

# UTOPIAN SPACE(S) IN FOUR WORKS OF PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ

by

LORI OXFORD

(Under the Direction of José B. Álvarez, IV)

## ABSTRACT

Much of the literature produced during the first decade of Cuba's Special Period, an age of severe economic crisis generated by the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, contains references to the desperation experienced by people living on the island at the time. In some of the narrative works by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, the circumstances in which Cuba's people found themselves during this period are best described as a series of transposed realities, from nostalgically utopian to graphically dystopian, and many points in between. In this dissertation, I consider the different *-topian* spaces presented in the semi-autobiographical works of Gutiérrez, including utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia. Although these spaces occasionally do appear as the traditional interpretations, which equate tranquility with utopia and chaos with dystopia, the *-topian* spaces often appear in unexpected or non-traditional forms, such as death, prison, religion, insanity, or even the act of writing. Gutiérrez utilizes these coexisting but apparently contradictory spaces to depict the Havana in which he resides, a

space alternating between utopian dreams and the *nada* (“nothingness”) that pervades his characters’ daily existence.

INDEX WORDS: Cuba, utopia, dystopia, heterotopia, dirty realism, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Special Period, chaos

UTOPIAN SPACE(S) IN FOUR WORKS OF PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ

by

LORI OXFORD

B.A., University of South Carolina, 1998

M.A., Georgia State University, 2002

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2007

© 2007

Lori Oxford

All Rights Reserved

UTOPIAN SPACE(S) IN FOUR WORKS BY PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ

by

LORI OXFORD

Major Professor: Dr. José B. Álvarez,  
IV

Committee: Dr. Betina Kaplan  
Dr. Lesley Feracho  
Dr. Reinaldo Román  
Dr. Noel Fallows

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2007

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To each of the members of my committee, Dr. José B. Álvarez, Dr. Noel Fallows, Dr. Lesley Feracho, Dr. Betina Kaplan, and Dr. Reinaldo Román, I offer heartfelt thanks for their having invested so much time and attention in me, from early help compiling reading lists to revising this dissertation. My most sincere gratitude especially goes to my major professor, Dr. José B. Álvarez, for patiently reading and editing countless drafts of not only this dissertation but also all of my scholarly production over the past three years. His enthusiasm and expertise have been invaluable in my formation as an academic, and I value them as much as I do his friendship.

My trip to Cuba in 2005 to gather research would not have been possible without the financial support awarded to me by the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (now the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute) and the Graduate School at UGA. That trip allowed me to meet Juan Nicolás Padrón, Ricardo Hernández, Jorge Domingo, and Alberto Garrandés, all of whom helped to orient me in Cuban fiction and Cuban reality. A special thanks goes to Padrón, a true intellectual, for spending so much time as my expert guide in Havana and for allowing me to attend his classes on social history at the Centro Dulce María Loynaz.

Back at home, the following people all contributed in one way or another to this dissertation, and I offer them my wholehearted thanks: first of all, my

parents, Gary and Joan Oxford, for their unending love and support, as well as their indulgent understanding when my visits home were cut short for research or writing; Brandon Woodworth, for sharing with me a thick stack of articles and interviews; Joyce Moss, for cutting out and saving for me any newspaper article that dealt with Cuba; and my cherished friends and fellow lovers of all things Cuban, both Diego del Pozo and Dr. Elena Adell, for endless questions, conversations, and opinions. I am especially grateful to both of them, for they have taught me much and have served as examples for me in many respects, not only academically. I also thank a few special friends whose generous favors and advice have made my life easier while working on this dissertation: Amy Hernandez, Erica Maier, Claudia Happel, Kim Partain, Dr. John Ross, and Dr. Héctor Fernández-L'Hoeste.

Pedro Juan Gutiérrez has been a fundamental figure in my academic explorations, not only because of his literary works, four of which I analyze here, but most especially because of his bona fide revelations, his patient answers to so many of my doubts. I value tremendously our many exchanges, and I thank him enthusiastically for his time and his trouble.

Finally, and most of all, to Alberto, my partner in everything, who has been throughout this entire process my uncomplaining companion, dictionary, housekeeper, personal assistant, proofreader, accountant, cheerleader, and taxi driver, allowing me to concentrate on “the important stuff.” I could not have finished this journey without you, nor would I have wanted to. Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....                                    | iv   |
| CHAPTER  |      |
| 1 INTRODUCTION.....                                      | 1    |
| 1.1 Cuban utopias.....                                   | 1    |
| 1.2 Cuban literature after the revolution.....           | 8    |
| 1.3 A look at utopia as a genre.....                     | 16   |
| 1.4 Utopias as a theme in literary and filmic texts..... | 30   |
| 2 UTOPIA (CHAOS VS. TRANQUILITY).....                    | 37   |
| 2.1 Chaos vs. tranquility.....                           | 37   |
| 2.2 Utopia = non-existence.....                          | 51   |
| 3 HETEROTOPIA .....                                      | 57   |
| 3.1 Heterotopian planes/spaces.....                      | 57   |
| 4 PERSPECTIVES: RELIGION.....                            | 85   |
| 4.1 Religion as utopia.....                              | 85   |
| 5 INTERTEXTUALITIES .....                                | 114  |
| 5.1 Literature as utopia: escaping from reality.....     | 114  |
| 6 CONCLUSIONS.....                                       | 145  |
| 6.1 Active vs. passive approach to utopia.....           | 147  |
| 6.2 Heterotopias (death, prisons, etc.) .....            | 150  |

|     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 6.3 | Unexpected reactions to chaos.....                | 152 |
|     | WORKS CITED.....                                  | 154 |
|     | APPENDICES.....                                   | 163 |
| A   | INTERVIEW WITH PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ, Dec. 2005... | 163 |
| B   | INTERVIEW WITH PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ, June 2006..  | 203 |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Nearly all creators of Utopia have resembled the man who has a toothache, and therefore thinks happiness consists in not having a toothache.*

-George Orwell

*No se puede entender América si se olvida que somos un capítulo de la historia de las utopías europeas.*

—Octavio Paz

#### 1.1 Cuban utopias

Not surprisingly, the unique combination of historical circumstances surrounding Cuba has proven to be especially conducive to the harboring of utopian ideals, which can be found in artistic (literary, filmic, musical) expression or even in social and political realms. Cuba's long history of superlatives assigns it a distinctive place in the Latin American reality: one of the leading sugar producers worldwide throughout much of the island's recorded history; the last Hispanic country in Latin America to abolish slavery; among the last Spanish possessions to gain independence; the first Latin American nation to establish a Communist state;<sup>1</sup> and the country with the longest lasting travel ban and near-

---

<sup>1</sup> It is significant to note here that, to date, the only Latin American nation besides Cuba to have carried out a successful popular revolution is Nicaragua, a full twenty years after Cuba's revolution triumphed. In fact, Cuba's ideas and ideologies served as a respected model for the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. Nicaraguan poet and novelist Gioconda Belli, who actively participated in her country's revolution, tells in her memoir, *El país bajo mi piel: Memorias de amor y guerra* (2002), how she eagerly accepted an invitation from the Cuban

total embargo from the US, which has contributed in no small part to the island's economic difficulties. All of these circumstances combined contribute to utopian thinking from Cubans living on the island or in exile, as well as from those who have never visited it, particularly when considering what the island and the identity of its inhabitants may represent. A longing for a romanticized, faraway utopia did not begin with Cubans in exile, though; many slaves from west Africa idealized their homeland to such a degree that even slaves who were several generations removed from the African-born ones carried a nostalgia for a perfect motherland that they had never even seen. Phillip Wegner explains that utopia "offer[s] a mechanism by which people will invent anew [their] communities as well as the spaces they inhabit. The utopia's imaginary community is thus not only a way of imagining subjectivity, but also a way of imagining space, thereby helping the nation-state to become both the agent and locus of much of modernity's histories" (xvi-xvii). In this way, we can see the utility of utopia in the construction of Cuban identity, particularly when considering Wegner's observations alongside the course of Cuban history. Utopia as a thought or ideology by itself is incapable of being applied to nation-construction; it requires a vehicle to spread and develop it, and one of the most effective (or at the least the most common) media is literature, which also happens to be the key to what Carey-Webb terms "the narration of national identity" (7). In fact, if literature is often essential in the construction of a national identity, "one of the

---

government to attend their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration: "Cuba era entonces el faro de la revolución en América Latina; el primer territorio libre de América. ¿Qué más podía desear yo que hacer aquel viaje?" (286).

representational machineries that serve to consolidate the nation-state” (Prasad 7), then utopian literature must invariably play a part in the visualization and construction of utopia in society or utopian societies. Given this, utopia as it appears in Cuban literature must be even more significant.

Prior to the 1959 triumph of the revolution, a glorified vision of Cuba within its literature can be easily found, particularly in the works of 19<sup>th</sup> century writers such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, José María Heredia, and José Martí, all of whom penned nostalgic verses about Cuba while exiled from island. Although such idyllic representations do exist, for the purposes of this study I will focus on the utopian (or dystopian) images created in a more contemporary setting, specifically in Cuba’s Special Period, the years following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. “*El período especial en tiempo de paz,*” the situation thus named by Castro in a speech in 1991, refers to the epoch of crisis ushered in by the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s greatest economic benefactor and ideological partner. The first few years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were accompanied by severe shortages of food, as well as oil-derived fuels and many agricultural products that would have been necessary to alleviate the dire food scarcity, not to mention the near absence of many contraceptive devices and medicines to treat everyday ailments. These drastic circumstances led to an overwhelming atmosphere of depression and dissatisfaction that settled over the island, and in 1995, at the height of the Special Period, Cuba’s suicide rate was the highest in the Western Hemisphere (Chappell). Although most scholars agree that the Special Period’s

most extreme years are over, as of this writing (2006-07) Cuba has not yet emerged from its grasp, and many shortages continue to shape the lives of the island's inhabitants. Jorge Fornet points out that the Cuban revolutionary utopia had already begun to crumble long before, after the 1970 "*Zafra de los diez millones*" failed to yield the desired results (8). While I agree with Fornet that this failure had doubtless ideological implications, I see no evidence that the *zafra*'s disappointing conclusions drastically affected the lifestyles of millions of Cubans to the degree that we have observed during the Special Period.

The collapse of the Special Period represented not only an ideological dilemma but also an economic one, particularly when one considers that "the dominant feature of the Cuban economy between 1960 and 1989 was massive Soviet economic assistance, estimated to have peaked at nearly \$6 billion annually in the late 1980s" (Miró). This heavy reliance on Soviet "donations" makes the dissolution of Cuba's most important benefactor in 1990 even more drastic. With the loss of their virtual financial lifeline, Cubans began to encounter severe shortages of necessary items, from medicines to food, and the shortages only worsened as time passed. In only a few years, the situation became increasingly dire, and in 1994, Cuba experienced its fourth major exodus since the 1959 triumph of the revolution, the wave of *balseros*. The three major waves of emigration that preceded the phenomenon of the *balseros* were the flight of Cuba's elite immediately after the triumph of the revolution (1959-1962), the escape from Camarioca (1965), and the Mariel exodus (1980). Approximately

50,000 Cubans left the island during this most recent wave of emigration, and many of those who remained behind grew increasingly desperate.

One of the major voices to appear during the Special Period, considered by many to have inaugurated a new literary movement (or at least borrowed and revived an older one)—dirty realism—is the writer on whose works this dissertation will concentrate: Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, one of the best known contemporary Cuban writers on an international scale. It would seem that Gutiérrez is not only well known, but also easily recognizable, since my interview with him in Madrid was interrupted by a Brazilian couple that claimed to have read all of his works available in Portuguese. In fact, Brazil is where Gutiérrez has enjoyed the warmest receptions, where first editions of his books fly off the shelves and second editions follow only days later. It is interesting (and unexpected) to note that the country in which his works are best received is one that must read them primarily in translation.

Gutiérrez worked at a number of odd jobs, from ice cream and peanut seller to canecutter, before becoming a journalist in the 1970s and eventually evolving into an industrious producer of both poetry and prose, particularly after losing his job at the magazine *Bohemia* in 1999, following the international success in 1998 of *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*, a collection of short stories written feverishly during the crisis that began in the early 1990s, in which he presents the reader with a protagonist who is nearly driven to distraction by his extreme hopelessness and impotence in a Cuba that is falling to pieces all around him. In this work, as well as the four subsequent ones in his *Ciclo de Centro*

*Habana*, Gutiérrez paints a picture that is described in the *New York Times* as “lewd, impious, and brilliant” (Bernstein), demonstrating the baser vices that exist—for him, at least—throughout the space of the city and are not limited to certain social strata or to the zones that correspond to them, despite his general focus on the area of Centro Habana. According to Gutiérrez, all of his fiction from that decade is based not only on his observations of people and events, but on his own personal reactions to what was taking place all around him:

Se me desploman los [...] pilares de mi vida, [...] se me desploma el socialismo, se me desploma todo a lo que había dedicado mi vida. Yo me quedo sin asideros, me quedo en una situación económica difícilísima, muy deprimido. [...] De pronto veo que la ideología [a la] que había dedicado toda mi vida, defendiéndola con las uñas, era una falsedad que no funcionaba, sencillamente. Me habían engañado, me habían vendido un producto vacío.

(Gutiérrez interview — Appendix A).

It is this disillusioning sentiment of betrayal, coupled with a number of personal crises, that led Gutiérrez to bury himself in the cathartic act of recording, albeit in the form of fiction, that which he experienced and observed.

“Dirty realism” is a tag that is often assigned to much of the narrative of Gutiérrez, owing to the graphic sexual descriptions and scatology that characterize his works. Elsewhere, Gutiérrez’s fiction is additionally classified as belonging to the *nuevo boom cubano*: “post-60s, post-80s, post-Cold War but not quite post-Castro” (Whitfield 335). The label of dirty realism, although almost

universally espoused by editors, critics, and students alike, seems to be little more than a quick fix for categorizing Gutiérrez by grouping him with Charles Bukowski, Henry Miller, and others whose writings are also filled with sex and scatological references. It is true that the so-called “dirty realism” employed by Gutiérrez does share certain trademark characteristics with the works of those writers; among them, we find traits that correspond to Mikhail Bakhtin’s “grotesque realism,” in which the “essential principle [...] is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19). In other words, the material bodily functions acquire connotations of fertility and growth, allowing the body’s lower half (including genitals and buttocks) to take precedence over the upper half (the head and the heart, or the reason and sentiments contained within). I suggest that this inversion of the expected hierarchical relationship—the unexpected contrary of “mind over matter”—opens the door to other, perhaps less apparent, inversions, as well.

Gutiérrez comments in his article, “Verdad y mentira en la literatura,” that “la buena literatura habitualmente molesta a los poderes establecidos, ya que revela a los seres humanos en su doble faceta de luz y tinieblas, amor y odio” (280). I propose that “light and twilight, love and hate” are not the only seemingly incongruous blendings utilized by Gutiérrez. For example, the descriptions of the settings employed by Gutiérrez oscillate between the utopian, the dystopian, and the heterotopian in an unexpected fashion, often revealing the protagonists’ surprising affinity for the latter. In the chapters that follow, I will

consider and demonstrate how utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia are interwoven—as observation, inspiration, and interpretation, although not necessarily in that order—throughout several of Gutiérrez’s novels, specifically *Trilogía sucia de La Habana* (1998), *Animal tropical* (2000), *El insaciable hombre araña* (2002), and *Carne de perro* (2003). These three phenomena, although apparently contradictory (at least to some degree) have managed to coexist in Cuba, in particular since the advent of revolutionary ideology, and they are all reflected in Gutiérrez’s fiction, often simultaneously, just as they exist in Cuba’s reality. In this dissertation, I will illustrate how (and offer queries as to why) Gutiérrez utilizes the three *-topian* spaces to depict the multidimensional Havana in which he resides, where utopian dreams alternate with the *nada* (“nothingness”) that pervade his characters’ daily existence.

## **1.2 Cuban literature after the revolution**

In much of the Cuban narrative and film produced after the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the idea of spaces and the importance attached to them traditionally have appeared alongside other themes, as in works about exile, politics, or eroticism, for example. Those same literary (and filmic) spaces, though, are valid objects of study in their own right, and not merely as venues in which these other themes can make their presence felt, particularly in Cuban works produced in the 1990s, during the Special Period. The spaces in this literature function as much more than representations of a place; indeed, they can reflect circumstances or even entire realities—social, psychological, political, etc.—in addition to the physical place with which they are evidently and

inevitably connected. In order to better understand the literature produced in this period, however, it is important to note the history—both social and literary—leading up to it.

The Cuban Revolution that triumphed in 1959 was one of the most important events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only in terms of political but also human importance. The huge splash that the Revolution created caused long-reaching ripples that ventured into an endless number of disciplines: history, political science, and economy are areas in which the effects are most obvious, but the Revolution and its resulting policies also exerted direct effects on the sociology of the island, the psychology of its inhabitants, and the art, music, and literature that they produce. The Revolution, with intentions that—for many, at least in the beginning—gave the impression of genuine benevolence and justice, immediately began enforcing social reforms. Many of these reforms were oriented toward a restructuring of Cuban society, in some ways blurring the lines separating the center and the margins, and claiming to advance Cuba toward the goal of social equality, a primary tenet of Cuba's newly adopted communist ideology, albeit primarily in theory. A number of the changes enacted, though, actually forced other groups (such as gays and lesbians) to be relegated to second-class citizens at best and slaves at worst, forcing them to endure cruel rehabilitative programs, inhumane labor camps, and discrimination freely practiced at all levels of society. Thus, even in the beginnings of the revolutionary years, it became apparent that the attempts to better society were not wholly successful; on the contrary, some groups even found themselves in a worse situation (or feared that their current

circumstances would take a turn for the worse), as evidenced by the waves of emigration that began to take place soon after the triumph in 1959.

In many ways, though, post-revolutionary Cuba was not dramatically different from Cuba in the 1950s. Economic difficulties and scarce supplies certainly did not magically crop up as soon as Castro and his regime took control, as has sometimes been implied by U.S. politicians in their anti-communist fervor. María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, a poor black woman from Oriente province, comments in her memoir that “[i]n the fifties there was no lack of anything in Cuba, the shops were full of all the things anyone could need. What was missing was the money to buy them” (Rubiera Castillo 115). It is important to note here that Castillo is not referring to money necessary to purchase luxuries and whims, although undoubtedly those were also out of reach for the average Cuban. Rather, her comment makes reference to the fact that the Cuban population often lacked the purchasing power required to obtain such basic necessities as food, clothing, and medicines. In fact, during the mid-1950s, the cost of groceries escalated by 40 percent (Pérez 298), causing grave problems for the thousands of families already barely making ends meet. Adding to this hardship was the educational void that literally dominated the island in that period; Julie Marie Bunck explains that “the public schools, often corrupt and inefficient, educated most children,” and that “three out of four Cubans who had ‘completed’ their schooling were either illiterate or at best semi-educated. In 1958 Cuban illiteracy stood at about 24 percent” (22). With these facts in mind, it is easy to see why many Cubans would embrace revolutionary ideology; poor and illiterate, the vast majority of

Cubans found themselves in dire straits, and with no feasible means of improving their situation, they could only stand to gain from the changes promised. Pérez explains:

Again and again, [...] promises of the new Cuba—of social justice, economic security, political freedom—were made. And the promises did not end with the victory. On the contrary, they increased, if only because it was easy—perhaps necessary—to be revolutionary [...]. This was redemption by revolution, and conversions proceeded apace. (317)

Immediately after taking control, Castro's government began to implement programs to carry out what had been promised to Cubans, concentrating on immediate material relief. Among the 1500 "decrees, laws, and edicts" that were enacted between January and October of 1959 were regulations regarding up to a fifty percent cutback of rent payments, rate reductions in the telephone company, slashes in electricity rates, and numerous other reforms (Pérez 319). The main foci of this social and political restructuring were redistribution of land, universal health care and education, and new laws to promote gender and race equality. In order to create *el hombre nuevo*, an intended product of these economic and social reforms, and a specific utopian ideal, the Revolution began to instill new ideologies, not merely politically-oriented ones but also new manners of thinking in terms of how to view other fellow Cubans, ideologies that revolved around eliminating discrimination based on race or gender with the eventual goal of providing equal rights for all. Certainly, the revolutionaries were of the opinion

that “a new utopian order would emerge only from the crucible of revolutionary struggle,” and continued forward, often without heeding evidence that their efforts were not always successful, even dismissing such evidence as erroneous (Wegner 100). Only two years after the triumph of the Revolution, an incident occurred that seemed to confirm all of the utopian dreams: the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, or Playa Girón. Cuba, merely a Caribbean island-nation with little import in the world arena, came out victorious from the invasion of the U.S., arguably the most powerful nation on Earth. The euphoria that followed the incident at the Bay of Pigs served to convince many Cubans even more strongly that this new society was nearly a utopia, with their having just witnessed its realization.

In accordance with the aforementioned objectives of the Revolution, Rafael Ocasio, a biographer and critic of exiled Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas (who died in the U.S. in 1990), states that “Cuban revolutionary ideology called forth a redirection of the national literary aesthetics in step with radical changes in the country’s sociopolitical and economic platforms” and:

campaigns against illiteracy, beginning in 1961, became the first step in the advancement of basic political ideals, aimed in particular at the illiterate peasant masses. An incipient cultural bureaucracy [...] instilled in intellectuals a call for social responsibility in support of revolutionary aesthetics and ideology. Writers, as integral components of the campaigns against illiteracy, took on the task of spreading ideological platforms of the revolutionary sociopolitical structures. (1)

Other early priorities of the Revolution, as Sonja DeVries indicates in her film *Gay Cuba* (1995), were “[o]verturning institutionalized racism and sexism.”

Effectively, “[t]he Cuban-American critic Lourdes Casal has referred to the early post-revolutionary period in Cuba as a ‘honeymoon’ because of its fervor and vitality” (quoted in Ocasio 20). For example, the nearly immediate return following the launch of the Revolution of several renowned writers who had been exiled under the dictatorship of Batista, such as Nicolás Guillén, founding father of the literary movement *negrismo*, and Alejo Carpentier, one of the initiators of magical realism, led to the creation of notable cultural centers such as Casa de las Américas,<sup>2</sup> the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industries (ICAIC) and the founding in 1959 of the magazine *Revolución*, for which playwright Virgilio Piñera wrote regularly under the pseudonym “El Escriba”. Although figures like Guillén and Carpentier continued to be revered, other writers became outcasts due to expressing sentiments viewed as counter-revolutionary. Piñera, for example, a homosexual, was detained during “*La noche de las tres ‘P,’*” one of the government’s raids, in which certain “antisocial elements” (*prostitutas, proxenetas* and *pederastas*) were arrested for perpetuating specific social ills—curiously, all relating to sex—that were viewed as lingering

---

<sup>2</sup> Casa de las Américas is a truly revolutionary center in more than one sense. Álvarez explains that the center “provides space to Latin American writers who previously lacked access to publishing houses due to economic or political reasons. Consequently, Casa de las Américas revolutionized literary publishing mechanisms on the continent, establishing, for example, large volume editions without any cost to the author and with prices that were affordable for the public. Moreover, the center established literary prizes in different genres, opening participation to all Latin American writers” (2).

side effects of capitalist “immorality.” Emilio Bejel offers a mocking explanation of this rationale:

[H]omosexuals, being weak and therefore different from the base of macho Cuban culture, are perfect targets for recruitment by the enemy (American capitalism mainly); homosexuals are a threat to the nation because they corrupt children and young men and thus impede the formation of the “new man”; [...] homosexuality is the result of the distortions of capitalism, from which it may be concluded that socialism could now eradicate this social problem just as it could eradicate prostitution, drug addiction, and other ills and vices. (101-102)

The detainment of Piñera can be counted among the first cases of state-supported persecution of literary figures and other intellectuals, all in the name of furthering the revolution. Prior to that infamous night of raids, there had already been instances of censorship, as in the case of *P.M.* (Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal, 1961), a short (thirteen minute) film that was banned because of its content, deemed “counterrevolutionary” by the ICAIC. A few years later, the establishment of the UMAP camps (Unidad Militar de Ayuda a la Producción, 1965-1967) served to demonstrate further evidence of the failure of revolutionary ideology to advance Cuban society toward social utopia,<sup>3</sup> as did the

---

<sup>3</sup> Cuban writer Heberto Padilla, the example *par excellence* of Cuban parameterization of intellectuals, was “el primer escritor denigrado en forma contundente por las autoridades del régimen castrista,” according to exiled writer Zoé Valdés’s piece in the Spanish newspaper *El mundo* immediately after Padilla’s death in 2000. Padilla describes the UMAP camps thus: “[T]he

First National Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, in which parameters were established to allow the removal of people working in the broadly defined areas of education and culture, given that those individuals were judged as exemplifying values contrary to the revolution. In the mid-1970s, the Family Code was passed, in which the obligations of domestic partnership were delineated, obligating husbands and fathers to participate equally with their wives in the upkeep of the house and raising of the children. As was to be expected, the Family Code of 1975 did little to change the overall family dynamic, due undoubtedly to the implausibility of enforcing the Code, but its passing made a strong statement, and an official one.

