2025 editors, must also have been altered dramatically with regard to what Cuba is and what Cubans are and were. All the commentators make reference to the death from AIDS in 1987 of the "justly forgotten" Reinaldo Arenas¹⁷ in their footnotes to the testimony; they do, however, dispute the question of whether or not he can rightly be described as a Cuban writer. Whatever Reinaldo was once believed to be, perceptions of individuals, of situations, of everything do change with the times. A hint of this discrepancy that exists between perceptions of any one event is given in Sakuntala's presentation. It is important to note that, to all intents and purposes, the text and commentary constitute a factual account of the events preceding an alleged crime. So, in theory, it should be a clear and clean-cut description. However, even at the beginning of Sakuntala's presentation, some doubt is cast on the objectivity and credibility of the episode. He points out that this has been a well-known and exceptional case, widely reported in the press but he also tells us that:

¹⁷ i.e. Arenas as he appears in the novel as a fictionalized character.

En octubre de 1986 la prensa de casi todo el mundo divulgó una extraña noticia. Un cubano (...) había sido detenido en el Museo Metropolitano de Nueva York en el momento en que <<intentaba acuchillar>> (sic) el famoso cuadro la Gioconda de Leonardo da Vinci (...). Aquí muchos periódicos (...) continuaban diciendo que se suponía que el señor Fernández fuera uno de los tantos enfermos mentales expulsados de Cuba en 1980. (p.61)

Not only is news as reported in the press not worldwide, it seems (only most of the world – “casi todo el mundo” – carried reports on this “extraña noticia”), but their information amounts to interpretation, not fact: Ramón's alleged crime is recounted here very much as an unsubstantiated allegation, that is to say, Sakuntala places the accusation (“<<intentaba acuchillar>> (sic)”) between quotation marks. This is the newspapers', or perhaps the authorities' charge against Fernández, not Sakuntala's. The allegation is later refuted (or rather explained) in Ramón's statement: his intention was not precisely to vandalise a priceless painting, as the police and press assumed. Furthermore, Sakuntala then refers to the “muchos periódicos” – again, not all the papers reported the same news or version of the news – which drew their own prejudiced opinions about the accused himself. Their unconfirmed reports merely supposed that Ramón, not to say dozens of other Cuban emigrés, are unstable: “se suponía que” is uncertain, not a solid assertion of fact. So we are left wondering about Ramón's crime (if he was not caught actually defacing the painting but just “trying to”, how is it possible to deduce his intentions without resorting to supposition?), about his mental state (no evidence at all is given so far as to his instability or otherwise, except perhaps for the precarious assumption that “no normal person” would be inclined to vandalise the Mona Lisa) and, indeed, as to the newspapers themselves (if only most of the world's press covered the story, then why were the remaining ones not convinced by it or tempted to report on it?; what kind of papers did choose to cover the story and what particular style or bias did they share that provoked their interest and shaped their comments on the case?). Not even in the world's press, it appears, where concrete facts and information are expected to be found, does any consistency exist. The news itself is a matter of supposition and interpretation, and amounts to a particular, subjective version of the truth. This state of affairs is further highlighted later in Sakuntala's presentation:

Unos días después, el 17 de octubre, *The New York Times*, en una de sus páginas más remotas, dió a conocer la insólita muerte de Ramón Fernández en la prisión: <<Esta mañana el joven cubano que intentara destruir la obra maestra de Leonardo da Vinci apareció estrangulado en su celda donde esperaba para comparecer ante los tribunales. Lo raro del hecho – seguía comentando el periódico – es que no se ha encontrado ningún objeto que pudiera servir de vehículo para el suicidio.>> (pp. 61-62)

References to time here continue to be precise and universal, giving an air of "irrefutable fact", of objective documentation, which Ramón's account itself utterly contradicts: if we are to believe his insistent warnings about the imminent attempt on his life, his apparent suicide was, in fact, murder. The information quoted in this extract is purportedly taken from the world renowned *New York Times*, a pillar of respectable reporting, but even here the "fact" is interpretation. The report almost contradicts itself: how could "self-strangulation" in these circumstances be categorically described as an incident (an undisputed fact) of suicide? If this reporting is indeed a "noticia", then Sakuntala is right in qualifying it as "extraña" (p.61).

In some ways, however, there appears to be a certain agreement among the perpetrators of such unsubstantiated news: even if not all the press, without exception, carry the story, certainly the same brand of interpretation (or misinterpretation, depending on whose version of the truth we chose to believe) seems to be widespread. Almost consistently they reported: "<<un intento de acuchillamiento>> del cuadro, cuando, según todos los documentos y la propia confesión del acusado, el arma que éste portaba era un martillo..." (p.61). The facts are always *según* somebody: according to the papers, to the bulk of the documentation, to the accused, and so on. Even the accused's statement is referred to here as his confession: but how can it be described as a confession if in fact he claims not to be guilty of the crime of which he stands accused? In which case, his testimony is, in fact, more of a protest than a confession. In any case, each version of the facts is always someone's word against someone else's: Ramón's word against that of the witnesses at the museum, Sakuntala's against the subsequent editors', and so forth. Whether or not we accept Ramón's story against the newspaper reports, we are faced with the affirmation made by all the parties involved that the weapon he carried was a hammer, not a knife, a weapon more appropriate to bludgeoning a person (which, in effect, is what Ramón aimed to do to Elisa/Leonardo) than to slashing a painting. We should also bear in mind the question of Ramón's death before he ever reached his trial: despite the almost dismissive condemnations of the *New York Times* report, he was held in jail simply for "allegedly thinking about" or "almost attempting to vandalise" the Mona Lisa - he didn't actually get as far as carrying it out - but, as is suggested by the press, he is guilty by dint of being an apparently unsavoury individual. He is, it is reported: "el joven cubano que intentara destruir la obra maestra de Leonardo da Vinci" (p.61). As Ramón comments, he has been detained (albeit in the safest place for him under the circumstances) for being a Cuban immigrant. He has been, as he puts it: "Encerrado aquí por un delito que no he cometido, pero que, dada mi condición de marielito, es como si ya lo hubiese consumado" (p.72). Indeed, Sakuntala dismisses the version reported in the press:

Aquí terminan las noticias más o menos serias sobre este caso; noticias que comenzaron con un equívoco (el pretendido acuchillamiento a la Monalisa) y

terminan de la misma manera (el supuesto suicidio del recluso). Tal vez, con esa típica sabiduría que es característica de la ignorancia, la prensa amarilla intuyó que detrás de todo eso se escondía un crimen pasional. (p.62)

The kind of ignorant wisdom Sakuntala describes seems to apply to all the commentary made in this second Journey with regard to Ramón's case and to other situations mentioned. Certainly it would appear to be true of the press: yet, as Sakuntala suggests, just as the interpretations formed can be quite arbitrary and often unfair (as in the case of the probable racism behind Fernández's imprisonment), they can equally reveal a great deal and can unwittingly hit on real situations. Ramón's case, according to his testimony and to Sakuntala's affirmations, did indeed involve an underlying situation, if not exactly a "crimen pasional", as the tabloid press suggested. Whether the press could have imagined such a complex set of circumstances as the ones Fernández describes, on the other hand, is doubtful. Nevertheless, as much as misinterpretation can exist, so can intuition. How we classify any one version of the truth, however, depends on our own intuition, imagination and bias. Why should Ramón's account of events be so unacceptable to the commentators of 1999 and 2025 and yet seem so plausible to Sakuntala? It seems that when the truth as it is presented to an individual is unacceptable to him, then, as far as that individual is concerned, it simply cannot be the truth and, consequently, he reinvents the facts to satisfy his own criteria and his particular perceptions of what is feasible and what is not. So, according to their very different perceptions, the various narrators of the *Segundo viaje* reconstruct the "facts" of the case.

The *viaje* that Elisa¹⁸ and Ramón undertake is to "el pueblo de montañas" (p.72), the unnamed town which is so dear to Elisa. It is a journey through time as well as space, a journey into the past, and one which (according to Ramón) transcends the frontier between reality and art. After seeing the painting and realising the identity of the town, Ramón states quite categorically that the village in question was the town depicted in the background of la Gioconda. He is adamant that this is the case but still all the commentators add a footnote contradicting his declarations. All of them are certain beyond any doubt that they are right. Sakuntala underlines the apparent obviousness of his solution to the question when he affirms that: "Evidentemente la ciudad a que se refiere Ramoncito es a Syracuse..." (p.71). Yet, for all he believes this to be "evidente", Sakuntala is bluntly contradicted by Lorenzo and Echurre: "Discrepamos rotundamente con el señor Sakuntala. [...] Hemos llegado a la conclusión de que la ciudad [...] no es otra que Albany." (p.72). The editors of 2025 refute all these theories: "Rechazamos las teorías tanto de Daniel Sakuntala como de los señores Lorenzo y Echurre. La

¹⁸ Elisa/ La Gioconda/Leonardo da Vinci is Ramón's girl and a stunningly beautiful woman, very much like the Mona Lisa. She is an enigma from the beginning, disappearing from Ramón and evading questions. As it turns out, Elisa, the painting and Leonardo are one and the same.

ciudad no puede ser otra que el pueblo de Ithaca..." (p.72). Despite their respective assertions to the contrary, there is no proof or explanation from any of the three groups of commentators as to why their conclusions as to the identity of the town should be correct. They are all equally adamant that they are right, but it is interesting to note that their expressions of irrefutability ("evidentemente", "discrepamos rotundamente", "la conclusión, no puede ser otra que" – p.72), for all they are insistent, are not rational. Where Sakuntala believes that the town is "evidently" Syracuse, he gives no reason why this should be so evident; if it is so obvious, then it is evident only to him. Similarly, the editors of 1999 and 2025 pronounce that the town can only be Albany and Ithaca, respectively. Yet, given the four possibilities presented to us so far, this is not the case: there is an equal possibility that it could be (at the very least) Syracuse, Albany, Ithaca, or the town in the painting. What is clear from their conflicting deductions, then, is that there are multiple interpretations. Moreover, these comments deal with a town which Ramón claims to have visited along with Elisa: therefore surely only he can say whether it could or could not have been Syracuse, Albany or Ithaca. Indeed, the name of the town itself is largely irrelevant when we consider that the point in question is the journey Ramón claims to have made to a town which exists in a painting, in the company of a woman who, he affirms, later turned out to be the late Leonardo da Vinci. The commentators, however, have chosen not to dwell on the concept of travelling to another dimension but have concentrated on the question of the town's identity, not on the feasibility of whether Ramón ever made such a journey at all.

In fact, it is often the aspects of Ramón's testimony which prompt them to interject which tell us as much about the editors' perceptions as the actual comments they make. For example, Ramón mentions the value of the painting at one point. He refers to it in passing, not as a prime concern but as a brief throwaway comment, describing it as: "... valorado en muchos millones de dólares (más de ochenta millones decía el catálogo)..." (p.79). But this provokes an interjection from Lorenzo and Echurre, who offer a lengthy and rather contrived deduction: the *New York Times*, they say, put the value of la Gioconda at about a hundred million U.S. dollars, the catalogue at eighty. From this discrepancy they form the following assumption:

Imaginamos que detrás de esto se escondía una treta de gobierno de los Estados Unidos para aumentar los impuestos por el derecho de exhibición de la famosa obra en este país. Podríamos agregar que estas sospechas fueron casi absolutamente confirmadas cuando, en 1992, al abrirse el testamento del expresidente Ronald Reagan, quedó demostrado que *The New York Times* era de su propiedad desde 1944. (p.79)

Lorenzo and Echurre's theory is made less than entirely convincing by the somewhat cagey expressions they use to qualify it: "imaginamos que" denotes a supposition on their part, not a proven set of facts. This is made even shakier by the following sentence with its conditional tense "podríamos agregar que"; had they begun the statement with a more direct expression such as "además", the overall tone of the footnote would have been a good deal weightier. As it stands, the second sentence is a "might add", a possible addition to their initial imaginings. The sentence in itself is an exercise in unconvincing suggestion and qualifying expressions: they recognise that the situation of the first line amounts to "sospechas". Even these "suspicions" are qualified as having been only "almost absolutely" confirmed, an oxymoron in itself: since a suspicion can either be confirmed or unconfirmed (in which case it cannot be accepted as hard fact), "almost absolutely confirmed" actually does more to damage the credibility of the theories than to establish it. And for the "editors" of 1999 to actually misspell the name of the ex-president they have implicated in this scenario does nothing to strengthen their case. Even so, neither are we given any proof to the contrary: the situation the editors describe here may or may not be the truth but, for Lorenzo and Echurre, it is. And if it is, it casts a whole new light on the *New York Times* reports about Ramón Fernández's imprisonment and death. So, while one particular version of the facts is stated, at the same time it undermines its own credibility and remains, at best, less than irrefutable.

Truths are set up and shot down throughout this second Journey. Wherever "facts" are presented, they are questioned, either directly (by the intervention of another commentator) or indirectly (by the unconvincing nature of the comment itself, as in the section above). What is presented as fact may, on the surface, appear to be logically and rationally thought out but, nevertheless, reveals itself to be based on bias or interpretation. A conflict is evident between logic, interpretation and proven fact. According to Ramón's personal testimony, i.e. to his account of events as he witnessed them, the Metropolitan Museum closed at 10p.m. the day he waited outside the building for Elisa: "...hora en que, ese día, por ser viernes, el museo cerraba todas sus puertas." (p.80). This would appear to be a simple fact of memory: Ramón was at the museum that day and he remembers the doors closing at 10pm. Then again, he can only assume that the Museum closed at that time simply because it was Friday. Or does he know for a fact that this was the reason? Since, by his own admission, he was no regular visitor to the museum before his experiences with Elisa (he even got lost inside the museum), he may very well be mistaken. Certainly this would, on the surface, appear to be a rather trivial point, in view of the events that follow in Ramón's account, but it provokes the contradictions of the commentators: all three groups say he was wrong. Sakuntala declares: "Algún evento especial tendría que estarse celebrando ese día en el Museo, pues sólo los miércoles cierra a las diez de la noche." (p.80). Lorenzo and Echurre disagree: "El Museo Metropolitano de Nueva York

cerraba los miércoles y viernes a las diez de la noche. Los conocimientos del señor Sakuntala en esta materia son nulos." (p.80). And the editors of 2025 refute all the previous theories: "Antes del gran incendio, el Museo Metropolitano se mantenía abierto los martes y domingos hasta las diez de la noche." (p.80). Once again, the three groups of commentators would appear to be concentrating their attention on peripheral details and missing the fundamental aspects of Fernández's story. However, their comments do reveal their preoccupation with themselves: each commentator, in turn, indulges in a bit of oneupmanship, belittling the competence of the previous observer and declaring his (or their) own superior knowledge. This appears to be of greater concern to them than Ramón's bizarre tale as a whole. In this instance, no comment is made on Ramón's state of mind as he waited outside the museum, but the commentators do interject with evidence of their knowledge, while the editors of 1999 also take the opportunity to insult their predecessor, Daniel Sakuntala.

In a similar instance, they all comment on Ramón's description of the interior of the Metropolitan Museum. He recounts his frantic search for Elisa inside the Museum, when he goes into a temple exhibit: "...entré en un templo de la época de los Tolomeos (según decía un cartel)..." (p.76). Notably, Ramón qualifies his reference to the historical period of the temple by stating that he read the inscription on the plaque by the temple itself. Indeed, judging by his knowledge of and interest in the contents of the museum in general, he is hardly likely to have identified the temple on his own. Still, despite the statement that he takes his information directly from the museum, all the editors contradict him with conflicting historical "fact". Sakuntala is, again, obstinate in his opinion, negating any possibility of disagreement: "El templo al que entró no puede haber sido otro que el de Ramsés II..." (p.76). This time, not even the same group of editors can agree, and Echurre and Lorenzo contradict each other as well as Sakuntala. Echurre refutes any such suggestion and insists that: "Lo único que guardaba el Museo Metropolitano de ese templo era una piedra de unos dos metros de altura. Imposible que Ramón Fernández pudiera adentrarse en ella." He deduces, without room for doubt, that: "En realidad donde él entró fue en el templo del Debot." (Vicente Echurre, 1999 editor, p.77). He is contradicted by his colleague, though, when Lorenzo declares that: "El recinto donde entró el señor Fernández en el Museo Metropolitano era el supuesto templo de Kantur." (Ismaele Lorenzo, 1999 editor, p.77).

Lorenzo qualifies his identification with further "facts" about this *supuesto templo*, namely that it was a fake: UNESCO, he says, sold the original to the United States through John F. Kennedy, but the operation turned out to be no more than one of the many *estafas* apparently committed by Kennedy, so the temple was returned to its home in the U.S.S.R. and replaced with a full-sized plastic model which, in turn, was highly flammable and was the cause of the subsequent "great fire" in the Metropolitan Museum. The editors of 2025 refute all

the previous definitions of the temple: "El único templo egipcio que guardaba el Museo Metropolitano era el de Pernabi, dinastía 5." (p.77). Once again, the contradictions are opinionated and "unquestionable", but it is interesting to notice how precisely they are expressed. As before, the statements are presented as irrefutable: Sakuntala declares that "no puede haber sido otro que el de Ramsés II"; Echurre declares this to be *imposible* and that *en realidad* the temple was an entirely different one. All four groups of commentators, this time, stick rigidly to their own theories and insist that their respective assumptions are the only possible *realidad*. However, in doing so with equally plausible (or equally implausible) evidence to support their declarations, the effect is in fact to prove that multiple possibilities exist, that one reality is as feasible as the next, certainly in as much as they are put forward in these footnotes. It is important to note that the contradictions made here refer to historic accuracy, to specific periods in time. This is a preoccupation that runs through both the footnotes and the testimony in the *Segundo Viaje*, and on which I will come back to later. For the moment, though, I will only highlight that in both these previous sets of footnotes, the concept of time has been a concern, first with the confusion over the hour of closing at the museum (clock time), then as a matter of historical and cultural era.

On a superficial level, the footnotes appear to stray right off the "point", that is they gloss over the more obviously shocking aspects of Ramón's account and dwell instead on seemingly trivial concerns; yet they speak volumes about the vision of each narrator, revealing their priorities and their respective modes of interpreting the testimony. Ramón mentions, at one stage, that the hammer he took to the museum (to destroy the painting/Leonardo¹⁹) was one he kept for odd woodwork jobs. Sakuntala, however, does not comment on Ramón's plan to attack the Mona Lisa at all, but on the identity of the hammer: he asserts that, yes, Ramón did do a bit of carpentry and, indeed, made a very nice bookcase for him, but that the hammer actually belonged to him and not to Ramón at all; it had merely been on loan. Surely this is not a question of great importance, but it does reveal Sakuntala's preoccupation with how he himself should be perceived by the public. His comments throughout the *Viaje* persistently defend his own good character and importance as an intellectual; evidently, he is very much afraid of losing face. Later, when Fernández mentions the steel security cage that springs up around the painting, a mechanism triggered off by his attempt to lunge at it, Sakuntala picks up on the efficiency of this type of security system and affirms that only three paintings in the world are protected by it. His comments on the subject appear to be a rather thinly disguised attempt at name-dropping: "Estas obras, según datos obtenidos por mi amigo y curador, el

¹⁹Fernández is charged with planning to vandalise da Vinci's masterpiece, but according to Ramón's own account, his intention was to annihilate Leonardo/Elisa the person. The only way to do this, he believed, was to destroy the painting itself. (See *Viaje a La Habana* pages 90 - 91).

señor Kokó Salás" (p.91). This claim to friendship with Salás, curator and collector of data is hardly in direct connection with Ramón's testimony but, perhaps in an attempt similar to his declarations of great friendship with the now infamous writer of the testimony we are reading, declarations which, in point of fact, are not really borne out by the testimony itself, seems to be more of an effort to assert his own contacts and status than to add any insight into Ramón's account. Such comments certainly could not be described as *notas aclaratorias*²⁰.

In response to Sakuntala's mention of Kokó Salás, Lorenzo and Echurre retort that Salás, in fact, was not a curator at all, but: "un delincuente común, dedicado al tráfico ilícito de obras de arte en Madrid bajo la protección del gobierno de La Habana en contubernio con Ramón Sernada." (p.91)²¹. The muck-slinging continues with the 2025 editors' offering on the subject, which states that such slander against Mr. Salás: "es subestimar su personalidad y su importancia histórica. Kokó Salás (nunca sabremos si fue un hombre o una mujer) fue una persona culta y superdotada dedicada al espionaje internacional al servicio del Kremlin." (p.91). Furthermore, they underline their point with a book reference on the matter: "Para mayor información véase *La Matahari* (sic) *de Holguín* escrito por Teodoro Tapia." (p.91). Once again, we are presented with conflicting accounts of a single issue: who is (was) Kokó Salás? An eminent curator, a delinquent and an art smuggler or a supremely gifted (if androgynous) spy with the K.G.B.? Clearly, opinions of this individual vary greatly according to whose assessment you hear and to the year in which you hear it: if Kokó was a curator in the '80's, and a delinquent in 1999, by 2025 he has come to be thought of as brilliant and worthy of a published biography. Again, each group of commentators is unbending in its affirmations. It becomes evident, though, as the footnotes progress, that each group has a particular set of preoccupations and a specific manner of perceiving the "facts": if Sakuntala is at pains to assert his own worth, Lorenzo and Echurre are equally keen to contradict him purely for the sake of proving him wrong (however shaky or unsubstantiated their proof might be). They repeatedly dismiss his comments out of hand with such degrading remarks as : "los conocimientos del señor Sakuntala en esta materia son nulos. (p.80). The editors writing in 2025, on the other hand, contradict the previous commentators based on what appears to be factual evidence, like, for instance, Teodoro Tapia's biography of Salás.