The storming of the Peruvian embassy in 1980 by dissidents and the subsequent opening of the port of Mariel to those who wished to exit Cuba demonstrated, probably more than any other event in Cuba's revolutionary history, a resounding restlessness from within the island. By acknowledging the

---

government had come to the conclusion that it was necessary to cleanse the institution of homosexuals, who would be sent off to concentration camps in Camagüey. Under the rubric of Obligatory Military Service, these camps also became places of incarceration for people disaffected with the system because of their religious beliefs, such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The camps were the creation of Raúl Castro, who thought he had discovered in Bulgaria new and efficacious methods for "curing" homosexuals. In fact, the procedure was quite rudimentary. It was purest Pavlov—pleasure and revulsion being produced by particular erotic stimuli. For instance, they would show a film of two men having sex; when the patient's pulse was at its height and he was at the point of orgasm, an electric shock would be applied. The procedure would be repeated frequently, until a conditioned reflex of repulsion had been achieved.

"This treatment drove many people mad. Unquestionably, the system, called UMAP, was among the cruelest ever invented by the regime. But in spite of adverse criticism voiced by a few sensible people in power, State Security went on sending young people to the UMAP camps through 1967; often, they were students and artists who had done nothing wrong" (129).

flood of disgruntled Cubans who literally crammed themselves into the boats leaving Mariel, Castro was, in fact, recognizing a failure within the system he had worked over twenty years to establish. Castro easily dismissed this, though, by laying the blame for the discontent on the discontented themselves in a speech soon after the embassy incident: “Los que **no quieren** adaptarse al esfuerzo, al heroísmo de la revolución, no los queremos, no los necesitamos” (emphasis added).

The Special Period that was born of the collapse of communism introduced a new sense of desperation and frustration. As is to be expected, the crisis immediately made itself felt in Cuban literary production, both from the island’s residents as well as Cubans in exile.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, the crisis suffered by the Cuban people during this period takes place amid enthusiastic slogans that continue to trumpet the original causes and resulting triumphs of the revolution, such as placards assuring passersby “*Vamos bien*,” even while empty shelves in stores suggest otherwise. These conflicting images contribute to an atmosphere of intense contradiction, and this sort of intriguing social reality invariably emerges in literature of the period.

### 1.3 A look at utopia as a genre

---

<sup>4</sup> Zoé Valdés, mentioned previously for her commemoration of Heberto Padilla, is one of the best known exiled Cuban writers of the period. In her novel, *La nada cotidiana* (1995), the protagonist, appropriately named Patria, endures the ubiquitous shortages and frequent blackouts, while a friend of hers, known only as “La Gusana,” flees the island for Madrid.

Utopia, or utopianism, is not an end but, rather, a means to an end; it is a tool, not a destination. “Utopias are sites with no real place,” according to Michel Foucault, sites that “present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these [sites] are fundamentally unreal spaces” (24). Regardless of whether or not utopia exists solely in the imaginations of artists and philosophers, the simple act of working towards or even dreaming of shifting society in the direction of a utopian reality represents a certain degree of agency on the part of those whose thoughts and actions incline toward the utopian. Uruguayan essayist Fernando Ainsa explains that utopia “no se limita a ser la construcción imaginaria de un mundo posible, sino que es una forma de percibir y analizar la realidad contemporánea” (“Tensión” 22). Likewise, Claeys and Sargent hold that “utopia and the changes they undergo both help bring about and are reflections of paradigm shifts in the way a culture views itself” (3). By approaching the age-old concept of utopia with this in mind, it becomes clear that, even if one deems the achievement of utopia to be an impossible ambition, by upholding this objective one may better comprehend the very social fabrics that maintain utopia’s inaccessibility.

### **1.3.1 Definition/etymology/history of the term**

Studies of utopia as a construct generally agree that it first appeared in the early sixteenth century, when Thomas More coined the term to represent the desire of attaining perfection, an idea that had certainly existed previously in the human subconscious, although More’s work on the topic is one of the first times

(in Western civilization) that it appears, at least outside religious texts. During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Humanist movement of European thought spurred scholars to criticize the status quo and to offer plausible suggestions for reforming the by-then decadent and unenlightened medieval society. John Anthony Scott calls *Utopia* “perhaps the greatest of the Humanists’ many reform tracts,” since in the work can be found “a detailed and specific program for the regeneration of society” (ix). More’s term, *utopia*, is generated from a play on words: *ou-topia*, the negation of a place, or “a place located nowhere,” and *eu-topia*, “a place of happiness.” Patricia Waugh explains that “traditionally, utopia has functioned as the absolute projection of desire, which, in its rationalized stasis, is paradoxically the *death* of desire” (196), thus revealing that utopia’s inherent paradoxes are not limited to its contradictory double definition, that of “non-space” and “happy space.” It is interesting to note that More once explained in a letter to Erasmus that his principal intent in creating the term was the former definition, although the latter one, denoting the possibility of an ideal world, is what has prevailed in society’s interpretation (Henaff 3-4). However, Ainsa postulates that rather than negating a space (or generating a “non-space”), utopias actually perform a different function, that of simply creating another space, or an “other-space”:

Toda utopía presupone el rechazo del tiempo presente o del lugar (espacio) donde se vive, cuando no de ambos a la vez, y la representación de un territorio que está en “otro lugar” (otro espacio) u “otro tiempo”, pasado o futuro. Esta realidad alternativa, en tanto alteridad, ofrece una contra-imagen crítica de

la realidad vigente (el aquí y ahora), a la que corrige proponiendo radicales modificaciones a lo injusto de su estructura. (*La reconstrucción* 37)

Ainsa's explanation of utopia's role as an "other-space" remits us to the suggestion made earlier, that utopia behaves as a tool in comprehending one's own reality; by envisioning and fashioning the utopian "other-space," one can take a more active (and more objective) role in examining the original space.

### **1.3.2 Characteristics of utopia**

Given that utopia represents an alternate reality, some critics perceive that its definition has evolved into an indication of dissatisfaction with the status quo, a synonym of a rebellious attitude, of "oposición o resistencia al orden existente por la proposición de un orden que fuera radicalmente diferente" (Ainsa, *La reconstrucción* 21). Others suggest that "utopias humanize or dehumanize us by intervening in the contemporary social consciousness, not by producing the blueprints of a realizable future world," thus emphasizing the role of utopia as a tool of self-awareness, rather than merely an exercise in futility (Nandy 2-3).

One of utopia's defining characteristics is its universality. From the most widely-held beliefs in myths of creation to dreams of futuristic societies, utopia generally exists either as a foundation (in the sense of a paradise lost) or as an ambition to be realized. In this study, however, I will treat utopia and the steps toward its creation or attainment (regardless of whether or not those efforts are successful) as a method. More than merely a symbol or a motif, utopia can

function as its own literary technique, one that facilitates self-analysis, whether for the writer, the protagonist, or the reader, and not merely a starting point or a finish line.

In order to present a definition of utopia for the purposes of this dissertation, I will first examine the various conditions that serve either as the means with which the utopian objective may be achieved, or even as the objective itself:

- *Geographic or other isolation.* Most discussions of utopia encourage or even require segregation from the rest of the world, ostensibly to maintain the purity of the utopic state. This type of isolation can be accidental, resulting from a natural disaster or something of the like<sup>5</sup>, or it can be entirely deliberate. In the latter case, the founders of the utopia often depend on the members' ignorance of other realities in order for the society to function.<sup>6</sup> In fact, More's original *Utopia* is an island

---

<sup>5</sup> Within literary and filmic utopias, plane crashes or other accidents are often the incidents that force isolation, whether for an individual or a group. Scenarios such as the 1960s sitcom "Gilligan's Island," in which several passengers are stranded on an "uncharted desert isle" or the film *The Blue Lagoon* (Kleiser, 1980), in which two children are the sole survivors of a shipwreck and grow to adulthood in total isolation from society, both demonstrate two very different outcomes of such forced isolation.

<sup>6</sup> This sort of deliberate isolation is quite common in the utopian genre. M. Night Shyamalan, a young Indo-American director, experiments with alternative societies and perceptions of reality, including a child's other-worldly interactions with spirits of the dead (*The Sixth Sense*, 1999), the eventual triumph of good over evil in a comic book come to life (*Unbreakable*, 2000), and a spiritual reawakening that results from a jaded minister's encounter with hostile invading aliens (*Signs*, 2002). In one of Shyamalan's more recent films (*The Village*, 2004), however, he presents an idyllic community imbued with 19th century simplicity and ethics. When the townspeople begin to suspect that their

surrounded by rocks, around which only the Utopians themselves can navigate (More 42).

- *Achrony* (“non-time”). The creators of utopias often assign to their visions an indefinite era. If, however, a time period for the utopian society is fixed, it is almost without exception a future date.<sup>7</sup> While this practice avoids the pitfalls of aligning the utopian society with the social imperfections that may characterize any particular past (and, therefore, *known*) epoch, it also lends an air of idealism or even incredibility to the images being evoked, given that they can only exist in lives as yet un-lived. Ainsa concludes that, since there is no given time in utopias, neither is

---

security is threatened by diabolical outside forces, though, the changes that take place reveal to the viewer that the inhabitants of this village are not, in fact, representatives of a bygone epoch but modern-day victims of urban crimes that inspired them all to flee their oppressor—the city and the chaotic society that thrives there—and begin with a clean slate, forgoing modern luxuries and conveniences with intentions of avoiding the complications that accompany modern life. Particularly interesting for the purpose of this study are the extreme lengths to which the village founders go to isolate their community from the outside world: they invent stories of dangerous beings that inhabit the outskirts of the town, thus preventing any curious village dweller from venturing outside the barriers that were so carefully constructed. This brand of segregation, although extreme, typifies the imagination of utopian communities.

<sup>7</sup> George Orwell’s *1984* serves as the most well-known example of this tendency. Written in 1949, his novel — certainly more of a **dystopia** than a utopia, or a utopia gone bad — was set in a near enough future that contemporary readers of Orwell could envision either being alive to experience the new order he lays out in the novel, or at least knowing someone else who could be alive then. The very temporal proximity that exists, then, between the contemporary reality and the literary (failed) utopia, is the element that would have undoubtedly been most intriguing to Orwell’s readers. An earlier example of assigning a future date to a utopian tale is Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *The Year 2440 (L’An deux mille quatre cent quarante: Rêve s’il en fut jamais*, published in 1771), in which the narrator awakens several centuries in the future to find his city (Paris) improved to the point of perfection (Alkon 117-118).

there evolution, and that this lack, rather than hindering progress, actually supplements the utopia: “la ausencia de la evolución elimina el problema del determinismo y la causalidad histórica” (*La reconstrucción* 23).

The idea of an existence in an achronic era remits the subjects to having what might even be called a “non-existence,” living in a “non-time,” with a “non-history,” speaking a “non-language,” etc.<sup>8</sup> By structuring their literary realities in this way, writers are able to fabricate an enchanted paradise in which the trappings and obligations of society, culture, and communication are eliminated. For these writers, achrony is the only feasible solution to the problem detailed here by Nandy:

[T]he relationships between the present, an idealized past, and the utopian future are not isomorphic in all societies. Some societies locate their visions of the good and the ideal in the past because the past they see as open-ended and renewable; some others explain the present in terms of the idiom of the past; the past for them is allegory. Still others go back to their past to bypass cultural defeat in the present. (19)

- *Well-defined social order.* As a counterpart to the achronic utopia, some imagined utopias must ride the pendulum to its other extreme, that of

---

<sup>8</sup> For example, this sort of achronic utopia has been identified as a defining characteristic of much literature of the Latin American post-boom, characterized by “a renewed acceptance of, and confidence in, this reality which for the sake of convenience we call reality” and “social commitment, i.e. the incorporation of a critique of specifically Spanish American society” (Shaw). Notable pieces in this tradition are Cristina Peri Rossi’s *Solitario de amor* (1998), Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Elogio de la madrastra* (1988), and Manuel Puig’s *Pubis angelical* (1979).

management and supervision of even the most infinitesimal details of life. Since neither of these two forms of utopia actually exists (or, perhaps, has not yet existed), the literature that affords them a necessary dimension sometimes must also construct the very structure that supports them, from the meticulous social hierarchies down to the perfectly symmetrical and geometric visual aspects of this world. This aspect is often what converts a utopia (or something close to it) into a dystopia.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3.3 Types of *-topias*

Since its inception in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of utopia has been manipulated to represent variations on this theme, thus responding to a range of needs or questions that could pertain to diverse situations. In fact, Barr and Smith emphasize that utopia's very ubiquity makes it a totally imaginary construct (at least thus far), since not one of recorded history's societies has achieved it: "to conceive of utopia [...] is from the outset to reconstruct human culture" (1). It follows, then, that the reconstruction to which Barr and Smith refer allows for diverse creations, perhaps nearly as diverse as the world from which those creations originate. The following list is a compilation of characterizations of some of the most common types of *-topias*:

---

<sup>9</sup> Ainsa names Evgeny Zamyatin (*We*, 1920), Aldous Huxley (*A Brave New World*, 1931), and George Orwell (*1984*, 1949) as 20<sup>th</sup> century examples that illustrate this tendency (*La reconstrucción* 25). Wegner even classifies the mathematical society created by Zamyatin in *We* as "one of the first and most successful 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-utopias" (147). I would add to this list Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil* (1985), in which viewers experience an uncanny, other-worldly setting that appears to be a crushing of the human spirit by a society

- *Ecotopias*, or ecological utopias, seem to coincide with periods in which an environmental apocalypse could be envisioned, most notably the 1970s, when oil spills, petroleum crises, and issues regarding pollution brought ecological matters to the forefront of much public discourse. René Dumont, one of the founders of France’s Green Party, helped initiate the movement with his 1973 study *Utopia or Else... (l’Utopie ou la mort)*, while the novels *Ecotopia* (1974) and *Ecotopia Emerging* (1981) by Ernest Callenbach are also suitable examples of this genre in literature. In Callenbach’s works, he envisions a society in which technology is appreciated primarily for its potential in having a positive impact on society and the environment. The citizens of this new society—one that secedes from the US in 1999—are progressive and maintain a keen social and environmental consciousness.
- *Femtopia*. In order for a utopia to classify as a feminine (or feminist) utopia,<sup>10</sup> merely possessing aspects of the utopian “no-place” or “good place” is insufficient. Rather, a femtopia requires either the inversion of traditional expectations of gender (and, some might add, society as a whole) or the elimination of those expectations altogether. Without exception, femtopias “emphasize that freedom and equality go together;

---

dominated by machinery.

<sup>10</sup> I include the two terms (“feminine” and “feminist”) here in order to distinguish between a utopia written from a feminine perspective, populated primarily with feminine characters, and a feminist one, in which certain social realities are inverted to make a point about social justice, particularly those aspects that deal with emancipating women from traditional inferiority to men.

they are not separate or separable. [...] Equality must be achieved for freedom to be possible, and vice versa” (Sargent 30). Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915) and Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) are classified by Frances Bartkowski as exemplifying what she terms as “what if” feminist utopian strategies:

Through remodeling that which is *not*, we watch the “not-yet” taking shape, what could be, might be, even what some say ought to be. The conditional and subjunctive modes ironize the tendentious voice of projection—the ought is warned by the if and produces a “grammar of desire.” (4)

Lucy Freibert notes the significance of the fact that *Herland*, first serialized in magazines, was not published as a book until 1979, over sixty years after Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s feminist utopia first appeared (67). It is interesting to note that in Russ’s novel all of the protagonists are female. In one of the communities that exist in this piece, there is a social structure resembling a challenge to patriarchy, given that all individuals (including, and especially, women) are allowed to *choose* the families to which they belong, and have the final say in many other life choices.

In regards to femtopias, it is important to note Carol Thomas Neely’s observations that “women have traditionally been marginal to utopia-discourse” and that “women have mostly been ignored, both within traditional utopias and as their authors” (60). The fact that women have been essentially excluded from canonical utopian literature and philosophy

augments the significance of the femtopias' creation as spaces by, for, and about women and equality.

- *Religious utopias.* Within the mythologies of countless world religions exist ideas of utopia, particularly at the beginning and end points of a time continuum: an initial utopia, such as the Garden of Eden, and a final utopia, attainable only after a lifetime (or several lifetimes) of eschewing pleasure in favor of holier practices and thoughts. Other religious perspectives pose the possibility that humankind's very existence is a utopia—or can become one—such as nirvana, a stilling of all human distractions, whether physical or spiritual.

While there have been numerous attempts at establishing real-life utopian communities based on religion—the communities created in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ohio and 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgia come to mind—the literary religious utopia is much more frequent (and successful, at least economically). Apocalyptic tales (particularly those used as “hellfire and damnation” tools of proselytizing) have recently resurfaced in the realm of Christian literature as the ultra-successful *Left Behind* series. This series, authored by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim F. LaHaye, recounts the tale of the “Rapture,” the event prophesied in the Book of Revelation, in which faithful Christians are instantaneously removed from the Earth and taken to a heavenly home to prepare for the coming battles of the Apocalypse. In this way, reality is presented in only two sensational possibilities: that of utopia (Christian paradise) or dystopia (Earth, or the apocalyptic

battlefield). Also prominent in the arena of religious utopia are works dealing with missionaries, their sacrifices and “successes,” given that many view the role of missionaries as purveyors of “paradise.”<sup>11</sup> For example, the film *End of the Spear* (Jim Hanon, 2006) depicts the real-life story of five North American missionaries who traveled to Ecuador in the 1950s to evangelize the Waotani, a violent indigenous tribe. The missionaries are speared by members of the very tribe that they attempt to convert, which serves as an ironic turn of events, provoking debate regarding whether “conversion” is anything more than “contamination.”

Paradoxically, others consider that the recipients of many missionaries’ evangelical efforts, usually remote communities outside the confines of Western civilization, are already the inhabitants of *another* type of paradise, one unfettered by the issues stemming from modernity.

- *Techno-utopia*. Although there seems to be disagreement on the precise definition of techno-utopias, the one that appears to be the most plausible is that techno-utopianism is a “visionary proclamation” of technorealism, or “an attempt to assess the social and political implications of technologies so that we might all have more control over the shape of our future” (“Technorealism”). Aspects of techno-utopia can also be seen in many popular television series and films, in which the use of ultra-modern gadgets and vehicles piques the interest of viewers, from 1960s TV shows

---

<sup>11</sup> See note 38 in chapter 4 of this dissertation for a more thorough examination of the definition(s) and implication(s) of “paradise.”

“Get Smart,” “The Jetsons,” and “The Avengers” to all 21 James Bond films (to date).

Ashis Nandy explains that “[o]f all the utopias which threaten to totalize the human consciousness, the most seductive in our times has been the one produced by modern science and technology” (10). Although Nandy is referring to “real-world” utopias, visions of a perfect world in which physical suffering is diminished and interpersonal communications are made effortless, these mental pictures are brought to life in filmic and literary technological utopias such as Scottish science fiction writer Iain M. Banks’ “The Culture” series, including his novels *Consider Phlebas* (1987) and *Use of Weapons* (1992).

- *Dystopia*, an anti-utopia or failed utopia, is never the original intent of its creators. Rather, dystopias are the unfortunate malfunctions of society’s (or individuals’) attempts to realize some sort of utopia; indeed, according to Nandy, “an overly determined attempt to actualize a utopia can turn it into a dystopia for many or destroy its ‘pull’ by exposing it to the harsh light of human experience” (3). The novels *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury, 1953) and *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Margaret Atwood, 1986) as well as the films *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998) and *Equilibrium* (Kurt Wimmer, 2002), among many others, all depict dystopian societies.

It has been suggested that the word was first used by British philosopher John Stuart Mill, who created the term the contrast “eutopia” (“good place”) with “dys” and “topos,” or “negative place” (“Dystopia”).

Bartkowski explains how utopian literature, so common at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evolved into representations of dystopia:

[The turn of the century] is a negative moment, the time of antiutopia or dystopia. The future still holds all that imagination may shape, but the visions are much more uniformly grim. The nightmare fears of technology which often led to regressive, pastoral, anti-industrial images in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are confirmed by a realization that the machine will not be banished from the garden. (7)

Sargent points out that 20<sup>th</sup> century interest in the existence of dystopias has grown from “the pressure of two world wars and the rise of Soviet communism. The wars forced us to recognize how superficial our civilization had been. Soviet communism demonstrated the transformation of *(e)utopia* into *dystopia*” (565).

- *Heterotopia* is a term coined by Michel Foucault. In a 1967 lecture, later published as an article (“Of Other Spaces”), Foucault explains why he chooses to focus on spaces, particularly his idea of a heterotopian space: “I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. Time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space” (23).

The new dimension of space that Foucault adds to the body of analytical works dealing with utopias is particularly useful when

examining literary works that deal with contemporary issues. Since the settings of these works are known places and time periods, the utopian realm (recognized but at the same time other-worldly) that appears in the works deals with spaces. Foucault explains: “Utopias [...] are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down” (24). By locating utopias within “no real place,” but assigning to them the property of being analogous to Society, Foucault is establishing a certain coexistence, or juxtaposition, of spaces. It is precisely this relationship of juxtaposed spaces that will serve as one of the theoretical foci of this study. Foucault’s explanations of the principles of heterotopias will be the basis of much of my analysis of the novels of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez in the chapters that follow, particularly chapter 3, “Heterotopia.”

#### **1.4 Utopias as theme in literary and filmic texts**

Because the subject is so universal, examples of the utopian genre abound within world literature and film, practically beginning with the very origins of both. The subject of paradise (lost or found) has captivated the human imagination from ancient times, and existing literary texts, rooted in oral tradition, demonstrate as much. As is the case with any other topic, though, utopia has evolved with the passing of the centuries, and its trajectory can be easily identified; for example, Ainsa points out that “la caracterización del género

utópico ha permitido asimismo establecer paralelos y diferencias con géneros conexos centrados en los mitos de la Edad de Oro y en las leyendas de las *insulae fortunatae* de la literatura clásica y medieval” (*La reconstrucción* 21).

As mentioned earlier, the images of utopia that are present in literature undergo an eventual transformation. As societies become more and more technologically advanced, scientific progress is the very element that becomes the object of their fears: that humankind’s own brainchildren may surpass or even overpower it. Ainsa affirms:

Las llamadas utopías negativas o anti-utopías revierten, a partir de fines del siglo XIX, el optimismo positivo de las utopías tradicionales en el temor a la masificación y “robotización” del individuo, resultado de la excesiva reglamentación de la esfera privada que rige la vida contemporánea. En efecto, en el rechazo semántico de lo utópico [...], se percibe claramente el destino entre la utopía del orden y la de la libertad, entre la del ser ideal del Estado y la del estado ideal del ser. (*La reconstrucción* 29)

Even so, it is easy to assume (mistakenly) that, despite all the diverse characteristics that exemplify the varieties of utopia, everyone shares the same comprehension of it. However, Nozick points out that, because “[u]topian authors, each very confident of the virtues of his own vision and of its singular correctness, have differed among themselves [...] in the institutions and kinds of life they present for emulation,” the utopias created by those authors are never identical (311). To prove his point, Nozick creates a lengthy list of individuals

that includes Elizabeth Taylor, Gandhi, Columbus, Ayn Rand, Thoreau, “you, and your parents” and asks, “Is there really *one* kind of life which is best for each of these people? Imagine all of them living in any utopia” (310). Nozick’s observation seems appropriate for any discussion of utopias, even one that does acknowledge necessary and inevitable variations (such as this study), due to the necessity of acknowledging the impossibility of bringing utopia (the concept) to fruition (the reality), since there is no single utopia.

#### **1.4.1 Utopias in Latin American literature and film**

While various examples of utopias in world literature and film have been mentioned earlier in this chapter, I would like to shift the reader’s attention toward the general geographic region whose utopias (or dystopias, as the case may be) are more relevant to this study: Latin America, the “New World.” With regard to this term, assigned to the Western Hemisphere upon the Europeans’ first encounters with the peoples residing there, Ainsa points out: “Ninguna otra región del mundo al ser descubierta o «encontrada» ha sido bautizada Nuevo Mundo, privilegio de un título que le ha dado carta blanca para ser el espacio de la posible utopía” (“Tensión” 27-28).

The very beginnings of recorded history in the Americas point to a utopian interest. Although the voyages of Christopher Columbus were motivated, arguably, by the pursuit of lucre, his reports to the King and Queen of Spain, his economic benefactors, are filled with idyllic accounts of a peaceful world of

natural abundance.<sup>12</sup> Given the sometimes chaotic European societies of the period, these paradisiacal depictions represent a quest for a lost reality, a search for a contemporary Garden of Eden. It is for this reason that Ainsa comments: “América entrelaza íntimamente el mito clásico y la nueva utopía” (“Tensión” 25). Years later, Óscar Agüero confirms Ainsa’s observation:

América Latina es [...] el continente utópico [...] en más de un sentido: su irrupción en el horizonte geográfico y cultural de Europa detonó las facultades utopoiéticas adormecidas en el Viejo Mundo. Las Indias Occidentales fueron motivo de conquista y depredación, pero a la vez constituyeron el lienzo donde renacentistas ilustres, inconformes con la sociedad de su tiempo, bosquejaron sus sueños de una sociedad más justa. (321)

Agüero points out the true importance of the Europeans’ “discovery”: more than an earthly paradise, the new continent also represented a **social** paradise, where perfect beings lived harmoniously. Mizrach suggests that “as reports of the native Americans showed them (read: *constructed* them) to be everything Europe was

---

<sup>12</sup> In Columbus’ diary, which includes the accounts sent to his benefactors, he speaks of an earthly paradise in which there is plenty of fresh water, people live peacefully, and no one seems to have to work. It is evident that his tales are exaggerated; Raquel Chang-Rodríguez offers an explanation: “interesado en que los Reyes Católicos vean su hazaña como una buena inversión, no vacila en exagerar la riqueza y belleza de las tierras americanas, así como la bondad y carácter pacífico de sus habitantes. Por eso el Almirante y sus hombres buscaron desesperadamente el oro que habrían de llevar a España para confirmar lo relatado en cartas y documentos. Y por eso Colón describe a los indígenas, desconocedores del hierro y de las armas de fuego, como a seres a los cuales se podría conquistar y cristianizar fácilmente, todo para la gloria de la Iglesia, de España, de los Reyes Católicos y de Cristóbal Colón” (23-24).

not but *wished* it was—free of guile, deception, disingenuousness, and corruption, the myth of Rousseau’s *Noble Savage* was born: innocent, docile, unfettered” (“Symbolic Invention”). Paradoxically, the ruling belief among Europeans at the time was that these people, the native Americans of various regions within both North and South America, who were valued for their very non-European traits, could only be improved by the imposition of European traditions and institutions. In fact, as Carey-Webb tells us, “[t]he disappointing discovery that native life does not conform to European notions of utopia provides an insidious justification for European governance of native society” (90-91).

Ironically, although hundreds of years ago the “New World” was viewed/viewed itself in a utopian manner, primarily as the attempted realization of Europeans’ dreams that had been frustrated in the Old Continent, the geographic focus has shifted over the centuries to a new sort of utopia: the economic and social opportunities provided by the behemoth to the north, the United States. Ongoing revolutions and depressed economies serve as the primary motivations for flight from Latin America to the US, and are often accompanied by ingenuous expectations of the North American reality.<sup>13</sup> The

---

<sup>13</sup> A fitting example of this urgent need to escape oppressive or even dangerous conditions, combined with a total naïveté regarding one’s flight and final destination is Gregory Nava’s film *El norte* (1984), in which Quiché-speaking siblings, Enrique and Rosa, are victimized by the oppressive Guatemalan military. After the brutal murder and beheading of their father and kidnapping of their mother, the two siblings recall a conversation with their godmother, in which she shares her impressions of the US, “el norte,” as a sort of promised land, a place where even the poorest of the poor enjoy luxuries like running water and indoor toilets. Ironically, although the *Good Housekeeping* magazine on which she bases her impressions contains images of typical US dwellings, the family reacts as if it contained tales of streets paved with gold.

French writer, Marcel Henaff, describes his first visit to the US (southern California) and to Mexico (Tijuana):

En unos minutos, tan sólo unos centenares de metros, y se pasa de un universo saturado de signos de abundancia, ordenado, pulido, controlado, a un universo de pobreza —pese a la existencia de un activo comercio, de grandes hoteles modernos—, luego en los barrios periféricos se imponen los signos de la misera: casas deterioradas, carreteras llenas de baches, automóviles oxidados; en pocas palabras: se sabe que aquí se está en el tercer mundo... Sin embargo, este mundo también me parecía más cercano, más real, más humano. Mi pregunta era muy sencilla: **¿por qué tanta riqueza de un lado, por qué esta miseria relativa del otro? Podría responderse de inmediato: porque en un lado está el capitalismo triunfante y en el otro, sus víctimas** [emphasis in original]. (1)

Although Henaff's descriptions are certainly realistic, the disparity he describes is the basis of the "legends of paradise" that exist within many developing nations, with the countries of Latin America being only a few of many examples. For those individuals that hold these tales to be true, the abundance, tidiness, and order that are perceived to exist in the US would undoubtedly represent an other-worldly existence, and could easily be (mis)understood in utopian terms.

With this in mind, it is apparent that the utopian spaces that have always been a part of Latin American history, from both internal and external

perspectives, have served either as goals to which one may aspire (as in the case of active attempts to construct social utopias in Cuba and Nicaragua) or as ironically desirable representations of the *other* (as in the Europeans' view of the Americas prior to and during colonial times). It follows, then, that utopias and other –topian spaces appear in literature as literary representations of the writers' perceptions of the space(s) that they inhabit. Of particular importance for this study are the various renditions of utopian space(s) that are presented by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, and it is those renditions that will be examined in the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 2

### UTOPIA (CHAOS VS. TRANQUILITY)

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.  
—Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism”

*Horóscopo del 2000* for Aquarius, Pedro Juan’s sign:  
“En modo maléfico resultará un utopista incorregible, o un ser pervertido, peligroso, sin conciencia ni sentimiento, de una fría maldad.”  
—*Animal tropical*

#### 2.1 Chaos vs. tranquility

The idea of utopia, an elusive plane of perfect existence, doubtless is as old as humankind, as I explain in chapter 1. In fact, throughout most of the history of Western civilization, our perspective of ourselves and our realities has stemmed from the belief that our very essence contains an inherent flaw that makes utopia unattainable for us, since we (as human beings) are responsible for our paradise lost, the “idyllic state [that] had been [extinguished] at the dawn of human history” (McGrath 43). If, however, instead of viewing utopia as a Christian, Jewish, or Muslim conception of heaven, and if for “utopia” one understands the paradoxical definitions (as established in Chapter 1) of both “good place” or “happy place” and “no place,” then it follows that the pursuit of utopia would be simultaneously exciting (as one nears the objective of happiness) and exasperating (since the intent is to arrive at a place that does not, in fact, exist: “no place”). In essence, one implication of this assertion is that utopia is defined by what it is not: utopia cannot be (or has not yet been) found in existing human

spaces, principally because those very spaces are impediments to its existence. The very disorder of human society and human nature, then, is what prevents human achievement of utopia. Nonetheless, the ambition of reaching a utopian objective can be evaluated on a continuum, and even though the achievement of a nirvana-like state of the absence of disorder or distraction may necessarily imply the absence of existence, by approximating that state, a degree of utopia can be attained. Essentially, this utopian continuum is represented by its two poles: chaos and tranquility.

These two opposites—tranquility vs. chaos, or heaven vs. hell—appear as binary forces throughout the narrative of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, and in many instances, both are used to depict the same Cuba.<sup>14</sup> Ostensibly, the two planes of existence are discrepant forces of contradiction, yet somehow both manage to appear and sometimes even coexist in the Cuba represented in Gutiérrez's works.

### 2.1.1 Complaining of chaos

The most easily visible references to a chaotic, dystopic world in Gutiérrez's works are the ones found in complaints about Cuba made by the characters who live there, since the references are direct, with no need to extrapolate from intertextualities or metaphors. These explicit allusions to chaos are particularly significant for this study of utopias, given that a traditional view of utopia reflects an absence of chaos (or perhaps that a traditional view of chaos

---

<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this study, I have elected to analyze not the entire *oeuvre* of Gutiérrez, but rather the works that comprise his *Ciclo de Centro Habana*, specifically the semi-autobiographical ones, written in first person.

reflects an absence of utopia). By this, one can conjecture that the chaotic depictions that appear in Gutiérrez's works serve to demonstrate a no-utopia, or a dystopia.

I associate the idea of dystopia here with chaos for two reasons: firstly, that in certain circumstances, the two terms could function as synonyms; but secondly, because the specific word "chaos" (and various derivatives) seems to be one of the terms most frequently used by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez upon offering a description of the setting of his works. For instance, in *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan reflects on his life and those of others around him: "Me pregunto si todas las vidas son tan vertiginosas y caóticas como la mía. ¿Todos vivirán tan desesperadamente?" (89). Although he makes a conscious distinction in this rhetorical question between his life and the lives of others, it is made abundantly clear that the conditions that have allowed his life to spiral out of his control do not affect only him; instead, everyone around him is also faced with the same hassles, hunger, and desperation. While the others may react differently to their lives' circumstances, there is no reason to assume that their lives seem any less dizzyingly chaotic to them.

Another instance in the same novel connects chaos with the time period, as Pedro Juan enters another reflection on love and life: "Pensé que el amor es un sentimiento inusual en esta época" (133). He immediately goes on to justify his perspective: "Ojalá que en el futuro la gente aprenda a no inyectarse tanto odio y rencor unos a los otros" (133). While his observation does not necessarily depict a picture of chaos, the image of deliberate hatred and bitterness is certainly anti-

utopian, at least. At another point in the novel, Pedro Juan ponders the Cuban reality that has been his nearly from birth: “A veces pienso que la época y el lugar son sórdidos para todos. Ha sido un proceso de años: desde el caos y la confusión hasta la sordidez y el absurdo. Terrible” (122). Pedro Juan the protagonist shares the birth year of Gutiérrez, his creator: 1950. His birth in that year makes it clear that he has experienced the entire process through which the Cuban Revolution has passed, from the triumph in 1959 to the present day. With this comment, though, it appears that Pedro Juan has nothing affirmative to say about the event(s) that shaped his life, only describing the chaos and confusion, the sordid and the absurd. Pedro Juan even defends his viewpoint and interpretation of the chaos around him during one of the few available moments of calm, when he describes the impression made upon him by a still, peaceful night: “Quiero mantener [esta escena] en la memoria [...]. Todo está impregnado de silencio y soledad absoluta. Después pintaré una versión de esta escena y la gente dirá que mis cuadros son abstractos. Yo no hago comentarios. Me llevó casi toda la vida aprender a ver algunos trozos coherentes en medio del caos” (68).<sup>15</sup> Again, Pedro Juan’s implication is that the chaos to which he refers has existed for most of his life.

Pedro Juan is not the only character in Gutiérrez’s narrative to express discontent with the situation in Cuba, however. In *El insaciable hombre araña*,

---

<sup>15</sup> While in Cuba in 2005, I overheard an observation at the Universidad de La Habana: “Si el surrealismo se hubiera inventado en Cuba, sería costumbrismo.” This comment aligns nicely with Pedro Juan’s remark about how his painting would be received if he tried to capture the scene before him.

his wife, Julia, arrives home after a long day of selling pizzas at work and begins her tirade, which Pedro Juan condenses thus:

Sale de la casa a las siete de la mañana. Regresa a las ocho de la noche, con olor en el pelo a humo, queso rancio y grasa de cocina. Generalmente llega irritada, con más arrugas en la cara que de costumbre, y hablando mal del gobierno, del transporte público que es un desastre, de los vecinos que se cagan en la escalera y de lo mal que está todo y de lo mucho peor que se va a poner porque el futuro es negro. No tiene seguridad social, ni vacaciones pagadas, ni derecho a jubilación, ni sindicato ni nada. (35)

Julia's frustration in such circumstances is comprehensible, given that she makes clear on numerous occasions that she would prefer a life that not only included more luxuries but also provided certain intellectual discussion. When she goes to the beach, instead of spending the day frolicking in the water or people-watching, like Pedro Juan, she lugs along a 900-page treatise on slavery in Cuba. Likewise, before turning in to go to sleep, instead of gossiping with the neighbors, as some other folks in the building do, she is absorbed by a lengthy biography of Joseph Fouché. A thirteen-hour workday, especially one like Julia's, with aspects that some might consider intellectually demeaning, is certainly not utopian, and is one of the foci of Julia's harangues.

Not unlike Julia, an elderly neighbor of Pedro Juan in Centro Habana constantly grumbles, although not for the same reasons. Pedro Juan sidesteps his doomsaying neighbor whenever possible so as to avoid being infected by her

pessimism, since (as he says) “[ella] lo ve todo mal. A veces estamos una hora o más hablando de la muerte, los enfermos, lo mal que van las cosas, los viejos decrepitos con una jubilación de tres dólares mensuales, y de lo mala que es la soledad” (47-48). Certainly, the conditions under which the neighbor lives are not unlike those affecting Pedro Juan, also, but (at least in this case) while she focuses on that which never goes right, he tries to look beyond it all in order to “*salir adelante*”: “que se joda ella sola, pero que no me joda a mí” (48). Regardless of the individual perspective, a society in which shortages, blackouts, hunger, under-education, etc. are all a way of life instead of a rare exception reveals a wide gulf between the reality and the utopian goal of eliminating those ills, touted as objectives of revolutionary Cuban society.

In *Animal tropical*, Pedro Juan comments on using literature to escape from his surroundings: “[Y]o estaba leyendo una novela lenta, filosófica. Leía en los pocos instantes de tranquilidad y sosiego de que disponía en medio de una ciudad especialmente vertiginosa y caótica. Un sitio estrepitoso donde nada permanece inalterable por mucho tiempo” (17). With this comment, Pedro Juan implies that the chaos in which he lives —“es la casa del caos” (24)— is destructive. However, it becomes clear shortly afterward that he accepts these conditions, regardless of any ill effects he may suffer because of them: “Hay que estar plenamente presente donde uno se encuentra, y no escapar siempre” (19).

The tranquility/chaos distinction, or utopia/dystopia, can also be viewed, as I mentioned earlier, as a heaven/hell dichotomy with definite religious overtones. According to Claeys and Sargent, this can be seen from the very

earliest works with utopian themes, which share a focus on “myths of a golden age or race in the past and earthly paradises like Eden” (6). It comes as no surprise, then, that references to (earthly or fallen) paradises or other religious elements abound in Gutiérrez’s characterizations of the spaces in which his protagonist moves. In *Carne de perro*, Pedro Juan visits his mother in El Calvario, a barrio outside of Havana. His mother informs him of the sad physical state of one of the women in the barrio, who suffers from a mysterious malady that no doctor can understand or treat, and Pedro Juan responds: “¡Cojones, verdad que esto es un calvario! Qué bien le pusieron el nombre a este barrio” (134). In another part of the novel, a woman from Rapid City, South Dakota visits Pedro Juan to look over the house in which she once lived, four decades before, and laments ever having returned to South Dakota, equating the experience to an exit from Eden: “[Mis peores años c]omenzaron cuando regresé a Rapid City. Me arrepentiré siempre. No debí irme jamás de aquí. Fue como... abandonar el paraíso” (103). The irony in the North American woman’s woeful observation is evident: while many Cubans bemoan the dire housing conditions, extreme shortages of food and other supplies, and even the destructive forces of nature in the tropics, viewing their space as hellish at worst and a sort of Purgatory at best, the woman from South Dakota remembers the island as Paradise.<sup>16</sup> In spite of the possibility that the changes that have occurred over

---

<sup>16</sup> The following observation of life in Cuba, attributed to Cuban writer Abilio Estévez, uses religious imagery: “In Cuba the Apocalypse comes as no surprise: it has always been an everyday occurrence.” It is significant to note that Estévez also has a novel titled with a religious reference: *Tuyo es el reino* (*Thine Is the Kingdom*, 1997).

time could likely be one of the explanations for this disparity of opinion, the irony produced by the difference in perspective remains evident, both to the reader and to Pedro Juan.

### 2.1.2 Yearning for chaos (the norm in Cuba)

Oddly, this world with so many dystopian features is not altogether unpalatable for Pedro Juan; rather, it serves as an anomalous source of comfort for the protagonist, particularly when he finds himself distanced from it. In the second section of *Animal tropical*, Pedro Juan travels to Sweden to spend a few months with Agneta, the Swedish event coordinator who has organized his visit, where he finds himself not entirely pleased with this unfamiliar, decidedly unchaotic society, nor entirely displeased with Agneta, who becomes his lover.

As “La amante sueca,” titled for Agneta, begins, Pedro Juan recounts his first experiences in Stockholm, stating first and foremost that “Ahora todo es más sencillo” (115). Nearly everything that he experiences in Sweden can be described thus, “sencillo,” since everything appears to be well built, well planned, and well organized, owing to a pervasive sense of order and orderliness that his new neighbors (all Swedish) seem to share: “Aquí todo es muy seguro. Todo está bien remachado, bien atornillado, muy correcto, alta precisión. La gente olvida hasta el significado de la palabra ‘inseguridad’” (156). His comment is particularly significant, given his fellow Cubans’ renowned ability to make do, or *resolver*, even in the face of limited resources or unsafe situations.<sup>17</sup> Thus, by

---

<sup>17</sup> *Resolver* is one of a number of Cuban euphemisms for “getting by,”

calling attention to the near-perfect lack of insecurity in Stockholm, he is also underscoring the contrary in his own city. Even in locales that are notoriously disorderly in other regions, in Sweden there is stillness and calm, such as in the *Loppis*, or flea market: “Hay unas pocas gallinas, gallos, conejos. No se ve a nadie. Sólo escucho el viento y mis pasos sobre la grava. [...] Parece como si el sitio estuviera abandonado” (164-165). Throughout the section, Pedro Juan marvels repeatedly at the tranquility and quiet that he encounters in Sweden, which he describes with a blend of respect and measured cynicism—respect for the Swedes’ propensity for achieving (and maintaining) such silence, and cynicism regarding why they would voluntarily elect to do so. At one point, several weeks after arriving, Pedro Juan finds himself bored and alone in Agneta’s apartment, where he observes: “Hay un silencio pasmoso. Increíble. ¿Cómo los suecos logran esos silencios absolutos en un barrio donde hay tantos edificios de apartamentos? Silencio prolongado y perfecto” (157). His question implies a certain degree of admiration, perceived in his choice of words: “increíble,” “lograr,” and “perfecto,” for example, evoke the reactions of one who is positively impressed. It also denotes another question, though, given the

---

along with *luchar*, *inventar*, and *escapar*. Often, *resolver* alludes to the pilfering of goods from the workplace for personal use. Independent Cuban journalist Raul Rivero explains: “Ordinary Cubans, who have no relatives in the United States, do not work in a foreign company or have no friends in a corporation, those Cubans who ride bicycles and get paid in national currency—the vast majority of the population—have to recur to three verbs which raise suspicion: ‘*Inventar, resolver y escapar*’”. Regarding the beginning of the Special Period, when these terms came into popular use, historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. states: “Vast amounts of ingenuity were applied simply to meet ordinary and commonplace needs—to *resolver* and *inventar* became the operative verbs of a people seeking ways to make do and get by” (387).

circumstances under which he poses it; the tedium he suffers leads the reader to continue his inquisitive wondering, not merely a reaction to the *¿cómo?* of the Swedes' achievement, but also a *¿por qué?* Days later, Pedro Juan complains of claustrophobia—"¡Uf, este apartamento cerrado herméticamente!" (170)—and escapes to the balcony, where he observes: "El termómetro marca 20 grados. Los jardines verdes, el sol brillante, el silencio y la calma. El cielo azul. Los pájaros cantando. Nadie a la vista. Absolutamente nadie a la vista" (171). Once again, although the description is a positive, almost an Edenic one, the emphasis on the absence of humanity from the scene begs the question of *why?*—with this Disney-like setting of singing birds, beautiful greenery, and pleasant weather, why is there no one outside enjoying it all? Such quiet calm can be uncomfortably foreign to Pedro Juan, who is more accustomed to and apparently prefers the clamor and jostling of a city like Havana, where sound and movement confirm one's own existence as well as that of others in the surrounding commotion. As a matter of fact, practically the only instances in which Pedro Juan reports of a chaotic atmosphere are when he describes his visits to the few Cuban bars that dot the city: "Un poco más arriba de Radmangatan está el bar La Habana. [...] Es carísimo. [...] Pero siempre hay música salsa y los negros habaneros bailando con las suecas. Entonces regreso por unos minutos a la locura" (115).<sup>18</sup> This temporary return to chaos represents more than a simple bout of homesickness for the protagonist. Rather, it is a return to normalcy, to life as he knows it—and

---

<sup>18</sup> Gutiérrez's choice of words is significant here, too: not "*caos*," but "*locura*," which reflects one of the three nearly omnipresent heterotopian spaces that I identify in chapter 3.

prefers it. He has already made clear to the reader that the space that he has created for himself—as a writer, as a man, or as a Cuban—is one that must be within the constant movement, energy, and sound that all typify Havana. It is for this reason that the very tranquility of Stockholm disquiets him.

Another circumstance, certainly not chaotic but at least unexpected (and thereby disrupting the otherwise rigid order of things) stems from his erotic adventures with Agneta. Pedro Juan recounts that his expectations of Agneta before arriving were rather low, since his standards for eroticism—his oft-described experiences with Cuban women and his current lover, Gloria, in particular—were already quite high. In addition, (as he says) “siempre se dice que los suecos son ingenuos y fríos y que viven flotando en el aire. Por algo existe esa frase: ‘No te hagas el sueco’” (117), but he finds that his predictions have little to do with the reality that had been awaiting him in Stockholm: “Al fin llegué y dos o tres horas después música, whisky, sofá, friecito y llovizna afuera. [...] Y a la cama con la amante sueca. Esperaba algo peor. Pero no. No hay que sacrificar nada” (117). At this point, Pedro Juan delivers a description of Cuban women’s excessive demands (“mantienen al macho siempre agotado y no puede irse con otras hembras”), only to counter it with a description of his experiences with Agneta, commenting that (compared to Cubans) she is “mucho más placentera. [...] No lo esperaba” (117). In this way, Gutiérrez begins the section with a side-by-side comparison of the two realities, an evaluation that persists and repeats itself numerous times throughout “La amante sueca,” whether weighing sexual experiences, the weather, music, beverages, or even daylight, confirming

(in a sense) Foucault's observations about the juxtaposition and simultaneity of spaces.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the comfort that one might presumably derive from this type of order and routine, Pedro Juan finds himself longing desperately for Havana. He describes in detail one peaceful afternoon he and Agneta spend together in Stockholm: he goes jogging; they eat lunch and converse; he dozes a bit and reads a magazine; he smokes a cigar; they watch a documentary on TV; they eat dinner; she goes to bed; he stays up reading. Not only are the day's events relayed in exact chronological order, but also with descriptions of what they eat and drink, what they read and discuss, and even the temperature and the position of the sun in the sky. Although their activities are relaxing and might even be considered appealing by some, the point by point narration provided by Pedro Juan, coupled with the simple sentence structure that repeats throughout this episode—"Regreso, me ducho, comemos albóndigas, ensalada y frutas. [...] Dormito un poco más. Me despierto y fumo un tabaco" (135)—make the afternoon in Sweden appear mind-numbingly tedious, particularly when compared to the constant, unpredictable hubbub in Havana, with which the reader has already become quite familiar, based upon the descriptions of that city, which abound in the novel's first section. As a matter of fact, the very tranquility of Agneta's Stockholm apartment perturbs Pedro Juan instead of relaxing him. He is unable to maintain concentration while reading and recounts:

---

<sup>19</sup> In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault comments that "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition" (22). I examine this statement and other Foucauldian ideas regarding transposed spaces in greater detail in

A veces me interrumpía y me venían flashes a la mente: Gloria, las consultas de las santeras en La Habana y muchos golpes de la memoria. Gente, lugares, momentos. El desorden y la confusión, el caos y la tormenta acechando siempre. No duermen. No descansan. Cuando sucede hay que controlar la mente. [...] Lo mejor es dejar la mente en blanco y no luchar. La lejanía del lugar de origen genera a veces el desorden. (135)

Such episodes of nostalgia do not occur only when Pedro Juan is bored at home, though. At one point he manages to convince Agneta, cunningly playing on her sentimentality, to drive him to a nude beach: “‘Ah, titi, compláceme. Sólo nos quedan unos días juntos. [...] Quizás no vuelvo jamás a Suecia.’ Ella se pone lacrimosa. A veces el Pedrito manipulador se dispara y rompe el hijoputómetro” (205). After enjoying an afternoon on the beach, complete with a gratifying (for Pedro Juan, at least) episode of exhibitionism, they go to a luxury resort for lunch: “‘todo perfecto. Me encantan las mujeres que saben gastar su dinero” (206).

Unlike the monotonous afternoon at Agneta’s apartment, on this occasion all of Pedro Juan’s previous complaints (directed only to the reader, not to Agneta) are remedied with wine, steak, and fooling around in public. Even so, he is unable to escape the nostalgic longing for Cuba and his life there: “Sin quererlo, mi pensamiento se va a Cuba y a Gloria” (207). It is vital to note here that Pedro Juan’s recurrent thoughts of Gloria indicate much more than a man’s sexual longing for his mistress, despite his repeated emphasis on her sexual acrobatics.

Gloria is also *mulata*, thus embodying a long-standing historical visualization of Cuba, the mulatto woman, “the principal signifier of Cuba’s national cultural identity” (Kutzinski 5), or “the living, breathing symbol of Cuba, since the fate of the *mulata* often resembles Cuba’s own destiny” (Kneese 444). Pedro Juan even compares her to the quintessential Cuban *mulata*: “Gloria pudo vivir aquí hace doscientos años y hubiera sido igual. Quizás se llamaría Cecilia Valdés. La misma buscavidas, con una moral y una ética moldeadas por ella misma” (25). Additionally, Gloria serves as a redolent personification of noisy Havana, since Pedro Juan describes repeatedly her silver bracelets that constantly jingle, enveloping her in an everpresent, haphazard music, “como campanillas” (23), reflecting the perpetual clamor of the city in which this *habanera* lives, as well as the bracelets’ siren-like song, evoking in him a visceral reaction and beckoning him to enjoy her sexual favors.