The editors of 2025 do not express any personal grudge against Sakuntala, Lorenzo or Echurre. For all they reject the affirmations of all three, they provide detached, impersonal comments on the text and previous commentary. This is blatantly apparent in the footnotes which, which interrupt Ramón's account when he quotes Elisa's remarks to him in Italian: "- *Il*

²⁰*Viaje a La Habana* p.64

²¹Kokó Salás, as he is named here, is surely an ironic reference to the individual called Coco Salá who figures prominently in Arenas's autobiography *Antes que Anochezca*.

veleno de la conoscenza é una delle tante calamitádi cui soffre l'essere umano - dijo mirándome fijamente-. Il veleno della conoscenza o al meno quello della curiosità." (p.82). Sakuntala interjects here to correct Ramón's feeble Italian:

El pobre Ramoncito puso en su testimonio la transcripción fonética de estas frases. Yo, con mi amplio conocimiento del idioma italiano (fui discípulo de Giolio B. Blanc), las escribo correctamente. Me apresuro a aclarar que ésta es la única corrección que he hecho al manuscrito. La traducción al español sería la siguiente: <<El veneno del conocimiento es una de las tantas calamidades que padece el ser humano. El veneno del conocimiento o por lo menos el de la curiosidad>>. (p.82)

His rather patronising reference to "el pobre Ramoncito" is perhaps somewhat out of place if we consider that Ramón, to all intents and purposes, has never learned Italian²² but has managed a near-perfect transcription of the words from memory alone. Sakuntala takes the opportunity, though, to demonstrate his own knowledge of the language and, once again, indulges in some name-dropping. He points out that this is the only correction he has made to the testimony at all, a claim which, on the surface, does not hold water, given the number of footnotes Sakuntala provides which, though they perhaps do not alter the words of the text themselves, certainly contradict and distort it. Yet, for Sakuntala, these interjections, until now, are only "aclaraciones", not alterations to the manuscript. It is surely significant that he should chose to make this particular comment. The editors of 1999 have their own observations to add and these, again, are expressly directed at Sakuntala:

Aunque la traducción es correcta dudamos que el señor Sakuntala haya sido discípulo del barón Giolio B. Blanc. La alcurnia de este personaje no le permitía codearse con gente como el señor Sakuntala, mucho menos ser su profesor. A no ser que hubiesen motivos muy *estrictamente personales*. (p.82)

This time they have added some innuendo to their defamatory remarks. The commentators of 2025 also interject: "Giolio B. Blanc dirigió por muchos años la revista *Noticias de Arte* en Nueva York por lo que seguramente conoció a Daniel Sakuntala quien también tenía pretensiones literarias." (p.82). If we look again at Elisa/Leonardo's declaration, we are faced with two things: firstly, that her/his comment comes as a parabolic synthesis of the human quality that ultimately destroys Ramón and drives the critics of his testimony, that is, that their downfall is their irresistible need for knowledge or, rather, their curiosity. So, when Ramón and Elisa are in the mountain village together, she tells him the reasons behind her intention to kill him. Ramón, of course, has no idea what has been said to him, since Elisa/Leonardo

²²He is confused more than once by words he hears Elisa speak in a language he does not know and, indeed, in this instance he only transcribes what he hears, he does not understand the words at all.

makes her remarks in Italian, but he copies the Italian as he has heard it. For this reason Sakuntala patronises his friend Ramoncito and grandly claims to have helped him by correcting the Italian and translating it. Ramón, therefore, never had any understanding of what was said to him that day and we only have (in Spanish) Daniel Sakuntala's version of Ramón's version of the conversation to consider. The point behind Elisa's remarks is clear and poignant, though: "<<El veneno del conocimiento es una de las calamidades que padece el ser humano. El veneno del conocimiento o por lo menos el de la curiosidad.>>" (p.82).

Indeed, we should reflect on the tendency of the various commentators of this Journey (not to mention all the other narrators of the novel) to wander over the dividing line between *conocimiento*, that is to say between striving to "saber", to find out factual information, and *curiosidad*, which amounts to interpretation or "intuir". Elisa's accusations are borne out by the very nature of the commentary on Ramón's testimony, to say nothing of the account of Ramón's own persistent *curiosidad* and the consequences it brings. Ramón, it has to be said, neglected to wonder about the language this supposedly Greek girl, Elisa, was speaking to him and, indeed, our learned commentators (including the linguistically expert Sr. Sakuntala) do not pass comment on this rather curious fact. Sakuntala, for all he has taken the trouble to produce a translation, fails to consider the meaning of what Elisa actually said and concentrates instead on the "ignorance" of "el pobre Ramoncito" (p.82) and on his own greatness as a scholar and an intellectual. Apparently he does not realise that he himself is full of the *veneno* she describes, in its most unproductive form. Also suffering from this condition are the subsequent editors, who also miss the meaning behind Elisa's words and comment only on their rivals' intellectual pretensions: Lorenzo and Echurre accept Sakuntala's translation but dismiss the claim that he was ever a pupil in Italian language of someone as revered as Giolio B. Blanc, at least "al no ser que hubiesen motivos muy *estrictamente personales*" (p.82) [Arenas's italics] - yet more unfounded speculation. The editors from 2025 disagree, but also ignore the rather startling revelations of Fernández's text, restricting their comments to the annotations of the previous editors. They affirm that Blanc and Sakuntala must have been acquainted though Blanc's involvement with a literary journal in New York and Sakuntala's literary pretensions. *Conocimiento*, in fact, has very little to do with these comments, but *curiosidad*, and especially biased speculation, is obviously flourishing. The only moment of sincerity at this point in the text comes when Ramón, on hearing Elisa's words, which are unintelligible to him, tells her: "No entiendo ni una palabra - le dije con absoluta sinceridad.", to which she responds: "-Pues quiero que me entiendas." (both p.82). Communication is the key but they have not managed to achieve it.

The same kind of adamant insistence that the editors show with regard to the "truth" of their own affirmations recurs in the *Tercer Viaje*. For instance, in response to Ismaelito's

claims (which do turn out to be true) to have known from the beginning that Ismael was his father, Ismael shouts three times “¡Mentira!” (p.151). The truth of the situation (i.e. that his new-found young lover, introduced to him as Carlos, is actually his estranged son and, therefore, his reason for being in Havana at all) is unacceptable to him, just as the “facts” put forward by each editor in the *Segundo Viaje* are unacceptable, and therefore cannot be true, to any of the others. Ramón Fernández is as certain, as categorical in his statement that la Gioconda is Elisa as the editors are in their commentary. He insists:

Indiscutiblemente aquella mujer de pelo oscuramente rojizo y lacio, de rasgos perfectos que, mientras depositaba delicadamente una mano sobre la muñeca de la otra, sonreía casi burlonamente de espaldas a un paisaje brumoso en el cual parecía distinguirse un camino que daba a un lago, era Elisa.(p.78)

We should bear in mind, here, that these remarks come from the apparently ignorant, uncultured Ramón and not from a would-be intellectual such as Sakuntala: so where else but from his own experience would such a young man acquire such intimate familiarity with da Vinci’s painting? Fernández himself admits to being unfamiliar, if not uncomfortable, in surroundings like an art gallery, so where did he learn all this information about the Mona Lisa? He may well be something of a cultural airhead in Sakuntala’s terms but he most certainly “knows women”, as is proven by his references to numerous lovers in the past. This would seem to lend a certain credibility to his story: he does not seem to have much to gain from fabricating all this detail and, certainly, he makes no claims to academic superiority. So his lack of pretension at least suggests a lack of self-interest, although that does not exclude the possibility that he may be unbalanced, as the authorities have stated on his records. At the very least, his testimony, for all it is fantastic, stands on an equal footing with the apparently more rational writing of his commentators.

Even so, despite Ramón’s certainty that Elisa and the Mona Lisa are one and the same, this “truth” seems so extraordinary even to him that he invents a more “plausible” explanation for the likeness of the two women: thinking rationally, he deduces that Elisa could not have been the original model for the painting, but follows his own, seemingly logical process of deduction, reasoning that, first of all, the woman in the painting was European, as is Elisa. Therefore, he surmises, Elisa could be some distant relative of the woman in the painting and, as such, might even be the owner of the painting. In naked contrast with the iron conviction expressed by the editors as they announce their respective deductions, Ramón couches his suppositions very clearly in terms of “maybe”: he does not state categorically that Elisa is, definitely, a relative of the artist’s subject, only that “podría ser entonces algún pariente remoto”. Similarly, he only speculates that Elisa “podía ser dueña de aquel cuadro.” (p.79). That, he deduces, must be why she is in New York: she is chaperoning the painting. This

version of the truth seems much more logical to him and, therefore, he believes it to be the correct one. But even here, his choice of words reveals he still cannot be one hundred percent certain about the truth and he can only say that Elisa might be (*podría ser*) some descendant of the model and, therefore, could be the painting's owner. Unlike the commentators on his testimony, Ramón is aware of the fallibility of his own perception. He goes even further with these logical deductions but, still, can only speculate on the possible explanation behind Elisa's furtive attitude: "Ahora creía comprender todas sus preocupaciones por pasar incógnita. Se trataba de una multimillonaria ninfomaniaca que, por razones obvias, debía mantener sus relaciones sexuales en el anonimato." (p.80). For these "logical" reasons he discards his existing preoccupation with *anomalías* which he now only "thinks he thought he witnessed"; yet the words he chooses to describe his process of logical deduction suggest that here, too, it is purely a case of interpretation, not proven fact. He cannot be sure but he thinks he understands the situation at this point (*creía comprender*), and yet his assumptions are based on *razones obvias* (obvious to his train of thought only), rather than any kind of evidence.

Sakuntala, too, forms his own conclusions as to the motives behind the actions of others according to his own, very subjective, imaginings about them. He puts Reinaldo Arenas's²³ rejection of his request to publish Ramón's testimony in *Mariel* down to sexual tension: he assumes that Arenas and Fernández will have met in Cuba and that Arenas will be smarting at Ramón's certain rejection of his advances, since, Sakuntala deduces, such a virile young man as Ramón could have no time for a "queer" like Reinaldo. It is Elisa/Leonardo who passes judgement on these distortions (or, at least, differing perceptions) of the truth: at the "moment of truth", when she drops the bombshell on Ramón and reveals to him that she is Leonardo da Vinci²⁴, she tells him: "Claro, hasta ahora tu torpeza y tu cobardía no te han permitido ver las cosas tal como son." (p.73). The same could be said, indeed, not only of the commentators but of all the protagonists (the narrators) of the three *Viajes*. She returns to the question of the vice of curiosity when she explains to Ramón why she kills: "<<esos hombres no se conforman con disfrutar, quieren saber, y terminan como tú, teniendo alguna vaga idea de mi desequilibrio.>>" (p.83). It is precisely the curiosity of men, their need to continually form their perceptions and assumptions and investigations that drives her to kill them. Ramón's downfall has been his persistent curiosity about this enigmatic woman: his need to satisfy his doubts about her has led him to uncover a situation that he has no idea how to handle. Similarly, in the *Primer Viaje*, it is Ricardo's insatiable need to find the one remaining person who has not applauded the couple's garb that ultimately leads him to the *muchacho* and,

²³ Again, this is Reinaldo Arenas as he appears in the novel, as a fictionalized character, the subject of references made by the various editors.

²⁴ The question of Elisa/Leonardo/the Mona Lisa's identity is rather more complex than it appears on the surface and I shall return to it in more depth later.

paradoxically, leads Eva to her downfall. Curiosity the vice, it seems, involves more than a hunger for knowledge: the poison Elisa describes involves a constant searching for and remodelling of the facts, a continual effort to make sense of things (i.e. to make the facts acceptable to oneself) that, inevitably, does not lead to where we expect to go.

The footnotes containing the editors' comments, as we have seen, are equally prone to this kind of reconditioning of the facts, of supposition and interpretation. The comments of the editors centre around their own respective viewpoints and reveal them all (but most especially Sakuntala, Lorenzo and Echurre) to be utterly self-centred: Lorenzo and Echurre debunk any claims to author status made by Sakuntala; Sakuntala, on the other hand, consistently blows his own trumpet, asserting with great pomposity his significance as an intellectual and his other gifts and virtues, while at the same time indulging in some bitchiness towards individuals against whom he bears one grudge or another; the 2025 editors base their comments purely on information gleaned from confirmed sources and they take their historical data as gospel - if the documentation says that Sakuntala was "a writer" then, as far as they are concerned, he was one. The editors of 2025 might appear to have the greatest credibility here, since they avoid lapsing into personal jibes like the others. Despite the greater objectivity of their comments, however, they are not necessarily any more convincing than the previous editors'. While Sakuntala and the editors of 1999 interpret the affirmations that have been made, the 2025 commentators relate the statements they have acquired from their written sources and accept them as hard fact, ignoring the possibility that their pronouncements are as potentially flawed as those of the other editors. Theirs may be a version of events based on documentation but it remains, nevertheless, a version of events. Sakuntala, still, is the most self-indulgent of the three groups of commentators, in as much as he tends to name-drop and to go off at a tangent so as to allow him to throw in a remark (complimentary or otherwise) about some acquaintance of his. For instance, he makes a passing reference to Delfín Prats²⁵, commenting that:

Pero esa es otra historia, como la de la bofetada en plena guagua que allá en La Habana le propinara mi amigo, mi hermano, Ramoncito, a Delfín Prats por habérsele lanzado repentinamente a la portañuela. (p.63)

This is a rather throwaway comment to be included in the footnotes to a published testimony and, again, it is only one way of understanding the facts. It is even reminiscent of the stand-up comic's trick to introduce material entirely unrelated to the previous comments by way of suggesting that "that's another story, like the time when...": Sakuntala's unrelated story, however, seems to have a gossipy edge that has been itching to be told. It is not the stuff of

²⁵ The name of this character, Delfín Prats, is poignant: he also appears in *Antes que Anochezca*, as well as the *Pentagonía*, see Chapter 3.

academic footnote reference, then, but very much an emotional aside included for personal motives.

It is interesting to note that each group of editors in this Journey is unaware (to all intents and purposes) that any subsequent editors will be remarking on their contributions; even Ramón, who clearly intends his testimony to be published and widely read, could not know how long it would take for his text to reach publication or that it would receive the comments of editors as late as 1999 and 2025. He knows, however, that Sakuntala is to receive and proof read his manuscript, since it is to Sakuntala that he entrusts it for future publication. For all he is aware of this situation, though, Ramón includes in his testimony a reference to spending one night at his friend Daniel Sakuntala's house. Sakuntala has offered him a safe haven while he is on the run from Elisa/Leonardo. Ramón wakes during the night and, in his words: "Mis propios gritos me despertaron tan repentinamente que tuve tiempo de ver a Daniel succionándome el miembro. El se hizo el desentendido y se retiró a un extremo de la cama donde fingió dormir." (p.87). Clearly, Sakuntala's desired image of himself does not coincide with the information Ramón offers, which throws an entirely different and less savoury light on the character. In his comments on this section of the testimony, Sakuntala claims to have left this part of the manuscript unaltered "por pura honestidad intelectual" (p.87), but he qualifies this by saying: "Pero esos abusos lascivos a los que se refiere no pueden ser más que productos de su estado nervioso y de la pesadilla que en ese momento padecía." (p.87). Funny, then, that Ramón makes no mention of any nightmares, only of waking up. Indeed, Lorenzo and Echurre seize the opportunity to besmirch Sakuntala's character further, in a reference to: "La hoja moral de este personaje [Daniel Sakuntala], quien desapareció desnudo junto al lago Erie en medio de una orgía multitudinaria, así lo confirma. (pp. 87-88). That Sakuntala's enigmatic and tragic end should "confirm" Ramón's claims is less than convincing. The 2025 editors, for their part, tell us that Sakuntala "desapareció junto al lago Ontario. Fue allí donde se encontraron sus ropas. Lo de la supuesta orgía no es una noticia confirmada." (p.88). It would appear, then, that their suggestions about the man's erotic habits fit rather better with Ramón's testimony about Sakuntala than with Sakuntala's own.

What, then, is fact? Can fact be reduced to information that is documented and *confirmada*? That would surely exclude any conclusions as to Sakuntala's sexual preferences, since it is doubtful that these would be documented anywhere but in the personal memoirs of someone like Ramón. Can we accept as fact, then, the subjective claims of Ramón, Sakuntala or Lorenzo and Echurre, when each evidently has a personal interest in how something like Sakuntala's sexual conduct is described? It is chilling to note that, while the editors of 1999 and those of 2025 concentrate on the whereabouts of Sakuntala's disappearance, the 2025 commentators restricting their comments to tangible evidence in the form of written

documentation, events have occurred that appear to defy any concept of logical deduction: with the exception of the 2025 editors, so far all the contributors to this testimony have vanished in suspicious circumstances. Fernández's body mysteriously disappears from the mortuary; Sakuntala, apparently, disappears somewhere near Lake Erie or Lake Ontario and his body is never found; Lorenzo and Echurre, who finally publish the testimony in 1999, also vanish, along with all copies of the book (or almost all) on their return to Cuba. The effect of these mysterious events is to further draw the reader into the debate being held by the writers of this *Segundo Viaje*: we are forced to reappraise the "truths" that have been offered to us and are ultimately faced with the fact (if, indeed, we accept it to be a fact) that "something" has befallen Ramón, Daniel, Lorenzo and Echurre. If Ramón was the first to disappear and did so immediately after testifying in his manuscript to threats on his life made by Elisa/Leonardo, then are we not confronted by the possibility that his story may be true (on a fictional level!), for all the editors have persistently neglected to comment on the credibility of its facts? Whatever we do deduce about the deaths of these four men, we are being forced to interpret and to engage in questioning and deduction.

3. The "I" in the mirror

3.i Ricardo and Eva versus Richard and Evattt: individual identity and collective identity

As Elisa has shown us, deductions can be a dangerous thing. In the first Journey, Eva too is guilty of a great deal of supposition and this, indeed, is to be her downfall. Eva constantly speaks and acts on Ricardo's behalf, without pausing to ask or to consider his opinion. Ricardo has no individual voice until the two tumble towards disintegration as a couple and their *viaje* nears its conclusion. At the beginning of the *Primer Viaje* it is very clearly Eva who wears the trousers and she directs Ricardo in virtually everything they do in life, the assumption being that she does so "for his own good". She describes to Ricardo (as we have seen, the whole of the first Journey is narrated to Ricardo), for instance, her early attempts to groom him according to the image she has chosen for him:

Por aquellos tiempos estabas bastante influido por los gestos de Clark Gable. Gracias a mí dejaste de imitarlo y te fuiste modernizando. En la luna de miel descubrí, para tu beneficio, que echándote la melena adelante y dejándote crecer las patillas, te dabas un aire a los²⁶ Ricky Nelson que te quedaba estupendo. Luego te convencí para que te aclararas el pelo, y el parecido fue formidable. (p.13)

Eva believes she has done Ricardo a great service, and that her efforts have been for his “beneficio”; thanks to her, she believes (“gracias a mí”), he has bettered himself. It would appear from this section that Ricardo has simply gone along with Eva’s manipulation but it is important to note that, for the moment, only Eva has a voice in this recounting of events. Although there is very little evidence, initially, that Ricardo has protested very much at being the subordinate, there are suggestions that Eva’s efforts to act on his behalf “for his benefit” do not always please him and that, sometimes, if not often, her assumptions that Ricardo is thinking as she is are wide of the mark. Once again, it boils down to a lack of communication. This is made evident on the occasion when Eva plays a record which she presumes Ricardo likes as much as she does, for the simple reason that it has never occurred to her that he might not. When she turns on the record player, she is taken aback when her husband reacts: “<<Apaga eso>>, dijiste. <<Bien sabes que no me gustan esos tipos con su gritería.>>” (p.23). She has, in fact, been unaware of this possibility, and states: “Pero yo no sabía nada, Ricardo. Hasta entonces nunca me habías dicho que no te gustaran <<Los cinco latinos>>.” (p.23). At the beginning of Eva’s narration, then, it seems to be Ricardo who obeys Eva without a word but, once the *Viaje* is being planned, she shuts up and goes along with his plans for the trip. As she says: “Sólo querías que yo tejiese.” (p.34). And she does as she is bid. She does voice her opposition to the trip but she goes nevertheless and she makes the preparations that are asked of her. The misinterpretation and incommunication between the pair work both ways. Once the *viaje* is set up, indeed, this situation gets out of hand and virtually no communication exists between them. Repeatedly there are situations where feelings have not been voiced or heard, or where motives and emotions have been misconstrued; Eva says, for example: “... el del plan fuiste tú. Yo, después de todo, no te dije nada de lo que estaba pensando.” (p.33). Later she says: “Bien sabes que nunca quise emprender el viaje. Ese no era nuestro mundo.” (p.38). Her comments here expose a great deal about the gulf that exists between them: firstly, she assumes that Ricardo knows her objections, even though, at the end of the day, she has agreed to undertake the trip he has planned. Whether or not she has at some point expressed her trepidations about the journey, he is left with the fact that she has, finally, accepted it and her accusations must be taken with a pinch of salt; secondly, for all she chides Ricardo here for

²⁶ sic; compare this with Eva’s misspelling of her idols *Audry Hepburn*, *Edy Fisher*, et al further ahead

making plans on her behalf and forcing her into a tour she had no wish to undertake, she is just as guilty as he is of ignoring his individuality and speaking for both of them when she talks about *nuestro mundo* instead of *mi mundo*. It does not seem to occur to her until the climax of their journey, when Ricardo leaves with the *muchacho*, that her *mundo* could conceivably not apply to Ricardo as well. She consistently projects her own needs and motives onto Ricardo. She says, for example, that:

lo más triste de todo era que yo a veces presentía (y tú más aún, bien lo sé) que el viaje lo hacíamos casi en contra de nuestra voluntad y a la vez obligados por nosotros mismos, como alguien que buscara su propia destrucción. (p.40)

She speaks in the plural here and even presumes to know without any doubt (“bien lo sé”) what Ricardo *presentía*, a verb which, in itself, involves an internal process of thought and feeling, not a visible action and, therefore, makes her deduction flimsy at best. It is likely, then, that in referring to them both, she is in fact expressing only her own perceptions. For her, the couple are a single entity, not two separate individuals.