As Odette Casamayor aptly observes of Pedro Juan, “El caos [...] vive en el propio protagonista; no es algo meramente exterior.” I concur with Casamayor’s statement and propose that it is because of this inner —and very Cuban— chaos that Pedro Juan is prohibited from enjoying the tranquility of his new (albeit temporary) space in Stockholm. In other words, despite his numerous complaints about poor planning, scarcities of supplies, and disorganization in Cuba, it has been ingrained in his nature to tolerate and to deal with these issues, but not to live without them.

## 2.2 Utopia = non-existence

Within the realm of literature that centers on (or drifts toward) utopia, it is the idea of utopia as *ou-topia*, or a “no-place,” that provides a common perspective for an examination of spaces. For a number of reasons —survival, fantasy, anonymity, escape— many writers construct an enchanted world, one in which there is no time, no history, no language, no sound, no society: in short, a paradise in which even death (or “no-life”) is a desirable end. It is the absence of all that makes us human, precisely that which allows the *ou-topia* to exist, from this general point of view. From a Cuban perspective, this *ou-topia* is the *nada*, the nothingness that has come to define life in Cuba.<sup>20</sup> From Pedro Juan’s perspective, this *nada* is his destiny.

In the *Trilogía sucia*, Pedro Juan reveals the pervasiveness of the *nada*: “Me gusta ir a casa de mi madre para no hacer nada. Sólo doy vueltas por ahí y converso con los amigos, que me dicen: «Ya no te veo en la televisión ni te leo en la revista, ¿qué pasa?» Y yo les respondo: «No pasa nada.» Ése es el asunto. No pasa nada” (86). This seems to agree with Pedro Juan’s lemma of “Nada busco y nada encuentro” (104). Gutiérrez even titles the second part of the *Trilogía* as “Nada que hacer,” and in that section Pedro Juan comments: “No tenía nada que pensar. Me quedé con la mente en blanco” (140). Another day, he continues: “no tenía nada que hacer. Bueno, así es día tras día. Nunca se hace nada. [...] Nada. [...] Nadie sabe qué espera” (237), and still later his sentiment

---

<sup>20</sup> Cuban writer Zoé Valdés’s *La nada cotidiana* (1992) deals precisely with this “day-to-day nothingness,” from empty shelves to empty souls, and ends with a scene in which Patria, the protagonist, finds herself in bed with her two lovers, *el Traidor* and *el Nihilista*, providing a despairing stance on Cuba’s situation (169).

persists: “No tengo nada que hacer. Es más: no tengo la más mínima idea de qué puedo hacer hoy, mañana, dentro de un mes, un año o un siglo” (263).

In *Carne de perro*, he recounts part of a surreal afternoon, in which his only response is the very same *nada*: “Caminé [...] sin pensar en nada. Es difícil pero a veces se logra. Insistir in la nada. Insistir en la nada. Muchas veces al día. Entrenarse para la nada. En la mochila tenía [un libro] pero ahora no quiero leer, me dije. No quiero leer. No quiero saber nada de nada” (34-35). In another part of the same novel, Pedro Juan contemplates the future of two sleeping children on a truck, “desconecta[dos] del mundo”: “no soy nadie, no tengo nada, no vengo de ninguna parte, nadie me espera, soy la nada, apenas un poco de gas disolviéndose en el espacio” (42). Likewise, in *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan repeats his complaints of “Nada que hacer” (88) and “No había qué hacer” (121).

Gutiérrez’s almost tiresome repetition of “*nada*” throughout these works serves to underline the void that permeates Pedro Juan’s life. Oddly, even though it is in Cuba that life is in a constant state of flux, with noise and frenetic activity, Pedro Juan’s observations/complaints of “nothing to do” arise chiefly when he finds himself there. In Sweden, where (as previously noted) silence and tranquility reign, instead of complaining of having nothing to do, Pedro Juan goes for a walk, reads the newspaper, watches the news on TV, or finds some other way to occupy his time. From this, it can be interpreted that Pedro Juan’s emphasis on “*nada*” does not depend upon the expected tranquility/chaos analysis (that nothingness is associated with peace, silence, and calm). Instead, even

though his comments regarding the pervasive nothingness appear to be complaints, Pedro Juan consistently associates his life in Cuba with a vacuum of activity, despite the island's well-deserved reputation for being noisy and attention-grabbing, which would in theory serve to fill such a void.

Continuing in the vein of “nothingness,” Pedro Juan in *El insaciable hombre araña* relates the following experience after a cramped bus ride to the beach: he swims out from the crowded shore as far as he can, rolls on his back to float effortlessly, and considers that “[e]s una sensación perfecta. De equilibrio tal vez. Interior y exterior. [...] No hay sentimientos. No hay interrupción. No hay tiempo. No hay principio ni fin. Nada. Uno mismo deja de existir. Quisiera quedarme así eternamente” (17-18). Pedro Juan's reflection is not entirely surprising, since the experience could be interpreted simply as a much-needed escape from the chaos that surrounds him in Centro Habana. What is intriguing about his comment, though, is the paradoxical desire that he expresses: to live in a setting with no life, no existence, *nada*. While the fragments I have previously discussed do treat the theme of nothingness, they are more descriptive of the conditions in which Pedro Juan's life unfolds. Here, though, the nothingness serves as the objective, a seemingly illogical goal to attain and uphold.

### **2.2.1 Uroboric yearnings**

In psychology, the image of the *ouroboros*, or the snake devouring its tail, has been used to express the idea of a primeval desire to return to one's beginning, to The Beginning, to a time with no time, to a non-place, a space with

no language, history, society, emotions, or anything else. Rather, it is a desire to arrive at (or to return to) a void that preceded all of these things. Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann describes these uroboric impulses as “a desire to be dissolved and absorbed; passively one lets oneself be taken in” (49). Such uroboric desire, as it may appear within literature, is sometimes viewed as nothing more than a rejection of the status quo, but at other times can represent a genuine desire to return to (or to evolve toward) nothingness, particularly the nothingness that we all experienced while in the womb. Those who experience uroboric yearnings often use the image of the darkness and emptiness inside the womb to depict a uroboric paradise. Philosopher John Visvader describes this type of desire as “[possessing] the peculiar characteristic of having as one of its goals its own demise,” since it has the paradoxical quality of hoping to exist in a state in which no existence is possible (455), much like the aforementioned goal of Pedro Juan to achieve and maintain nothingness.

Gutiérrez includes this seemingly incongruous desire throughout his narrative, illustrating a desire on the part of his protagonist to live once more in the security of infancy. He fondly recalls his experiences as a child, protected and safe (if ignorant) and, when confronted with grave events, reacts with an unambiguous longing to return to those days. For example, in *Carne de perro*, Pedro Juan explicitly expresses this uroboric desire as a reaction to the gut-wrenching coverage of the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001: “Encendí el televisor. Daban noticias del desastre de las Twin Towers. El caos y el vértigo siguen haciendo estragos. Me [...] fui a El

Calvario. Cuando estoy un poco atormentado regreso al vientre materno. Me aísló en posición fetal” (116). It is curious that he recognizes his desire here to escape the realities that confront him (even if this reality only touches him from the television set) as a longing to return to a safe, secure place. Pedro Juan is certainly referring only metaphorically to his mother’s womb, but even so, his explicit reference to it evokes the uroboric longings that characterize this sort of *ou-topia*.

However, Pedro Juan’s yearning for another time and place does not always represent a desire to exist in a womb-like non-time or non-place. Instead, he occasionally longs for a return to the simpler Cuba of his childhood, a space and era which he obviously once occupied, as in *Carne de perro*:

Pensé que la solución vendría sola [...] con la vejez. Entonces podría neutralizar el deseo ciego y retirarme por ahí, a un campo, con dos o tres vacas. Ordeñarlas al amanecer y atender una huerta. Sólo eso. Lo mismo que hacía en la finca de mi abuela cuando era niño. Recuerdo muy bien los detalles de aquellos años, en los cincuenta, antes de que comenzara el caos y la diáspora. Había silencio, soledad, árboles, pájaros. Y pocas visitas. Casi nadie. Era un mundo muy pequeño. Apenas un kilómetro a la redonda más o menos. Eso simplificaba las cosas. Ahora todo es vertiginoso. El mundo es gigantesco y caótico. Inabarcable. (47)

Once again, Gutiérrez uses the terms “*vertiginoso*,” “*caos*,” and “*caótico*” to present the world inhabited by his protagonist, and terms such as “*silencio*,”

“*soledad*,” “*árboles*,” and “*pájaros*” to paint a picture of the idyllic world to which he longs to return. It is ironic that these last four terms are the same ones used in *Animal tropical* to detail Pedro Juan’s experiences in Sweden, although he finds the silence, nature, and solitude there to be curiously offputting, even as (in Cuba) he expresses a deep longing to re-experience all of these things from his childhood. With this, it becomes apparent that the protagonist’s desire for peace and tranquility is not unconditional, as it is not “*silencio*” and “*soledad*” for which he yearns. Instead, he experiences the desire to know these qualities in a Cuban reality, or, in other words, he longs for “*silencio y soledad cubanos*.”

## CHAPTER 3

### HETEROTOPIA

#### 3.1 Heterotopian planes/spaces

In the 1967 text, “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault emphasizes the role of spaces in contemporary societies, both physical places as well as more abstract, inverted sites. To this end, he claims: “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition” (22). In these observations, there appears to be an inherent contradiction, given that the laws of physics impede the reconciliation of actual physical sites and juxtaposition or coincidence. Since two sites cannot occupy the same space simultaneously, Foucault’s claim borders on the nonsensical. If, however, one were to alter the theorist’s phrasing and substitute the concept of abstract “planes” for “spaces” (which could imply “places”) in Foucault’s argument, then the importance lies more on associated functions, mindsets, or perceptions rather than actual sites. Perhaps it is appropriate that Foucault initiate his examination of the spaces that he calls “heterotopias” with an ostensibly contradictory phrasing, since the concept itself (heterotopia) relies on inversions (or manipulations) of commonly recognizable situations/sites/spaces/planes. He continues, elaborating on the notion of space and explaining that there is much more involved than mere demography:

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the

space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. [...] We live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (23)

Foucault's description here elicits a search for definitions of relationships:

spatial, causal, functional, or perhaps even having a number of other qualities or connections. What is difficult (and conceivably even unachievable) is a clear and consistent characterization of heterotopian space in general; Foucault provides a number of examples, some of which I will discuss later in this chapter, as instances of heterotopian contexts, but the only clear and repeated characteristic in the heterotopias named by Foucault is a shared emphasis on dissimilarities: they are most easily defined by what they are not.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> The Australian scholars Graham St. John and Sherman Young both find fault with what they consider the dubiety of Foucault's definition of heterotopia. St. John states: "Partially developed by Foucault, the concept has been applied to a range of spheres, installations, geographies, and events, accumulating a heterogeneity of meanings in the history of its usage—a confusion which is, in part, a legacy of its brief and non-concise treatment by Foucault himself" (22). Young has a different notion of heterotopia, although he, like Foucault, attributes the greatest significance of heterotopias to contrast, or what he terms "the essence of difference": "The very idea of heterotopias suggests a problem with the definition of 'other.' [...] Whilst it is tempting to use the term 'heterotopia' as a catchcry for new conceptions of spatialization, as a kind of postmodern reframing of space embracing generic notions of 'other,' it is perhaps a simplistic approach that produces little." Young's criticisms of Foucault's principles of heterotopia as "simplistic" are less surprising when one considers that much of Young's work centers on defining spaces created by the internet, (cyber)spaces that are all heterotopias, or at least could be viewed as such, and which were formed over two decades after Foucault's analysis of heterotopian spaces.

If the reality is as Foucault suggests, then the criteria that he mentions would reveal Havana as a city well established in what he refers to as “the present epoch,” given the countless coexisting spaces that make up the city, its characteristic simultaneity of varied realities, and their juxtaposition (rather than separation). In the first place, the city has over a dozen distinct boroughs (La Habana Vieja, Centro Habana, Vedado, Guanabacoa, Miramar, Playa, among others), all of which reflect distinct architectural styles, which, in turn, represent distinct periods in Havana’s history. Additionally, Havana is steeped in inconsistencies, many of them owing to factors such as Cuba’s unique historical experiences of slavery and miscegenation,<sup>22</sup> and the more current economic discrepancies that exist despite (or perhaps because of) the socialist fiscal policies that perpetuate (or widen) the rift between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Expounding on these curious juxtapositions, the editor of an American magazine observes the seemingly impossible incongruities that coexist peacefully within Havana.<sup>23</sup>

Worlds collide on Calle Obispo, the main street of Old Havana. A spiffy new store sells compact discs and souvenirs, dollars only,

---

<sup>22</sup> I call Cuba’s history in these respects “unique” not because slavery and miscegenation only occurred there, since practically the entire Caribbean shares this history. Rather, in Cuba there is a unique combination of factors (such as how long slavery remained legal, how long the island existed as a colony of Spain, its unusual relationship to the U.S., etc.) that work together to give Cuba a history (and, by extension, a present) like no other.

<sup>23</sup> While the magazine, *Cigar Aficionado*, is not a scholarly journal, over the years it has presented articles documenting trips to Cuba and observations of Cuban culture as a result of the superlative quality of the tobacco grown there.

please, and no locals allowed.<sup>24</sup> In the dingy shop next door, old women wait in line for meager rations of rice and flour. Armed police stand watch on nearly every corner, but hustlers and prostitutes emerge whenever their backs are turned. Musicians in cafés filled with foreigners play endless versions of “Guantanamera,” while Santería devotees bang drums and chant in a ragged parade down the crowded street. Tourists search for adventure. Cubans struggle to survive. (Matthews)

Similarly, photographer Ron Tarver describes Havana as “lethargically energetic, immaculately filthy, an illusive illumination.” Travel guides for the city (and, indeed, all of Cuba) are brimming with such oxymoronic labels, contradictory characterizations that attempt to capture the essence of its ubiquitous paradoxes.

These conflicting yet coexisting realities also appear throughout the narrative of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. One example can be found in the following excerpt from *Animal tropical*, in which the novel’s protagonist, Pedro Juan, describes a scene that he encounters immediately upon exiting his building in Centro Habana:

---

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note here that the “no locals allowed” policy of the store mentioned in the article has almost certainly been abolished. *Cigar Aficionado*’s report dates from 1999, a difficult time economically for Cuba, given that only a few years earlier possession of foreign currencies was prohibited for Cubans, while many goods were only available for purchase with tourists’ money. Since then, official policies have changed, and as long as Cuban citizens possess dollars or convertible pesos with which they can purchase articles, they (and their money) are welcome virtually everywhere, with the exception of most hotel rooms.

En la esquina de Laguna todo está arruinado. Hay unos contenedores de basura rebosantes de pudrición, una loma de escombros, charcos de agua hedionda. En el mismo centro de la calle dos hermosos ejemplares, ajenos a todo. [...] Modelaban ropa. [...] Supongo que con la luz liviana del sol y en medio de tanta suciedad resaltaría aún más el charmé de aquellos dos ejemplares blancos como el papel, y rubios, con caras de dulces e inocentes angelitos. Al fondo siempre tenían algún edificio hecho trizas, perros sarnosos y flacos, y negritos mirándolos con la boca abierta. (37-38)

In this fragment appears the intersection of several distinct realities: blond-haired, white-skinned, angelic-faced Cuban models<sup>25</sup>, a backdrop of filth and misery, and (shortly thereafter) a group of foreign tourists recording the entire scene—in other words, a site in which several distinct realities traverse.<sup>26</sup> The juncture of these

---

<sup>25</sup> Although a reader's first reaction may be to classify the models as foreigners brought to Cuba to provide contrast for the photographs, it is made clear later that the models are, indeed, Cuban. Pedro Juan recounts: "Una señora a mi lado decía que eran extranjeros. [...] Yo le contesté que los fotógrafos eran japoneses pero que los modelos eran cubanos. Y ella, muy convencida, me replicó: «¡Qué va! ¿Tú no ves que son rubios y blancos? Mira qué bonitos los dos, son extranjeros.» Yo sabía que eran cubanos. No sé en qué pero les veía la pinta de cubanitos a la legua" (38).

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that *Animal tropical*, as well as the other works that make up the *Ciclo de Centro Habana*, takes place in a time period in which there are not only multiple realities on the street, but there is also a double (or multiple) economic reality: in 1993, Cuba's economy begins to function around two distinct (and competing) currencies, the Cuban peso and the US dollar. This shift is particularly significant, given that for decades prior to this, the possession of dollars was a serious offense. Suddenly, Cubans found themselves in the middle of multiple realities, as this financial shift eventually led to the (legal) use

realities—class, race, nationality, all demonstrated in varying degrees of marginalization—calls into question the space in which it occurs. It is evident that this same space is (or could be) interpreted in dissimilar fashions according to each subject’s respective manner of interpellating him/herself, whether said subject is a character present at the scene or a reader living the scene vicariously.<sup>27</sup> In Foucault’s analysis of spaces, he focuses on the ones that “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (24). By virtue of this distinction, Foucault assigns to spaces the unique role of simultaneously reflecting and interacting with the subject as well as the reality that surrounds him/her.

With this in mind, I refer to Foucault’s elaboration of two types of spaces that fit the above description: utopias and heterotopias, describing the first as “sites with no real place” and the latter, from the Latin for “other place,” as

---

of four distinct currencies: the US dollar, the euro, the Cuban peso, and the Cuban convertible peso, which is the Cuban money given in exchange for any foreign currencies. At present, only the two Cuban currencies are commonly accepted in legal exchange for goods or services. This duality, although simpler than the simultaneous and widespread use of the four currencies mentioned above, nevertheless evokes a perplexing sensation of the coexistence of double realities, since some products must be paid for with one type of currency, while other purchases require the other currency, and still other purchases can be made with either, although the prices can be drastically different, a practice described as “economic apartheid” (Feinstein). For more on the subject of how the use of multiple currencies casts a unique perspective on literary depictions of Cuban reality, see Esther Kathryn Whitfield, “Fiction(s) of Cuba in Literary Economies of the 1990s: Buying In or Selling Out?” (doctoral thesis).

<sup>27</sup> I refer here to Louis Althusser’s explanation of interpellation as the interaction between the individual subject and the ideology that may or may not define him/her (Althusser 159).

“something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites [...] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). It is interesting to note that Foucault apparently borrowed the term from the field of medicine, in which the condition of heterotopia refers to “parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien” (Hetherington 42). With the dimension added by this definition, it becomes clear that Foucault’s heterotopia has as much to do with the phenomenon of displacement as it does with placement. Once again, we are reminded of the importance of spaces/sites/places/planes, of the weight ascribed to a physical as well as abstract place.

By way of illustration, Foucault offers the example of a mirror as a primary heterotopia, “since it is a placeless place” (24). He elaborates:

In the mirror, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface [...]. It is a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. [...] The mirror functions in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment [...] absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

The example of the mirror serves to elucidate Foucault's principle, but it does so merely as a prototype, given that a number of heterotopic types—places and spaces—exist within society: boarding schools, boats, hospitals, cemeteries, gardens, etc. The mirror, on the other hand, is a purely emblematic heterotopia, since the space we observe there is not one into which we enter; rather, it is one that we envisage.

The examples listed by Foucault reflect situations, sites, spaces, planes, or even conditions, all of which are disconnected from any particular era: the honeymoon, for example—a physical space shift historically associated with the loss of virginity on the part of the female and the conquest and acquisition of property on the part of the male, while not ubiquitous across all cultures and eras, appears throughout centuries of European and American civilization. Some have suggested, though, the emergence of a contemporary heterotopia, coinciding with the dizzying advances in technology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century: cyberspace, or the Internet. Young claims: “If we take as a given that the new communications and computing technologies have resulted in the formation of new social spaces, it is a relatively straightforward task to map this so-called cyberspace as a heterotopia.”

In addition, another possible (non-Foucauldian) view of heterotopias presents them as a distortion of the expression of that which is beautiful, thus making beauty impossible to define: does it exist only in the original plane or also in the distortion of itself? In the fragment included earlier from *Animal tropical*, in which the two stunning models pose for photographs against a backdrop of abject squalor, the models' own beauty very nearly negates itself

with its incongruity, given their surroundings, and the striking contrast that results accentuates the models' frivolity rather than their exquisite looks. Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo has developed a view of heterotopia that is different from that of Foucault, although also complementary, by linking the abstraction to the realm of aesthetics and classifying it as a brand of utopia that has somehow become twisted: "it is a matter not of a pure and simple realization of utopia, but of a realization that has been distorted and transformed. Aesthetic utopia comes about only through its articulation as heterotopia" (69). Even so, Vattimo's vision of heterotopia does not deviate significantly from that of Foucault: "Our experience of the beautiful [...] is restricted to the moment when these worlds and communities present themselves explicitly as plural" (69). In this way, Vattimo emphasizes the feature of plurality and juxtaposition, much like Foucault, but adding the aspect of (somehow contradictory) aesthetics.

This explication of dual sites and spaces could well be applied to the shifts in setting that occur in *Animal tropical*: the setting jumps from Havana to Stockholm and back again in the novel's respective three parts ("La serpiente de fuego," "La amante sueca," and "Furia y bolero"), representing both sides, sometimes even concurrently, via the protagonist's flashbacks and daydreams of one city while still in the other. These two cities are also significant human spaces in nearly any conversation about utopias, of course, since an impassive sociological/philosophical/economic discussion of these urban realities would point to Stockholm as the evident forerunner in a comparison of utopias, given the success of Sweden's renowned social programs, particularly when compared to

the dearth of supplies, medicinal and otherwise, that Havana has endured throughout the Special Period. Even so, Gutierrez's protagonist, named—as is always the case in his semi-autobiographical fiction—Pedro Juan, has a more than evident inclination for chaotic, “grotesquely realistic” (borrowing Bakhtin's label) Havana, despite its virtually dystopian depiction in the novel.<sup>28</sup>

Other situations/sites/spaces/planes that exert a similar effect on the protagonist(s) in Gutiérrez's narrative are also depicted as heterotopias, either directly for the reasons named by Foucault or (one could argue) because of their metaphorical relation to other, already established heterotopias. For the purpose of analysis, I have identified four categories that are (or could be) heterotopian: death, prison, pleasure, and insanity. In the pages that follow, I will examine the role(s) that each of these notions plays in Gutiérrez's narrative.

### 3.1.1 Death

In the everyday imaginary as well as in multiple literary representations, death is figured as an event (the moment that signifies the end of life) or even as a state (the condition that results from the completion of that event); both the event and the state adopt various symbolic representations that recur throughout

---

<sup>28</sup> The only instance in the entire *Ciclo de Centro Habana* in which Pedro Juan expresses a preference for Sweden (or any place other than Cuba) is in *Carne de perro*, when the protagonist is overcome with the extreme conditions of summer in Cuba: “Calor y humedad, moscas y olor a pudrición. Estoy muy haragán con tanto calor. A veces me gustaría volver cada verano a Suecia. A pesar del aburrimiento y del panorama tan insípido y de la hosquedad deliberada que utilizan para otorgar visados” (29).

literature. The idea of “death as event” is frequently rendered by skeletons, skulls, and bones in general, since they are the most visible evidence of what occurs after the event has transpired. Further, the notion of “death as event” can be personified by figures such as the Grim Reaper, who employs his scythe to cut down the living in a sort of morbid harvest, thus emphasizing the actual loss of life. In contrast, symbols of vastness or infinity, such as the sea, evoke “death as state” more than event, due to a sense of permanence as well as apparent limitlessness; the sea (or other bodies of water) can embody both the beginning and end of life. For these reasons, water appears to be linked more to the conception of “death as state,” since one can be enveloped and suspended in water, and its sheer expanse implies omnipresence, conjuring images of a condition or circumstance more than an incident.

An alternate view of death, one that aligns more closely with the symbol of the sea than skulls or the Grim Reaper, is the idea of death as a place—or, more accurately, as a space, at least as a representation within literature. Although death is generally considered a state/event/space to be avoided, it could also be regarded as an objective worthy of attaining, particularly when life—death’s only alternative—offers little more than a bleak prolongation of suffering. This dual representation appears in the works of Gutiérrez, in which death, as well as sites and situations that relate to it, appear as both places to be avoided and places that hold an attraction for the protagonist (but only under certain circumstances, which will be identified and examined later in this chapter).

Nearly all of the events in Gutiérrez's narrative take place in Cuba, with the only exception being the protagonist's trip to Sweden in *Animal tropical*. While he is in Stockholm, Pedro Juan develops a fascination, almost an obsession, with death and the various heterotopias stemming from it, presumably as a consequence of a frustrated craving for the chaos of his home. In fact, images of death seem to swirl and linger around him, as they surround him during his stay in Sweden, regardless of whether or not he searches for them willingly. In this way, Gutiérrez evokes contradictory sensations of the peace and tranquility that death can represent, accompanied by a sense of frustration and disgust that are provoked by this positive reaction. After all, embracing death clearly equates to rejecting life, and Pedro Juan, a lover of women, fine cigars, and good rum, is surprised at this reaction in himself.

Throughout "La amante sueca," the second of three parts in *Animal tropical*, appear over two dozen direct allusions to death: murder, suicide, cemeteries, and morgues, among other references. Near the beginning of the section appears the first of these allusions, as Pedro Juan and Agneta travel over a bridge that spans several kilometers, and she calmly points out, "Aquí se suicida mucha gente. [...] Se estrellan contra el agua [y m]ueren" (120). In the pages that follow, the references to suicide, accidental death, and murder recur: Agneta tells a grisly tale of a friend of hers who hanged himself in a forest (122); Pedro Juan listens to one of Jeff Buckley's CDs over and over, commenting that the artist "[Se] suicida con veinticinco años. Atormentado el tipo" (138)<sup>29</sup>; Pedro Juan

---

<sup>29</sup> There is some controversy regarding whether Jeff Buckley's death by

discovers a strange collection of photo albums in Agneta's apartment, all filled with newspaper clippings of automobile accidents that resulted in death or severe injury (124-25); the two calmly take in a news report about deaths in Kosovo that includes numerous images of decomposing, bluish-purple body parts (140); a woman's cadaver is found close to a nearby jogging trail in the woods, and each time he returns to the area, Pedro Juan's eyes inadvertently scan the site, seeking out another body (153); a young lady dies, crushed to the point of asphyxiation at a music festival (160); a friend of Agneta's shows Pedro Juan her extensive photo collection of corpses in varying states of decay (218); and Agneta views a newly vacant apartment, still exactly as it was left by the former tenant, who has committed suicide (224). Once Pedro Juan even uses death to describe the weather: "Pleno verano pero no a pleno sol. [...] Lo perfecto para alguien con vocación de cadáver" (180). In addition to all of these direct references, death is also used as a descriptive figure of speech. At the nude beach, Pedro Juan sees a sunbather and observes: "Parece un cadáver. [...] Es como el cadáver de una vieja y fea señora. El cadáver de un cuerpo usado y gastado" (201). He uses a similar metaphor to describe Agneta's reserved personality and compare her to

---

drowning in a tributary of the Mississippi River in 1997 was an accident or a suicide. The haunting and frequent references to death in his songs, as well as his admission of suffering from bipolar disorder, both make his decision to swim with jeans and heavy boots in the Wolf River's strong currents appear to be motivated by suicidal tendencies. Jeff Buckley's estate, though, disputes this: "Jeff Buckley's death was not 'mysterious,' related to drugs, alcohol, or suicide. We have a police report, a medical examiner's report, and an eyewitness to prove that it was an accidental drowning, and that Mr. Buckley was in a good frame of mind prior to the accident" ("Happenings"). Regardless of whether Buckley's death was actually a suicide or merely an accident, the association made by Pedro Juan in the passage described above remains significant.

Gloria: “Gloria habla de todo en abundancia y facilita las cosas, pero Agneta es una tumba, la muy cabrona” (187).

The only other topic present to the same degree in this segment (or anywhere else in the novel, really) is sex, and on a number of occasions, death and sex are even intertwined and appear as complementary forces, as in Pedro Juan’s description of the ideal death:

Dicen que ésa es la muerte perfecta: un paro cardíaco con la pinga tiesa y templándose una putica, por unos cuantos pesos. [...] La última vagina de tu vida. Y tú no sabes que es la última. La pinga tiesa. Y de golpe la bomba te da un tarrayazo. Haces una mueca y te mueres. [...] Yo quisiera morir así. (226)

Sex and death unite once more in Pedro Juan’s retelling of an early morning erotic episode with Agneta: “Bajo hasta su bollo. Lo tieneapestoso, con toda la leche de anoche. Supongo que estoy mamando un cementerio de espermatozoides. [...] Como Saturno: devorando a mis hijos” (170). Here we see how Gutiérrez even uses traces of a sex act that the reader does not witness to evoke the joining of death and sex.<sup>30</sup> The merging images of the two forces in these two examples, combined with the shifts in physical setting that provide the framework for *Animal tropical*, evoke (but do not recreate) Foucault’s ideas of interwoven

---

<sup>30</sup> A similarly themed scene appears in *Carne de perro*, when Pedro Juan tries to clear his head—enigmatically filled with nothingness—by walking along the beach, where he discovers evidence of a recent amorous encounter: “Al pie de otro cocotero había un preservativo usado, repleto de esperma. Mucho semen. Cientos de hormigas se movían nerviosas, excitadas, dentro del condón y en sus alrededores. Bebían, comían, masticaban y tragaban espermatozoides. Cientos de pequeñas hormigas, alegres y divertidas, devoraban los microscópicos cadáveres

heterotopias: eroticism (as escape) and decay (as exit) both represent planes of existence that are situated within, as well as separate from, the “normal” one(s). In his treatise on the phenomenon, Foucault specifies and defines various subcategories of heterotopia: crisis, deviation, function, juxtaposition, temporality, exclusion/inclusion, and universality (24-27). Within these subcategories, he cites the space of the cemetery, attributing to it the principal quality of heterotopia of function, but recognizing its links with other brands of similar spaces (universal, sacred, temporal, etc.). For the purposes of this analysis, Foucault’s selection of the cemetery as heterotopia *par excellence* allows the reader to delve deeper, not only into Pedro Juan’s apparent obsession with death, but also his inexplicable (even to himself) attraction to cemeteries during his stay in Sweden.

A short distance from Agneta’s apartment and visible from her balcony is a small cemetery that calls Pedro Juan’s attention, not merely for its evocations of tranquility, but also as a point of comparison to other traditions of burial grounds:

[H]abitualmente está desierto. Sólo los árboles enormes y antiguos, el césped verde, las tumbas discretas y simples y el silencio y la soledad. Muy diferente de esos cementerios católicos, llenos de lujo absurdo, con mármoles y esculturas y orgullo post mortem, encubriendo la pudrición y la asquerosidad de los cadáveres y los gusanos. (137)

---

de miles de seres humanos” (35).

The protagonist's subsequent elaboration on the antithetic qualities of other cemeteries with which he is familiar serves to emphasize the simplicity and serenity present in this Swedish burial site.<sup>31</sup> He continues: "Me gusta mirar este cementerio tan apacible" (137). He returns over and over to the window or the balcony to observe this site, which he finds soothing. At one point he becomes aware of this effect, and he relates as much to Agneta:

Siempre recurro al cementerio. Es la paz. Desde aquí lo percibo totalmente, y le digo:

—Es muy hermoso ese cementerio.

—¿Te gusta? Creía que detestas la muerte.

—Me atrae y la temo. Paz y sosiego. Serenidad y vacío.

La nada. Al principio uno se aterra ante la nada. [...] Creo que es perfecto. Piedras, tierra, césped, árboles y viento. El equilibrio eterno: tierra, aire, fuego y agua. ¿Tú entiendes, Agnes, cuánto dolor se borra con la muerte y de nuevo renace? El dolor forma parte de nuestro espíritu. Genera el equilibrio. [...] El equilibrio de ese cementerio me maravilla. Me gusta saber que existe y que está ahí. Pero no vivimos en los cementerios ni en la eternidad. Este pedazo de tiempo, o de eternidad, que se llama vida, es brutal, salvaje y doloroso. Y hay que sobrevivir. (215)

---

<sup>31</sup> Although this description refers to a general group of "esos cementerios católicos", any visitor to Havana's Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón will recognize that site as an easy basis for comparison here, given the Colón Cemetery's elaborate monuments for over one million tombs.

This confirmation by Pedro Juan of what the cemetery signifies to him is but a reiteration of another comment he makes earlier regarding his relationship with the site, or human nature's relationship with this unmistakable representation of death: "Eso es lo que somos al principio y al final: polvo y silencio. Pero nos aterra saberlo y entonces metemos mucho ruido y mucha turbulencia en el medio, entre el principio y el final" (157). It is ironic that he make such a statement, given his repeated observations of the overwhelming, suffocating silence and calm that prevails (for him, at least) in Sweden. Perhaps the "nos" to whom he refers here, then, does not represent humans in general, but Cubans in particular, and it is from the Cuban experience and perspective that the protagonist waxes philosophical.<sup>32</sup>

Oddly, there is only one other person in "La amante sueca" who seems even mildly interested in the ambience of cemeteries—a Swedish woman who moonlights as a gravedigger. While dancing with Pedro Juan at a bar, she invites him to visit her there: "Te va a gustar. [...] Es muy antiguo. Hay un bosque de robles muy hermoso. Ve sin apuro y podemos conversar. Te puedo telefonar para que coincidas con un entierro. Es muy bonito" (133). Certainly, it seems peculiar that burials would be a conversation topic on the dance floor, and even more strange that someone would suggest them as the venue of a friendly

---

<sup>32</sup> I have found only one such direct reference to death in the sections of *Animal tropical* set in Havana: Gloria is offered a recordkeeping job in the morgue, but leaves after only two hours: "¡Qué asco, y qué repugnancia y qué morbo! [...] Es como un almacén del horror, como una película de Frankenstein" (262). From the contrasting references found within the same novel, it is evident that for Gloria (or for Cuba) death evokes a very different reaction than the quiet intrigue it produces for Pedro Juan during his stay in Sweden.

encounter. Cemeteries, in Foucault's estimation, are a sort of "strange heterotopia [...] unlike ordinary cultural spaces," for a number of reasons: they have a connection to every individual in society, they are a formerly consecrated space (as part of a church) that has retained vestiges of that sacred nature despite having moved in many cases to a secular place, and they have shifted from occupying a central area in society to a more geographically marginal one as social attitudes and traditions relating to death have evolved over the centuries (25). It would seem that for Gutiérrez, cemeteries (as well as other areas that exist in multiple dimensions, such as prisons and archeological sites) also function as a heterotopia for a different reason, that of "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 25).

In another instance from *Animal tropical*, at the very end of Pedro Juan's stay in Sweden, he visits an archeological site dating nearly three millennia, complete with ruins of a farm and human remains, something like an accidental cemetery. He envisions what their lives, extinguished so long ago, must have been like, imagining their sexual habits, family relations, and awareness of their own mortality. He comments:

[P]ercibí aquel modo de vivir como un destello de luz dentro de mí. Han pasado dos mil setecientos años. Nada. Un soplo en la galaxia. Una milésima de segundo en el universo. Ese instante [...] nos ha bastado para considerarnos muy importantes, decisivos, trascendentes, infinitos. Me gustó aquella granja de la Edad de Hierro. (233)

With this reflection on the part of the protagonist, Gutiérrez closes “La amante sueca,” leaving the reader with one last heterotopia to contemplate before moving forward into “Furia y bolero,” the third and final part in the novel, in which Pedro Juan returns to the jumbled, clamorous space of Havana. This abrupt change is signified not only by the physical movement from one place to another, but by the description of the space itself, depicted as the converse of Sweden’s neatness and calm: “Cuando regresé a La Habana necesité unas cuantas semanas para readaptarme a la cochambre [y] volver a las costumbres primitivas de cagar en una bolsa de papel y lanzarla a la azotea de los vecinos” (237).

Despite having readapted, though, to chaotic Havana, Pedro Juan impulsively moves with his Cuban lover, Gloria, to a house on the beach, far from the city and all that it entails. Once more, he finds himself forced to settle into a new and unfamiliar environment: “Después de toda una vida en Centro Habana me siento un poco extraño aquí con tanto silencio y el viento que viene del mar. [...] Es un lugar saludable y demasiado tranquilo. [...] Necesito tiempo para adaptarme al sosiego y a la serenidad” (292). Finally, though, he finds his new isolation and the silence that it brings to be agreeable, and Gutiérrez ends the novel with his protagonist’s observations: “¿Qué más necesito? No quiero computadoras, ni e-mail, ni Internet, ni quiero que me jodan más. Que me dejen en paz y no me molesten” (294). His precipitous desire for tranquility belies his previous longing for the chaotic space of Havana, and the reader is left unconvinced that his new pastoral residence will be anything more than a temporary escape, especially when considering that only a few days earlier Gloria

comments to Pedro Juan: “Te has podido quedar en veinte países y vivir como las personas. Ah, pues no, tú de atravesao y de bruto, siempre regresas a la cochambre,” to which Pedro Juan responds simply, “No quiero vivir en otro lugar,” referring, of course, to any other place but Havana (284).

### 3.1.2 Prison

In Foucault’s elaboration of heterotopias, he describes what he terms “heterotopias of deviation,” or sites “in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (25), and cites prisons as one of the foremost examples of this type of heterotopia. Indisputably, a prison is a real physical place (unlike some of the other examples of heterotopia listed by Foucault, such as the inverted world contained within a mirror), but prisons possess a number of characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of society, or at least from non-heterotopian society. Primarily, the inhabitants of a prison are maintained separate from (but are not inaccessible to) those on the other side of prison walls. This is true regardless of where the prison is located in regards to the rest of society, since it can be established at a sufficient distance to isolate it from the general population (as is most often the case), or it can be created in the midst of a bustling city.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, while a prison is a functioning and (one could argue) necessary part of society, the prison also

---

<sup>33</sup> Although it was closed in 2002, the example of the Casa de Detenção in the Carandiru Penitentiary Complex, located in the middle of the city of São Paulo, Brazil comes to mind.

contains within its boundaries another society altogether, similar in its hierarchies but at the same time very distinct in its codes of honor.

Gutiérrez refers to prisons and prison-like spaces throughout his narrative, although prisons are never as frequent a motif in his works as is death. In *Animal tropical*, for example, there are several instances in which Pedro Juan makes reference to prisons, sometimes emphasizing the experience of incarceration and at other times underscoring the significance of the site itself. Agneta invites Pedro Juan to accompany her to a prison, where she serves as a volunteer. Upon hearing her request, he comments: “una prisión..., uff, eso es igual que una morgue” (174), thus creating what could be construed as a double reference to heterotopia. He uses one, which is the site of the prison and relates it to another, to the sites linked to death (here, the morgue). Gutiérrez includes a dialogue between Pedro Juan and an inmate at the Swedish prison that connects the space once more to an absence of life:

—No tengo a nadie. Mi mujer se perdió. No recibo visitas.

—¿Nunca? ¿En seis años y medio?

—Nunca. Nadie. Nada. (177)

At another point in *Animal tropical*, Agneta unites all three key heterotopian concepts —pleasure, death, and prison— by assuring Pedro Juan that, if he sleeps with her boss, Agneta will kill them both and throw their bodies off the aforementioned bridge favored by those committing suicide, or (on second thought) have Pedro Juan’s body buried in Sweden’s *Lapland*—“Tierra congelada”—to rot slowly in the cold, “Bien lejos del trópico y de [s]us amigos

supermachos y [s]us amantes negras” (185-86). When Pedro Juan reminds her of what her fate would surely be upon carrying out such a calculated plan —“Jajajá, y tú vas a la cárcel”— Agneta coldly replies, “No me importa. Voy a la cárcel” (186).<sup>34</sup> The three elements of pleasure, death, and prison all combine here to confirm Foucault’s ultimate reflection on heterotopias: that they exist “between two extreme poles,” serving either “to create a space of illusion” or “to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (27). In the case of *Animal tropical*, there are, indeed, “two extreme poles”: Stockholm and Havana; Swedish culture and Cuban culture; Agneta and Gloria; even Agneta and Pedro Juan. Reflections on any physical space between these two poles, whether literal or abstract, are absent from the novel, but the connections that link or even interweave them are the basis of the entire text in “La amante sueca.” In addition, the three elements all constitute obsessions of Pedro Juan, either as something to be avoided (prison) or to be fully achieved, regardless of the consequences (pleasure). Ironically, death is a factor that can unite both of these extremes, given that a prison sentence represents a sort of legal, social, and personal death,

---

<sup>34</sup> Agneta’s threat also appears in *El insaciable hombre araña*, only this time, it is made by Pedro Juan’s mother to her husband’s lover: “Ella trabajaba [...] a una cuadra del río. Un día [...] la sorprendí. La agarré del brazo y le dije: «Vamos conmigo que tenemos que hablar.» [...] Cuando estuvimos en la orilla del río, saqué el puñal y le dije: «No voy a hablar mucho. O dejas tranquilo a mi marido o te voy a partir el corazón a la mitad, y te voy a tirar al río, pa’ que te coman los tiburones. Te voy a desaparecer, cabrona.» (131). It is ironic that two women, both of whom Pedro Juan half respects, half tolerates, would make the same threat and for the same reason. A Freudian reading might explain that Pedro Juan’s attraction to Agneta exists in part because of her similarity to his mother.

and that pleasure is so often associated with death, both within the novel and as an act or event (as in “*la petite mort*”).

The prison motif also runs through *Trilogía sucia*, as in the scene in which Pedro Juan visits Hugo, a friend and former co-worker who had been incarcerated years earlier for attacking a man that repeatedly insulted his family, most of whom had fled Cuba for Miami. Hugo’s horrendous experiences behind bars left him unable to cope with the situation in Havana after his release: “Lo encerraron en una celda muy estrecha con dos negros delincuentes, y no soportó. Acabó de enloquecer. Estuvo días gritando y soltando espuma por la boca, hasta que lo llevaron al manicomio y le metieron el primer corrientazo. Estuvo siete años encerrado, recibiendo electroshocks” (83-84). Pedro Juan finds Hugo’s physical and mental state so distasteful that he decides to never repeat his visits with him, not merely to prevent his friend’s visible agitation upon recounting his experiences in prison and the asylum (yet another of the heterotopias of deviation named by Foucault), but primarily due to Pedro Juan’s self-interested reaction to Hugo’s inability to continue drinking rum with him.

Finally, Gutiérrez’s use of the prison as a motif is especially significant, given that he is a Cuban who lives and writes in Cuba, unlike many other Cuban writers since 1959, who have produced their works from the sorrow and safety of exile, even though many of those works do present Cuba’s situation from that distant vantage point. The idea of Cuba as its own island prison is a recurrent one that can be found in Cuban literature<sup>35</sup> as well as in chronicles of the island’s

---

<sup>35</sup> Although the writers may not always use prison-specific terms to

history and society, given the rigorous regulations that monitor and restrict not only the departure of Cuban citizens from the island, but also many of their activities while still on it. By using the Foucauldian explanations of heterotopias, one can even describe Cuba itself as such, depending on one's perspective of whether Cuba is a representation of "society itself in a perfected form," as early promoters of the Revolution might have depicted it, "or else society turned upside down," as it might be viewed by the exiled Cuban diaspora (Foucault 24).

### 3.1.4 Insanity

As I have mentioned previously, in Foucault's elaboration of heterotopias of deviation, he lists rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons as prime examples, but he also appends that "one should perhaps add retirement homes that are, as it were, on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation since, after all, old age is a crisis, but it is also a deviation since, in our society [...] idleness is a sort of deviation" (25). This distinction is

---

describe their surroundings, the idea of being trapped (legally and officially) within the confines of the island is repeated, especially in the literature that appears after 1959, although the notion emerges before then, as in Virgilio Piñera's 1942 poem "La isla en peso," which makes reference to "La maldita circunstancia de agua por todas partes." Later, the play *La noche de los asesinos* by José Triana, Zoé Valdes's novels *La nada cotidiana* and *Querido primer novio*, as well as the novel *Matarile* by Guillermo Vidal Ortiz, several short stories by Ángel Santiesteban, Leonardo Padura Fuente's "tetralogía," especially *Máscaras* and *Paisaje de otoño*, Abilio Estévez's *Tuyo es el reino* (in which a house with a prison-like interior is even referred to as "la isla") and his play *El enano en la botella*, *La sombra del caminante* by Ena Lucía Portela, many of the works of Reinaldo Arenas (*El portero*, *Termina el desfile*, *Antes que anochezca*, for instance), and finally Alexis Díaz Pimienta's *Prisioneros del agua* all present either explicit or metaphorical references to being in a prison-like space. (A special thanks to my friends and colleagues Diego del Pozo and Elena Adell for

appropriate, but I would argue that the same logic could be applied to the psychiatric hospitals that Foucault lists as belonging only to the list of heterotopias of deviation: it is evident that individuals who are committed by others or by themselves to being kept separate from the rest of society exist in a heterotopia of deviation, since their views or behaviors indeed deviate from what is considered “normal” by society; however, their space is also one of the heterotopias of crisis, characterized by Foucault as “privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (24). It follows, then, that if we can define the physical space in which psychiatric patients exist as a critical space, their mental state also represents a crisis, albeit not a physical one. In addition, if (as I suggest earlier in this chapter) these spaces or places are not merely physical, but also planes or situations, then we can categorize insanity itself as a variety of heterotopia.

Insanity—in particular, a deep-seated fear of insanity—emerges as a recurrent theme in Gutiérrez’s narrative. So frequent are the references, in fact, that in an interview with Gutiérrez I posed the question of whether he feared losing his sanity, since lunacy itself appears almost as a leitmotif in his works. He replied: “Sí, muchas veces en mi vida he tenido miedo de enloquecer, de perder la cordura totalmente y también miedo al suicidio. Por eso ahora estoy en una etapa de autocontrol a ver si no sigo avanzando hacia el caos total. [...] En fin, que es preferible durar unos años más con salud y no seguir en medio de tanta

---

suggesting nearly all of the works on this list.)

confusión” (Appendix B). Gutiérrez’s response is not surprising, given his proclivity for reflecting on the potential causes or possible consequences of mental illness, whether it is he or someone else who is affected by the condition.

For instance, in *Carne de perro*, Pedro Juan confides in the reader:

“Siento la locura cerca. El pánico. Hay momentos de lucidez máxima. Si llegas a ese punto te puedes volver loco porque ya no hay más respuestas. Es como llegar al final del camino y saber que no puedes avanzar ni un paso más. Y retroceder es imposible” (30). Here, sanity is viewed as a linear—or perhaps even chronological—phenomenon, one with boundaries that must be heeded, else there will be repercussions. In this way, (in)sanity is devised as a distinct space, separate from others, with recognizable parameters, much like the heterotopian spaces mentioned earlier in this chapter, or even like Cuba itself.

Sanity, or the absence of it, is often associated with artistic production, which can explain Pedro Juan’s (and other characters’) visceral need to write, sing, perform, or exercise creativity in some other way.<sup>36</sup> In *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan receives a visit from an admirer of his works: Yésika, a Cuban woman who married an Italian and left Cuba. When she asks him about his wife and comments on how she would like to be the wife of a writer, an artist, a poet, Pedro Juan responds: “Es muy difícil. [...] Un artista siempre está a punto de volverse loco” (60). With this statement, Pedro Juan acknowledges his own precarious position as someone who relies on artistic production—whether the

---

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 5, “Intertextualities/Literature/Act of Writing,” for more on literary production as a means of survival.

fabrication of alternative realities or the verisimilar representation of his own reality—to maintain his sanity.

In *Trilogía sucia* appears a chapter entitled “Yo claustrofóbico,” in which Pedro Juan comments on his personal circumstances at the beginning of the Special Period: “Tenía tres opciones: o me endurecía, o me volvía loco, o me suicidaba. Así que era fácil decidir: tenía que endurecerme” (29). Later in *Trilogía*, in a chapter with the appropriate title of “En busca de la paz interior,” he relates the similar attitude of a friend: “Fue en el verano del 94. Hacía cuatro años que había mucha hambre y una gran locura en mi país, pero La Habana era la que más sufría. Un amigo siempre me decía: «Pedro Juan, la única forma de vivir aquí es loco, borracho o dormido.»” (35-36). It is likely that these despairing pronouncements reveal more about the onerous conditions in Havana during the 1990s than about Pedro Juan as a protagonist or Gutiérrez as his creator, but even so, it is significant that a definitive retreat into insanity is signaled as one of the few mechanisms of survival for these characters.

Likewise, in *Animal tropical*, a santera reveals her insight to Pedro Juan: “¿Usted piensa mucho, hijo? [...] Usted piensa pero con preocupaciones. A veces usted cree que se va a volver loco” (80). Later, he experiences a sensation while in Stockholm that recalls the same sentiment: “[S]obre mí aleteó la sensación de locura. A veces me sorprende y revolotea a mi alrededor. ¿Algún día puedo enloquecer? Me aterra pensarlo. Pero es así. La idea me angustia de un modo terrible y me desordena. Todo se desequilibra dentro de mí. Me da un deseo irrefrenable de salir corriendo a campo traviesa, gritando” (136). The recurrence

of this sensation, despite Pedro Juan's having moved into a different environment, indicates that his fear of entering the space of insanity is not linked—at least not solely—to the Cuban context. Instead, regardless of the physical place in which he finds himself, it has become a part of his psyche, although it is unclear whether the part affected is his psyche as a man, a writer, a Cuban, or all of those factors combined.

The intersections of the spaces evoked by Gutiérrez's frequent references to death and events or conditions related to it, prisons (literal and figurative), and the fear inspired by losing one's sanity serve to illustrate Foucault's emphasis on simultaneity and juxtaposition. By utilizing spaces and circumstances such as those mentioned in this chapter, together with their heterotopian depictions, Gutiérrez constructs a multifaceted image of Cuban reality, despite the fact that several of those spaces exist outside the boundaries of Havana or even of Cuba, since the lens through which the reader experiences them is the (very Cuban) perception of the protagonist/author.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**PERSPECTIVES: RELIGION**

*Paradise is all around us. This is not so much a  
theological statement as an observation on a  
contemporary preoccupation of literature.*  
—Helen

Wilcox

**4.1 Religion as utopia**

One could easily suggest that no other force shapes individual and social identity to the same degree as any society's Truths and the respective religions that reflect them. Religious beliefs and their often rigid authority over the lives of believers can shape the cosmovisions of the present, attitudes toward the events of the past, and expectations for what the future holds. Rare is the secular polemic that could divide a country—the issues that win elections, sway public opinions, or provoke civil wars are usually contentious as a direct result of their religious (moral) significance. As Matibag suggests, a primary function of religion is the way it “gives a sense of meaning to its believers [and] unites them into a community [by] rechannel[ing] or sublimat[ing] instinctual drives into socially acceptable form” (7). It is often the strongest common element that joins members of a society, and when that element meets opposition—whether originating from another society or from within the same one—the friction that results can be socially destructive.