Indeed, this misconception of two people as one identity is made more fragile by the saturation of the text with verbs and expressions of certainty where, in fact, tenuous assumptions are being made by one about the other. The text is peppered with phrases which imply an assumption regarding the opinion or emotion of another human being (Ricardo, like: “Causamos sensación, Ricardo. De eso estábamos seguros” (p.24), and: “a veces yo te sorprendería mirando a un sitio distante, buscando - ahora bien lo sé - a esa persona” (p.24). What is actually revealed is a situation where a lack of communication leads to misinterpretation and all the presumptions made carry an element of doubt; Eva’s conclusions as to Ricardo’s state of mind at a given moment are fortified with declarations of certainty as to the accuracy of her deductions but, paradoxically, the effect is to suggest how subjective her interpretations are. Indeed, such expressions permeate all three Journeys, as we have seen in the categorical declarations of the editors in the *Segundo Viaje*. I will return to this point with regard to the *Tercer Viaje* further ahead. Eva goes on to say: “Acaso pensabas - sí, estoy segura que así era” (p.30). For all she may be “segura”, what she is endeavouring to do is read Ricardo’s mind and, therefore, her guess is only as good as anyone else’s what he may have been thinking. These suggestions as to the fragility of their relationship are perhaps a premonition of the end. We are not told ahead of time about the action that is to take place at the end of their Journey until the moment arrives in Eva’s narration but some suggestion is contained in Eva’s comment, expressed with characteristic certainty: “si de algo estoy segura - de eso no me cabe la menor duda - es de que siempre me fuiste fiel. Fiel hasta el fin del viaje, Ricardo.” (p.37). Eva’s conclusions as to Ricardo’s motives and responsibility for the change that occurs in him

at the conclusion of their journey are quite evidently the product of her imagination and not the result of any discussion that could have taken place between the pair. Indeed, such conversations never do take place, leaving Eva to hypothesise about Ricardo's feelings and thought processes. In reference to an early stage in their journey, she speculates: "¿Sería que desde entonces ya estabas conspirando contra mí?" (p.30). Like the editors of the *Segundo Viaje*, Eva centres her analysis of things and her comments around her own sphere of vision. *Nuestro mundo*, as she describes it, in fact refers to her own, individual world, to her experience and perspective. Even in this section she is looking at Ricardo's actions and reactions and relating them exclusively to their possible bearing on herself. From this stem all her assumptions about this other, separate human being. In her mind, he is effectively an extension of herself.

If we look again at the description (discussed earlier) of Eva and Ricardo's mad performance of the full range of their costumes in order to impress the *muchacho* (*la capa de supermán, la casacaholandesa, el traje de faraón*, etc.), it is evident that, stylistically, besides the dizzying absurdity of it all, the list reads very much like a tennis match:

Tú mostrabas el gran suéter tipo inglés (...). Acudí a las maletas y exhibí el largo traje de tarde rojo bermellón [...]
 Tú te erguías sobre los grandes zancos portando la casulla y el gorro de payaso. Inmediatamente me disfracé de dominó [...]
Tú, saliste en short [...]. **Yo** exhibí mi disfraz de jardinera [...]
Tú, los pantalones de pana y la capa de supermán. **Yo**, la casaca holandesa. **Tú**, el traje de faraón. **Yo**, la cartera a punto calado y el paraguas de seda fría. **Tú**, el camisón monacal. **Yo** la bata corintia. **Tú**, la capa gris topo y el sombrero con plumas de avestruz. **Yo**, el chaquetón con cantos ribeteados. **Tú**, el gran disfraz de almirante. **Yo**, la redencilla de cristal. (p.51; my emphasis in bold)

The formula *Tú*, _____. *Yo*, _____. makes it plain that the performance we once saw as a team effort has become (or perhaps always was) a competition between individuals and not a collective activity at all. The underlining of this point comes when Eva, shattered by her defeat, finally leaves, dressed in one half of the set of sweaters with *MOI* and *TOI* on them. Appropriately, hers is the *MOI* one: she is, quite literally, confronting her own solitude, in big bold letters, where she used to find individual superiority in being the dominant one of a group of two, where her "partner" was actually nothing more in her own mind than an extension of herself. Throughout this first Journey a debate persists regarding the identities of these two. It begins, indeed, with the very names of the two characters. At the beginning of her narration, Eva comments that it is strange, even hard for her to use her husband's name *Ricardo*: she had been used to calling him *Richard*, the decorated version of his name she introduced along with her embellished version of her own name, *Evattt*. Her sole reason for the name changes is part and parcel of the role playing they perform: "dijiste <<Evattt>> (hacía tiempo que pronunciabas

sin problemas esas tres *t* finales que yo le había agregado a mi nombre para hacerlo más *jai*).” (p.22). To be more *jai* (classy), to project more *caché* (chic) is Eva’s consistent goal, even if it involves eclipsing her (and her husband’s) very identity to do it. Why does “Evattt” insist on and feel the need to make her own and Ricardo’s names and identities more “exotic”, even if this is unconvincing and superficial? What do Evattt and Richard reveal about Eva and Ricardo? During the course of the Journey, changes are evident in both characters with regard to their state of mind and attitudes to the performances and so on, but more so in Ricardo. When the couple stop by the Río Canto, Ricardo is dressed in a “formidable traje de obispo rojo púrpura” (p.43). and Eva in a: “gran chaquetón de crash negro tragedia” (p.43). Eva describes the incident that ensued:

Estabas ahí, Ricardo, muy cerca de mí, mirando el río enorme, y yo te sentía como ausente, como si estuvieses ahora en otro mundo. En silencio me cruzaste por delante. Te vi hacer gestos absurdos, extendiendo los brazos al agua. De pronto, pensé que querías lanzarte al torrente. Corrí a tu lado y te agarré por las grandes mangas del camión. <<Richard>>, te dije, <<¿qué sucede?>>. Pero tú no me contestabas. Tiré de nuevo de la manga y repetí tu nombre. Fue entonces cuando te volviste, Ricardo, y a voz tronante me gritaste que no te dijera más Richard, que tu nombre era Ricardo. (p.43)

Ricardo has crossed over from being the fabricated man Eva has tried to shape according to her idols (she has controlled his appearance, his lifestyle, his weight and even his name), back to being himself. He has rejected (to Eva’s shock) the mask of Richard in favour of his own true identity. What has prompted him to make his affirmations is that Ricardo has come home: “Tu voz sonó muy clara cuando dijiste: <<A dos kilómetros de aquí está la casa donde vivieron mis padres>>.” (p.43). Here, having returned to his birthplace, he does manage to communicate with Eva to some degree; it is surely damning evidence of the incommunication in their relationship that Eva has not had any idea until now as to where Ricardo’s parents’ home was, or even that they were to be passing nearby it on this trip. It is important to note, however, that Ricardo has not yet rejected the whole idea of the performances or the costumes which were, in any case, partly his idea in as much as it was initially Ricardo who pushed Eva into making the quest around the country in search of the one remaining spectator. Indeed, as Eva’s description of their attire reveals, even this episode is carried off with their signature colour and drama; we only have to visualise the regal colours of Ricardo’s splendid bishop’s robes in *rojo púrpura* in contrast with Eva’s funereal black to sense the foreboding in this scene and the shades of Eva’s imminent tragedy and Ricardo’s triumph to come. What has occurred is that Ricardo has reaffirmed his identity as an individual in his own right.

It is significant that this takes place on a riverbank, particularly if we consider this conversation between Eva and Ricardo in the light of Ismael’s dream from the *Tercer Viaje*.

Here, as in Ismael's dream about the waves against the Havana beach, an encounter with a body of water is catalytic to realisations on the part of the character concerning his communication (or lack of it) with another person (in both cases, his wife). The glaring difference in Ricardo's case, though, is that he has managed, at least in some degree, to establish some communication with Eva, if only to go some way towards waking her up to the fact that he is not what she believed him to be. Nevertheless, both Ismael and Ricardo do carry on playing their adopted roles for some time longer (until their respective journeys come to an end) and, while Eva has not yet grasped the idea fully, she (and the reader) at least has some inkling of the unmasking that is to happen when Ricardo finally meets the *muchacho*²⁷ and puts an end to his masquerading both as the character of each costume and as the husband Eva perceives him to be. Here it is Eva who, like Ramón when he hears Elisa speaking in her foreign language, watches uncomprehendingly as Ricardo makes "gestos absurdos" in silence. Whereas Elvia and Ismaelito misinterpreted Ismael's gestures as friendly waving, when he was in fact warning them, Eva misunderstands Ricardo's movements with the opposite effect. Both the dream and this incident (before Ricardo turns to speak) take place in silence and it is because of this failure to speak to one another that confusion arises over the meanings of the gestures: are they waving or drowning? Are Ismael and Richard happy and honest in their roles or are they not? It is by the sea (next to another body of water) that Ricardo's ultimate "triumph" and his separation from Eva (both in a marital sense and, more significantly, in a personal one) takes place. As Eva declares on their arrival at the Faro de Maisí, the point where the land ends and the sea begins heralds for her "el fin del mundo" and, indeed, her world as she knew it does end there. In the section quoted above, she hints at what is to happen, when she already sees that Ricardo is suddenly "ausente", as if he were in another world. So a line has already been drawn between her world and his.

It is here, when Ricardo rejects *Richard* and asserts his individual identity, that his voice finally becomes more audible, clearer and more imposing: he shouts at Eva "a voz tronante" and, as she tells him, "Tu voz sonó muy clara". Finally he has spoken clearly and as himself, not as Richard, not as the Pope or Superman but as Ricardo, in his own right. Even so, Eva hears him only superficially, much as she hears her popular songs and her movie dialogue: she hears and comments on his tone and on the words he speaks but does not grasp the meaning or the implications of what he has said. Unlike Ismael and Elvia's case (in real life, as opposed to Ismael's dream), the communication between these two has so far only functioned in one direction. The single entity comprised of Eva and Ricardo (in Eva's mind) is gradually being eroded or exposed as a sham but Eva, clearly, has not altered her vision of

²⁷ The young man is the individual who turns out to be the elusive last remaining audience member they seek.

things. Throughout the *Primer Viaje*, almost until the end of their Journey, she speaks, acts and thinks on behalf of Ricardo (not to say mamá) constantly. Only when plans for the journey are well under way does Ricardo stop being the passive one of the pair and begin to lead while Eva follows. Even after that stage, though, Eva sees the couple as a single unit and still presumes to know her husband's mind; the difference is that he has discovered a need (to find and create some kind of impact on the elusive remaining spectator). Both in the early stages and during the trip, then, everything is eclipsed by their determination to be seen, to be a resounding success.

As we have seen from Eva's comments on only being visible in Cuba, not abroad, their obsession is with being noticed, with standing out from all other people. Yet it is their (and most particularly Ricardo's) growing obsession with the need to locate and impress the one remaining person who has not paid them any attention that is perhaps the most disturbing aspect of their fixation. That person's attention becomes the single most important goal and, much as the narrator felt in *El Asalto*, the couple undertake a crusade across the country to find that elusive person:

alguien, que todavía no habíamos podido localizar, dejaba de mirarnos siempre. Y ese alguien era más importante que todos los demás. Y ese alguien, ay, Ricardo, parecía estar en todos los sitios, acechándonos sin mirarnos, precisamente fastidiándonos por su poco interés en fastidiarnos; por su indiferencia. (p.27)

The key to this "someone's" importance is his indifference itself. And yet still they persist in trying to make him take notice by putting all their energies (and means) into precisely what has failed to flick him out of his "indiferencia" so far. "Destacarse" is their prime objective and, with the exception of the *muchacho*, everyone heralds their success in making themselves seen, even the authorities who pursue them. Their first short tour around Havana in costume is a spectacular triumph and spurs them on to "exhibirse" everywhere and to everyone they can. It is important to bear in mind the maxim they are given by mamá, though, that they should only seek to "*destacarse por la indumentaria*" (my emphasis in italics), and not by any other means. The difference here - that it is the clothes and not the performance which make them stand out - is underlined several times and is clearly a rule of great concern to them. After one "triumfo" in Havana, a very exhilarated Eva returns home, revelling in their glory: "por nuestro arte, por nuestro genio inigualable. <<Por nuestros vestidos>>, dijiste tú entonces." (p.28). Why this need to stand out, then? Is it rebellion, dissidence, frivolity, escapism? And why do the clothes excite so much interest from the public? Can their success really be put down to the clothes themselves, or should we attribute it in part to their attitude or, simply, to the fact that they have managed and dared to create and put on these costumes at all? The attitude of the two performers has a great deal to do with it and this gives us some insight as to their motives and

the public's reasons for its interest: "Y caminabas exhibiendo todos los trajes, tomando, por momentos, posturas desvergonzadas, hasta lujuriosas" (p.30).

At the very least, then, Ricardo's attitude is provocative, but whether the pair are actively trying to rebel in some way is less clear. From their first "triumfos", they are hunted by the police but, far from deterring them, this only serves to fuel their "sueños dorados" and their need to continue. Could it be that the public's delight has something to do with their rebelliousness? The police persecution Eva describes the couple having suffered in Havana (and only in Havana, it should be noted) and the public solidarity they have inspired is worthy of great artists. Underground support groups for them spring up around Havana (*Los Camisas Abiertas* and *Los Batts*²⁸) and they are treated like dissident artists, valued among young admirers and protected around their clandestine performance spaces. Eva describes their "work" as a "lucha" and makes references to *la persecución constante*. She uses politically charged language all through her description of this period in their lives, such as: "el grupo clandestino <<Los Camisas Abiertas>>"; "salíamos muchas veces escoltados discretamente por <<Los Batts>>"; "Nuestro círculo de operación"; "Seguimos atacando a la ciudad" (p.31). It is quite a network of clandestine activity and undercover support, all in the name of... *indumentaria*? Or is it in the name of, say, freedom of self-expression, diversity, flamboyance or lustfulness? Leaving aside (for the moment) any allegorical implications, the dedicated and energetic support the two receive for their performances, Eva says, is aided by practical help like procuring fashion magazines through clandestine channels so that the creations can continue to be made:

Nos hicimos una red de aliados que nos llamaban constantemente, ofreciéndonos la última revista de moda publicada en París, conseguida sabrá Dios de qué forma, invitándonos a una fiesta secreta [...]. Gracias a ellos nos salvamos. Sí, gracias a ellos nos salvamos. Sí, gracias a ellos [...] pudimos hacernos de aquel hilo español que nos costó un ojo de la cara; todos los muebles de nuestro cuarto, sin contar la cama, claro. (p.32)

From her insistent repetition of *gracias a ellos*, it is evident that Eva's gratitude for the dedicated support of the *Batts* and the *Camisas Abiertas* and others who helped them is passionate. Not only did she and Ricardo (and, by implication, mamá) sacrifice everything for their *triumfo*, but many members of the public have taken great risks on their behalf. She recalls a particular success at a function in Guanabacoa (*el Gran Toque Sagrado de Batá*), of which she tells us that the audience (a roomful of dancers and French tourists) erupts into applause. Eva says: "Rompimos todas las reglas de la tradición, y sin embargo, nadie protestó." (p.29).

²⁸ "Los Batts" and "Los camisas abiertas" are underground organisations of dissidents, who end up supporting Ricardo and Eva when they fall foul of the authorities and need help smuggling in materials to make their costumes. See *Viaje a La Habana* p.31.

Others who, it would seem, might be equally likely to stand out from the crowd (a whole roomful of dancers, all sweaty and all black, a large group of French tourists) stop in their tracks and look at Eva and Ricardo. The triumph here, Eva says, is to have broken every rule of tradition and yet, despite such flagrant disregard for the rules, the pair encounter only delight and admiration, not punishment or ill-feeling. So, according to their faithful followers, Ricardo and Eva have achieved hero status in their own right but the question of being “heroic” is qualified in several mentions:

Tú fuiste una vez quien dijiste que nosotros éramos los verdaderos héroes.
<<Porque en un lugar>>, dijiste, <<donde todo el mundo es héroe, el único que realmente lo es, es el que no quiere serlo>>. (p.42)

So in a place such as Cuba everybody is a hero. The only individuals who truly qualify as heroes, however, are those who do not want to conform to the same kind of “hero” status their society expects them to adopt (that of revolutionary hero, perhaps). By implication, then, their heroism lies in their non-conformism.

The concept of triumph and heroism recurs in the third Journey, where it is connected with tenacity, as in Ricardo and Eva’s tenacity in their “cause” here, but also tenacity in the sense of basic survival in adverse circumstances: “has triunfado, has triunfado, es decir, aún no has perecido, porque si algún acto heroico merece atención es el de haber sobrevivido un día más” (p.102). For Ismael, then, heroism is more basic than it is for Eva. In any case, the notion these characters have of what “heroism” entails very much goes against the traditional concept of the Cuban revolutionary hero. For Eva and Ricardo it involves staying visible. If we look again at the section quoted above (regarding Eva’s gratitude towards the groups who supported them), it is worth considering the implications of the final comment here: “Sí, gracias a ellos [...] pudimos hacernos de aquel hilo español que nos costó un ojo de la cara; todos los muebles de nuestro cuarto, sin contar la cama, claro.” (p.32). Every possession the family have between them is sold off, one by one, to buy threads for Eva to make their costumes. Although, when they are preparing for the trip, Ricardo tells her to sew and insists that he will find her yarns if she keeps on weaving, it is still Eva’s obsession they are enacting: her need is to put on the spectacular costumes and play the roles and hear the applause, while Ricardo’s is to find this mysterious last person and make him look at them. In any case, mamá’s wishes and needs are overlooked and ignored to the extent that she loses every last one of her possessions along with Eva and Ricardo’s for the good of their enterprise. Finally, they have sold everything, down to the record player, the bed, the mirror and even the globe (beside which Eva’s grandfather posed for the oil painting which they also sell). Notably, almost the

last things to be sold off are the bed and the mirror, the ultimate symbol of married life (at least as far as furniture goes!) and of “seeing oneself”.

It is worth considering the significance of the mirror here, since it relates to the revelations of the end of the Journey and, for that matter, of the other two *Viajes*. Both Eva and Ricardo steal the opportunity to look at themselves (respectively) in secret²⁹, when they think the other is not there to see. Why should two such extroverts, so well used to parading in front of crowds of hundreds of people, be so coy about looking in their own mirror at home? The obvious difference is that the mirror forces them to look at themselves, to contemplate their own images, rather than act out a role for public consumption. Clearly there is a gulf of some sort between “being seen” (which is vital to them) and “seeing oneself” (which is problematic and secretive). When Eva catches sight of Ricardo during the night, posing in his garb in their empty house in front of the mirror, she is sad for him: he should be performing for a public. Yet, the next day, she finds herself doing exactly the same thing. The fundamental thing about their performances is not to let themselves be upstaged, but still adhering to the rule pointed out by mamá: that this should only be achieved through their costumes, nothing else. According to Eva, it is Ricardo who first breaks the rules during their final attempt to impress the *muchacho*: “Habías roto el pacto, Ricardo. El pacto tácitamente acordado desde el día en que mamá nos hizo ver las cosas como eran: *sólo nos destacaríamos por nuestros trapos...*” (p.52). It is unclear from Eva’s comment here just what pact Ricardo has flouted, whether she is referring to the one whereby his only outstanding qualities are to be external and foreign, for instance. In any case, he asserts some kind of freedom and does break free of the patterns they have followed in their shows so far. By this time it is clear that this is a competition between the two of them. Eva, too, breaks the “rule”. As she says: “No podía quedarme atrás.” (p.52). She now expects and hopes that the *muchacho* will look at her specifically, not at the couple collectively. She goes on: “<<Ahora me mirará>>, dije. Y hasta intenté ordenarme el pelo...” (p.52). She is mistaken, though: the “winner” is Ricardo and she has been, definitively, *opacada*. At this point it becomes clear to Eva that both she and Ricardo are individual entities. At the very start of the *Primer Viaje* Eva alludes to events she is to describe, referring to some as yet unspecified act for which she cannot forgive Ricardo:

ya pongo la cabeza en lo que estoy haciendo [...] por ti, Ricardo. Por ti, o quizás para vengarme de ti. Porque hay cosas que no se pueden perdonar nunca. [...] Sólo una cosa no podía perdonarte. Y esa fue precisamente la que hiciste. Y a última hora, Ricardo, cuando ya casi habíamos ganado, los dos juntos, la gran batalla. (p.12)

²⁹ See *Viaje a La Habana* p.30

She does not state at this point or, for that matter, later, exactly what is the crime Ricardo committed for which she cannot forgive him. What she does point to, albeit in a sideways fashion, is the question of their unity as a team (“ya casi habíamos ganado, *los dos juntos*, la gran batalla” [my emphasis in italics]), and indeed he does ultimately betray their identity as a collective person and the notion that the two of them together can outshine everyone else. Here, too, the question of misinterpretation and incommunication comes into play. Eva’s downfall has been her inability to see Ricardo as himself, not as an extension of her own identity or as Richard; for this reason she fails to understand his thoughts and, in the end, to predict the outcome of their final performance together. She has persistently presumed to know his mind, always without actually asking him anything and seldom with any success:

Creía saber cuáles eran tus planes (porque casi siempre he adivinado tus pensamientos, porque casi siempre hemos pensado más o menos las mismas cosas, porque casi siempre habíamos sido la misma persona). (p.34)

Eva’s words give away the fragile and subjective nature of the assumptions she has always formed about her husband. She says herself that she “creía saber”: she did not know, she only thought she knew his mind. Indeed, her claims to have “guessed” Ricardo’s mind expose in themselves the fact that she has always relied on guesswork, on *intuir* rather than *saber*. Even this short phrase is saturated with qualifiers like *casi*, *más o menos* and *creía saber*, which collectively make for overtones of uncertainty and unreliability in what she has deduced. Eva’s unsubstantiated interpretation of Ricardo’s motives, opinions and feelings and even the accusations she throws at him in this text are made without regard for the need to do some finding out prior to drawing her conclusions. No communication takes place between them but she jumps to her conclusions purely as a result of her own imaginings about him. For instance, at the beginning of the *Primer Viaje* she accuses him without basis in fact: “Tú, Ricardo, también inventaste pasos increíbles (seguramente ya desde entonces tratabas de opacarme).” (p.17). Now that she is looking back on her life, of course, the collective need, the concern of the collective unit, has given way entirely to the individual’s needs and what is good for Eva can no longer be disguised as the good of the couple. She has no real reason, besides bitterness, to believe that Ricardo’s actions have been in any way directed towards her, since what he has done in taking off with the *muchacho* has simply been in order to satisfy his own needs, not to destroy Eva or, indeed, to *opacarla*.