One example of religion's tight hold over the public discourse of a segment of contemporary society can be found in an ideological clash in my home state of Georgia in 2004. That year, public school districts in Cobb County elected to place disclaimer stickers on all biology textbooks in which the topic of evolution appeared as a feasible explanation for the development of living beings. This controversial action, which drew the attention of news media and bloggers from across the nation and beyond, was a response to fundamentalist Christian parents who objected to the inclusion of evolution in science classes, in which discussions of alternative (religious) theories were absent. These parents claimed that science had reached the status of a secular religion for its believers, complete with dogma and projections for the future, and a faulty one, at that.<sup>37</sup> This incident illustrates how the long reach of religious beliefs can shape all aspects of believers' lives and worldviews, even those aspects that (seem to) have little connection with the religion itself.

In much the same way that the Cobb County parents equated believers in science to believers in religion, one could also liken many people holding religious beliefs to believers in utopia, despite the connotation of naïveté often associated with the latter. For many, their religion is utopia, or at least represents it, and there is no feasible entrance to this unknown reality save obeying the religious directives which they hold to be true. Christianity, the predominant

---

<sup>37</sup> Regarding the evolution/creationism clash, the Christian evangelist Jimmy Swaggart has been quoted as saying, "Evolution is a bankrupt speculative philosophy, not a scientific fact. Only a spiritually bankrupt society could ever believe it. [...] Only atheists could accept this satanic theory" ("Know Your Enemy").

religion of Western civilization, centers upon various tenets, among them the acceptance of Christ as the son of God and living to please Christ and his divine father in order to enter heaven in the afterlife—in other words, working and sacrificing in the present for the future attainment of a type of utopia. The Christian heaven is often described as having mansions in the sky or streets paved with gold, a realm in which the individual's earthly good deeds and sacrifices are duly rewarded. In this way, the Christian utopia represents not merely a manifestation of poetic/divine justice, but also a persistent optimism reflected in the faith of believers that this perfect utopian future awaits them, regardless of the trials and despairs of the present.

The (popular) utopian ideal of Christian heaven has shifted over the centuries, reflecting the changes that have occurred within the various social realities that shape it. Initially heaven is associated with a physical place, or “paradise”: it “was seen, like the Garden of Eden, as a place of fertility and harmony, where humanity dwelt in peace with nature and ‘walked with God.’” (McGrath 43). H. S. Benjamins points out variations in interpretation of the term: “‘paradise’ is used in a wide variety of meanings. ‘Paradise’ refers, of course, to the Garden of Eden, but may also point to the Kingdom of God, Heaven, or the place where the blessed souls await their entrance into a higher heaven of supreme glory” (153).<sup>38</sup> This view begins to shift over the centuries, changing in

---

<sup>38</sup> To understand the evolution of the term, “paradise,” McGrath expounds on early views of paradise as it appears in ancient times: “It is in the Old Testament that we are first introduced to the idea of ‘paradise.’ The word itself has been borrowed from other languages of the ancient Near East, including the Old Persian word *paradeida*, which probably designates ‘an enclosed garden’ or

the times of early Christianity from a literal place which can be physically entered to a spiritual state. McGrath tells us that St. Augustine's description of heaven focuses more on the absence of thirst, hunger, pain, and suffering than on geography: "Humanity [...] lived in the enjoyment of God, living without any want. [...] There was no sadness, nor any foolish joy, for true gladness flowed ceaselessly from the presence of God" (52). Through the centuries, though, the representation of heaven shifted from that of a perfect garden and harmony with nature to an image with a more human focus: McDannell and Lang reveal that by the Middle Ages "an urban revival throughout Europe inspired religious writers to describe heaven no longer as a paradise garden but as a city, as the new Jerusalem" (69).<sup>39</sup> During the Reformation, central figures like Calvin and Luther held that the essence of heaven was a dissolution of social classes or hierarchies

---

perhaps 'a royal park.' The Greek word *paradeisos*—borrowed from the Persian original—is often used in the writings of historians such as Xenophon to refer to the great walled gardens of the royal palaces of Persian kings such as Cyrus. The original 'garden of Eden' (Genesis 2) is referred to as 'paradise' in Greek translations of the Old Testament; the term is also used at several points in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The word 'Eden' itself may derive from the Sumerian word *edinu* ('plain'). It is possible that a traditional Mesopotamian image of 'the king as gardener' may underlie some of the themes in this passage, and be taken up and developed in new directions in the New Testament" (43).

<sup>39</sup> McDannell and Lang also elaborate an explanation for the emergence of the heaven-as-city: "Accounts of the other world resonate with descriptions of golden streets, jewelled buildings, and richly dressed residents. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the reality of medieval urban life, with its narrow and darkened streets, drafty castles, and coarsely dressed inhabitants, the celestial city assumed its place in Christian notions of heaven" (108).

of any sort, thus erasing any authority in paradise except that held by God himself (McDannell and Lang 154-155).<sup>40</sup>

With these observations, it is clear that the varied Christian perceptions of paradise (which dominated Western civilization until recent technological developments made travel and immigration—phenomena which contribute to a multi-faceted cosmovision—much more feasible) have shifted through the centuries to adapt to human beings' changing views of the world, the society in which they live, and—most of all—themselves. It is only in the last few centuries that the idea of paradise (used here as a manifestation of utopia) have shifted from images of a heavenly (and heretofore unimaginable) reality to optimistic plans for society here on earth. If nothing else, the very idea of heaven as a paradise serves as a source of consolation for believers—perhaps merely a pleasing thought for some, but a necessary coping mechanism for others. As an example of the necessity of a belief in paradise, McGrath cites both William Langley's 14<sup>th</sup> century work, *Piers Plowman*, which demonstrates a vision of a perfect heaven that served as an escape from the “war-ravaged, plague-ridden, and politically corrupt England” where the author lived, as well as the many Afro-American spirituals from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “a powerful and deeply moving witness to the intense consolation derived from dreaming and singing of a better life, which served both as an emotional compensation for present sufferings and grievances,

---

<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note that this assumption about the absence of authority was viewed as a natural step to the conjecture that there would be no marriage in heaven, since the contemporary view of marriage held that it was a relationship of control and obedience, nor children, since they require authority figures to care for them (McDannell and Lang 155).

and a stimulus to hope for the future” (137-138). It stands to reason, then, that a similar need for solace would also exist among Cubans, given their country’s tumultuous history, especially in times of difficult circumstances.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Importance of santería/espiritismo in Cuba

The various ethnic blendings in the Caribbean have left their mark on music, food, language, and a myriad of other representations of the range of cultures that exists there, with religion being one of the most visible areas. Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert explain the origins of Caribbean syncretism:

Caribbean peoples fashioned a heterogeneous system of belief out of the cacophony of practices and traditions that came forcibly together in colonial society: the various religious and healing traditions represented by the extensive slave population brought to the New World through the Middle Passage; Spanish, French, and Portuguese variants of Catholicism; the myriad strands of Protestantism brought to the English and Dutch colonies; and remnants of Amerindian animistic practices.

---

<sup>41</sup> Silvia Pedraza explains that Cuba’s Special Period “constituted not only an economic crisis but also a crisis of disbelief. Cubans on the island began to feel that their leaders were less than capable and the promise of a future Communist society with a decent life for all faded. Little by little, they began going to churches—not only the Catholic church but also the many Protestant churches, the Afro-Cuban *santería* cults, the Jewish synagogues” (483). With this, we see that these religions’ promises of a future reward evidently appealed to the Cubans who were withstanding the shortages and frustrations of 1990s Cuba.

These creolized religious systems, developed in secrecy, were frequently outlawed by the colonizers because they posed a challenge to official Christian practices and were believed to be associated with magic and sorcery. They nonetheless allowed the most oppressed sectors of colonial Caribbean societies to manifest their spirituality, express cultural and political practices suppressed by colonial force, and protect the health of the community. These complex systems developed in symbiotic relationships to the social, linguistic, religious, and natural environments of the various islands of the Caribbean, taking their form and characteristics from the subtle blends and clashes between different cultural, political, and spiritual practices. (*Creole Religions* 2-3)

Although African and European (Spanish) traditions are not the only ones to contribute to Cuba's rich religious mixture—the tale of the Bahía Virgin's discovery by the “Three Juans,” Juan Indio, Juan Esclavo, and Juan Criollo, attests to the presence of other factors—Africa and Europe have left the most easily discernible influences, visible in major Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería and Palo Monte. The reconciliation of the diverse belief systems, or syncretism, described by Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert as “the active transformation through renegotiation, reorganization, and redefinition of clashing belief systems” (*Creole Religions* 7), is one of the defining cultural characteristics of the region. Cuba's heterogeneous reality reflects this phenomenon as well as or perhaps even better than any other Caribbean country, with many religious

symbols and customs that have become so ingrained in the consciousness that they have gained a seemingly secular cultural importance.<sup>42</sup> Matibag explains:

Studies in cultural anthropology and folklore have revealed that religion functions as the central, binding force of Afro-Cuban culture. Yet “religion” in the normative Western sense of the term does not do justice to the complex system of systems that is Afro-Cuban religion, a comprehensive system that syncretizes, articulates, and reproduces extensive orders of knowledge in the areas of psychotherapy, pharmacology, art, music, magic, and narrative. (7)

If, as Matibag suggests, Afro-Cuban religions, or this melding of African beliefs and Catholicism, have had (and continue to have) such a sweeping effect on so many spheres of Cuban life, then I believe it essential to point out a significant detail regarding the birth of these syncretic religions in particular: that they were not the result of an intentional attempt to merge these different viewpoints—in fact, had there been any other possibility, given the circumstances, it is likely that

---

<sup>42</sup> Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert elaborate on the origin and implications of the concept: “It is significant to note that the term ‘syncretism’ first appeared in Plutarch’s *Moralia* in reference to the behavior of the Cretan peoples who ‘mixed together,’ came to accord, or closed ranks when confronted by a mutual enemy. The term was later used to describe an integration of two or more separate beliefs into a new religion” (*Creole Religions* 7-8). Schmidt offers a more critical perspective of the term: “Can [...] Afro-Caribbean religious traditions be called syncretistic? The word syncretism has negative connotation; it is also too simple to embody the full meaning of the creation process [...]. The idea of syncretism would indicate that these religions were formed by mixing the dominant Catholicism with suppressed African traditions during the time of slavery. Hence, using the term syncretism would give a pejorative undertone to African traditions which does not appear to be true to reality” (236).

this unique religious mixing that has come to define so many aspects of Cuban culture would not have taken place. With this in mind I refer to Brandon:

The Catholic Church was not able to implement on the plantations the kind of guided culture change, eventuating in syncretism, which it was able to produce elsewhere. Moreover, there is little to indicate that the masses of African plantation slaves had any great craving for Christianity such that they would have created this syncretism themselves before emancipation. (61)

Brandon's observation notwithstanding, the historical and social conditions in Cuba were precisely what provided the impulse for and sustenance of Afro-Cuban syncretic religions. In the following pages, I will focus primarily on two of these religious systems, *santería* and *espiritismo*, since these are the most significant forms of expression found in Gutiérrez's works.

Probably the most widely recognized of the Caribbean syncretic religions, *santería* occupies an important part of the Cuban consciousness. It is only fitting, then, that Gutiérrez should include numerous references to it throughout his works, not merely as advancements of plot but also as factors in character development, particularly that of his preferred protagonist, Pedro Juan. Along with several other Caribbean syncretic religions, *santería* is based on the merging of the *santos*, or (white) Catholic saints, with *orishas*, or (black) African deities brought through the Middle Passage by the West African men, women, and children destined for slavery in the Caribbean colonies, and has been described as a "process of accommodation, preservation, and resistance" (Fernández Olmos

and Paravisini-Gebert, *Sacred Possessions* 5).<sup>43</sup> Murphy reveals how these people, once in Cuba, found themselves obligated to create “multiple levels of discourse to organize their heterogeneous religious experience, referring, in more public and secular contexts, to the Yoruba orishas by the Spanish word *santos*. Alerted to the energetic devotions to these *santos* practiced by Afro-Cubans, outsiders labeled their religion *santería*, ‘the way of the saints’” (81).<sup>44</sup>

Despite periods of harsh oppression as well as ongoing prejudices, *santería* has survived as one of the most visible and widespread expressions of Afro-Cuban culture since its formation. Prior to the abolition of slavery, Afro-Cubans (who were not referred to or viewed as such until much later) were not considered as a source of valuable cultural contribution, but merely as an economic resource, acknowledged only for its utility in labor (Bastide 1). As a result of this viewpoint, belief in *santería* was often scorned; ironically, many figures who belonged to the white oligarchy also turned to *santeros* in dire times, and even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern Western medical establishments “functioned alongside Yoruba [...] healers and diviners, and stethoscopes, divining chains and magical instruments could all be found among the diagnostic tools available to the Cuban

---

<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note here that the deities that survived the enslavement and oppression of their believers are predominantly Yoruba, even though the enslaved Africans belonged to various ethnic nations, not just the Yoruba.

<sup>44</sup> The term itself, “*santería*,” is said to have demeaning origins, since it derives from Spanish and implies a devotion/obsession to saints. For this reason, many believers prefer the term “La Regla de Ocha,” or the Rule of the Orisha, the Yoruba deities (Robinson).

people” (Marks 228).<sup>45</sup> In spite of the popular interest (and even faith) in these practices, it was not uncommon for groups of practitioners, caught *in flagrante* while performing rites of santería, to be punished and even imprisoned for participating in “sorcery” or possessing the practice’s “dirty objects,” such as feathers or corn (Wedel 31).

Espiritismo, a younger belief system, shares many of santería’s core beliefs but incorporates more North American and European cultural influences, in particular those from the mid-19th century.<sup>46</sup> Although Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg established the central tenets of spiritualism in the mid-1700’s, it stagnated until a century later, when French engineer Hippolyte Rivail, who published his writings under the *nom de plume* Allan Kardec, crafted a variant of spiritualism that consisted of a “combination of scientism and progressivist ideology with Christian moral teachings and personal mysticism” (Brandon 86). Around the same time period, a North American family in New

---

<sup>45</sup> The reliance, even when given other alternatives, on Afro-Cuban religious healing practices is not surprising when one considers that for a long period of time, those same practices existed in the absence of any more modern procedures. In *Cimarrón: Historia de un esclavo*, Esteban Montejo, a runaway slave, narrates his recollections of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to writer and ethnologist Miguel Barnet. Regarding the importance of Afro-Cuban practices in medicine, he recounts: “En aquellos tiempos no existían grandes medicinas. Los médicos no se veían por ningún lugar. Eran las enfermeras medio brujeras las que curaban con remedios caseros. A veces curaban enfermedades que los médicos no entendían. Porque el problema no está en tocarlo a uno y pincharle la lengua; lo que hay que hacer es tener confianza en las yerbas, que son la madre de la medicina. El africano de allá, del otro lado del charco, no se enferma nunca, porque tiene todas las yerbas en sus manos” (45).

<sup>46</sup> In this dissertation, I discuss Espiritismo only as a phenomenon within a larger group of syncretic religious beliefs in Cuba. I should acknowledge here that Espiritismo is a category unto itself, within which other variants exist.

York state made public their interactions with the spirit of a murder victim (Chaudhuri). Borne of these incidents, the movement of spiritualism, or “the belief in the ability of the living to communicate with the dead in and through such practices as table rappings, levitations, and trances by personas called ‘mediums’ (mediators through whom communications are supposedly transmitted to the living from the spirits of the dead, a process also referred to as ‘channeling’)” rapidly gained popularity through the United States and Europe, reaching as many as two million followers in only two years (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions*, 172). According to Catherine Yronwode, some of the most radical issues of the time, such as women’s suffrage and the abolition of slavery, were taken up by the practitioners of espiritismo, which may have also made the beliefs more attractive to those who were ready to embrace a belief system based on progressive, rational ideas.

Espiritismo made its way to the Caribbean via literature from Spain and immediately created conflict with existing belief systems on the islands: “The belief that people could communicate with spirits of the dead flew directly in the face of teachings of the Catholic Church, and the idea that people could communicate directly with God or the saints without a priest was clearly heretical” (Brandon 86). Nevertheless, espiritismo rapidly attracted the attention of many Cubans for various reasons, ranging from a long-simmering resentment toward the Church, to political leanings toward independence (which, in turn, signified distancing oneself from the Church, inextricably linked to Spain and

Spanish control over the island), to a genuine religious openness toward progressive thinking (Brandon 86).<sup>47</sup>

One common variant of espiritismo is *espiritismo cruza'o*, or “crossed spiritualism,” in which components of Catholicism, Allan Kardec’s spiritualism, and core beliefs of the African religions introduced by slaves are all fused, or “cruza’o.” Daisy Rubiera Castillo explains:

The central nucleus [of *espiritismo cruza'o*] is the belief in the impact—or lack thereof—of the spirits of ancestors in the development of the earthly life of human beings if these don’t fulfil the ceremonies necessary for the eternal rest of the deceased in the afterlife. It is one of the forms in which homage is rendered to the dead, an expression of the dissoluble link between the invisible and visible worlds, where the former occupies the determining role, considered sacred to followers. (175n)

---

<sup>47</sup> It has been suggested that Espiritismo enjoyed wider acceptance for various other reasons, as well: “The printed works of Kardec and Soler [Amalia Soler, a promoter of Espiritismo in Spain] marked Espiritismo as a white literate tradition like Catholicism and unlike Santería. In other ways Espiritismo was both similar and different from Santería. Espiritistas made fine distinctions within the world of the dead which Santería did not make and generalized those which it did. Espiritismo threatened to creep into every crevice vacated by the ancestral dead, but it did not give lineal ancestors an exalted and powerful place. Even though Espiritismo had saints, they were different. In Espiritismo the saints were pure and remote and not at the ready call of the medium; instead, mediums relied on a variety of lesser and more accessible spirits. As a result the spirit guides and angel guardians of Espiritismo were lumped together with the saints or orisha; in turn the saints or orisha assumed new roles as protectors, spirit guides, and guardian angels” (Brandon 88).

Both of the primary religions mentioned here—santería and espiritismo—emphasize connections between the human realm and another, more supernatural one, transcending both space and time. In the pages that follow, I will examine the appearance of religious beliefs, particularly elements of santería and espiritismo, in the narrative of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. Of specific interest to this chapter is the demonstration of some religious beliefs as what Cultural Materialist Raymond Williams has termed “the residual”:<sup>48</sup>

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only [...] as an element of the past but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. (122)

Williams’ idea establishes the link between present-day manifestations of culture and the conditions rooted in the past that yielded those cultural aspects. Because santería and espiritismo are so strongly centered in Cuba’s history, despite any official discourse that may have attempted to vanquish or at least debilitate them, they both also fall squarely under the category of “the residual” (that is, if one considers religious expression to be a cultural process).

---

<sup>48</sup> According to Jon Marcoux, “Cultural Materialism is a theoretical paradigm that stresses the empirical study of sociocultural systems within a materialist infrastructure-structure-superstructure framework.”

#### 4.1.2 Religions in Gutiérrez's works

In *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan describes an encounter with a young man he meets at a party, “uno de esos mariconcitos” (31), who initiates a conversation that turns to religion: “Hablando con el tipo descubro que somos vecinos. Vivimos a dos cuadras, en Centro Habana. Y no sé cómo empezamos a hablar de santería. «Tú eres hijo de Changó, pero tu madre es Ochún», me dijo. Y por ahí seguimos hablando” (32). The topic leads to what the young man does for a living—“Pico muertos”—and Pedro Juan is simultaneously disgusted and intrigued, wanting to know more; he explains: “Mi pasatiempo preferido es chupar sangre ajena” (32). Pedro Juan’s anxious response amuses the young man, who tells him: “Todos los hijos de Changó son como niños. Se hacen los machitos y los mujeriegos, pero le tienen miedo a los muertos, a los cementerios, al monte, a la noche. Todo les da miedo” (32). The man’s comment could be interpreted as a jibe intended to taunt Pedro Juan, since in this book (as well as all the others in which he appears) *macho* and *mujeriego* are two terms that suit him perfectly, but the comment comes across to the reader more as a sincere observation of a genuine belief in the characteristics of Changó’s children.

The issue of Pedro Juan’s religious parentage also appears in the *Trilogía sucia*. He finds himself famished and on the streets after being viciously beaten by a jealous lover. An elderly woman offers him some of her meager rations and, upon making eye contact with Pedro Juan, scolds him for allowing himself to fall in such a state (“apaleado, sucio, barbudo y desesperado”):

—¿Por qué estás así? Tú eres hijo de Changó.

—Y de Ochún también.

—Sí, pero Changó es tu padre y Ochún tu madre. Rézales, hijo, y pídeles. Ellos no te van a dejar abandonado. (59-60)

It is interesting to note that, while Pedro Juan never reveals any doubt regarding his connections with Changó and Oshún, he sporadically acknowledges that he neglects his spiritual obligations: “Yo tenía medio abandonados a los santos” (26). In this instance, though, he neither admits his neglectful attitude nor does anything to strengthen that relationship and placate the deities or *muertos* that accompany him, despite the dire circumstances in which he finds himself.

One incident in *El insaciable hombre araña* serves to emphasize the links between religion, community, and geography. Two women appear at Pedro Juan’s door, Bibles in hand, making their rounds to evangelize his neighborhood, and ask him: “¿Usted nos permitiría hablarle un momento sobre la existencia de Dios y su bondad divina?” to which he immediately responds with an invitation to enter (85). It is significant to note here, however, that his unexpected willingness (even eagerness) to converse with the women has less to do with metaphysical curiosities on his part than with the fact that they are women, despite their virtuous intentions; he observes: “[Una] era una mulata de unos treinta y pico o cuarenta años. Muy interesante. A pesar de la blusa recatada y amplia, se le notaban muy buenas tetas. No las podía disimular. Tenía una boca gruesa y una mirada seductora. Casi lasciva. Casi” (85). Nevertheless, despite Pedro Juan’s warm reception of the *predicadoras*, he is aware from the beginning that their

visit is in vain, whether their (presumably Protestant) attempts to evangelize are directed toward him or to his neighbors, and he makes as much clear to the reader: “Predicaban. Lo hacen mucho en este barrio diabólico. Van de puerta en puerta, pero aquí todos venimos de África. Y por tanto se practica la santería” (84).

This comment by Pedro Juan is significant on more than one level: he recognizes the futility of the women’s visit, since the population of the neighborhood evidently has its own belief system, already firmly ensconced and difficult to sway. He also associates three key terms or concepts in his observation: African heritage, santería, and that which is *diabólico* are all linked here. The link between Africa and santería is an obvious and well-documented one, but his use of *diabólico* to describe his neighborhood is unexpected, particularly since he includes himself in the group by employing a verb in the first person (“**venimos** de África”). The “diabolical” description certainly could reflect centuries of official discourse in Cuba, in which the practice of santería often met with fierce opposition from the authorities, which (purportedly) was justifiable on the basis of religious or moral reasons, but was probably little more than a flimsy cloak for legalized racism. As is often the case when a religious, social, or political movement encounters such antagonism and must shift to an (at least partially) underground existence, the movement’s creeds or practices are strengthened by the resistance, and Cuba’s religious history illustrates this phenomenon over and over.<sup>49</sup> Despite any anti-religious stance (official or

---

<sup>49</sup> It is important to recognize that the religions mentioned here—santería and espiritismo (cruza’o)—are Afro-Cuban religions, and therefore the efforts to undermine or prohibit them can also be interpreted as attempts to weaken the

social), it is clear that the dominant set of religious beliefs in Pedro Juan's neighborhood is evidence of Williams' "residual," given that the practice of African religious traditions is generally not observed as a commemoration of historical events (which would otherwise classify the practice—from Williams' perspective—as "archaic" rather than "residual") (121-122).