Following her “defeat”, Eva undertakes the trip back alone, as an individual person for the first time. The *Primer Viaje* is, in a sense then, her journey, since she is the only one to make the trip back to Havana. In her own words: “Y comenzó la travesía de regreso. El viaje a La Habana.” (p.53). “*El viaje a La Habana*”, not “*mi viaje*” (my emphasis), she says (and,

similarly, “*la travesía de regreso*”); so the “*viajero*”, in this case is Eva, not Ricardo. She has become the traveller and must now confront and undertake her own journey, now that Ricardo has completed his. It is interesting to pay close attention to the description of the scene of the final performance, at the moment of Eva’s defeat by Ricardo, when Ricardo wins the attention of the *muchacho* and, ultimately, the lives of both Ricardo and Eva are irrevocably changed:

Vi al muchacho ponerse de pie, echar a andar con pasos viriles, atravesar todo el salón y dirigirse hasta el extremo donde tú estabas desfallecido. Lo vi llegar hasta ti, y mirarte. Lo vi extender una mano y ayudarte a incorporar. Y ahora vi a las dos serpientes caminando por sobre el promontorio de las rocas. <<Qué trine Eva>>, <<Qué trine Eva>>, cantaban con voces increíblemente claras mientras se perdían por entre los derriscaderos y las tunas, rumbo al mar. (p.53)

It is Ricardo, the hero, who finds his Other in the course of his journey, facing the *muchacho* eye to eye, and claims his authentic identity. Yet, as he undertakes his new course towards the sea, it is Eva who begins to hear the voices of other people and their voices are finally clear to her. She recognises Ricardo’s identity as an individual. As she does so, she is faced with her own reflection: by implication, neither is she a component in the collective identity she had constructed (Richard and Evattt):

Y en ese momento comprendí que siempre me habías mentido, Ricardo. Siempre, desde la primera vez que me hablaste. Sí, porque cuando el muchacho, envuelto en no sé qué resplandor, se puso de pie y decidió mirarte, comprendí que no era yo precisamente quien tenía los ojos más hermosos del mundo. (p.53)

Eva’s vision is now focused on others besides herself. The *muchacho* is, specifically, *viril* and this is what separates him from Eva and denies her his position as the person with the *ojos más hermosos del mundo*. The *muchacho* approaches Ricardo only when Ricardo has stopped the performance, the charade of both the costume and of his life, and not while the pretence is ongoing. The lines of men from the village (the audience is comprised of men this time) are referred to here as *serpientes* and it is these “serpents” who sing “Qué trine Eva”; it is the men who sing to the woman here, to the woman who has effectively failed as a wife and been replaced by a *muchacho*. The situation is horribly clear to her now, as they sing *con voces increíblemente claras*, more audible, certainly, than she has ever heard before. Eva cannot comprehend the *resplandor* the young man radiates which she, for all her sartorial splendour, does not but it is plain to her that she does not now have, nor has she ever had, “the most beautiful eyes in the world” for her husband. It is fitting that her discovery of her own “failure” should be phrased in terms of *el mundo*, since the journey up to now has hinged on the boundaries of Eva’s world, both in terms of her chances of being successful in her

performances (which she recognises can only happen, realistically, in Cuba) and of her sphere of vision. So far she has never seen beyond her own *mundo* as far even as her husband's.

The men leave the scene of the revelations and head towards the sea, towards what Eva saw as *el fin del mundo*, where the Cuban coastline ends. They are also approaching, though, a body of water, as Ricardo did on the day of his outburst to Eva (over her calling him Richard) and as Ismael did in his dream. We have seen previously that in the other two situations this has been connected with incommunication and, certainly, that does have some bearing here too when we consider Eva's incomprehension of the whole result; she does not understand why things have turned out so unexpectedly and, more importantly, makes no move to ask Ricardo or to speak to him and he makes no attempt to talk to her. The *muchacho*, indeed, is silent altogether and communicates with Ricardo only through physical gestures, not language. Rivers and seas, though, are charged images to employ, even in the obvious setting of an island as isolated (politically) as Cuba. On a universal level, it suggests freedom: without falling into the same trap as the characters with all their fabricated assumptions, we can infer from all three episodes a connection with freedom in the sense of crossing over from one role or life to another, more sincere one. If we look again, firstly, at Ismael's dream, we find him standing fearfully on the partition wall that runs down the beach to the stormy, perilous sea. He is quite isolated from Elvia and Ismaelito across on the next wall down and, while they believe him to be waving, he is in fact fearful of drowning. The sea, in his dream, is an imminent danger which separates him from his family. As an image, it invades his dreams just at the time when he is about to enter an unfamiliar and scary situation in returning to his wife and son after so long. In Ricardo's actions beside the river, too, there is an element of danger and risk: Eva pulls him back, thinking he is about to throw himself into the *torrente*. Again, this is not calm, soothing water but a dangerous, frightening torrent. As Ricardo comes into contact with the water here (or at least approaches it), there is evidence that he has taken a first step across a line which takes him away from his performing self (Richard) and back to his original self (Ricardo). But, again, this is not a happy revelation but a disturbing outburst. At the Faro de Maisí, on the other hand, Ricardo's departure towards the sea with the *muchacho* (and that of the other men ahead of them) does not herald danger or fear, but simply the completion of the crossing over Ricardo has made to his own identity. The danger and trepidation conveyed in these situations, however, involves the women as much as it does the men. In the third of these situations, it is Eva who is left behind to confront the unknown and to deal with her tragedy; in Ismael's dream, it is his wife and child he is fearful for, since they have not grasped the danger they are all under, standing on these precarious walls; and when Ricardo gets too close to the river, it is Eva who panics and pulls him back from the water. In all cases, it is the men who approach the water. So the concept of the river/sea is linked not only to miscommunication but

also to danger and to a transition which is brought about (or almost brought about) by the men and bodes badly for the women.

Eva arrives home as a single person (both in a marital sense and a conceptual one). She has sold off all their clothes and has left herself with only a skirt and the sweater with *MOI* on it to her name. The wording of the sweater announces her predicament: she is no longer one half of *MOI et TOI*, only *MOI* and it is the individuality of her new status that she must now confront. She recreates herself once again but still following a formula for how and who she will model herself to be, reflected through her *indumentaria*. Working furiously once again, she knits a mourning dress. She is redefining herself as a widow but the question of whether she is a widow (if the husband she had has ceased to exist) or an abandoned wife (if her Ricardo still exists) is somewhat muddy. In any case, her condition as *viuda* is her own interpretation of her situation and is based on her assumptions about Ricardo once again: “Como una gran viuda me exhibiré ahora por todos los sitios.” (p.54). Ricardo’s newly discovered identity, or perhaps we should say “rediscovered”, since he has reverted to his original name, has come about through his rejection of the masks he has been wearing during his life with Eva and has led him to leave his wife for the anonymous *muchacho*. It is a change of identity, then, involving gender roles as well as shaking off the needs of the other person which had been projected onto him. From the beginning of Eva’s narration, the gender roles of the two are quite clearly defined. The couple may be a performing partnership but suggestions of their defined roles as man and woman, and husband and wife are plentiful. Eva describes herself through stereotypically feminine elements like knitting the clothes which, in themselves, are flamboyant and bordering on camp. While Ricardo is the male who goes out and searches the city for supplies, she is the woman who stays at home and makes the clothes. Only at the very end of their journey as far as the Faro de Maisí do these roles become undermined and ultimately broken down and it is the nameless and, as such, representative *muchacho*³⁰ who leads Ricardo away. At the end of the couple’s journey together, and only then, does it become evident that *ese alguien* who has eluded them is male.

During the journey and only then, Eva realises the truth of her relationship with Ricardo: times have changed and things have changed quite substantially between them. For some time they have scarcely come into physical contact and it has been months, even years, since they were lovers. Even in a purely physical sense, then, Eva has failed to notice that this collective entity, as she perceives the couple to be, has become (or perhaps has always been) two separate and very distinct individuals. Their physical disunion reflects the gulf that has opened up between them.

³⁰ The question of the muchacho’s anonymity is one I shall return to later in this chapter.

3.ii Ismael and Elvia

Elvia is instrumental in bringing about Ismael's confrontation with his alter ego. She initiates the Journey he undertakes in inviting him to return to Cuba but, equally, she has provided him with the son who will be the reflection of himself held up before Ismael. Even so, she is just as guilty of presuming to know the feelings and reactions of another person, though perhaps more accurate in her assumptions. In the postscript to her letter to Ismael, in which she invites/persuades him to come to Cuba, she says: "P.D. Por si te decides a venir (sé que te decidirás), Ismaelito ha hecho una lista de cosas que quiere que le traigas si puedes." (p.99). Ismael later refers back to these comments, acknowledging, first of all, that it is Elvia's prediction that he will come and that he will be willing and able to bring gifts and goodies to his son. Yet the text that follows relates to Ismael's assumptions as to Elvia's intentions and motives when she wrote it. Eva and Elvia do share this one attribute, among others, but it is important to notice that Elvia's greater talent for guessing her former husband's responses goes hand in hand with the very different situation in which this (estranged) couple find themselves, in comparison with Eva and Ricardo: Eva's perceptions of Ricardo are as an extension of herself, and her journey takes her to the point of total separation from him and a rude awakening to her status as an individual entity; Elvia's journey, on the other hand, takes her nowhere in a geographical sense, and in fact reunites her with Ismael, although this in no way reflects a lack of acceptance on her part of his identity as an individual. She does, certainly, remain oblivious to the situation that has arisen between her son and his father (they have become lovers) and, to that extent, she fails in her assumptions about her menfolk's thoughts, but she possesses a tolerance and a serenity that is entirely alien to Eva. Whereas Eva accepts Ricardo's actions through lack of communication with him, Elvia simply accepts Ismael and welcomes him unconditionally into her home. To that end, some of Ismael's deductions about her motives are greatly misplaced. Some communication does happen between Elvia and Ismael, even when that communication is silent rather than spoken. Ismael recalls Elvia's reaction to his trial: "¿Pero, cómo olvidar aquella mirada triste, casi comprensiva (si es que alguien puede comprender la tragedia ajena) el día del juicio?" (p.114). Despite the other, glaring instances of incommunication between the two (not least the basic lack of correspondence between them during Ismael's years in the States), they manage to communicate to some degree: at the trial, it is Elvia's face that speaks volumes. We are left, indeed, with the impression that Ismael's pain may not have been entirely alien to her. For all he describes her expression as only "casi comprensiva", the suggestion is that she has

established as good an empathy as it is possible to sustain between two human beings. And yet, she does not truly or completely empathise; no one can.

So there are forms of communication and forms of incommunication and miscommunication between all the groups of main characters in the three Journeys. Things are said, but only indirectly, insinuated rather than affirmed. Even Ismaelito and Elvia's current situation as residents in Cuba (at the time when Elvia writes to Ismael) is only alluded to in her letter, which the narrator describes as follows:

aquella manera de insinuar la circunstancia que allá se padecía, dicha así, como de paso, entre líneas, pensando en la censura y en la complicidad de quien leería, también lo conmovió. <<Tú sabes, tienes que saberlo, cómo está esto por acá...>> (p.115)

What moves Ismael here is not precisely the shortages and so on that his family are suffering in Cuba but that Elvia should have to curb her expression in her letter, that she should not be able (or allowed) to express herself freely. She relies on his interpretation being accurate. This one section of the text, in fact, highlights a whole mesh of inference, interpretation and supposition going on between Elvia and Ismael: Ismael (or rather, the narrator) assumes that the vagueness of her allusion to the situation in Havana at present is because she is concerned about the censors; she may not have explicitly said very much on the subject but it is enough to make him sympathise. The word used is "conmover", though, which perhaps does not translate adequately as "sympathise" with the implications it suggests in Spanish. Just as Elvia empathised with Ismael's tragedy at his trial and, in that respect, was united with him in a spiritual sense, here Ismael is moved by her situation but moved with her (con-mover). There is at least a spiritual, if not verbal, connection going on and, at least in this moment of shared emotion, the two individuals become a collective person. Elvia does, indeed, expect the kind of complicity from him, the appropriate interpretation of her limited words, which Ismael mentions: her choice of expression "tienes que saberlo" is charged: is it an assumption that he will undoubtedly know what she means, or a rebuke, a command that orders him to think, that he must try to understand? It is in this third Journey that the concept of communication (or lack of it) between individuals receives perhaps the most complex and comprehensive treatment. It is a theme that flavours Ismael's dreams on his first night at the Hotel Tritón in Havana: he dreams about being on top of a partition wall between the beaches near Havana, looking at Elvia and a young Ismaelito on the opposite wall. Elvia and Ismaelito gesture to him to jump into the raging sea and he gives them a threatening hand gesture in response, but they misinterpret his signal, thinking it to be a friendly, affirmative wave. They applaud and carry on pointing to the waves. An almost impassable chasm exists between the individuals.

All the characters suffer from this failure to communicate, as we have seen, and from the misconceptions they form about others as a result, i.e. Elisa's diagnosis of the "venom of curiosity". Their individual outlooks which shape their interpretations of things are conditioned by their experiences as individuals, rather than by a collective experience: the question is one of miscommunication between one person and another, which results in prejudiced assumptions, rather than prejudice on a group or national scale. Nevertheless, the experience of each individual, without question, involves that individual's recollections of circumstances that have affected society as a whole. In other words, in the case of Ismael, his perception of Cuba is particular to the trauma he has suffered following his arrest and trial, i.e. as a direct result of the government in power. Hence his remarks to Carlos/Ismaelito with regard to the situation for visiting Cuban exiles in Havana. Ismaelito comments: "Es el único hotel destinado a los miembros de la comunidad cubana en el extranjero, dijo el joven, allí están mejor albergados. Y custodiados, agregó Ismael." (p.126). So what Ismaelito perceives as "albergar", constitutes "custodiar" for Ismael and it is doubtful whether Ismael's lonely and less than idyllic existence in the U.S. is something he would describe as being part of a "comunidad cubana en el extranjero". Again, though, the choice of term here is worthy of note since it alludes to a collective entity, to a body of like-minded people (Cuban exiles) who are also still, in some way, integral to the Cuban experience itself (the Cuban community), a question that is pivotal in Ismael's experience of living away from his country and, now, returning to it. In a similar instance to the one just mentioned, we are confronted with Ismael's interpretation of the billboards he sees as he walks around the city, with their triumphant, rousing propaganda, where "Los verbos eran realmente optimistas (arribaremos, cumpliremos, sobrepasaremos, ganaremos, venceremos)"; but he does not see them in terms of their optimistic messages, rather that "hasta los colores de los carteles, radiantes y vivos, contrastaban con el resto de la ciudad que era, ante los ojos de Ismael, un basurero gigantesco." (p.133). Surely the billboards could equally be seen as something bright, uplifting and hopeful; but it is "ante los ojos de Ismael" that they fail to impress, and it is his pessimism that prevents them from being "optimistas". It is significant, also, that the "optimistic" verbs to which reference is made are also plural (arribaremos, sobrepasaremos, etc.): the collective identity conflicts starkly with the individual's (this particular individual's) perception. The difference is clearly in the eye of the beholder here, just as it was in the footnotes to Ramón's testimony. Ismael has arrived in Cuba with the preconceptions he formed as a result of the circumstances leading to his exile all those years before. That is not to say that his slant on Cuban society is overtly portrayed as being mistaken, just that it differs from his son's. It is up to the reader to do as the characters do and apply his own interpretation to the events of the Journeys.

Persistently, Ismael's preconceptions are contrasted with other possible judgements, the effect being that the different possibilities are thrown into relief and the gap between the standpoints is highlighted. So frequently does this occur in the third *Viaje*, though, that Ismael's preconceptions about life in Cuba verge on paranoia: this mistrust may not be unfounded, however. He refers, for instance, to his transfer from jail to an "open work camp" (following his arrest but, obviously, prior to his exile to the U.S.): "*Al otro día salí en cordillera[...] para un campo abierto, es decir para un campo de trabajo forzado.*" (p.109). His reclassification of the "campos abiertos" here is testimony to his own experiences and, as such, carries a certain verosimilitude but, at the same time, it loses objectivity since (as with the testimony of Ramón Fernández) we are faced with the account of individual (and therefore subjective) experience, despite it being a first-hand account. When Ismael returns to Havana this situation of interpretation versus direct communication reaches outrageous proportions and it could reasonably be argued that his paranoia takes over; or perhaps it is simply a case of "once bitten twice shy". Once in Havana, he presumes his hotel room will have been bugged:

Ahí estaban las maletas repletas, los efectos eléctricos, el dinero, todo lo que pensaba entregarle a su familia. *Mi familia*. Y casi sintió deseos de reír al pronunciar esas palabras. Pero si me río, pensó, ¿qué dirán los que en algún sitio descifran las grabaciones que recoge el aparato situado estratégicamente en algún lugar de esta habitación? Entonces, sin duda para confundir a los agentes encargados de interpretar cualquier sonido que se produjese en aquella habitación, Ismael se rió a carcajadas (p.120) [Arenas's emphasis]

Not only does Ismael presume that recording equipment will have been planted in his room, he also attempts to predict how these recordings will be translated by security agents. Yet, at the same time, we are left with the suggestion that even the narrator's depiction of Ismael's motives can only be deduction rather than certain fact: it is not definite that his motives for laughing are to confuse government security but only "sin duda" is this his purpose; all the previous descriptions of Ismael's thoughts, then, are subject to interpretation - the narrator's as well as our own.

The biased interpretation that comes from any individual's personal sphere of vision, then, is fickle: it depends very much on the circumstances of the moment, on which the individual inevitably bases his assumptions. This becomes even more tenuous when judgements are being drawn on other individuals. Ismael is guilty of this when he reappraises his first impressions of the young men he saw on guard at his hotel: they are transformed, in his eyes, from stony-faced sentinels into laughing, bubbling young men when he meets them off duty, in the company of Carlos/Ismaelito. The fickle nature of human perception, which the characters often take to be "truth" or "fact" applies also to Ismael's concept of his own life in exile and to the homeland he left behind. The whole nature of his situation as a Cuban

immigrant in the United States is brought into question when he refers to: “*el exilio, es decir la libertad*” (p.112) [Arenas’s italics]. His journey to Havana is, in itself, forcing him to readdress this issue: what is expatriation and what is Cuba, or rather, how does he see his life in the U.S.A. and what does Havana represent to him? It forces him to confront his interpretation of his past, of himself, of his identity, and yet there is still the suggestion that this is not a question of coming to terms with a previously misunderstood truth, or of revealing things as they truly are, but that it involves questioning and reappraising apparently staunch prejudices. Ismael’s journey to Havana is not only a return to his homeland but a return to aspects of himself which he had either forgotten or had never appreciated: “*toda aquella juventud, que cuando fue no fue como ahora lo veía, lo invadió, y el quiso ser aquel joven, solitario e independiente [...] quiso sentir la brisa de su tierra*” (p.117). He hankers after the individual identity he had, the independent man he was during those years: since, he has lost his role (as husband and father and, paradoxically, as dissident or homosexual, since he is neither in a practising sense in the US) and also the homeland he knew to be his – “*su tierra*”.

It may not be that these are concepts particular to Cuba which he is now discovering, or rediscovering: indeed, they may well be the product of his maturity or his wider experience of the world. In any case, there is more than one concept of solitude, he finds: lonely and desperate, perhaps (as Ismael almost certainly was in his life in the States) and alone and independent. Once again, it depends on how you look at it but, it could be argued, this might also be a case of nostalgic eyes versus realistic ones. Either way, it involves looking over the fence (at another country, another age, another time) and finding the grass to be greener. Alongside this positive vision, though, Ismael experiences again the long-forgotten feeling of permanent fear and of imminent threat when he returns to Havana. For all the characters, Havana is unquestionably an enigma. For Ismael it is his homeland but it is also a country which persecuted him and ultimately forced him into exile. For Eva (in the *Primer Viaje*), it is inferior to the idyllic fantasy lands Hollywood has painted for her, yet it is the only place in which she can play out the charade of her fantasies to any effect. Even Eva’s mother leaves Havana because she can no longer suffer the infernal heat but she later writes from the U.S. to say she sometimes misses the Cuban sunshine. Exile, rather than a contradictory situation, appears to be an impossible, irreconcilable one for these Cuban characters. Whether this is a phenomenon particular to the Cuban experience or whether it is true of any exile is not overtly discussed, but, for Ismael anyway, it is a no-win situation and he has, effectively, no homeland:

Y cuando regresara, cuando volviera a Nueva York, entonces estaría en el terror absoluto, pues ya sabría que aquel mundo, que nunca será su mundo, que no le pertenecía, y al cual él le era indiferente, era lo único que tenía. Es decir, el único

sitio donde, como una sombra, podría seguir existiendo. *¿Por qué he venido?*
¿Para qué he regresado? (p.136). [Arenas's italics]

The only homeland he has (Cuba), he does not belong to (or in) and it does not want him; his alternative arrangement, though, is only a place for him to exist and never a homeland. It is a love/hate relationship Ismael has with Cuba. His preceptions of the past are not and cannot be clear: he refers to *aquel mundo*, the world he had to abandon, which, even so, is also his own, personal world: "*aquel mundo, mi mundo*" (p.115) [Arenas's italic type]. So exactly where and what is his world? Does it exist? Or does it depend on his interpretation of things and, therefore, exist only in his imagination; in other words, did he ever in fact, leave Havana? Exile has a great deal to do with incommunication or, more precisely, with isolation. If Ismael consistently feels like a fish out of water in the U.S., it is because he has been isolated from his own culture: "El inhóspito clima, la inhóspita ciudad, la inhóspita jerga del inglés que al principio lo excluyó totalmente y que nunca podría aceptar como algo suyo." (p.116).

His situation is created through incommunication on a linguistic level but also on a cultural one: he finds no contact point between himself and his experience of the world and this alien society which cuts him out completely. There has been no understanding between Ismael and his new city, neither mutually nor even one-way. Still, this is Ismael's perception of the situation, once again, and it is only his own thoughts that can alter his conceptions. For instance, while Ismael waits in the bus queue to return from the beach to his hotel in Havana with Carlos/Ismaelito, the darkness and the moonlight distort (or, rather, embellish) the bodies of the other young men in the line. Again it is all a question of perspectives: their vision, though perhaps like the one Ismael once had, is nothing like the outlook he has now:

Cualquier objeto extranjero era para aquellos jóvenes un talismán que los ponía en contacto con otro mundo, el que ellos soñaban a su manera. Sin duda diferente, sin duda diferente, pensaba Ismael, a como es, a como realmente es. (p.142)

This one section highlights the conflict which underlies the situation of these young Cubans and of Ismael. Like Eva (in the first Journey), they prize foreign objects more than they are worth and are perhaps setting themselves up for disillusionment such as Ismael has suffered during his own exile, but the objects they crave are talismans which can break through the isolation and put them in contact with "otro mundo, el que ellos soñaban a su manera": the other world they seek to reach is entirely of their own imaginings and is individual to each one. Their appreciation of the objects are windows to their interpretations of the "other worlds" themselves. Even the other worlds are not specified or defined as other nations or other cities, but as "mundos": since this is the third of the three Journeys, the use of the term here cannot

fail to remind us of Eva's repeated references to "nuestro mundo" during her journey: her "world" did not relate to her circumstances, to her station in society or to her physical situation but to her perception of those things. It is a matter of the mind of the individual. Ismael's thoughts on the *mundos* of the young men's imaginations are cynical, perhaps, but not damning or dismissive like the editors' comments of the second *Viaje*. It is significant that the phrase which is repeated in the section quoted above should suggest certainty or, at least, near certainty: but what is "doubtless" is merely that the young men's perceptions will be different from the reality of their worlds, not that the worlds should be any one way. The only thing that Ismael sees as being true is that the individual's concept of things does not represent reality, which suggests that he predicts for all of them the same disappointment he has encountered himself. In other words, he projects his own interpretation onto them. The difference between them and Ismael, though, is also highlighted: they are described as "jóvenes" and, as such, their perceptions will be the product of a very different sphere of vision and will almost certainly differ greatly from those of this older man.

Human perceptions, though, and the spheres of vision which create them, do not spring from nowhere. They are the result, we are told, of society and life as each individual experiences it: Ismael reflects on the appearance onto the political scene of Fidel Castro, insisting that his "dictadura" and the crimes suffered in the country under his rule spring from Cuba's tradition and did not come from nowhere. He affirms that "*son sencillamente las consecuencias lógicas de nuestra tradición, una tradición vinculada a la miseria, el chantaje, la inescrupulosidad, la sinvergüenzura, el robo y la demagogia.*" (p.112) [Arenas's italics]. He attributes the existence of a dictatorial regime in Cuba to the country's historical heritage, then, but also to its island status: it is an isolated state, as was highlighted by the *Pentagonía*: "*Las razones porque en Miami no hay una dictadura es sencillamente porque no es una isla y porque está en los Estados Unidos.*" (p.112). His own suffering through the misconceptions by others of his character and motivations did not end when Ismael left Cuba for the US, though, and we are told that he is assumed to be all manner of outlandish things by dint of not fitting the conventionally accepted profile of a Cuban exile: "ya en algunos círculos se comenzaba a difundir el rumor de que tal vez (casi seguro) podía ser un agente infiltrado, un provocador, quién sabe" (p.112). Much as was the case with the contradictory interjections of the commentators in the *Segundo Viaje*, the reader is confronted here with various slants on what "being Cuban" implies in the climate of Ismael's time. The tone is confrontational: Ismael's narration is directed to an unspecified "you" narratee: "*¿Pues acaso piensan ustedes que Fidel Castro surgió por generación espontánea?*" (p.112) and this, in turn, is followed by a reference by the narrator to the majority of Cuban exiles Ismael has encountered during his life in the U.S., as if this were the explanation of Ismael's challenge. It may be that this is Ismael's

pronouncement on the reality of Cuba's situation as he sees it, directed at those Cuban emigrés he has met in the States who have, in his view, failed to appreciate the context of Cuba's troubles but, at the same time, the effect of any affirmation directed to an undetermined "you" (where the narratee is exodiegetic) is to flick the reader and incite him to question and to take note. Dictatorships, Ismael warns, do not spring up from nowhere; they are the product of a lengthy and disturbed history. The vision of this regime and, the implication is, of any regime, is created by the experiences of the people who bring it about. Every school of thought is created in a context, then, whether it is a collective ideology or the perceptions of some individual. Regimes such as this one are shaped by the prevailing conceptions of their time and the regimes, in turn, shape and distort the interpretations of society, such as those of the Cuban exiles in the U.S.A. who have made their own assumptions about Ismael according to the prejudices which have taken root in their minds after their personal experiences of the Cuban authorities. It is interesting to compare their judgement of Ismael (a probable secret agent of the Castro government, no less) with Ismael's fears that his hotel room in the Hotel Tritón in Havana should have been bugged. Paranoia (or, at least, mistrust) is not a quality exclusive to Ismael, then.

To the Cuban Americans who have shunned Ismael, he is most likely a terrorist, not an exile like themselves, who views their homeland in a different light. Where does the difference lie, then, between protest and terrorism? The line is drawn, it seems, purely according to the perceptions of the individual holding the pencil. Whether a case is one of freedom fighting or terrorism depends on how the individual interprets the "facts" (if, indeed, we can talk about facts as such) of the case. Just as to establish "what Cuba is" entails many considerations, as Ismael cautions, so it requires some careful analysis to evaluate U.S. society with some degree of fairness or objectivity, without lapsing into some utopic view of democratic North America:

El mismo sistema democrático, los mismos Estados Unidos, por ser un país libre, eran de hecho los mejores aliados del crimen, sencillamente porque para poder seguir siendo (presumir ser) un sistema democrático tenía que permitir de una u otra forma (no importa cual) que los criminales lo invadiesen. (p.112)

The societies of both Cuba and the United States are to be considered in some kind of context, then, in order to appreciate the problems inherent in each. Even here, though, a distinction is made between what "is" and what is "seen to be": the narrator implicitly questions what is accepted as democracy in the U.S.A. when he differentiates between "seguir siendo" and "presumir ser un sistema democrático". If we look back at Eva and Ricardo in the first Journey now, we are forced to reconsider their rather ambiguous position as dissidents in the Cuba of the *Primer Viaje*: does their ambiguous nature highlight the ambiguity of their situation as supposed agitators? In any case, it is evident that "dissidents" like Eva and Ricardo and Ismael

only remain such in the eyes of the government in power; their actual potential to do harm in the cases of these three and, indeed, in the case of the “madman” Ramón Fernández, is debatable. In all these cases, it should be noted, there is a distinct lack of verbal communication or willingness to listen and to understand the other side between the individuals in question and the authorities. Ismael, too, is guilty of this reluctance to accept the word of the other party. This is certainly true of his encounters with other individuals and, most obviously, with Carlos/Ismaelito. The initial impressions he forms of Carlos are, at best, cynical and mistrustful. He believes that Carlos has chosen to buddy it up with him purely in order to inform on him later, for instance. He thinks to himself, but does not say to Carlos’s face: “repondió Ismael, pensando: ¿Y tú qué eres? ¿Una puta? ¿Un policía encargado de vigilarme? Sin duda, las dos cosas. En fin, qué más da, concluyó” (p.136). Even after his trip to the beach with Carlos/Ismaelito, Ismael is jumping to the worst conclusions about his new friend. When Carlos takes a while to come up to Ismael’s hotel room, Ismael supposes the whole set-up has been an elaborate ploy to steal the \$200 bribe money for the security men and lift operator, which he paid to allow Carlos to sneak up to his room. After they make love, though, a dejected Carlos is convinced the Ismael will instantly forget him once he leaves the hotel. Ismael responds by insisting that he loves him.

The interpretations of these two men about each other are presumptuous and inaccurate to say the least. Their preconceptions in this regard have much to do with identity. An argument takes place, for instance, as to whether Ismael is in fact Cuban or North American. Carlos asserts that Cuba is always at war; when Ismael asks “against whom”, he replies: “Contra casi todo el mundo, dijo el joven, pero, específicamente, contra ustedes. ¿Contra nosotros? Sí. ¿Acaso no es usted ciudadano norteamericano?” (pp.126-127). Again, then, this is a case of conflicting perceptions and of lack of communication. The young man is confrontational with Ismael in that, in his accusations against ‘ustedes’, he includes him in a collective group (the whole of the population and government of the U.S.A.), pigeonholing him along with ideologies which, in fact, Ismael does not share, rather than ask him directly where he stands on the issue. The question of who or what constitutes a “ciudadano norteamericano”, as Carlos describes Ismael, underlines the predicament of this exiled Cuban, now a naturalised U.S. citizen, returned “home”: he is neither one thing nor the other and simply does not fit the preconceived labels Carlos (and others) apply to him. Similarly, the two men cannot agree as to whether or not Carlos/Ismaelito is a *policía*, a definition he roundly rejects: “¡Yo no soy policía!, gritó entonces Carlos. ¡Oiste, yo no soy policía!... Pero entonces, ¿qué hacías anoche con el uniforme? Eso es obligatorio.” (p.137). Incommunication is inevitable when you are obliged to don a uniform which, in itself, labels you in a particular role, but cannot openly express your distaste for it. Even so, when Carlos does point this out

to Ismael, the two do not actually communicate and Ismael holds onto the reaction that it all amounts to the same thing and, either way, Carlos is still a *policía* in his eyes. Despite the repeated protestations of the other party, each remains firm in his initial perception of the role of the other. So who or what is Ismael, exactly? What role does he fulfil? Is he a “gusano”³¹, a tourist, an exile or a fugitive? Layer upon layer of possible interpretations cloud the “facts” of Ismael’s character and position: he is what you want to make of him according to your own sphere of vision and prejudices. Through the narrator we are presented with Ismael’s interpretation of what ordinary Cubans must be thinking of him and his attitude to their (and his) country:

No se trataba pues de un odio patriótico, imbuido de una ideología contraria, se trataba de que lo veían como un vencedor, como un intruso, alguien que había podido salir huyendo y ahora volvía a restregarles a ellos, a aquellos cuerpos mal vestidos y mal alimentados, su triunfo, es decir el hecho de no haberse muerto de hambre y de poder vestirse pulcramente. (p.122)

Clearly, this in itself is only one possible interpretation of the attitude of the majority of Cubans to visiting exiles like Ismael but it is significant that the image should be one of aggression, of superiority and of triumph. The specific use of the word “triunfo” here must resonate, since it has appeared so frequently in the first Journey in reference to the successes of Ricardo and Eva. Their “triumfos”, too, depended on obtaining material wealth from outside Cuba: whether that raises questions of the need for a show of greater material wealth than the average Cuban or whether it is a matter of establishing contact with the world outside the island is something I shall return to later but, for the moment, it is worth earmarking this connection between Eva’s perceptions of life abroad and the perceptions held by the various groups mentioned of Cubans like Ismael who have achieved this goal of living abroad. They are, most certainly, conflicting views of the “reality” of life outside Cuba. Ismael’s own assumptions about returning to Cuba as a rich and, therefore, welcome tourist are also misplaced. Passers-by can spot his North American clothing a mile off and so he sticks out like a sore thumb; one woman, noticing his trendy gear, calls him a *gusano* and many others look at him with envy and distaste. Once again, we should bear in mind that all these events are focalized through Ismael himself and so they are filtered through his interpretation. Nevertheless, we must also accept that such instances have occurred, to all intents and purposes, and they force him to look at himself anew: “Ismael volvió a inspeccionarse a sí mismo,” (p.122).

Ismael is no stranger to introspection, as we have seen, but this time his reflections are a revelation: returning to Havana has forced him to alter or, at the very least, to reconsider, the sphere of vision on which his previously held perceptions of everything (including himself)

³¹*Viaje a la Habana*, p.118 and p.121.

were based. It is interesting to compare this incident with the misconceptions drawn by others about Ramón Fernández (by the authorities, who pass him off as “unstable”, by the crowds at the museum, who believe him to be a common vandal, by the commuters in the station when he is arrested, who assume him to be mad or dangerous and do not rush to his aid, and so on) and with the conflicting footnote comments about one “Reinaldo Arenas”³² and about Kokó Salás in the *Segundo Viaje*. The expression of Ismael’s decision to accept Elvia’s invitation and go back to Havana throws the subjectivity and prejudice of all the novel’s presumptions into painful relief. He will go back to his family with his suitcases full of clothes, full of gifts for them and thus “les mostraría que él tuvo razón al marcharse, que el triunfador había sido él” (p.118). He will take this opportunity to vindicate himself, then, and to demonstrate his superior status. He also feels the need to vindicate himself to the Cuban authorities and wryly notes that he will now be treated very differently from when he left:

Ahora la misma policía que lo había despreciado y humillado sería la primera en recibirlo, amistosamente, pues ahora, al llegar no sería un <<gusano>> qué va, sino un miembro honorable de la comunidad en el exilio, es decir alguien que pagaba con dólares y por lo tanto había que explotarle su sentimentalismo. Sí, iría, iría a humillar a esos policías, y a demostrarse a sí mismo cuánta razón tuvo en abandonar todo aquello y, sobre todo, a comprobar de una vez y para siempre que no existe el regreso, que no puede existir, por lo menos en tanto que no se haya abolido el tiempo” (p.118)

Ismael does not believe himself to be a “gusano”, but a dollar-endowed tourist. If he is right, and money talks in Cuba, he will be welcomed with open arms and revered as a successful emigré who has made good in the States and therefore vindicated himself for the crimes for which he was originally persecuted, if only because his dollars will be more than welcome. His journey is to be a means of vindicating himself to himself, of proving that the lie of his glorious, successful exile is true and that the misgivings he so obviously has about ever having come to the U.S. in the first place are quite unfounded. By returning to Cuba, he seeks to prove that returning would be impossible, that he has left behind the ghosts of his past. Of course, his hopes are not to come true and his assumptions about the money-grabbing delight and jealous awe with which he will be welcomed by the Cuban people and, especially, by the police, are quite wrong. If he expected to be seen as a “triunfador”, he has been greatly mistaken. Neither the average man in Havana nor he himself comes to think of Ismael that way. His apparent *triunfo*, much like those of Ricardo and Eva, is pure charade. Elvia is right when she tells him in her letter that: “Aquí nadie se acuerda de ti” (p.99). To that extent he is right in believing that he cannot go back to the Cuba he left: no one does perceive him as they once did but still he cannot hope to bend their perceptions of him, except, perhaps, on a one-to-

³² As he appears in the novel as a character.

one scale. He is still to be labelled, just as he was at his arrest all those years before, only this time the labels will be different. Prior to his arrest, he struggled against his inner identity as a homosexual and, at the same time, against his public role as the model husband and father:

Cuánta soledad cuando precisamente lo suponían plenamente acompañado, qué necesidad de amor cuando todos pensaban, hasta la misma esposa, que él gozaba del amor absoluto, qué esfuerzo, y a todas éstas sin que pareciera que era un esfuerzo, para abrazarla y poseerla varonilmente, satisfaciéndola, simulando mi gozo, sin que remotamente comprendiera cuánto necesitaba yo también un cuerpo como el que ella abrazaba. (p.102-103)

The conflict of his inner identity with his outward persona is evident in the opposing language: “soledad”/ “acompañado”, “plenamente”/ “necesidad”. Like Eva and Ricardo, Ismael has had his share of wearing a mask and playing out a role which conflicts with his real identity as an individual. Yet in Ismael’s case this has involved as much assumption on his part as to how others have seen him, not least his wife, as on the part of those who have forced him into this predicament of having to adopt a public persona in the first place. He believes he has successfully played the role of the male in his relationship with Elvia: this, in itself begs the question of whose concept of manly behaviour this involves, whether it is Ismael’s perception of how a heterosexual married male is or should be, or whether it is his interpretation of how Elvia or other people expect a husband to be. His uncomfortable duty, as he sees it, has been to satisfy, to please his wife but, judging by the expression of comprehension on her face as she saw him convicted for homosexual offences and her open, tolerant fondness for him when he returns to her home in Havana, it is surely doubtful whether his assumption that he has satisfied her sexually or emotionally is correct or that his pretence has fooled her at all. While he has suffered because of being misunderstood, of being believed to be something he was not, he has virtually committed the same mistake with Elvia: who is Ismael, and who are we, to say what feelings she experienced during all of this? We never do hear from her lips what went through her mind or, come to that, what her own sexual preferences are or were. The two did not ever communicate these feelings to each other. To that end, then, could this lack of communication (and I use the term “lack of communication”, rather than “failure to communicate”, since both partners were, obviously, constrained by circumstances into living this lie) be the root of Ismael’s unbearable loneliness? It is misinterpretation or, should we say, the result of conflicting perceptions, that has brought Ismael to his predicament as an exile and convict in the first place. Not only is he convicted for being an “immoral” and a “maricón” but he is denounced as a <<gusano>> and an <<apátrida>> que deseaba abandonar la revolución (p.110). Paradoxically, the “apátrida” has found himself returning home to find the kind of love and contact with another human being that has been missing in his life. So far,

then, we have encountered suggestions that Ismael may be many conflicting things, not least a loving husband/closet homosexual, a secret agent of the Castro regime in Miami/an immoral, anti-revolutionary criminal and a wealthy, successful returning emigré/a smug *gusano* who no longer belongs to Cuba. Much as with Ramón Fernández, we are left to make what we will of these impressions but, in the end, the overriding suggestion is that impressions are fickle and frighteningly precarious.

Even in prison, such unfounded supposition abounds, based, once again, on the particular sphere of vision each convict has. Elvia's visit to Ismael in El Morro jail, with Ismaelito in tow, causes scandal among the inmates as well as the other visitors and their comments, as Ismael remembers them, are damning: "<<Ahí está la mujer del cherna>>, dijo alguien. <<Buena tortillera debe ser>>, dijo otra voz. <<Y con el hijo, qué inmoralidad>>" (p.109). These are, of course, Ismael's recollections of what was said and, as I have said before, we should bear in mind that these are his impressions of the prisoners' and visitors' impressions but, nevertheless, these comments speak volumes about the people who made them and the prejudices they hold. *Inmoralidad* is clearly a concept that varies according to the concept of any one individual, regardless of the "immorality" for which that person (in the case of these fellow-inmates) has been sentenced. Ismael's conviction is not for a crime in concrete terms (with tangible evidence of actual harm like, say, damage to property or assault) but for something perceived to be criminal and, because it is deemed to be "offensive" to morality, it is embroidered out of all proportion: ".aquí el fiscal lo interrumpió: ¿Cómo podía llamar <<hombre revolucionario>> a alguien que estaba acusado, con testigo directo, de un acto contranatura?" (p.107). Ismael's crime is to have committed an act that is deemed to be *contranatura*: all anti-homophobic bias aside, the definition *contranatura* in itself invites the question of who can, in fact, be considered worthy or capable of determining what goes with or against the grain of nature or human nature? If you can resist hunger, can submitting to feeling hungry be considered *contranatura*? Or is it the other way round? Is *contranatura* a term for an act that contradicts human impulses or one that yields to it? And, in that case, who decides which impulses are acceptable and which are not? Clearly, it is not a question of "nature" but one of "morality" which is, by definition, a code of social conduct determined by a group of individuals and based on the preferences and prejudices they hold, whether this applies to a case of supposedly "indecent acts" like same sex sex or to the case of, say, a psychopath who kills another person but then has no recollection of his actions. *Contranatura*, then, is a charged and subjective term to use in a legal context. Ismael's downfall is the testimony of his "lover", not, say, a series of surveillance reports on his conduct or any kind of physical evidence; it is the word of one man against another. Whether we choose to accept Ismael's version of the incident or the informant's is largely a question of our own

preconceptions but, either way, we are again faced with the fact that more than one version of the “truth” exists. Of course, in the case of Ismael’s alleged “crime” as we, the readers, hear of it, there is not much contest, since the account of events according to Ismael is recounted in intimate, personal terms and reveals the background to his encounter with this young man and the impossibility of his situation as a homosexual trapped in the guise of a heterosexual husband and father. Our sympathies are almost bound to lie with him. In any case, Ismael is consistently not what he has been seen to be. Those around him, almost without exception (if we consider Elvia as a case apart for her tolerance and understanding), have deluded themselves and misinterpreted him in grand style. He was, and is, not what they imagined:

pero Ismael, él que era incluso jefe de los círculos de estudio del C.D.R., un hombre que parecía tan serio, tan moral, que parecía tan hombre, y con un niño, con un muchacho de buena familia y que tenía, según él mismo confesó, sólo diecisiete años; uno menos que los que Ismael recordaba haberle oído decir cuando se conocieron. (p.106)

Ismael *parecía* many things to many people but was he those things or was he not? And why does he no longer “seem to possess” those qualities? His actions, his alleged crime cannot possibly be said to have proven that he is not “serio” or “moral” (at least moral regarding all issues other than following the accepted line on sexual orientation), much less that he is not “hombre”. Evidently, it is the question of what “hombre” entails which colours these perceptions of Ismael’s character as a whole: this is one very specific and very narrow concept of what hombre means. It is “man according to someone”, just as the age of the “minor” in question is given according to the young man himself. The youth’s age is not stated as documented fact but as the version according to the boy/man himself (whatever his motives for giving this age might be) or the one according to Ismael (the one he seems to remember the young man telling him). Everything, it seems, is *según* somebody, which begs the question: is it possible to *conocer a* anyone, or just a version of that person, according to your own interpretations of the image they present to you? In this case it is evident that no such *conocimiento* took place; no communication was established between the two men.

While in jail, Ismael is held incommunicado: entirely deprived of communication, that is, except with himself. The only communication in the sense of dialogue, of listening to and expressing thoughts, is with himself and this dialogue is frequent and recounted in detail in this third Journey. The “public disgust” at his crime which he recalls is in his mind, for all it may be true, is supposition on his part in that it is his impression of the public’s reaction. As he says (thinks): “*pero todos esos comentarios yo sólo pude imaginarlos en la celda común donde estaba incomunicado.*” (p.106). He is persistently misunderstood, even when he tries to go unnoticed altogether. As he walks through Havana on his way to Elvia’s house (after Carlos

has apparently stolen all his belongings and clothes, except for the trunks he wears) he finds he cannot pass unnoticed and is picked out and “misunderstood” by gangs of youths:

Pandillas de muchachos, al parecer vagabundos o delincuentes de ocasión, que lo miraban con recelo. [...] Ismael estaba muy lejos de que pudiera ser confundido con un turista, más bien parecía un loco. Qué otra cosa podía ser aquel viejo con un short verde olivo que arrastraba un tronco carconido por toda la orilla del mar. Y como loco fue tratado por la pandilla de delincuentes quienes para entretenerse comenzaron a tirarle piedras. (p.150)

The gangs of street kids (at least Ismael assumes they are street kids) then stone him and chase him since he is evidently (evidently to them, at any rate) some nutter wandering around. When Ismael passes an army post, the soldier on guard duty hits him with his rifle. Appearances trigger a reflex in the minds of Ismael, of the boys and of the guard and they classify the individual in question according to their preconceptions about what someone who looks like that must be, and act on their assumptions. The preconceptions of each may be based on past experience but, in these cases, their suppositions fall wide of the mark. Their assumption is based on reference points they have gleaned either from past experience or social conditioning. Near-nakedness of this very scruffy kind, carrying some item of refuse as a potential weapon and, probably, the rather deserted route Ismael has chosen to walk alone on this day of family celebrations indicate certain things to them: vagrancy, despicability and insanity. Similarly, in the second Journey, Daniel Sakuntala tells us that Ramón misunderstood the extent to which he could have trusted his friends and relied on their support. He suggests (albeit, perhaps, to provide an inflated image of himself as a good-hearted person) that Ramón underestimated him as a friend and affirms that, in view of Ramón's theft of money from Wendy's burger bar when he is trying to flee from Elisa, Fernández did not appreciate the extent to which he could have trusted his colleagues there, not least the generosity and affection of the cashier, who pays for the stolen money out of her own pocket to protect Ramón. Ramón's assumptions about her were clearly wrong and her feelings for him and willingness to trust him were much greater than he perceived them to be.