Because of santería's dependence on elders' passing down rites and beliefs via the oral tradition, the reliance on believers' family members and especially (dead) ancestors is strong. Within the episode of the *predicadoras* at Pedro Juan's door lies a demonstration of this link, as Pedro Juan recounts a typical exchange between the evangelizers and his neighbors:

Cuando las predicadoras preguntan: «¿Usted cree en Dios?», la respuesta usual es: «Sí, pero aquí tenemos nuestra religión. Y ésta es la de verdad, porque todo esto me lo dejó mi abuela que...» Los

---

position of Afro-Cubans in society. This is particularly significant, since these individuals generally were not viewed as Cubans, but simply as *negros*. As far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Cuban authorities banned activities of Afro-Cuban religious groups. Noted anthropologist Fernando Ortiz explains: "Members were forbidden to parade in the streets and prohibited from meeting within the city walls. The more overtly African dances and dirges were no longer allowed at funerals" (qtd. in Ayorinde 26). In the next century, the governor of Cienfuegos requested the prohibition of *toques de tambor*, since the drums facilitated conspiratorial activities (Ayorinde 28). The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the demonization of *brujería*, an expansive category which included several types of religious traditions, including santería and espiritismo. Although the latter was initially practiced by learned whites, it was also embraced by blacks and eventually was considered to be *brujería*, since it was incorporated into healing practices (Román). Ayorinde explains: "The suppression of Afro-Cuban practices could be justified only by asserting that they impelled practitioners to commit crimes. [...] All Afro-Cuban religious practices were associated with criminality, a view that persists even today" (49).

predicadoras piden disculpas humildemente, se retiran, tocan en la próxima puerta y se repite la escena. Así hasta el infinito. (84)

Not only does the response of his neighbors reflect a typical reticence on the part of believers (in anything) toward the possibility of shifting their presently held beliefs, but it also emphasizes the link between believers and their family members of previous generations. Certainly, religion is not necessary for the existence of a strong link between an individual and his/her family or history, but when the religion is transmitted through those family members and requires great efforts on the part of the believer to honor the ancestors as well as the beliefs that they passed down, the emphasis on family—a vital element in santería—becomes apparent.

Surprisingly, the references to evangelical Christians in Gutiérrez's narrative are nearly as frequent as the allusions to Afro-Cuban religions. In *Trilogía sucia*, Pedro Juan recounts a sudden encounter with a zealous neighbor who underwent a radical transformation: “En un par de años ha sido sucesivamente la negra más pobre, cochina y apestosa de todo este barrio. De ahí se metió a jinetera de lujo, con perfumes chillones y vestidos de mucho brillo, blancos y rojos. Ahora es esclava de Jehová. Lo dejó todo para predicar. Anda con unos espejuelos gruesos, una Biblia y unas ropas muy recatadas, de colores discretos” (105). Pedro Juan generally avoids the neighbor, but in this instance she spots him and exclaims:

«Hermano, ¿tú sabes leer la Biblia? Hay un Salmo que quisiera comentar contigo. Es el 51, que dice: “Ten piedad de mí, oh, Dios,

conforme a tu misericordia; conforme a la multitud de tus piedades borra mis rebeliones. Lávame más y más de mi maldad. Y límpiame de mi pecado.” ¿Sabes por qué David hace esta plegaria pidiendo purificación? ¿No lo sabes? Seguramente nunca lo has pensado». (105)

Later in *Trilogía sucia*, Pedro Juan and a companion encounter a group of young, brawny Mexican men, “con gruesas cadenas y pulsas de oro” in a Cuban pizzeria that accepts only dollars. The Mexicans are in Cuba to spread the gospel, and they tell Pedro Juan and his friend:

Oramos para que muchos puedan cruzar con nosotros por las puertas de Dios. [...] Esta mañana un muchacho quería vendernos algo en la calle. Y nosotros le contestamos que no. Predicamos la palabra de Dios, le dijimos. Y otro que estaba cerca vino a nosotros y nos invitó a su iglesia. Por cierto, no es una iglesia. Es una casa de familia donde celebran el culto. Y allí mismo, ante nosotros, dos personas rompieron sus collares de santería y nos dijeron que estaban confundidos por el demonio y se arrepintieron de adorar imágenes. [...] El demonio se ha ensañado en esta tierra y necesitan a Dios. Hay que mostrarles el camino. (177)

Pedro Juan’s disdain for the evangelicals is apparent, even though he refrains from criticizing them, their religion, or their enthusiasm in both cases. Instead, the descriptions of the neighbor and the Mexican men both seem to reveal what could be viewed as mere caprice or even hypocrisy on their parts, given that the

neighbor went from a sullied, miserable existence to that of a more comfortable streetwalker, at which point she became a modest, staid devotee of Christ, while the Mexican men, evidently healthy and well-fed, travel to Cuba to sermonize about “cults” to a half-starving public, while they eat pizzas in an air-conditioned dollar restaurant, their heavy gold jewelry jingling as they witness to their fellow patrons.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is a predictable characteristic of human nature that people turn to religion when their personal circumstances become difficult to bear (as in the spike in religious interest during the Special Period). In *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan recalls an episode in which he tries to carry out an interview with an elderly man who survived a Pacific typhoon, decades earlier, so that he can produce a sensationalist (and therefore popular) article. Although Pedro Juan repeatedly asks for details about the typhoon, the old man’s line of thought diverges over and over until the interview becomes impossible. One of his tangents focuses on the ship’s crew’s reaction to the storm:

—[...] ¿y el barco podía zozobrar?

—Claro. Ése era el problema. Todos los marinos empezaron a sacar santos y velas y resguardos, y collares de santería. Y arrodillados, rezando, encendiendo velas a las once mil vírgenes. Casi todos tenían los santos escondidos.

—Pero eso es lógico. En una situación así...

—¡No, no, compañero, eso estaba prohibido! Nada de religión.

¡La religión estaba prohibida, compañero! (146-147)

The old man's tale reveals an important truth about the role of religion—in this case, santería—as a consoling entity when the individual encounters a perilous situation, as well as one's willingness to believe, despite any official discourses that aim to disprove or even prohibit one's beliefs. Although the religious paraphernalia had not been visible previously, they were present on the ship; it was only when the crew was faced with death that the items were brought out from their hiding places to be used as talismans against the unknown. The story demonstrates the real nature of the crew's beliefs in santería: believers hid their faith until it became (in their view, at least) the only force that could keep them alive.

Less connected with established religious beliefs, espiritismo also pervades much of Cuban life and has a strong presence in Gutiérrez's novels. In *Carne de perro*, after a particularly energetic afternoon in bed with Miriam, one of his lovers, Pedro Juan has an unsettling experience with a spirit that appears only to Miriam and leaves a message with her:

Miriam, un poco asombrada, mira hacia la puerta y me pregunta:

—¿Viste eso?

—¿Qué?

—Una mujer con un vestido negro que se iba. ¿No la viste?

Me quedo paralizado. Esas cosas me aterran y tengo la cabrona suerte de que siempre me tocan mujeres que ven espíritus y

muertos por todos lados. Miriam se levanta rápidamente y va hasta la puerta del cuarto. Mira en el pasillo y regresa:

—¿Qué era, Miriam?

—El *Ánima Sola*. Siempre viene en sueños, pero cuando me desperté la vi que salía de la habitación.

—¡Cojones! ¡Mira cómo me erizo! ¿Qué es eso?

—Es una mujer vestida de negro. Dicen que vive sola en un monte. No sé bien. Viene, me da consejos sobre los hombres y se va. Hace mucho años que se me aparece.

—¿No te da miedo?

—No. Hay una oración para ella y siempre me pide que se la rece.

—¿Y qué te dice?

—Ahora me dijo: «Este hombre no es tuyo ni de nadie. Vas a sufrir mucho si sigues con él. Se gustan pero no pueden vivir juntos. Ustedes se parecen demasiado y eso trae discordias. Busca mi oración y reza tres veces.» Me tocó la frente y se fue.

—Y despertaste.

—Cuando me tocó la frente. Sentí su mano muy fría. Era un sueño, pero no era un sueño. ¿Tú me entiendes? (140-141)

Pedro Juan's response to Miriam's encounter with the supernatural demonstrates his acceptance of the alternate reality that she describes. Despite his sometimes jaded reaction to human nature and low expectations of those around him, presumably due to a world-weary outlook and an absence of innocence, Pedro

Juan's reaction to the *Ánima Sola* reveals a complete lack of cynicism or disbelief. Rather, he accepts his lover's account so wholeheartedly that he even experiences a physical reaction ("Mira cómo me erizo"). It is interesting to note that the character of Pedro Juan, generally presented as a tough, invulnerable cynic, loses that cynicism when matters turn to religion or to the spirit world.

In a similar instance, one which corroborates Pedro Juan's observation about the extrasensory faculties of the women who keep company with him, Gloria in *Animal tropical* reveals the true motive behind her having abandoned a steady job at the hospital. At first, she describes her obligations casually, without preoccupation: "En la morgue del hospital de emergencias. [...] No tiene nada que ver con los muertos. Tengo que llevar un libro de registros" (251-252). Later, though, her reaction is much more visceral: "¡Qué asco, y qué repugnancia, y qué sorbo! [...] Es como un almacén del horror, como una película de Frankenstein. [...] Frascos con ojos, con lenguas, pedazos de corazón, manos enteras, cerebros, huesos, orejas" (262). As if registering and sequencing jars with body parts were not bad enough, Gloria goes on to reveal the true reason she had to leave:

—Los muertos caminando por ahí. Entraban y salían. Los mismos. Eran cuatro.

—¿Qué tú dices, Gloria?

—Ay, papi, te lo he dicho otras veces. Yo veo muertos. A veces.

No me gusta pero es así. Espíritus oscuros que no se elevan. En

las dos horas que estuve ahí, cuatro espíritus caminando. Daban vueltas y vueltas, como si estuvieran perdidos, vagando. (263)

This time, though, Pedro Juan expresses cynicism: “Eso es teatro tuyo. Tú tienes mucha imaginación” (263), although it appears that his statement of doubt stems more from a desire to provoke Gloria by discounting her story than from genuine disbelief. Because of Pedro Juan’s repeated references to apparitions and spirits throughout Gutiérrez’s novels, it is unlikely that the reader would swallow any such disbelief on his part.

In another instance in *El insaciable hombre arena*, Gloria gives a spiritual cleansing to her brother, and Pedro Juan fears that she will enter into a trance, as she often does in such circumstances:

Gloria tembló unas cuantas veces. Si el muerto le bajaba se complicaba la cosa, porque la negra Estanislá, cuando se encarna en la material, habla sin parar por lo menos una hora. Hay que buscarle una botella de aguardiente y un tabaco y hasta que no los termina no se va. Después de esos trances Gloria se queda agotada y no recuerda nada. Ahora el muerto no puede entrar en la material. Gloria rezó y la alejó. Dio fuego a un tabaco y [...] le sopló encima el humo del tabaco, rezando a tres santos diferentes y a las comisiones africanas. (204-205)

Even Pedro Juan’s mother has supernatural experiences from time to time. At one point in *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan describes a conversation she has with him, one which seems to him to be boring at first but later branches

into topics that grab his attention: “Sus notas incluyen algunos muertos que se le aparecen a cualquier hora. Lo describe todo con tanta precisión que la creo.

Parece que sí ve a esos muertos inquietos. Si me sucede a mí me cago.

Literalmente. Con mierda y todo. Ella no. Lo asume con una naturalidad total”

(126). At another point in the novel, Pedro Juan’s mother recounts how a black dog arrived at her door, howled terribly, and fell over dead. Pedro Juan interprets this as a sign that there was spiritual turmoil inside her house: “¡Lo que tenías metido aquí dentro era mucho! Te mandaron al perro a recogerlo” (75). He later comments to the reader: “Mi madre es un poco espiritista. No mucho. Menos que mi abuela, que murió hace quince años, pero todavía ronda cerca y nos guía en lo que puede. [...] Ella sabía que el perro recogió algo fuerte y cayó fulminado. Lo mío es más sencillo. Por suerte no veo muertos” (75-76).

The women in Pedro Juan’s life are not the only ones to experience these encounters. In fact, Pedro Juan is perpetually accompanied by two spirits who guide his actions, although he is not always cognizant of their influence.

Throughout the works in which Pedro Juan appears, he is told repeatedly that the spirits of an Indian and a Black man walk with him. In *Animal tropical*, Rosa the santera communicates with a *muerto* to advise Pedro Juan:

—[Usted] toma mucho ron, que es lo que le gusta. Y fuma tabaco. Bueno, dice el muerto que el ron, los tabacos y las mujeres vienen por el africano. Usted tiene un africano cimarrón, usted sabe, un africano huío, y un indio a su lado. Nunca se le despegan y le ayudan mucho.

—Eso me han dicho.

—Es que están ahí. Al lado suyo. Y cómo se esconden los dos. Son astutos los muy cabrones. No se dejan ver fácil. Hay que saber. [...] El indio es más tranquilo y le gusta más el silencio y las flores, pero el africano es revoltoso y contestón. ¿Usted es contestón, mi'jo? Sí. Ni me responde. Se ve que usted es jocicú y rebelde. Un negro jocicú y contestón. No servía pa' esclavo. Huyó de la hacienda. No quería trabajá. Prefería estar muerto antes que bajar la cabeza y quedarse callado. Ese negro era esclavo pero se quitó las cadenas y huyó pa'l monte. Con las cadenas se moría. Prefería vivir salvaje en el monte, aunque pasara hambre. Pero libre. Y las mujeres se le daban fácil. El tabaco y el aguardiente. Eso era lo de él en vida. Y ahora está al lado suyo y no se le despega. (80-81)

The spirits of the Indian and the black man who accompany Pedro Juan seem to serve not only as a variant of the traditional “guardian angel,” protecting their charge from misfortune, but also as an influence on Pedro Juan’s actions and personality, invoking impressions of the proverbial devil on one shoulder and angel on the other. However, instead of merely swaying Pedro Juan’s perspective and affecting his decisions, the (stereotypical) spirits of the *indio* and the *africano huío* actually incarnate themselves in his person, thus contributing to the brooding, proud, and unruly character of the protagonist, as well as to his

physique.<sup>50</sup> When asked in an interview about the constant (re)appearance of these two spirits in his narrative, Gutiérrez had this to say:

Me lo han dicho varias veces algunas santeras y barajeras en Cuba. Que tengo un espíritu de un indio muy inteligente y astuto, que no se deja ver y se esconde atrás de mí y un negro un poco más bruto pero fuerte y salvaje, un negro cimarrón, que sólo usa un taparrabos y un trapo colorao en la cabeza, un negro de monte que le gustan las mujeres y el aguardiente y el monte. Nada de música ni fiestas ni flores. Eso a veces yo lo presiento pero lo veo más como algo muy poético y especial de hablar de mi personalidad que como una realidad total. He tenido experiencias espirituales muy fuertes y continuas. (Appendix B)

Gutiérrez's response emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the spirit world, since he reveals that the situation depicted in his narrative of the two spirits who follow him is merely a representation of his own experiences.

Although not all of the references to *muertos* that appear in Gutiérrez's novels pertain specifically to Pedro Juan or to the women around him, it is the sheer number of references that carries particular significance. Judging from his narrative, many *habaneros*—Pedro Juan included—believe that spirits constantly

---

<sup>50</sup> Without a doubt, the overt sexualization of the black man in Cuban history and culture—indeed, in Western history and culture—combined with the fact that one of Pedro Juan's *muertos* was a slave represent a point of pride for Pedro Juan, who is viewed (by himself as well as by others) as remarkably well-endowed. Proof of this appears in Pedro Juan's frequent recollections of his lovers' reactions to the quality of his genitals (“¡Esto sí es una pinga!”) in addition to the fact that the moniker “pinga de oro” is practically an everpresent motif in

roam the world of the living, although no one in these works questions their reason for doing so. In fact, one of the seminal figures of Espiritismo, Allan Kardec, explains their wandering thus:

Spirits acquire knowledge by passing through the trials imposed on them by God. Some of them accept these trials with submission, and arrive more quickly at the aim of their destiny; others undergo them with murmuring, and thus remain, through their own fault, at a distance from the perfection and the felicity promised to them.

(47)

Ironically, Kardec's explanation of the experiences of spirits is remarkably similar to many Christians' view of the human condition as a journey filled with obstacles to test spiritual endurance or faith. It is especially significant to note the relationship of both groups (spirits and Christians) with utopia from these two points of view: much like humans, who are traditionally viewed (at least by most of Western civilization) as responsible for their expulsion from utopia as well as their failure to reattain it, the spirits described by Kardec inadvertently prolong their suffering by distancing themselves from what he terms "the perfection and felicity promised to them," or a type of spiritual utopia.

---

his recounting of his lovers' pillow talk.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERTEXTUALITIES / LITERATURE / ACT OF WRITING

#### 5.1 Literature as utopia: escaping from reality

*I wouldn't recommend sex, drugs, or insanity for everyone,  
but they've always worked for me.*  
—Hunter S. Thompson

*La vida aquí se reduce realmente a música, ron y sexo. Lo demás es paisaje.*  
—Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, *El insaciable hombre araña*

From literature's earliest appearances as part of oral traditions, to e-books and websites centuries later, the messages conveyed within the texts have served distinct functions, occupying various spaces on a grand spectrum from weighty didacticism to blithe entertainment. In the case of the latter, literature, along with other media such as films or theatrical representations, can provide an indispensable outlet, allowing the reader to escape from the reality that belongs to him/her. In this sense, the space occupied by literature in the imaginary of its public is not a negligible one, given that it fulfills a necessary function: the provision of a means of escape.

There are entire genres of literature dedicated (although perhaps not exclusively) to this function: escapist literature includes (but is not limited to) science fiction, fantasy, and other forms of utopian literature, genres which are not always exclusive to one another. As discussed in chapter 1 (1.1.2 and 1.1.3),

science fiction and fantasy often have at their core utopian (or dystopian) dimensions, given that the author often creates a reality distinct from that of the “real world,” and these new realities frequently represent an improved society (or failed attempts at achieving it). By creating a different reality, authors of these genres as well as of others belonging to the escapist category open a portal through which their readers can leave behind a drab, mundane, or otherwise unsatisfying existence.

Literature and other media do not have to belong to the escapist genre to treat escapist themes, of course. Probably the best known example of literature about escape is, of course, the classic *Arabian Nights*, in which Queen Scheherazade’s very life depends on her ability to invent and recount stories to inveigle her husband and convince him to value her art of guiding him into a distinct reality every night. In this way, the queen avoids her husband’s tiring of her, and manages to use her storytelling as a means of survival. Many of her tales, such as those of Sinbad the sailor, Ali Baba and the thieves, and Aladdin’s magical lamp, are among the most famous and widely recognized pieces of world literature. Thus, the stories in *Arabian Nights* represent attempts (and achievement) of escape on a double plane: Queen Scheherazade succeeds in postponing her imminent execution over and over again (plane 1) by weaving a figurative tapestry populated with unique and intriguing characters, many of whom lead lives of adventure and luxury, and in this way captivating not only her murderous husband but also millions of readers over the years (plane 2). Because

the escapism is twofold in *Arabian Nights*, I cite the work as an ideal example of escapist literature.

A more recent work with a premise that is not entirely dissimilar is Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), in which two men find themselves as unlikely cellmates in an Argentine prison. To combat the mounting frustration at being imprisoned and the mind-numbing tedium of living day after day in loathsome conditions, one prisoner (Molina) begins a nightly ritual of recounting plots of movies that he has viewed over the years. Initially, Molina's activist companion, Valentín, incarcerated for participation in leftist activities, is hesitant about using the film plots as a means of temporary escape, since the films are all apparently "movies for the masses," B-movies with little intellectual value other than sentimental entertainment. Eventually, though, Valentín overcomes his feeling of guilty pleasure and begins to appreciate allowing himself to wander into the fictitious webs spun by Molina. The movie retellings are then no longer limited to nighttime escapes but occur at any time, day or night, in which the men find themselves in need of a separation, even only an emotional one, from their fates. The forays into the world conjured by Molina are so successful that the reader often finds him/herself as disappointed as Valentín when the plots of the films come to their end.

This escapism, though, is not limited to the experience of the reader, listener, or spectator. On the contrary, the creation of literature is often a necessary process for the creator/writer, much more than for the reader. In many cases, the writer is in need of a therapeutic release, and the physical and emotional

act of writing can impart that catharsis, which often can only come about by means of creating another dimension which the writer can explore.

In the case of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, the reality that is depicted in his narrative is neither a brand new world nor even an alternate dimension parallel to an existing reality, but rather his attempt at a faithful reproduction of the world that surrounds him. Rather than serving as a reproduction of that world, though, Gutiérrez's realism functions more like a mirror—a reflection that depends on the biases of the vehicle that reflects it. Foucault cites the mirror as a common heterotopia, given that it (or the reality reflected within) is neither real nor artificial, since from outside it we can only observe the reflection, which we recognize, but we are not able to enter into that world.<sup>51</sup> Gutiérrez's narrative functions in a similar fashion, representing the chaotic world in which he lives, and allowing us (the readers) to glimpse inside, but at the same time it is a world that is inaccessible (at least in part) to the readers, since his narrative is more autobiographical than fictitious.

### **5.1.1 Act of writing / constructing one's own space**

Like many writers, Gutiérrez acknowledges that the act of writing in itself, as mentioned above, is vital to his very existence, not merely as a writer in particular but as a human being. Indeed, the conditions in which Gutiérrez found himself in the mid-1990s near the beginning of Cuba's Special Period (explained

---

<sup>51</sup> See chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of heterotopia.

in chapter 1) were extremely dire, leaving him with little recourse for survival.

Gutiérrez describes the period and the effects it had on him personally:

El edificio donde yo vivo, había a veces 15 días sin agua, sin una gota de agua. Te imaginarás la mierda en los baños.

Recordándose: no había gas para cocinar [...] y entonces se cocinaba con carbón. [...] Una situación desesperante, como nadie se la puede imaginar. Una ciudad tan grande como La Habana es muy vulnerable [...] si no hay gas y no hay recogida de basura.

Naturalmente empiezan las ratas y las cucarachas y [...] todo tipo de enfermedades. Esta situación se acumulaba, 91, 92, 93, 94, el 5 de agosto del 94 explota el pueblo por el Malecón, pidiendo libertad [...]. Yo empiezo a escribir la *Trilogía sucia* en septiembre del 94. [...] Mi respuesta es en septiembre del 94 empezar a escribir estos cuentos desesperados pero sin saber lo que estaba haciendo. No responde la *Trilogía sucia* y los demás libros a un proyecto intelectual premeditado, sino que fue un escape del dolor. (Appendix B)

Given this comment, it becomes clear that the act of writing, especially amid such devastating circumstances, acquires a significance much greater than that of mere therapy; rather, writing becomes a means for survival.

Gutiérrez's attitude toward the role of writing (for him as a writer) is revealed in a comment that Pedro Juan, the protagonist of his semi-autobiographical fiction, makes in *Animal tropical*. Before traveling to

Stockholm, Pedro Juan emphasizes the differences between the two realities, using these very differences as his versions of definitions of what embodies them. While in his bed one morning, reading Kundera, he receives a telephone call from Agneta, the Swedish event coordinator in Stockholm, who arranges his visit and in whose home he stays. Agneta has been reading Pedro Juan's works, set in Havana, and often shares with him her questions and incredulous reactions. On this occasion, Pedro Juan comments that, while Agneta reads his works to inject some excitement into her otherwise tranquil life, he immerses himself in a quiet, deep book, trying to create a space in which he can exist independently from the chaos that surrounds him. Later, when this "conversation" (which consists of silence more than anything else) concludes, Pedro Juan reflects again on those differences and what they mean for him as a writer:

Cuando vuelvo al libro pienso en el *tempo*. Se escribe como se vive. Es inevitable. Un *tempo* lento y reposado es el ideal para la percepción de un escritor europeo sobre su material. Él vive dentro de una cultura sedimentada, extenuada. [...] Es la percepción de quien [piensa] tranquilamente. [...]

En cambio, yo pertenezco a una sociedad efervescente, que convulsiona, con un futuro absolutamente incierto e impredecible. En un sitio donde hace sólo quinientos años vivían hombres en cuevas, desnudos, que cazaban y pescaban y apenas conocían el fuego. (18)

Pedro Juan realizes the importance of the dissimilarities between these spaces and comments: “Si viviera en Estocolmo mi vida quizás sería lenta, monótona, gris. Los alrededores son decisivos. Lo único que puedo hacer siempre, en Estocolmo, en La Habana o donde sea, es construir mi propio espacio” (18).<sup>52</sup> Here Gutiérrez puts his own words in the mouth of his protagonist/alterego and reveals that writing, or “construction of one’s own space,” is a requisite.

In *Animal tropical*, Pedro Juan (the same character, although in a different novel) elaborates on the need for writing in his life: “Cuando uno escribe hasta convertir la escritura en un vicio, lo único que hace es explorar. Y para encontrar algo hay que ir hasta el fondo. Lo peor es que, una vez en el fondo, es imposible regresar a la superficie. No se puede salir jamás” (89). With this comment, it is clear that writing is not only a necessity but also can be viewed as a type of addiction, an activity that draws in its victim until there is no easy exit.

Likewise, in *Carne de perro*, Pedro Juan cites writing as his method of dealing with the world around him. Not long after helping an alcoholic on the streets and hearing the man’s story of how his two sons were eaten by sharks before his eyes as they tried to escape in a *balsa*, Pedro Juan notices a pack of vultures feeding on something on the beach, and he realizes in horror that they are consuming the cadaver of the man he’d met earlier. After a coldhearted passerby

---

<sup>52</sup> In one of my interviews with Gutiérrez, he pointed out the necessity (and occasional impossibility) of constructing one’s own space: “Me gustaría alejarme en mi próximo libro de La Habana. Escribir algo quizás de Europa, entre Viena, Madrid. Lo que pasa es que en Cuba no puedo. Yo soy un escritor muy emocional. En Cuba yo no puedo escribir una novela que se desarrolla en Viena, con frío. Yo sudando... ¿escribiendo que está nevando? En eso soy un desastre” (Appendix A).

laughs and comments, “Tenía poca carne,” Pedro Juan suppresses his disgust and leaves: “Me fui y traté de olvidar aquello. Quería concentrarme en mi novela y empezar a escribir” (18). It is significant that his first reaction when faced with such a dehumanizing event is to escape to his typewriter. Later, he describes the importance of writing to his life:

La lujuria y el alcohol habían erosionado mucho dentro de mí. Demasiados estragos. Todos mis recuerdos mejores eran de mujeres desnudas sobre la cama. Y sexo. Mucho sexo. El desenfreno total. Necesitaba concentrar mi energía en algo más perdurable. Era una cuestión de vida o muerte.