Feelings, motives and character, then, cannot be supposed or assumed, since they are, by definition, individual qualities which do not slot into the generalisations people are often so quick to form, as the characters in the Journeys do. Ismael alludes to this in reference to the individuality of his feelings and experiences: “*Sí, ya sé que otros podrán decir que han sentido lo mismo o algo parecido, pero lo que yo sentía era precisamente único porque era mi sentimiento.*” (p.104). The “reality” of any person or of any situation, if there can be one, lies in the fact that every person and set of events is individual and, therefore, cannot be fitted into the prejudices and preconceptions that such suppositions and deductions result from. What it

comes down to, as Ismael says, is something personal and undefinable: “*Ya sé que no es así. Pero es así...*” (p.104). This makes for an impossible situation, further aggravated by the inadequacy of words and the failure of human beings to communicate, for whatever reasons. Ismael, for instance, spends a good deal of time contemplating the issue of what to call the falling of snow: a storm, a flurry, a shower or whatever³³. The essence of communication lies in words, that is to say, no amount of word-play can actually alter what a thing is but, by the same token, expression is everything. On one occasion, for example, Ismael has trecked all over Havana and needs a taxi, so he asks a passer-by where he can find one:

Y al terminar de pronunciar la palabra *taxi*, Ismael se dio cuenta de que había cometido un grave error ideológico. ¿Taxi? Preguntó el pequeño ser que al principio se hizo el desentendido, como si la misma palabra, taxi, le causase repugnancia. Aquí no existen taxis, señor. Usted querrá decir un transporte especial. Lo que busco es un vehículo que me lleve hasta el hotel, dijo Ismael. (p.133)

As Ismael points out, a taxi by any other name is still a mode of transport and the apparent breakdown in communication which momentarily takes place between Ismael and the passer-by has very little to do with non-comprehension and everything to do with intolerance or “repugnancia”. Rather than a failure to understand, the problem is a failure to un-close the ears. The “error” Ismael has committed is indeed about ideology, rather than vocabulary. Whether a taxi is a “taxi” or a “transporte especial” or a private hire car, it’s still the same thing, just as Ismael is still Ismael, regardless of whether he is to be classified as a Cuban, a North American, a tourist, a criminal or an alien: incommunication occurs when any one definition is stuck to so rigidly as to eclipse any openness to understanding who or what the person or thing really is.

Communication breaks down constantly (if indeed it ever actually functions at all) throughout all three Journeys, to the extent that, in places, it is replaced by complete silence (as in the case of Ismael’s inward communication as a replacement for outward dialogue) or substituted for alternative forms of expression, which are often desperate and invariably turn out to be ineffective. There is the case, for instance, of Ismaelito’s friend who had been working for the secret police. The young man takes his own life and his way of saying goodbye to Ismaelito is to call him and let him hear by phone the fatal shot being fired. To this end, it is the silence of snow which fascinates Ismael at the beginning of the third Journey, as he watches it fall from his New York apartment window. It is a levelling, equalizing silence which produces the same white-out, the same calm over the whole city; as it is described: “ese unánime silencio” (p.102). Even in the noisiest parts of New York City, a uniform silence

³³ See *Viaje a La Habana* p.101.

descends. It is perhaps ironic (and certainly symbolic) that this silence is eloquent in comparison with Ismael's difficulty in finding words to describe it: it communicates more ideas than he can pinpoint in words. You could construct a million theories on the miracle of snowfall but words and hypotheses, Ismael finds, cannot come close to the essence of the thing itself: "Pero existía una enorme diferencia entre aquella teoría y los efectos de ese silencio." (p.102). Labels and titles are a trap created by people, then, just as Ismael's predicament prior to his trial, as a husband and homosexual, is a no-win situation. They are two apparently mutually exclusive roles which society has defined very clearly and, under his circumstances at the time, Ismael can fulfil neither one successfully. Even now he cannot escape from his impossible circumstances: being a husband and father, being gay and being seen as *maricón*. Like it or not, he is still a husband and a father. His situation, like life, it seems, is no-win thing, made worse because he finds himself being forced to perpetuate the misconceptions that have been formed about him. As the narrator says: "si algo no perdona la vida es que la vivamos." (p.103). Aside from being pessimistic, this comment is debatable within the context of the book: it becomes impossible to live with unadulterated freedom only when social constraints (the "morality" accepted by the authorities and ostensibly by the public majority) intervene, as in the cases of Ismael and of Ricardo and Eva.

The question is how the vicious circle of incommunication can be broken. In the third Journey, it is Elvia who provides hope. It is only with her that some semblance of communication does exist: "parecía que de alguna forma, que él casi intuía pero no podía explicarse, ella seguía queriéndolo." (p.115). Perhaps it is not precisely Elvia who manages to communicate but love itself which breaks the barriers. Love, it seems, defies words and definitions. Ismael, at this point, can almost infer, can understand (or nearly) without the need for or the ability to convert his "intuition" into words and categories; yet, at the same time, it is all beyond him and he cannot fathom why this intuition should be so. It is interesting to compare Elvia's letter to Ismael with Eva's narration in the first Journey (where the narratee is Ricardo). Both women effectively write to a recipient who may well never read what they have to say and, to that end, they must have motives for writing at all, besides basic dialogue or narrative device³⁴. Do they write for the narratee's benefit or for their own? Eva's attempts to communicate with Ricardo, as far as we are aware from the novel, are not effective and, in fact, we have no reason to believe that she has sent or will ever send her words to Ricardo at all. Elvia's letter, on the other hand, arrives, is read, and its contents most certainly hit home, provoking changing and conflicting reactions in Ismael during the course of his journey. If her

³⁴ I am referring here to the characters' motives as they may bring something to the thematic content of the text, rather than to Arenas's reasons for choosing to give these two women characters a voice.

intention was to “get through to him”, she has succeeded. She is the only main character in any of the three *Viajes* who does.

There are even instances when language itself becomes indecipherable between one character and another, as on the occasion when Ricardo takes ill in Baracoa and, in his feverish state, utters some “names” which Eva cannot understand³⁵. Similarly, in the *Segundo Viaje*, while Ramón pretends to be asleep, Elisa paces around, gabbing in *una extraña jerigonza* (p.81). Ramón does not understand much of what she is saying, except: “<<Los inventores>>, <<los intérpretes>>, creo que le entendí decir en un momento en algo parecido al español.” (p.81). He cannot claim to have understood or even to have distinguished clearly what has been said, only that he “thinks he heard” something that “sounded like” Spanish. In any case, none of the message reached him intelligibly: indeed, there is a vast difference between the two words he believes he may have heard mentioned, since the inventor and the interpreter carry out two very different functions. Elisa’s comments about the vice of curiosity are borne out here when Ramón presumes to have picked up some of what she has said, despite admitting to finding her *extraña jerigonza* quite unintelligible. It is poignant that he has picked up on the very words *inventores* and *intérpretes* since he, like the editors, has been inventing and interpreting all along with regard to what he has accepted as the “truth” about the enigmatic Elisa. Nevertheless, when he does come to hear her speaking in this peculiar foreign tongue, not only does he not pause to wonder how this allegedly Greek woman comes to be speaking in a language so similar to Spanish, nor to comment on this in retrospect when he discovers Elisa/Leonardo’s identity and Italian nationality, but he also fails to grasp the significance of the two words he fancies he has heard her say. Here, his persistent analysis of her every move lets him down or, perhaps, his perception of her at this point does not make him wonder about this phenomenon in particular but to concentrate on his other (misguided) assumptions about her. However, Ramón also falls victim to being misunderstood by other people, despite his protestations, that is to say he experiences being both the non-comprehending listener and the speaker who is misunderstood. As he flees through Grand Central Station from Leonardo/Elisa, he screams for help: his cries are perfectly audible and, this time, there is no language barrier as such, but the railway commuters assume he is insane and ignore his pleas, even more so when he strips off and jumps around to attract at least someone’s attention and, better still, to get himself arrested and taken into the comparative safety of police custody (which is indeed what happens, though it takes some time for anyone to pay him any mind and the ruse does not ultimately serve to save his life). His vain efforts to be noticed by whatever means are clearly reminiscent of Eva’s desperate, shameless attempts to

³⁵See *Viaje a La Habana* p.45.

catch the eye of the *muchacho* in the first Journey, when she and Ricardo give their final performance.

The preoccupation with failed communication is very evident in all three Journeys, then. Communication is illustrated in all its failed forms and only very few successful ones. These successful instances (between Elvia and Ismael, and between Ismael and himself), though, underline the failed ones and the human need to rectify them. It is more than fitting that the third Journey should have a happy - and eloquent - ending: the whole *Viaje a La Habana* (in all its three parts) is complete, Ismael has reached his destination and a final moment of silence provides a bond between the three characters of Ismael, Elvia and Ismaelito that is too highly charged to be reduced to comments or observations or description, as has been the downfall of the characters of the three Journeys until now. Ismael tells us simply: "*Luego, en silencio, los tres comenzamos a comer*" (p.153). Their silence here, like the silent snow where his Journey begins, overrides words and labels and the three have established a contact which defies definition. Whereas the editors of the second *Viaje* and Eva in the first have presumed to know something, when they have actually been making tenuous and often failed attempts to interpret, here the three individuals have declined to qualify the event of their meeting according to the patterns of their respective spheres of vision and thus mould it into a distorted interpretation, but have, instead, chosen simply to infer. It should be borne in mind, of course, that this happy situation comes just as the pretence acted out by Ismaelito comes to light (Ismael discovers that his young lover "Carlos" is his son and the very reason for his visit in the first place, and that his belongings were not stolen by some sponging youth who used him to steal from him but were deliberately taken by his own son and are now here in front of him). Elvia knows nothing of this situation (as far as we are aware), either that Ismaelito had already seen his father or, much less, that the two had been lovers. So communication between the three relatives is hardly open. The question of communication in *Viaje a La Habana*, though, is a deeper matter than simply telling the truth and has, instead, everything to do with adopting and imposing roles and labels. As we have seen, this is always (without exception, if we look at each of the characters in turn) the result of an individual's particular sphere of vision. Any person's panorama is limited and, as such, restricts and twists the perceptions the individual makes about something or someone.

Unlike Eva and Ricardo, Ismael tries not to *destacarse* as he makes his way to Elvia's house in Santa Fe, dressed only in a pair of khaki shorts. Even so, like Eva, Ismael has a fantasy like Eva's dream of splendour and <<*Impalas*>>: Ismael's is a dream he has always had, almost since he was born. While Eva's is about glamour and public adoration, his involves the freedom of flight: "Muchas veces desde niño, [...] Ismael se había quedado extasiado ante el vuelo de un avión que ascendía hasta perderse más allá de las nubes."

(p.110). His dream comes true in part in that he flies away but, of course, he has dreamt of flying up and away, not of landing in the cold reality of life as an exiled Cuban in New York. His fantasy and its impossibility lie in the fact that he can never disappear or escape from any aspect of himself or his life, as he discovers on his return to the life he thought he had left behind for good in Havana. While Eva is horrified by the thought of ever disappearing from the limelight, it is precisely the prospect of being invisible that Ismael longs for. He harks back nostalgically to his youth in Cuba and to the thought of: “pasar inadvertido entre los otros [...] Diluirse, diluirse entre ellos para no perecer.” (p.118).

Invisibility, in his case, is all about survival; not for him the hype of groups like the *Camisas Abiertas* to hide him from the police. For Ismael, solitude equals peace, a concept that is very far removed from Eva’s desolation at finding herself alone after Ricardo has deserted her. His need for *soledad* could be put down to a form of escapism or of escaping from his hopeless situation as a gay man living the role of a straight husband, but the question of solitude also implies incommunication with other people. We are told of his attitude to being alone: “esa paz, sólo cabía en una palabra, esa magnífica palabra que todos quieren rechazar y que es la única que nos salva: soledad.” (p.113). Solitude is connected to survival, to saving oneself, then, in Ismael’s mind and, indeed, it is his connection with another man (his breaking with the solitude he has maintained for so long in his sham marriage) that has caused his arrest and led to his exile. It is interesting that this section should describe solitude in collective terms, though, as something that saves “us”: the “us” referred to when the narrator mentions “es la única que nos salva” [my emphasis] is not defined but it does denote, by implication, a group identity and a collective experience. Whether it refers to homosexuals, to Cubans, to human beings as a whole or whatever, it expresses a “group solitude”, not an individual or isolated one. Elvia’s letter makes Ismael realise that he is not alone and can never be and, therefore, he cannot remain in the cocoon of his *soledad*: like it or not, he is tied to other people. The concept of solitude as Ismael envisages it, implies some relationship with collective identity which is neither entirely contradictory nor entirely complementary. It raises the question of a conflict, if there is one, between individual identity and collective identity:

no podía dejar de sentir una enorme piedad hacia los solitarios como él, pero que, a diferencia de él no habían podido sobrellevar la soledad, y por ahí deambulaban, de cine pornográfico en cine pornográfico, en caravana larga y desesperada. También están los vagabundos, esos solitarios vencidos por la soledad, solitarios burlados por la soledad, pues nunca se está solo, pero tampoco acompañado, cuando se duerme en un parque o en un portal. (p.113).

This is a very specific kind of “soledad” that Ismael has in mind, connected as it is to X-rated cinemas, parks and so on. It is a world of sexual loneliness with which he is somehow

familiar, the loneliness of clandestine homosexuality or, perhaps, the loneliness of being an unloved gay man. He is insistent that he is not one of these men, though: they are “vencidos”, he is not. Perhaps the distinction here is that, for him, solitude has meant survival, or perhaps, simply, he is drawing a line between solitude as a state that can be chosen and loneliness, which is an emotion to be suffered. Ismael goes on to define *soledad* in his own terms:

Pero ese no es mi caso, se decía, quizás para animarse, porque yo sé cual es el sentido de la vida porque yo sí he sufrido verdaderamente, porque yo sí he visto verdaderamente el horror, lo que es verdaderamente el desamparo, la incomunicación, la gran soledad, cuando se está en una galera con doscientos o más asesinos que además te consideran un depravado y un inmoral y desde luego te desprecian. (p.113).

His repetition of the word “verdaderamente” suggests that, if there is a real suffering, there is also a less authentic one, a false testimony, as opposed to his true one, and a false isolation, unlike his real isolation. The suggestion may be that he had never previously conceived of how unspeakable the situation could become until his imprisonment in El Morro opened his eyes but, equally, the underlying idea could be that situations as a general rule are often misconstrued and so only those who have witnessed them and experienced them first hand can relate the “true” facts, as opposed to the assumptions. His definition of loneliness is about being isolated for being misunderstood and misinterpreted, i.e. for lack (a lack enforced by the circumstances of his imprisonment, through needing to protect himself from harm in the jail) of communication with the others; as he says, he has suffered “lo que es verdaderamente la incomunicación”. He continues:

Yo he visto, yo he visto, yo sí he visto y he padecido, y como he sobrevivido, nadie me va a hacer un cuento a mí. Ellos no saben nada, ellos no saben lo que les espera, ellos no saben de dónde vengo yo ni yo puedo explicárselo (p.113)

Ismael insists that he and only he knows what happened to him, what he is and who he is, but his hard-headed tone, although it does not weaken his credibility, is reminiscent of the editors of the second Journey. He is no more open to comment from others than other people have been to hear and understand his account or than the narrators of the *Segndo Viaje* are to each other's points of view. The situation comes down to communication: they don't know and he can't communicate it to them. Ismael's way of thinking here, his defiant rage, is a failed attempt to break this incommunication with the people who don't appreciate what “real suffering” is or that he knows all about it. He is kidding himself if he thinks that by simply knowing these “realities” himself, others will come to understand, since these assertions are, of course, his inward, unarticulated thoughts.

Ismael has a clear image in his own mind of himself and of his identity (which he rakes over again and again in his constant self-analysis): his problem lies in communicating it with the outside. To examine Ismael as an individual, though, we must also look at the version of him (if indeed he is a “version”) that is his son Ismaelito. Ismaelito acts, in part, as a reflection of Ismael, not only in that he reveals aspects of Ismael to us but also in so far as he causes Ismael to see himself (the reflection of himself) in a different light. The moment of his union with Ismaelito/Carlos is described in the following terms:

Y en aquel instante, Ismael dejó de ser un hombre de cincuenta años, para convertirse también en un hermoso joven que era amado y poseído por su hermoso compañero. Sensación de flotar, certeza de diluirse, de integrarse, de fundirse a alguien que siendo él mismo - él mismo - es el opuesto, la resistencia anhelada y amada, que siendo uno mismo puede darnos el placer de ser otro, ese otro yo tan desgarradoramente dado ya por desaparecido y de pronto en medio del infierno, en plena llama, encontrado. (pp.147-148)

In becoming one with his his opposite, who is also himself (his mirror image, a man and, as we will discover later in the narration, his child³⁶), Ismael finds his other *yo*. When Ismael arrives at the house in Santa Fe, the revelation (to Ismael and to ourselves the readers) that Carlos is Ismaelito brings another dimension to this scene. Carlos/Ismaelito is, indeed, Ismael's image, even dressed in the clothes he stole from Ismael. When he discovers Carlos' real identity, Ismael is struck more than ever by the young man's beauty and radiance; but this functions on a deeper level than mere physical perfection: “lucía ahora mucho más bello, ataviado con las ropas modernas y juveniles que Ismael había comprado en Nueva York. Precisamente para él. Radiante, el hijo se acercó hasta el padre y lo abrazó.” (p.151). Unwittingly, Ismael bought the clothes for his son and his lover, not just to appease Elvia or his own guilty conscience as he thought. We should bear in mind that Ismael's relationship with Carlos/Ismaelito at the hotel is not just a physical bond as far as Ismael is concerned, but is the culmination of all his years of solitude in finally finding love. For that matter, we have no reason to think that the feelings Ismael has are not reciprocated. If we look back at the conversation which takes place between the two men after they make love, Ismael has been transformed by the experience. He declares his love and sincerity to “Carlos” and, very notably, there follows a dialogue between them; dialogue being, as we know, alien to Ismael, this heralds a drastic change. The two actually communicate with each other. Ismaelito talks again about his hope of leaving but, this time, his request for help takes on a fresh, more spontaneous tone and Ismael's response is very different from before. Carlos says: “Yo sé que nunca podré salir de aquí. ¡No!, gritó otra vez Ismael. No pienses así. Lo lograrás, lo lograrás.”

³⁶ We must remember that, as yet, Ismael has no idea that Carlos is in fact his son Ismaelito and, at this stage, neither does the reader.

Sino nada tendría sentido entonces.” (p.147). It is for Ismael, not Carlos, that “nada tendría sentido” if the boy does not leave Cuba. Ismael, who formerly embraces solitude, has now adopted an entirely changed sphere of vision, based on a collective outlook. Everything now looks different because it is seen from the perspective of someone connected to someone else. However, the dialogue that takes place between these two still constitutes an internal one, another level of self-analysis, since Ismaelito is Ismael and the dialogue he establishes is with himself.

Elvia provides another dimension to the concept of role playing and false identities in the novel as a whole. The pantomime of appearances Ismael, Eva and Ricardo have been playing is thrown into relief when Ismael stops to consider its effect on this other person: “Ismael sintió pena [...] por Elvia; toda su vida, pensó, dedicada a alguien que no existe, viviendo para alguien que no existe, amando a alguien que no es, haciéndole de esposa, de mujer, de madre a una sombra.” (p.104). Just as Ricardo, now, will never reappear (at least as Eva saw him, since her *Richard* never existed), Elvia too, Ismael says, has centred her life around someone who was never there at all. In both these cases, to that extent, the women are deceived by their husbands and by their own myopic perceptions of them, and sacrificed to their situations. Nevertheless, it is significant that one word in particular is included in this section which puts a different slant on this comment: “pensó”. This vision of poor Elvia is Ismael’s vision of her, not her own. We are not to know whether she did in fact believe his charade at all, in fact, we can only speculate (as Ismael does) as to her motives for living her life as she has done or as to her perception of Ismael’s identity.

The circumstances of Ismael’s need to leave Cuba in the first place centre around the question of his identity and other people’s notions of it. He flashes back to that time and we are told: “Y allá estaba él, con treinta años o menos queriendo precisamente demostrar que admiraba lo que aborrecía” (p.102) In a comment reminiscent of the frantic life of the gay population of Havana in *El color del verano*, Ismael remembers that, in those years “proliferaban en forma iminente e ineludible por todos los sitios” (p.102). So Ismael, while he is an individual with his own identity, is also part of a collective experience endured by a proliferation of young men, suggesting that a large percentage of his generation has suffered the same life experience and the same crisis of identity that Ismael has. Like the citizens of the Represidential state in *El Asalto*, who are continually terrified of being convicted for whispering, Ismael has known the urgent need to cover himself in order not to be discovered by an already suspicious authority, Ismael recalls the pressure he felt to be seen to be manly: “*Qué gesto, qué expresión de indiferencia, de desprecio o de despreocupada camaradería hacer ante ellos para que el que me vigila se dé por derrotado y no pueda consignar en su agenda <<maricón>>*” (p.102). His reasons for trying to, for needing to be invisible are all about

avoiding the label of *maricón* and the persecution that would (and did) ensue. By way of convincing him not to be ashamed to come back now, Elvia assures him: “Aquí nadie se acuerda de ti, salvo, desde luego, tu hijo y yo.” (p.199). He should be O.K., then, if no one remembers the label he has been branded with. Elvia has a great deal to do with Ismael’s definition of himself, however, and not only through her condition as an accessory to his masquerading as a heterosexual. Her letter reveals her closeness to Ismael even after so much time has passed and her intimate bond with him, despite the pretence of their marriage, and awakens thoughts which Ismael had long tried to bury. He tells us:

Había que ver la manera taimada con que Elvia iba apoderándose de su conciencia; lentamente, discretamente iba avanzando por las líneas para finalmente lanzarse, ya segura, sobre su presa en la postdata cuando escribía <<por si te decides (sé que te decidirás)>>. (p.117)

The narration speculates on how intimately Elvia can possibly know him in order to make such an assumption: how can she know, rather than guess, that he will decide to return to Cuba? A poignant question is posed: “¿Hasta qué punto ella era él mismo?” (p.117). The key preoccupation is with which identity is his real, authentic self: both Ismaels (the one of the past, in Cuba and the one in exile and now much older). The two Ismaels observe each other through Elvia’s remark:

sí, él mismo, allá, contemplándose acá, realizando tantos trabajos, padeciendo tanta crueldad, imponiéndose tantas disciplinas para no verlo a él allá, para no verse de una vez, los dos mirándose, ambos solos y desesperados, sí, *desesperados, a pesar de todo lo que haya dicho anteriormente*, esgrimiendo poderosas razones para que uno de ellos (¿El Ismael de allá? ¿El Ismael de acá?) saltase definitivamente la barrera y fuese a su encuentro. (p.117).

Neither the Ismael of his youth (in Cuba) nor the Ismael of the years in the USA has made the leap to confront his “I”; not until he is face to face with his Other – Ismaelito – does he finally do so and lay the ghosts of these Ismaels of his past to rest. Initially, Ismael seems to be the prey to the predatory, skillful Elvia’s calculating letter, very much as Ramón fell prey to the calculating Elisa; she is not expressing idle speculation when she says *sé que te decidirás*, Ismael believes, but has powers of intuition which go beyond merely presuming what his thoughts and feelings are likely to be. She does not merely suppose, she knows (and she is proved right) which way Ismael’s decision will go. Somehow she has entered his mind. Here it is Elvia, like Ismaelito, who is the reflection of Ismael, the other facet to him and his Cuban self. Like Ricardo, then, Ismael’s journey takes him to himself, to his own identity in a shape which was unrecognised by him. The destination turns out not to be what the traveller expected to find in either of these viajes (or, come to that, in any of the three) but they arrive at a point

which it was inevitable that they would eventually reach. Later on this same page, Ismael extends the notion of his other *yo* waiting in Havana to confront him: his “other self” involves not only Elvia but also Ismaelito, as we have seen. In his own words Ismael refers to this young version of himself in a reference that is to be borne out later but also to be modified in an unexpected fashion with the sexual encounter between the two men: “el nombre de su hijo, Ismaelito, su propio nombre, él mismo; Ismaelito, es decir, Ismael niño.” (p.117). Ismael’s journey is one of rediscovery, of reunion with his past and with himself.

3.iii Identity: Ramón’s encounter with Elisa/ Leonardo/la Gioconda

Elisa is a stark contrast to Ramón’s previous lovers. Ramón is the archetypal Don Juan, the image of virility and machismo and apparently irresistible to women. His innumerable lovers are nameless and largely forgettable women whom he describes as “mujeres anónimas” (p.68). Elisa, though, he most certainly knows by name, and she turns out to be his first love, despite his string of past conquests. The irony, of course, is that she is not the woman she appears to be. Like Ismael, Ramón discovers that the person he fell in love with is not the person he perceived her to be at all; Ismael’s lover turns out to be his own son, while Ramón’s turns out to be the late Leonardo da Vinci. In all three *Viajes*, love turns out to be very different from what the men (Ismael, Ramón and Ricardo) expected to find or thought they had found. In all three cases, the journey leads to a new, sincere kind of love, to a man who provides the ultimate, fulfilling loving relationship and to a complex situation which shatters life as the traveller knew it. In none of the *Viajes* is the destination the anticipated one. For Ramón’s part, he describes Elisa as: “la mujer de la cual yo me había, por primera vez, enamorado” (p.75). For him, Elisa is still defined as a woman, not as Leonardo. As he finds out to his cost, of course, she is fundamentally different from this initial concept he has of her. Elisa is a multiple character, at the same time woman (several women), man, artist, animal and work of art. The Mona Lisa, Leonardo’s masterpiece, is the depiction of female perfection and, indeed, she surpasses the women of Ramón’s previous conquests by far. Ramón may be uncultured according to Sakuntala but, if there is one area in which he is expert it is in feminine beauty, to which he has devoted a great deal of study: “inspeccionando con mi buen ojo a todas las mujeres que cruzan por enfrente.” (p.72).

Elisa is a bizarre amalgamation of woman or, rather, of several women in one (which might account for why she blows all Ramón’s other lovers out of the water), animal and something inhuman. Ramón has the sensation more than once of being with an animal, as on the occasion when he pretends to be asleep and, surreptitiously, catches a glimpse of Elisa

behaving like some kind of animal creature. She turns out not to be the definition of female perfection but a man, a homosexual and the definitive master artist. Initially she tells Ramón that her name is Elisa and that she is “de origen griego”. Even her alleged nationality turns out to be false and adds to the mesh of contradictions that make up her character. Like Eva’s costumes, Elisa is a strange conglomeration of nationalities:

cada sílaba de la palabra *Mediterráneo* la pronunciaba con una voz y un tono distintos. De modo que al oírla parecía que no estaba con una mujer sino con cinco absolutamente diferentes. Cuando se lo hice saber noté que su hermosa frente se arrugaba. (p.69)

So, rather than an amalgamation of nationalities, it is more accurate to say that Elisa is an amalgamation of identities; it is not different accents Ramón detects but the voices of different women altogether. We should reconsider her pretensions to being *de origen griego*, then, and keep in mind that perhaps this *origen* refers to something other than her birthplace in a strict sense. We will come back to this concept in due course. Already Ramón’s suspicions are aroused, but not to the extent that he gives up on her to look for someone less polemic. Little by little the identity of this “woman” acquires more dimensions, including, as I have mentioned, animal qualities. These are not simply qualities such as, say, a tendency to behave wildly, but involve visible aspects of an animal’s body. For example, Ramón recalls: “Sostuve aquella mirada y descubrí que los ojos de Elisa no tenían pestañas porque eran los ojos de una serpiente.” (p.79). This exceptional woman becomes more bizarre by the day and Ramón discovers one disturbing facet to her after another, each one more threatening and inexplicable than the last. Yet, stage by stage, he forms his assumptions and draws interpretations which seem logical to him about the “real Elisa”. Even when they are (supposedly both) sleeping together and he sees her head disappear from her body, he manages to gloss over it³⁷. Perfect she may be but she is impossible. Elisa - the Mona Lisa - then, is truly the embodiment of female perfection and, most of all, enigma. She does not exist as any single person, only as Ramón’s continual attempts to figure out the “truth” of her. Even so, he recognises that he forced himself to doctor his knowledge of Elisa to fit his perception of her as his perfect woman and so created an identity for her that could satisfy his doubts: “Pero yo con todo lo que había visto o había creído ver, más el deseo (¿Debería escribir amor?) que Elisa me inspiraba, me había propuesto, como un asunto de vida o muerte, saber quién era realmente aquella mujer.” (p.74) He is right to describe his quest for the truth about Elisa as a life and death matter, of course, and he proves here that Elisa/Leonardo is also right about the vice of curiosity: it does indeed turn out to be Ramón’s fatal mistake. Even here, though, Ramón is

³⁷This episode is recounted on p.73 of *Viaje a La Habana*.

uncertain as to what is fact and what is imagination. He does not even state categorically that he witnessed all the peculiar happenings he relates, but qualifies them by referring to them as “todo lo que había visto o había creído ver”. So the contrast is drawn between testimony and imagination and, as we can see from Ramón’s lack of certainty as to whether he can say he witnessed certain things or imagined them, that the line between the two processes is a fine one.

So who is the enigmatic Elisa? As “she” furiously tells Ramón (to his total incomprehension): “<<Sí, me gustan los hombres, y mucho, porque yo también soy un hombre y además un sabio!>>” (p.83). Just as Ramón confronts himself through Leonardo, da Vinci’s Elisa is the artist’s own mirror image of himself, shaped by his desires for his own identity. We are told:

Elisa no solamente era la mujer del cuadro, sino que esa mujer del cuadro era el mismo pintor que se había hecho su propio autorretrato, pintándose tal como él quería ser (como interiormente era), una mujer lujuriosa y fascinante. (p.84)

In the Mona Lisa and in Elisa, Leonardo has redefined himself, as Eva does at the end of her journey, according to his own concept of himself. It is worth noting that this self-made identity, the Mona Lisa, is described as *lujuriosa*: Ricardo, too, adopted an attitude of *lujuria*, during one of the couple’s early performances. It is a façade that both men have given themselves. One person’s vision of himself, like Leonardo’s Mona Lisa persona, conflicts starkly with the way others choose to see him: we have been familiar with the image of Elisa/the Mona Lisa in all her extraordinary femininity which is, after all, how Leonardo has chosen to identify himself but, when he is unmasked to Ramón, we are presented with da Vinci’s image as others (in this case, Ramón) see him:

Como jamás había practicado la sodomía quise hacerme la ilusión remota de que aquel esperpento, aquel saco de huesos, al que además le había salido una horrible barba, seguía siendo Elisa. Y mientras lo poseía lo llamé por ese nombre. Pero él, en medio del paroxismo, volvió el rostro, mirándome con unos ojos que eran dos cuencas rojizas.-¡Lláname Leonardo, coño! ¡Lláname Leonardo! (p.85)

It seems to be impossible to reconcile the two images. Leonardo’s outburst harks back to the first Journey, to Ricardo’s demands that Eva call him by his real name; in both cases, a gulf has existed between the identity the individual sees for himself and the one the other person has applied to him. Ramón, in this case, cannot conceive of a person who is both Elisa and Leonardo.

4. Conclusions: *Viaje a...* – seeking one destination, finding another

The travellers in the three Journeys have, as we have seen, arrived at destinations far removed from the ones they expected to find. All of them have come from Havana in the first instance and have travelled back there - even Ramón (we will look at this point shortly) - so is it possible to say that they have come full circle? For Ismael, his journey back to Havana, the place of his youth, is a return trip to himself as he was in his young life: “El viaje a Cuba, es decir, a la Habana, a decir, a Sante Fe, y a las playas de Marianao, que era el sitio donde había pasado su juventud” (p.119). It is the same place, geographically, but it is not the same time and he is now a different person. He comes to see himself both as the man he is now and as the young man he was from another perspective. The interpretation will inevitably be different from the ones he had as a young man now that he is mature and has experienced a great deal more of life but, by the end of his journey, he is a changed man from the one who flew down from New York to make this trip. While he set off with the hope of playing the part of the successful emigré and tourist, his intentions of playing out the charade are not realised and, instead, he finds his real self, his Cuban self (his *yo por allá*) in Elvia and, especially, in Ismaelito. Certainly, his is a journey to his youth: “Pero para Ismael, salir de pronto a aquella claridad, a la tibieza de aquella tarde, fue como recuperar súbitamente su juventud.” (p.120). From the opacity and masking effects of the snow in New York, he has suddenly come out to the brilliance and clarity of Havana. He has travelled in time as well as space: “Sí, iría [...], a comprobar de una vez y para siempre que no existe el regreso, que no puede existir, por lo menos en tanto que no se haya abolido el tiempo. (p.118). While he is apparently seeking to prove to himself that he can never go back to Cuba as he knew it and to lay to rest his ghosts from those days, at the same time *regresar* is exactly what he is trying to do: in going back, he hopes to prove to himself that there is no going back. Does not being lonely or, rather, being *acompañado* depend on truly communicating with another person? If that is so, then Ismael’s journey has brought him to himself, to the human contact he lacked before in order to “be himself”; his destination is Ismaelito, who is exactly the incarnation (Ismael-ito) of Ismael (his father) in his youth but as he could have been, had he not suffered such loneliness during those years.

Ramón’s journey, too, effectively takes him back to Havana (as I mentioned, in passing above,): Elisa takes him back to the mountain village which, he later realises, is the town depicted in the background of da Vinci’s masterpiece. He says of the village, however:

“Al recorrer aquellas calles estrechas y mal iluminadas, luego de haber salido de un lugar parecido a la Bodeguita del Medio, me parecía como si hubiera vuelto a la Habana de mis últimos tiempos.” (p.82). His trip has taken him back not just to Havana but to a very particular concept of Havana, the Havana of a certain time in a certain life. For all three men, the journey is intended as a means to finding peace of mind. For Ricardo, finding the last remaining onlooker and bending him to his will is the final remaining task required to achieve satisfaction. For Ismael, his journey is a question of going back to Santa Fe to bury his past but, as in the *Primer Viaje* and as with Ramón’s need to get to know his woman in order to settle happily with her, the expected comfort is not what he finds:

Pero ahora se trata de viajar a La Habana, repartir los trapos, ver aquello, reírme de todo, y regresar para instalarme aquí definitivamente, comprar si es posible una casa, jubilarme, y ya, sin una memoria que me obsesione, vivir en paz lo que me quede de vida mirando la nieve. Pero para eso, para lograr eso, para saber que eso es lo mejor y lo único a que puedo aspirar, tengo que ir allá. (p.119)

Like Ramón deliberately tries to bend the truth that he finds to make it into the truth he wanted to find, so Ismael plans to go to Havana with the express intention of “discovering” that he is better off in the States and that his life there will make him happy while his memories, he hopes to find, mean nothing to him. Clearly, though, this is not to be the case, since his memories are significant enough to cause him to go to these lengths to put them to rest in the first place.

It is impossible for these characters to attain the fulfilment and calm they seek as easily as they supposed. The situations of incommunication in which they have been living are like time bombs waiting for the moment when they will, inevitably, explode. All the catharsis of the novel is inevitable and unavoidable. Hints are made at the bombshell that is to come when Ismael finally arrives at Elvia’s home and Ismaelito is unmasked: Ismael even comments to “Carlos” that he is old enough to be his father³⁸. According to Ismael, everything happens for a reason and there is a pattern to life. In reference to the very short space of time he spent waiting, lying inert, between his encounter with Sergio and the moment when the police come for him on Sergio’s information, he expresses this thought: “¿Qué tiempo, qué tiempo estuve yo así? Toda mi vida, [...] desde ese momento hasta que muera aquí, y me pudra (o no me pudra) bajo la nieve.”(p.106). He has no choice, then, but to accept Elvia’s invitation/request and make the trip to Havana. Elvia receives Ismael with unaffected warmth. She welcomes him to “his home”, as she puts it³⁹, not hers. Her openness and affection do come as a surprise to her guest, not to say to the reader, after some of Ismael’s speculation about her calculating, avaricious requests for him to visit with gifts for the boy. It must be said, realistically, that

³⁸See *Viaje a La Habana* p.135: “Puedo ser tu padre, dijo Ismael”.

³⁹See *Viaje a La Habana* p.151

Ismael's intentions for going to Cuba to straighten out his own mind, placate his family with gifts, then leave, were selfish in the extreme and unreasonable expectations from his long-lost, needy wife and son. So far, he has been deluding himself about his trip and about his connections with Elvia and Ismaelito. In his room at the Hotel Tritón, he thinks about them:

sencillamente no sentía (no admitía) su responsabilidad como padre. [...] Pero ahora más de veinte años después, Ismael respondía otra vez a esa farsa: Ahí estaban las maletas repletas, los efectos eléctricos, el dinero, todo lo que pensaba entregarle a su familia. *Mi familia*. (p.130).

He has been deluding himself and, therefore, the time is bound to come when he is forced to wake up to what he has tried for so long to convince himself was not happening. The imminence of some ominous discovery is underlying but still present during his journey and there is a pervading sense from the beginning that the destination which awaits him cannot be evaded. On his arrival in Havana, Ismael recovers the fear of lurking danger that he had long since forgotten. He attributes this to life in Havana as he experienced it but the sense of foreboding and trepidation appears to involve something more personal than the dangers of society and the city. When he is escorted to his hotel by the young man (Carlos/Ismaelito), Ismael repeatedly and somewhat desperately insists that he does not need escorting, not to worry, that he is close enough not to be in any danger between here and the Tritón: but the implication is that he is afraid of the young man or, perhaps more precisely, of himself, not of being attacked or coming to any physical harm.

It is in the sea - again, a body of water - swimming with Carlos/Ismaelito that Ismael has his thoughts on age, on wanting to be young again, on feeling young but being old. He is faced with the nubile, beautiful Ismaelito, the youthful (but not idyllic) version of himself. We are told: "Allí estaba el joven, flotando cerca de él (de él, el viejo), acercándose aún más a él (él, el viejo) para contarle su terror"(p.139). Let us consider the last two words of this section: the build-up to them deals with Ismael's preoccupation with being old and, with his thoughts fixed on this concern, he sees the young man swimming closer to him and closer still to tell him of "*su terror*" (my emphasis). Whose terror does this refer to? Ismaelito's or Ismael's? The tension of the preceeding lines deals with Ismael's thought process, with the sensation of fear he is experiencing in finding this younger, much younger man coming so close. Even though the fear Ismaelito tells him verbally concerns his (Ismaelito's) pressing need to get out of Cuba, the underlying suggestion is of Ismael's increasing alarm about his intimacy with this youth. It is relevant, too, that Ismaelito's need should involve fleeing the country, as his father did in his younger days. In that sense, Ismael has indeed come full circle and arrived back in his home city, facing a mirror image of his young self. It is worth noticing that, at this stage, Ismaelito/Carlos fluctuates between addressing Ismael as *usted* and *tú*: he is on the border

(which he will soon cross) between maintaining some distance between himself and the older Ismael and establishing the greater intimacy which still frightens his father. The sea is fundamental to the scene of Carlos/Ismaelito's pleas for help in escaping to the States. We are told that Ismael: "pudo tocar finalmente, después de más de veinte años las aguas de aquel mar tan amado, tan lejano, y ahora casi prohibido, por el cual, *sí, solamente por él, debo confesarlo ahora mismo*, había hecho aquel viaje." (p.124). The sea, then, represents memories of Ismael's youth and, therefore, the destination of his *Viaje*. The sea itself, despite the walls, has not changed since he last bathed in it. With this scene in mind, let us look back at the scene of Ricardo's encounter with the *muchacho*, at the end of their journey to the "end of Cuba". When Eva and Ricardo come to begin their performance, instead of looking at them, the *muchacho* steadfastly looks first at his hands and then out to sea. Eva says: "Lo vi ahora con la mirada fija y lejana, observando el mar." (p.50). The concept of the sea also relates to the sexual and romantic discoveries made by the characters. In that sense, certainly, it represents the freedom of their passage into their true sexuality and the rejection, finally, of the masks they had been wearing before. Ismael has been virtually celibate, even in extreme situations like El Morro, throughout his life. To that end he is the flip side to Ramón Fernández, but neither of them has achieved fulfilment or happiness until they come to make their respective *Viajes*. Ismael's perception, his whole vision of the world, has been transformed by his encounter with Carlos/Ismaelito. He tells him:

Tú, tú eres la primera persona que invito desde más de veinte años, tú eres la única persona que ha podido cambiar toda la visión que yo tenía del mundo [...]Tú significas para mí la certeza de que a pesar de todo el horror, de todos los horrores, el ser humano no puede ser aniquilado."(p.146)

Ismael's outlook has been transformed to the extent that it has become an outward-looking perception, encompassing, as Ismael says, more than just his own person. Ismaelito has given him some concept of a collective self. Ismael's world, he discovers, is not what he thought it to be. The world he arrives at is unknown to him, not least the world of Carlos/Ismaelito:

Cuando sus manos se extendieron y palparon el cuerpo desnudo de Carlos, Ismael sintió que llegaba a un sitio y a un tiempo ignorados y sin embargo no desconocidos. Y aquel pecho, aquellos muslos, aquel sexo, aquella serpiente erguida, todo el joven, era una tierra de promisión. (p.147)

Carlos/Ismaelito represents a place and a time that are unfamiliar, yet familiar to Ismael and it is the young man's body – "todo el joven" – that embodies both these things. Ismaelito is Ismael but a side of him that he never discovered at Ismaelito's age, in the Cuba of those days, a place and time which now seem very far removed from this moment in this place. Ismaelito

embodies youth, hope and promise and, at the same time, he represents a return to these things for Ismael. It is evident that Ismael's *Viaje*, as well as the other two, is an emotional one, rather than a strictly geographic one. The spacial journey is catalytic to the real journey towards self-discovery. Each of the three Journeys has a turning point: Ricardo's long-awaited encounter with the *muchacho*, Ramón's discovery of Leonardo's identity and Ismael's physical union with Ismaelito. The difference here is that the "turning point" I have cited from Ismael's Journey precedes the revelations which take place at Elvia's house the following day. In this case, though, it is following making love to Carlos/Ismaelito that Ismael's perceptions change, even though the denouement in terms of the action is the discovery of Ismaelito's identity. There is even a paratextual device in the text which indicates a separation between the previous part of the Journey and the subsequent stages: a break appears in the text (a blank space) between the moment when Ismael and Ismaelito make love and the point where Ismael wakes up the next morning⁴⁰. During this gap, Ismaelito has left, taking with him every single thing in Ismael's possession, bar the shorts he is forced to walk to Sante Fe in. More fundamentally for Ismael on an emotional level, though, his entire sphere of vision has altered since making love with Carlos. His comment on his predicament is as follows: "Al menos, dijo entonces, tomando el short verde olivo y mirando hacia la habitación vacía, no fue un sueño. Hemos pasado la noche juntos" (p.149).

As perceptions change, things and people are revealed to be quite unlike the way they looked before. The snow Ismael contemplates from his apartment window, like Eva and Ricardo's costumes is a mask which covers things and makes them appear quite different. Ismael observes that: "la nieve [...] ahora se acumulaba en las escaleras de incendio, transformando sus armaduras mohosas y renegridas en senderos nacarados, algodinosos y relucientes que zigzagueaban como en una bella postal navideña." (p.106). Snow is a leveller which can transform all things into something white and sparkling, no matter what it hides underneath. This is the climate of Ismael's departure point, as far removed a climate as it is possible to have from the sunshine of Havana. As he looks out at the snow, Ismael remarks on how it has changed the view from his window: "desde la ventana toda la ciudad desaparecía por momentos" (p.101). It can mask whatever is underneath and, in doing so, allows his perspective on the city to be distorted: he could be anywhere at all. And yet the snow is also tranquil, calming and timeless: "como si del cielo hubiese descendido un frío sin tiempo para quedarse definitivamente sobre el paisaje." (p.101). In its function as a cloak on the real setting, it virtually wipes out any clues as to where one might be (aside from, obviously, being somewhere with a cold winter climate!) or when and provides the onlooker with a perfect canvas for escapism. Even so, it is quite a leap Ismael takes from the snowy winter of New

⁴⁰ See *Viaje a La Habana* pp.148-149

York City to the Caribbean heat of Havana. By implication, it was also quite a move for him to leave Cuba for New York in the first place. He sees exile as an impossible situation in which unhappiness is unavoidable; perhaps this condition has made his return to Cuba equally inevitable. He comments on the subject of exile:

Pobre gente, buena gente en definitiva, que de una u otra manera han perecido, viviendo siempre en una suerte de vaivén, ni aquí ni allá [...]. Porque si algo enseña el exilio, es decir la libertad, es que la felicidad no consiste en ser feliz, sino en poder elegir nuestras desgracias. (p.112)

On his arrival in the Christmas-time of Cuba, it strikes Ismael that the only thing which has remained unchanged there in all these years is the sun. The names of familiar places have changed, like the “Coney Island” amusement park, which has become the “Círculo de Diversiones <<Conrado Benítez>>”, as have the buildings, the places and so on. But not the Cuban sun or, fundamentally, the sea, for all time and political change can alter the island. The return to a familiar “home” which Ismael expected does not happen and the realisation of the time that has elapsed affects him deeply:

dónde está realmente mi juventud, qué hice con mi juventud, qué amigos tuve, qué placeres disfruté, qué dulces e inolvidables locuras cometí, dónde están esos fantasmas que me persiguen siempre porque nunca pudieron realizarse; qué he hecho, qué he hecho con mi vida, Porque mi verdadera tragedia no está en tener ya cincuenta años (una verdadera tragedia por otra parte) sino en no haberlos vivido nunca. (p.138)

The contradiction in his return is that his intention was to exorcise his memories by revisiting them when, in fact, the pain he needs to offload relates to memories he does not have and experiences which never existed. He has previously affirmed his heroic success in having survived until now, despite everything he has endured but he now discovers that, like the “pobre gente” he sees to be “viviendo siempre lo que no existe”, his life has been a matter of survival but not living. So far in life he has chosen survival over risk and only now does he come to see this and to regret it profoundly: “Cómo era posible que durante tantos años no hubiese comprendido que solamente hay dos opciones: el riesgo que presupone la aventura de una cierta felicidad, o el recogimiento” (p.138). He deduces that this is the reason why it was necessary for him to undertake this trip back to Havana: “Sí, había sido necesario viajar a La Habana, [...] para saber - para comprender - definitivamente todo aquello.” (p.158). Ismael’s journey has led him to the realisation of this concept, one he had never grasped until returning to the very place he left in order to survive safely, without risk to his life. He has come to learn this fact and to understand it and feel it: not only to know but also to comprehend. He has

finally chosen danger over safety, a choice that is reflected in a recent killing Elvia mentions to him at the end of the Journey:

Aquí mismo, en la esquina, mataron los otros días a un muchacho para quitarle un radio portátil. Al ladrón lo cogieron por el radio, que estaba encendido y él no sabía apagarlo. Prefirió dejarse capturar antes que tirar el radio. [sic] (p.152)

Neither Elvia nor Ismael make any comment on the boy's death to connect it to Ismael's thoughts on his own life, but the link is there in the fact that the young man was presented with a choice: smash or dump the radio and avoid capture, or listen to it for as long as he could before facing the inevitable reprisals. It is also significant that the object he stole should be a radio, a means of communication.

Ismael's journey and the *Viaje a La Habana* as a complete unit reaches its end on Christmas Day. So it is on the 25 of December that Ismael sees Elvia and Ismaelito for who they are and discovers himself for who he is by making love to Ismaelito on Christmas Eve (Nochebuena), when:

Ismael sintió, creyó sentir, mientras el ómnibus repleto avanzaba por la carretera, una plenitud misteriosa - Nochebuena, Navidad, fiesta ancestral y única - que se desparramaba sobre aquella región esclavizada, trayendo el espíritu, aunque las leyes lo prohibiesen, de un acontecimiento único.⁴¹

Christmas Eve⁴², as he points out, is a historical celebration which is based on looking back to the past. It is also a festival for children, associated with the youthful years of his life which Ismael has come back to face. Despite whatever authorities come into power, *Nochebuena* will always come around with all that it symbolises, with or without celebrations in the streets. Christmas, undoubtedly, signifies a change, an "acontecimiento único", centred around the birth of a son. Ismael is to discover Ismaelito both as another man and as a son, and this event is a revelation to him. Still on the bus and before arriving back at the Hotel Tritón (where, finally, he spends the night with Ismaelito), Ismael reflects:

sólo había una palabra, allí y en cualquier otro sitio, pensó Ismael, *contradiciéndome, ya lo sé*, que pudiera salvarnos, y esa palabra no era otra, no podía ser otra, que aquella vieja y maltratada palabra, ya en muchos lugares prohibida y perseguida y en otros comercializada y deformada. Amor. (p.142).

⁴¹ These are Ismael's feelings as he travels back to Havana with Carlos/Ismaelito, just before they concoct their plan to get Carlos past the hotel's security and up to Ismael's room.

⁴² i.e. *Nochebuena*: we should bear in mind that the 24th of December here carries the significance of that date in the Latin calendar, rather than the angloamerican concept of the day before the celebrations.

Love, as Ismael and the other travellers find, is inevitable and does not recognise boundaries of time, age, place, gender, politics or language. Ismael reflects on the Christmas story: “El nacimiento de un niño [...] que vino a inmolarsse, a entregarse, a crucificarse, para que el mito de la vida, es decir, del amor, no se extinguiese.” (p.142). It is perhaps ironic that Ismael’s son’s appearance also heralds the arrival of love, although the love these two share marries paternal love with romantic love. No ironic tone or comment is evident from the text in this regard, though, only that Ismael has discovered love for the first time. What is worth noting in his references to the Bible, however, relates to making sacrifices for love. It is the concept of taking risks, of sacrificing safety in order to experience the passions of life and love that Ismael has come to learn on his Journey, and that is his destination.

CONCLUSIONS

The interplay between the techniques involved in constructing the systems of voices in the texts – the paratextual devices which abound in the works, as we have seen, and the complex stratification of the narration in each text – exposes the subjectivity of the perceptions at work and, in turn, of the versions of lives and events that conventionally qualify as history. There is clearly a thematic function behind the structural interplay we have observed and behind the vertiginous reading experience created by the texts. To approach Arenas's works, I based my theoretical framework on the structure of the novels and their relationship with "history" and other external texts (Genette's theory on transtextuality), on the voices which narrate the pieces (narratology) and the perceptions through which events are depicted (focalization): these considerations have thrown into relief the relationships between sections of the same text (as we found with each of the works) and with related texts by the same author, which I have described as intratextual relationships. These considerations exposed, in turn, the characterisation of the narrators, heroes and protagonists of the works and, consequently, the ideological and thematic implications these reveal. The treatment of these aspects in the seven texts engenders the reading process I have described as "vertigo"; it is through this process that the ideological notions regarding testimony and History have been revealed in the texts.

The reading process in each of the works I have approached is at the same time vertiginous, kaleidoscopic and phantasmagorical: it is precisely the challenge and questioning posture instilled in the reader by the narrative that expose the questionable character of all texts that pass as history, or which convention has carved in stone. To produce the effect he needs, Arenas runs the gamut of every conceivable graphic and narratological device: the blank page is a canvas on which he creates his narrative through any and every paratextual possibility. From what we have seen of Arenas's hypertextual treatments in his work, we can surely raise an eyebrow at his erudite and

extraordinarily detailed consciousness of all manner of external texts: his hypertextual techniques have encompassed an extraordinary variety of literary traditions. This extraordinary range of hypotexts in his works is also complemented by Arenas's intimate awareness of world history, to say nothing of the plethora of information from various eras and cultures that becomes fodder for the conflict between the editors of the *Segundo Viaje* (*Viaje a La Habana*). It seems no genre or culture is safe from his hypertextualisation, and each of the works is certainly a riot of cultural awareness.

The effect of hypertextual relationships in any text, of course, is to recall an element or elements pertaining to that hypotext which will have some bearing on the manner in which the reader processes the hypertext's narrative, conditioned firstly by the recognition of the hypotext (with whatever resonance that recognition brings to the reader), followed by the mental processing of the nature of the hypertextualisation employed. Where contamination is involved, as was the case in *El mundo alucinante* and the *Pentagonía*, the effect is developed over the course of the narrative as a whole unit and, for the most part, will produce an analytical attitude in the reader's subconscious. Where multiple hypertextual relationships pertain to a single work (or block of works, in the case of the pentalogy), the questioning effect is intensified and the reader becomes increasingly aware of the presence of hypertextual games at work in the text.

Each of the seven texts I have examined has revealed a complex structure based on multiple narrational levels. The techniques employed, as we have seen, have a clear function as regards the voices of the heroes and characters themselves: the heroes have a consistent urgency of expression and suffer tension as a result of the misconceptions of the motivation for their actions on the part of other characters and of the societies that conform their settings. It seemed appropriate, then, that I should take these constants to their logical conclusion and comment on the consistency of purpose among all these heroes. I have already explored the intratextual relationship between the heroes of the *Pentagonía*, but it is evident from the studies I have undertaken that there is also an intratextual relationship between the quintet and the other two novels we have considered, exposing compatible ideologies and characterisations between the heroes on certain levels.

The characterisation of the heroes of the texts centres very acutely around the individual's Other, the mirror image of his "I". The hero is a victim of subjective repression and of the equally subjective power of the Historical definition of an individual by and according to the perceptions of other individuals: this is the case with all of the heroes we have explored, regardless of the timeframe and geographical setting in which he finds himself. By considering the focalization involved in the narrative, we are provided with a clear picture of the limited and personal nature of any character's focalization in the works, individual (as in the perceptions of such individual characters as Ramón Fernández in *Viaje a La Habana*, Fray Servando in *El mundo alucinante* or Héctor in *Otra vez el mar*) or collective (as we found with the Church's view in *El mundo alucinante*, the public audience's view at the presentation ceremony in *El Asalto* and the view of the dead cousins from the roof of the family house in *Celestino antes del alba*). The text itself speaks as the unifying voice of these works: it is a composite of voices which, as a complete unit, reveals the thematic questions addressed by the narrative structure itself: the characters are themselves, but they are also their Other, continually reproduced and reinvented and distorted in the hall of mirrors that is testimony of any kind, be it the texts we accept as History or the account of an individual such as the friar, Servando (real or fictionalised).

So, we can see that a structuralist and transtextual study of Arenas's prose work is conducive to an understanding of the detail and care invested in his writing: as a road into the texts it has exposed the intricacy of his structures and his hypertextual techniques. If the heroes have revealed anything about themselves, it has been the dignity implicit in their human qualities of vulnerability and fallibility, coupled with their equally human and emotional searches for that which they most crave in their lives, and (in the case of Fray Servando and the heroes of the *Pentagonía*) even beyond the grave. My aim with this thesis has been to produce a study broad enough to encompass a detailed look at the interaction between the narrative levels, while keeping to the principles of structuralist study. Furthermore, I have considered the text purely on its own merit, without contaminating or conditioning the direction the findings might take with preconceptions or considerations provided by my knowledge of Arenas's biography. Authorial voice, then, was to be considered only if and where it might be fictionalised in the text: this,

indeed, has proved to be the case in both the *Pentagonía* (*El color del verano*) and *Viaje a La Habana*, where Reinaldo Arenas appears in his fictional incarnation, as a character under the same name. The purpose of my thesis has been to consider the devices used to denote the narratological levels, the relationship between these voices and the hypertextual treatments in the works; from there, I hope to have examined the reader's experience of the narrators and protagonists as they are incarnated through these techniques.

These approaches have led me to acknowledge the ideological concepts embodied by the narrators and protagonists of each work: the heroes are flawed and human, but they are consistently passionate in the face of a logic which does not chime with their own principles. Every one of the heroes in Arenas's prose works I have examined has been involved in a lifelong search, yet he has ultimately found that the journey would take a different direction. Servando and Ismael both sought personal vindication (Servando in a professional capacity and Ismael in the sense of his worth as a man); Fortunato, Celestino, Héctor and la Tétrica Mofeta sought personal freedom; the narrator of *El Asalto* sought supremacy; Ricardo craved recognition; and Ramón sought the perfect woman. For all these heroes, however, it is in being forced to confront his Other that the hero finds the real path for his journey. It is not, in any of the texts, the identity he believed he sought, but in each case it ennobles him, reaffirms him and vindicates him as a human being in his own right and, therefore, a hero.

Despite the semantic differences between the works and the vastly different structural make-up of each, a consistent vision of a repressive world is filtered through the narrative. We can perceive a consistent ideology revealed in the texts, whereby the hero is constantly searching for a liberation of some kind, and for a new kind of space where such a liberation process can take place. It is the hero's search which gives rise to his successive transgressions, disasters and adventures: in other words, it is the search (and the urgency of the hero's need to search) that drives the action in the text. It is the fusion of the hero with his Other that finally leads him to the result of his search, though in each hero's journey the result turns out to be far removed from the outcome the character was expecting to find, and more illuminating, liberating and painful. In my examination of Arenas's prose works, I hope to have demonstrated that the hero's

liberation is achieved through the painful process of holding a mirror up to himself; nevertheless, as we have found, the mirror does not reflect a unidimensional image, but a multiplicity of facets of that Other, like a hall of mirrors in a fairground (each one distorting and reflecting the hero in a different way), the hero is presented with the most diverse and disturbing visions of himself. In recognising himself in the multidimensional Other, the hero ceases to be the identified role he was and becomes, not only a symbiosis with the Other, but an entirely reinvented man, an individual and not a representative, nor any longer defined as a member of a collective identity. He becomes his own, authentic and personal identity, warts and all.

The narrative is based on a manipulation of History, though this takes on different forms and is achieved through subtly different means in each work. The concrete time and space references mentioned (such as the lifespan of a friar in 18th and 19th Century Mexico, in the case of *El mundo alucinante*, or the story of a Cuban peasant family at a defined stage in Cuba's sociopolitical history, as in the *Pentagonía*) are consistently undermined by magical, macabre and hallucinating discourse which distorts the linearity of the events and corrupts the physical and temporal context. The historical and geographical referentiality remains, but has been hypertextualised. The Cuba of the setting in the *Pentagonía* erases the historical and geographical Cuba in favour of a poetic Cuba: the Cuba of the narrative becomes a poetic symbol in relation to the hero's search: perhaps the illustration of this notion in my thesis will open the way for studies into Arenas's relationship with his birth country and his country of exile in relation to his perception of Cuba, the poetic Island of his narrative. I hope that my study has opened up further avenues of research into Arenas's prose work, perhaps to explore more fully the question of individual identity as an ideological concern in his biography. I am also hopeful that this thesis will generate further study into intratextuality and autoreflexive techniques in Arenas's prose work and, perhaps, in other texts. This measureless time and infinite space are constant in the works (developed as they are over the course of each piece of narrative), as are the unreality of much of the action and the free rein given to imagination at certain points in the text. The subversion of the concrete reference markers such as time and location produce the "vertigo" effect involved in the reading process:

the more absurd and detached from the reader's experience of the real world the narrative becomes, the more he is made to reevaluate his own perceptions of what is real.

In confronting the narrative voices of the texts, my intention has been to establish the ideological concerns with expression that the texts reveal. The heroes, through the complex narration of the texts themselves, expose and embody a burning need to speak and be heard. It is in finally encountering their authenticity that they dignify themselves as heroes and reclaim the voice that has been denied them. To that end, in examining the narrative voices in this body of prose works, the narratological techniques themselves have revealed the symbolic and ideological voice of the text.

title	<i>El mundo alucinante</i>		
subtitle	<i>Una novela de aventuras</i>		
dedications	<i>A Camila Henríquez Ureña</i> <i>A Virgilio Piñera</i> <i>por la honradez intelectual de ambos.</i>		
quotations x 2	From: <i>Los Mártires, libro X</i> And from: <i>Obra General sobre la Historia de los Mexicanos</i>		
untitled prologue: letter	Unsigned letter to Fray Servando: it begins:- <i>Querido Servando...</i>		
titling system for chapters: various permutations of 3 levels of labelling:	Chapter number: <i>1</i>	Place: Location of chapter's action (city or country):- <i>México</i>	Chapter title: summarises the content:- De como transcurre mi infancia y otras cosas que también transcurren
narration proper	May contain plain type, italic type, footnotes, spacing between paragraphs, direct speech marks.		
epilogue title	<i>Últimas noticias de Fray Servando</i>		
epilogue narration			

APPENDIX 1 – Paratextual outline of *El mundo alucinante*

<p style="text-align: center;">Title: <i>Celestino antes del alba</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Dedication</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Quoted text: From Wilde, J. L. Borges and Federico García Lorca</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interexts peppered through main narrative and inserted on separate pages:-</u></p>	
Tx credited to; quoted by N = ?	Quoted text: “_____”
Mi abuela	“Fuimos a recoger caimitos y lo único que encontramos fue unas guayabas verdes.” p21
Arthur Rimbaud	“Bah, hagamos todas las muecas posibles” p35
Mi madre	“Deseo, cuando recibas esta carta te encuentres bien. Te mando una lata de jamón china. No dejes de comértela. Es de la buena...” p45
Los hechos, 4 – 20	“Porque no podemos dejar de decir lo que hemos visto y oído.” p53
El Espejo Mágico	“No le preguntes de dónde viene, Su historia es trivial. En la miseria, sus padres la vendieron por una bolsa de arroz blanco.” p57
Mi tío loco Faustino	“¡Almojicas bravas!” p67
Moussa-ag-Amastan	“¿Quién puede afirmar que la luz y la sombra no hablan? Solamente aquellos que no comprenden el lenguaje del día y de la noche.” p77
Mi tía Celia	“Fuiste a robar comida; pero tu abuela te vio y te dio un golpe con la escoba.” p81
Macbeth, Acto IV, esc.III	‘Good God, betimes remove The means that makes us strangers!’ p85
Jorge Luis Borges	A veces unos pájaros, un caballo, han salvado las ruinas de un anfiteatro.” p91
Dassine	“Durante mucho tiempo no aprenderás otra cosa que a reír y a reír” p91
Canción de Rolando	“Todo le viene a la memoria ahora. Sin poderlo evitar, suspira y llora.” p107

Moussa-ag-Amastan	No proclames tu poderío ya que no puedes impedir que la muerte extinga los días y las noches, que se deslizan como esclavos blancos; luego como esclavos negros.” p119
Uncredited	“-¿Es que no piensas darme el anillo? – dijo el duende. -Usted se ha equivocado de persona: yo no tengo que darle ningún anillo. -¡Imbécil! Yo nunca me equivoco. Eres tú el que te has equivocado de respuesta.” p127
Moussa-ag-Amastan	“No puedes negar que tu esclava más fiel es tu sombra, que pone una alfombra bajo tus pies.” p133
Arthur Rimbaud	“Ven, Demonio.” p137
Sófocles	“Electra. –Entonces, ¿Dónde está la tumba de ese desgraciado? Orestes. –no hay tal tumba; quien vive, no la necesita.” p149
El Padre Charles	“Toda escritura conduce más allá de los límites terrestres.” p157
Tristán Corbière	“Soy el que, sin cesar, me hago.” p165
Pan Yuan Tche	“¿Para quién se engalana la naturaleza este año?” p175
Mi abuelo	“¡Pascuas!...” p179
Cantos de caravana	“Yo soy mi destino. ¡Dejadme llorar!” p183
El Jardín de las Caricias	“Vengo a pronunciar tu nombre para recomenzar este sueño.” p184
El Espejo Mágico	“¡Bondad del silencio!” p193
Una de mis tías	“Para mí no hay nada como las albóndigas.” p201
Canción infantil	“Mambrú se fue a la guerra. ¡Qué dolor, qué dolor, qué pena!” p205
Eliseo Diego	“Verdaderamente la lluvia entre la noche canta.” p211

APPENDIX 2 – Intertextual outline of *Celestino antes del alba*

<p>main title: <i>Viaje a la Habana</i></p> <p>subtitle: <i>Novela en tres viajes</i></p> <p>dedication: <i>A Delfín Prats, mi fiel lector de los años setenta</i></p>		
<p>I PRIMER VIAJE</p> <p>QUE TRINE EVA</p>	<p>II SEGUNDO VIAJE</p> <p>MONA</p> <p>quotation: <i>"Estoy plenamente consciente de que al no ser un hombre..."</i> Leonardo da Vinci <i>(Cuadernos de notas)</i></p>	<p>III TERCER VIAJE</p> <p>VIAJE A LA HABANA</p> <p>quotation: <i>"¡Sólo encuentro un montón de piedras sin vida y un recuerdo vivo!"</i> Condesa de Merlin, La Habana.</p>
<p>MAIN NARRATIVE TEXT</p>	<p>MAIN NARRATIVE TEXT</p> <p>presentación de Daniel Sakuntala; nota de los editores;</p> <p>testimony of Ramón Fernández; footnotes.</p>	<p>MAIN NARRATIVE TEXT</p> <p>letter from Elvia to Ismael;</p> <p>narrative text, plain type; narrative text, italic type.</p>
<p><i>La Habana, 1971</i></p>	<p><i>Miami Beach, octubre de 1986</i></p>	<p><i>Nueva York, octubre - noviembre 1983 Nueva York, septiembre - noviembre 1987</i></p>

APPENDIX 3.1 – Paratextual outline of *Viaje a La Habana*

main title: <i>Viaje a la Habana</i> subtitle: <i>Novela en tres viajes</i> dedication: <i>A Delfín Prats, mi fiel lector de los años setenta</i>		
<p>I</p> <p>PRIMER VIAJE</p> <p>QUE TRINE EVA</p>	<p>II</p> <p>SEGUNDO VIAJE</p> <p>MONA</p> <p>quotation: <i>"Estoy plenamente consciente de que al no ser un hombre..."</i> Leonardo da Vinci (<i>Cuadernos de notas</i>)</p>	<p>III</p> <p>TERCER VIAJE</p> <p>VIAJE A LA HABANA</p> <p>quotation: <i>"¡Sólo encuentro un montón de piedras sin vida y un recuerdo vivo!"</i> Condesa de Merlin, La Habana.</p>
<p>MAIN NARRATIVE TEXT</p> <p>N = Eva N_t = Ricardo</p>	<p>MAIN NARRATIVE TEXT</p> <p>presentación de Daniel Sakuntala: N₁ = Daniel Sakuntala; N_t = exodiegético</p> <p>nota de los editores: N₂ = editors in 2025; N_t = exodiegético</p> <p>testimony of Ramón Fernández: N₃ = Ramón Fernández N_t = exodiegético</p> <p>footnotes: N₁ = Sakuntala; N_t = exodiegético; N₄ = Lorenzo and Echurre N_t = exodiegético; N₂ = editors in 2025; N_t = exodiegético</p>	<p>MAIN NARRATIVE TEXT</p> <p>letter from Elvia to Ismael: N = Elvia N_t = Ismael</p> <p>narrative text, plain type: N₁ = exodiegético; N_t = exodiegético</p> <p>narrative text, italic type: N₂ = Ismael N_t = exodiegético</p>

APPENDIX 3.ii – Paratextual outline of *Viaje a La Habana*

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