Otro de mis problemas era que, a esas alturas, podía convertirlo todo en literatura: lo más doloroso, la carroña, el lado miserable y oscuro de mi vida. Todo iba quedando atrás. Nada era duradero. Todo se quemaba como si a mi alrededor sólo hubiera hojarasca seca. (46)

Similarly, in *El insaciable hombre araña* Pedro Juan says: “Dicen que escribir ayuda a comprender los problemas. Conmigo funciona a la inversa: cada día estoy más confundido”(33). With these last comments, it is revealed that Pedro Juan’s relationship with writing/literature is much like that of an addict with his addiction—a love/hate relationship, in that the sensation brought by recording one’s life is very much sought after, but at the same time the act of recording one’s life can emphasize the negative, the failures, the depression, by serving as a reminder of all that.

At another point within the same novel, the minimal act of writing down his thoughts, simple though they may be, is described as Pedro Juan's only way of achieving serenity. Pedro Juan senses a phrase that keeps repeating in his head, "como si fuera un mensaje telepático: 'Tus secretos más oscuros y profundos.'" [...] Siguió martillando en mi cerebro hasta que busqué una libreta y la anoté: tus secretos más oscuros y profundos. Ya, la tranquilidad" (51-52). Once again, Pedro Juan's visceral need to write is revealed, even though in this case what he produces is far from a complex story or even a poem or shorter work. It is merely a phrase, but that phrase torments him, "hammering into his head," as he puts it, until he releases himself from it by putting it down on paper.

### **5.1.2 Intertextualities in Gutiérrez's works**

The emphasis placed by Gutiérrez on the absolute necessity of writing as a means of survival, of the construction of one's own space, is only strengthened by the multiple references to works by other writers, whether literature, film, or music: titles and tidbits of novels, poems, essays, contemporary songs, and pieces of classical music all abound in Gutiérrez's fiction, creating intertextual links that function as much more than mere literary adornment, since they can transmit meaning by insinuation or association and greatly enhance the substance of certain scenes or character development.

Intertextual references of this sort, or intertextualities, consist of references that exist in one text and connect to some aspect of another text, references which can impart meaning via other literary techniques, such as

foreshadowing or analogy. For example, a text containing a description of “star-crossed lovers” would immediately evoke sensations of young love and tragedy, transporting the reader—even if only for an instant—to *Romeo and Juliet*, which would certainly shape the reader’s expectations of the couple in question or even of the work as a whole, all without ever mentioning Shakespeare’s most famous tragedy by name. Intertextual references often simply append an additional nuance of meaning, thus developing the setting or character development, for example, without leading the (informed) reader through lengthy descriptions of the same.<sup>53</sup> Julia Kristeva takes the function of intertextualities even further, maintaining that no reader receives texts in a literary vacuum, that everyone has prior experiences with words, concepts, images, etc. and that these experiences shape the reader’s reception of any given text. She explains:

The word’s status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus). [...] Each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. [...] Any

---

<sup>53</sup> I specify here that the intertextual references are directed toward **informed** readers, since a reader who is not cognizant of the intertextuality or unfamiliar with the work to which it alludes benefits little (or not at all) from this technique. Indeed, it is not uncommon for writers to include such references in a conscious attempt to shape their reading public. To this end, Gutiérrez states that in his works, “Es cierto que menciono determinados escritores, libros, música. Porque de algún modo doy la sicología, la atmósfera del momento y del personaje sin tener que explicar mucho al lector. Respeto la inteligencia del que me leo si le digo que el personaje escucha en ese momento a Lou Reed y se lee a Herman Hesse. Creo que eso es muy sugerente. Y si le digo que se lee *Cumbres borrascosas*, escucha a Mozart y bebe una taza de té, es otra cosa ¿no? En fin,

text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. (37)

By using Kristeva's explanation, though, virtually any text could be considered an intertextuality, since every word that makes up the overall text participates in a dialogue with its own history (that of the word itself), the vertical paradigm presented by Kristeva, as well as that of the reader, the horizontal one. While I believe that Kristeva's idea is plausible, it appears that the focus she has elected widens excessively the definition of the term and places more emphasis on the historical linguistic aspect of the text than the actual literary creation; in other words (to use a metaphor that is stale but nevertheless accurate), with such emphasis on the reader's personal history with individual words, Kristeva is overlooking the forest for the trees.

A more widely recognized definition of intertextualities applies the explanation offered earlier in this chapter: a reference within one text to some aspect of another. Given the significance of literary and artistic production for Gutiérrez, it appears that the specific references that appear throughout Gutiérrez's works fulfill a greater purpose than merely revealing a dimension of a character's personality or foreshadowing, although these functions are certainly significant. It appears that, by driving repeatedly into his works direct references to other writer's pieces (as well as those of singer/songwriters, composers, and directors), Gutiérrez is also making a statement about the necessity of literary/musical/artistic production for these individuals. Although what they

---

trato de no ser demasiado explícito y sugerir todo lo posible" (Appendix B).

produce is often very different from that which Gutiérrez does, their inclusion in his works seems to imply that the simple act of production could be as vital for them as it is for him. However, regardless of their personal attitudes toward their artistic production, Gutiérrez's works are so heavily peppered with allusions to them and to the pieces they've produced that his own works at times appear to be a collage of intertextualities that combine in a new, unique way to (re)create Gutiérrez's own reality.

Classical music abounds in Gutiérrez's fiction, often as a direct and evident contrast to the setting or actions described just before or just after the references appear. In *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan recounts the story of his friend and occasional lover, Silvia, who is raped in Central Park in New York City. Thanks to her quick thinking, she escapes without having to endure being penetrated, but the experience is an ugly violation that leaves her humiliated and vulnerable. Surprisingly, the first thing that Silvia does after entering her house, even before removing her clothing, now stained with semen from the encounter, is put on a CD of *The Tempest* by Jean Sibelius:

Fue hasta el equipo de música y lo conectó. Tenía colocado un CD con *La tempestad*, de Jean Sibelius. La música comenzó a invadir lentamente a Silvia. *Las oceánicas*. Fue hasta el baño. Dejó la puerta abierta. Se desnudó. Hizo un gran bulto con toda la ropa. Después la botaría, incluido el abrigo que tenía las manchas secas y blanquecinas del semen. Se duchó largamente y lavó muy bien su pelo. Cepilló sus dientes dos veces. Se secó y se puso agua de

colonia abundante. Siguió sintiendo asco. Las habitaciones estaban caldeadas y regresó desnuda a la sala, escuchando la música. (14)

It is interesting to note that Sibelius' work is not merely a step in her cleansing ritual; rather, it is the principal part. It is both the beginning and the end of her cleansing, as well as the constant presence in the background during everything else. In fact, the music itself takes on an active role in the process, as it is more than a mere soundtrack for Silvia's activities—Gutiérrez writes that the music “comenzó a **invadir** [...] a Silvia,” using a verb that is not commonly associated with music, particularly in light of the violent experience she has just suffered (emphasis mine). Finally, it is striking that, despite the emphasis placed on the work, nothing is said about the music itself—not the instruments, the phrasing, the dynamics, or anything else—apart from its identification: *The Tempest* by Sibelius, thus implying that Gutiérrez assumes that his readers will recognize the piece and will not require descriptions to envision or understand the scene.<sup>54</sup> At the close of this episode, Silvia even allows herself to surrender to the piece, as if it were a partner in an erotic experience: “Se dejó caer en una butaca, echo la cabeza atrás, cerró los ojos y se olvidó de todo. Sólo existía Sibelius. In crescendo” (14).

---

<sup>54</sup> This technique would be in line with Gutiérrez's own narrative style, which he describes as follows: “Ir al grano y quitar adjetivos. Un adjetivo hay que pensarlo tres o cuatro veces, y al final quizás lo borras. Lo tachas y no pasa nada. La frase funciona sin el adjetivo perfectamente. Y entonces yo ya he ido depurando muchísimo mi lenguaje” (Appendix A).

Classical music fans will recognize the specific section of *The Tempest* to which Silvia listens, *The Oceanides*, as a sweeping tone poem that evokes the all-encompassing force of the sea. One music critic describes it thus:

*The Oceanides* [...] inhabits an auditory realm that fuses the fundamental energies of nature with the spirit of humankind through the magical medium of the ancient and the mythical. In it, one does not merely hear the sea as an observer, but is thrust into the being of ocean waves. The massive orchestral climax in the work seems like nature herself heaving a breath, a living surge of terrifying ecstasy that simply fills the listener with awe. (“Inkpot Classical Music Reviews”)

This reviewer’s description assigns an almost sexual feeling to the piece, thanks to sensual, erotic terms like “thrust,” “surge,” and “massive [...] climax,” all of which make the piece noteworthy in light of the violent sexuality of the preceding event and Silvia’s eager reception of the piece afterwards.

Other weighty references to specific works of classical music in *El insaciable hombre araña* also underscore the setting in which they are found. In a chapter entitled “Sosiego, paz, serenidad,” Pedro Juan says: “Yo escuchaba el *Messiah*, de Haendel. Eran las seis de la tarde y necesitaba sosegar un poco mi espíritu. La noche antes había tenido una gran bronca con mi mujer” (31). The protagonist’s reference to this specific piece as a tool for attaining a degree of serenity is significant, since it is made clear that he does not simply use it as background music; rather, he plays Handel’s *Messiah* to calm him during a

tumultuous moment, much in the same way that Silvia uses Sibelius to deal with the traumatic event that she has just endured. It is also interesting that both of these pieces can be classified as “tone poems” or “tone paintings,” works in which a specific mood or tone is achieved by the music, the lyrics, or the combination of both. To be sure, these tone poems also contribute to Gutiérrez’s works, even without supplying the music or lyrics.

Later in the novel, Pedro Juan uses another classical piece to alter his attitude and improve his artistic production:

Yo estaba pintando un cuadro, pero salía demasiado bien. Puse a Mahler. La sinfonía número diez, en La Mayor. Subí el volumen a toda mecha. Mahler atronaba. Todas las cuerdas chillaban. Y ni así. El hijoputa se resistía a embrutecerse un poco. Seguía lindo, atildado, tonto y estúpido. [...] Me tendí en el piso y cerré los ojos. Sólo existíamos Mahler y yo. (83)

The similarity between Pedro Juan’s experience with Mahler and Silvia’s experience with Sibelius is most apparent at the end of each description, when each respective character coexists with the music, although for Pedro Juan the relationship is much more mutual than Silvia’s giving herself over to what she hears: “Sólo existía Sibelius” for Silvia (14), while Pedro Juan clarifies that, for him, “Sólo existíamos Mahler y yo” (83). It is also interesting to note that while Sibelius “comenzó a invadir lentamente a Silvia” (14), evoking images of passivity or helplessness on her part, Pedro Juan’s experience with Mahler is much more active, albeit with a degree of measured vulnerability: “Nos

abrazamos y fue una penetración mutua. Llegamos al final. Quiero decir, llegamos al silencio, y yo estaba muy emocionado” (83). Once more, the erotic imagery intertwines with the music, and the piece acquires a special importance within Gutiérrez’s text.

Another episode in *El insaciable hombre araña* in which Gutiérrez uses a musical piece to correspond with (and possibly even evoke) mood is near the very end of the novel, immediately after Pedro Juan has a wounding argument with his wife, after which she leaves him to go live with her mother. He describes:

A eso de las seis se nubló y comenzó a llover con mucho viento. Era un aguacero torrencial. Cerré las ventanas y puse la Sinfonía número dos de Brahms, en Fa Mayor. Me serví un vaso de ron puro y observé detenidamente aquel torrente de agua, precipitándose sobre el mar y sobre la ciudad. Me muevo por la casa y dirijo la orquesta. Allegro non troppo. La dirijo perfectamente. ¡Esto es la vida! La soledad, la música perfecta, el ron, la furia del agua y los truenos. Yo espléndido y maravilloso, ejemplar único. Todas mis mujeres siempre han sido pelandrujas de barrio que detestan las sinfonías y la opera. Pero no importa. Aquí estoy yo solo. Emborrachándome con mi socio Brahms. Me quite el short y la camiseta y salí desnudo a la terraza, a empaparme en el diluvio frío. Los relámpagos y los truenos. Todo a mi alrededor es gris. Un torrente cerrado de lluvia cae sobre la ciudad, y escucho a Brahms vibrando. Allegro con spirito. ¡Qué

cojones! ¡Yo, el mejor de todos! ¡¿Quién dice que no merece la pena?! (202)

In this episode, it is apparent that Brahms' *Symphony No. 2* coincides not only with Pedro Juan's changing moods (from stormy to playful to satisfied), but with the atmosphere—literally.<sup>55</sup> Just as before, the intertextual reference adds another dimension to the narrative.

In *Carne de perro*, Pedro Juan arises from the bed after a marathon love-making session with his “amig[a] de toda la vida,” Miriam, he decides to change the CD to which they had been listening, “un disco de Maria Careigh” (74),<sup>56</sup> and suggests to Miriam a specific French composer:

Cambio el disco. Intento probar:

—¿Quieres oír a Eric Satie?

—¡¿Qué es eso?! ¡No inventes cosas extrañas!

Pongo un disco de Los Van Van. (75)

Miriam's reaction and Pedro Juan's placid acquiescence only confirm a statement he makes earlier regarding his musical tastes: “Casi todos mis discos son de música clásica. Tengo que escucharlos solito” (74). Although Pedro Juan's self-

---

<sup>55</sup> Gutiérrez mentions specifically the *Symphony No. 2 in F Major*, but Brahms' *Symphony No. 2*, complete with the directions he includes (“Allegro non troppo” and “Allegro con spirito”) is actually written in **D** major, not in F. Because Gutiérrez seems to be so intimately familiar with the minutiae of the classical pieces that appear in his narrative, I am inclined to think that this minor slip can be attributed to an editorial typographical error rather than misinformation on his part.

<sup>56</sup> I was puzzled by this reference, one that I did not recognize and for which I could find no information. Only after pronouncing the artist's name out loud did I realize that Miriam and Pedro Juan had been listening to Mariah Carey.

image seems to be a healthy one, neither self-aggrandizing nor self-deprecating, throughout Gutiérrez's novels his musical preferences often incline toward the urbane tastes of the intellectual, while the Cubans who surround him prefer other types of music, usually popular dance music or romantic boleros. He seems to accept these differences as insignificant, but on occasion his sarcastic comments belie this acceptance, as in *Animal tropical*, when he cites the lyric, repeated over and over, "chupa que chupa/fresa y chocolate," of what he terms "una pieza selecta del hit parade del momento" (40). By way of these intertextual references, Gutiérrez presents Pedro Juan as a character with a well-developed intellectual side without having to openly extol his finesse.

Classical music is not the only source of auditory intertextualities utilized by Gutiérrez, of course: his references to more contemporary popular music far outnumber the references to classical pieces. Most of the popular music that appears, though, seems to contribute less to the references in the text. In other words, the virtual ubiquity of popular music in Gutiérrez's works may be the factor that makes the strongest statement, whether about the characters or simply their setting.

In *El insaciable hombre araña*, after a conversation with his lover, Gloria (in which he makes the mistake of calling her by the name of another woman—his wife), Pedro Juan and Gloria return to his house, where he prepares dinner for them both. They sit on the balcony, eating his improvised "shop suey" and drinking rum, and listening to a CD of "Tina Turner cantando country" (208). Despite Pedro Juan's odd concoction of "frijolitos chinos, cebollas y salchichas de

pollo” and the seemingly anomalous combination of Tina Turner and country music, Pedro Juan says: “Nos sentíamos bien. Son buenos momentos. Y no importa lo demás” (208-209).

At another point in the novel, before Pedro Juan and his then-wife Julia separate, they entertain a visit from Gaspar, an old acquaintance of Pedro Juan’s. Like Pedro Juan, Gaspar is a former journalist, but he has chosen a different path professionally: “Esto es lo mío. La publicidad, el turismo y la bobería. Gano buena plata, no me busco problemas, nada de política, me codeo con gente de dinero, con extranjeros” (198). In their conversation, Gaspar reveals that he accumulated several thousand photos between 1991 and 1996, pictures of “el hambre y la miseria de mis dos hijos, de mi mujer, ¿te acuerdas de que yo parecía un esqueleto?”, and that he is planning to destroy the photographs as well as the negatives so that he can forget about that bleak period and move on, saying “El que se quedó en la crisis y la miseria, que se joda o se corte las venas. Hace dos años que ni paseo por Centro Habana. Nada de miseria” (199). During their conversation, Julia listens from another room and practically lights upon Pedro Juan on the balcony as soon as Gaspar leaves the house, telling him to follow in Gaspar’s footsteps and abandon his “libritos,” which (the reader will recall) all treat precisely the topics that Gaspar is trying so desperately to forget. Pedro Juan, in his frustration, ignores Julia, enters the house and puts on music: “Red House” by Jimi Hendrix. Once again, Gutiérrez uses a very specific reference; had he simply wanted to set the mood for the scene, he could have had his protagonist listen to 1960s rock, or even a non-specific Jimi Hendrix CD, but

Gutiérrez names the song. “Red House” is a song that tells a story, with a protagonist who shares Pedro Juan’s attitude toward life, even if the events in their lives are dissimilar, as the lyrics reveal:

There's a Red House over yonder  
That's where my baby stays  
There's a Red House over yonder, baby  
That's where my baby stays

Well, I ain't been home to see my baby,  
in ninety nine and one half days.  
'Bout time I see her,  
Wait a minute something's wrong here  
The key won't unlock the door.

Wait a minute something's wrong baby,  
Lord, have mercy, this key won't unlock this door,  
something's goin' on here.  
I have a bad bad feeling  
that my baby don't live here no more.

That's all right, I still got my guitar  
Look out now . . .

I might as well go on back down  
go back 'cross yonder over the hill  
I might as well go back over yonder  
way back over yonder 'cross the hill,  
(That's where I came from.)

'Cause if my baby don't love me no more,  
I know her sister will! (Hendrix)

Although Pedro Juan’s dilemma in this particular situation revolves around a disagreement with his wife, rather than infidelity or abandonment, both of these voices share the same response; the poetic voice in Hendrix’s song refuses to give in to despair and sings, “That’s all right, I still got my guitar / Look out now” in much the same way that Pedro Juan clings to his writings, even in the face of a nationwide economic and social crisis, to say nothing of a failing marriage. The

importance of having a means of creative expression is thus revealed, regardless of whether that expression involves a guitar, a typewriter, or a paintbrush (another of Pedro Juan's creative tools).

In *Animal tropical*, Pedro Juan listens on several occasions to songs by Lou Reed, and at one point even cites some of the original English lyrics, including their (more complete) translation into Spanish:

When you pass through the fire  
 You pass through humble  
 You pass through a maze of self doubt ...

Cuando pasas por el fuego  
 pasas por la humillación  
 pasas por una mole de dudas.  
 Cuando pasas por la humillación  
 te puede cegar la luz.  
 Hay gente que nunca se da cuenta de eso.  
 Pasas por la arrogancia  
 pasas por el dolor  
 pasas por un pasado siempre presente  
 y es mejor no esperar que la suerte te salve.  
 Tienes que pasar a través del fuego hasta la luz. (120)

At this point in the novel, Pedro Juan has just arrived in Sweden with the pretext of attending a conference, but the real motivation behind his visit, of course, is to spend several weeks with Agneta. Given the lyrics that he cites here, one can infer that the crisis that Pedro Juan (along with the rest of Cuba) endured in the 1990s has not ended for him, especially when considering the following lines: “pasas por el dolor / pasas por un pasado siempre presente / y es mejor no esperar que la suerte te salve.”

Pedro Juan and Agneta listen to Lou Reed in her car, but shortly after the song ends, Pedro Juan takes out that cassette and selects a different one from the

tapes he brought from Cuba. Once again, Pedro Juan cites the lyrics to the song, this one performed by Omara Portuondo, “Yo sí como candela”:

Tú no juegues conmigo  
 que yo como candela.  
 Yo canté en el paraíso  
 y me hicieron un altar  
 y yo me atrevo a cantar  
 al mismo Dios si es preciso.  
 Hago décimas e improviso  
 al que es necio y al que sabe  
 para mí no hay lance grave  
 yo me cobro a cualquiera  
 y si se me vuelve fiera  
 cierro y me llevo la llave.  
 ¡Que yo como candela! (121)

Even if *Animal tropical* were a reader’s first experience with Pedro Juan as the protagonist, s/he could easily recognize the lyrics of Portuondo’s song as a type of mantra for the unflappable protagonist, self-assured and tough. It is also interesting to note that, just as with the Lou Reed song, Pedro Juan makes no comments about the song itself. In fact, immediately after citing both pieces in detail, he describes the weather or the landscape: “El sol muy tímido entre las nubes. Llovizna lentamente” just after Lou Reed (120) and “Los bosques muy tupidos. Verde oscuro y grave” after Omara Portuondo (121). Because of this, it appears that Gutiérrez wishes to allow the songs and their lyrics to speak for themselves.

Another reference to pop music can be found in *Carne de perro*, when Pedro Juan is walking along the beach and whistling:

Camino por la orilla, sin prisa, y silbo. *The Ghost of Tom Joad*.  
 Me gustaría escuchar ahora ese disco, con Bruce Springsteen

cantando un poco ronco. Silbo despacio. Esas canciones se me grabaron en los huesos, en el invierno del 98, en Madrid. Mi única compañía, además de la incertidumbre y el desasosiego, era ese disco, una botella de VAT 69, y —a veces— Teresa. (54-55)

While the album by Bruce Springsteen that Gutiérrez cites here is notable for its sensations of loneliness and frustration, a more significant aspect of the work (for the purposes of this study, at least) is the intertextuality that exists within the album title itself, a reference to Tom Joad in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. This double reference, a sort of "meta-intertextuality," evokes images of the isolation and desperation that pervade both Steinbeck's novel and Springsteen's album, coming full circle to reveal those same qualities in the life of Pedro Juan.

Although Gutiérrez has acknowledged in interviews that film is not a primary influence on his work (cite interview here), he makes several references to specific films, such as *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954) and *Todo sobre mi madre* (Almodóvar, 1999) in *El insaciable hombre araña*. Most of Gutiérrez's cinematic allusions are apparently made in passing, perhaps as part of a description, but on occasion the film itself can function as a metaphor for some aspect of Pedro Juan's life. In *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan watches a television documentary about D. W. Griffith: "Hablan de una película que le quedó un poco sórdida, creo que *The Struggle*. No gustó al público. El narrador decía: «Era la época de la Depresión. La gente quería evasión y no ver sus propias miserias reflejadas en la pantalla»" (164). Although Julia is supposed to

be cooking, she comes to watch part of the documentary and comments to Pedro Juan: “¿Estás oyendo? Aprende. Aquí no te publican tus libros, y caes como una patá en el culo. [...] Sí, por chocante y pesao. Escribes siempre de la misma mierda de todos los días, y la miseria y la jodienda” (164). In a 2002 review of *The Struggle* (1931), William Drew states:

The combination of Griffith’s unpolished realism and an unheroic leading man in the throes of alcoholism [...] held no appeal for the Depression era audiences of 1931. The film was both a commercial and critical disaster that ended Griffith’s directorial career, although many later critics would recognize it as one of his finest works.

Perhaps Gutiérrez sees (or hopes to see) a link between Griffith’s situation—that of a misunderstood, underappreciated artist—and his own. Like Griffith, Gutiérrez presents a world that is often bleak and discouraging, and it would not be uncommon for his intended audience of fellow Cubans to reject his work, just as Julia rejects Pedro Juan’s in the novel. One wonders, though, given the circumstances leading up to Julia’s admonition of Pedro Juan, whether her rejection of his writings stems in fact from Pedro Juan’s choice of content or from the absence of financial success that his writings have brought him (and her). Regardless of Julia’s motivation, the importance of the intertextual reference is clear.

In another instance, Pedro Juan exits a theater after having viewed *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, whistling the film’s theme song. He comments:

Cuando la estrenaron yo tenía siete años. Han pasado cuarenta y sigo silbando lo mismo. Quizás no existe otro lugar del mundo como Cuba para ser uno y muchos al mismo tiempo. Pues es difícil. Uno trata de aferrarse a un espacio pequeño y manejable. Aturde saber que el mundo es tan inmenso. O que uno es tan minúsculo. (*Trilogía 203*)

Pedro Juan's reference to simultaneously being "uno y muchos" evokes Foucault's explanations of heterotopias as sites of juxtaposition, whether physical or chronological. It is the film's personal meaning for him as an individual, more than what the film represents in the world of cinema, that renders it significant in this context.

Another film that seems to hold a specific meaning for Pedro Juan is one that he mentions in *Animal tropical* during his stay in Sweden: Sean Penn's *The Crossing Guard* (1995) "con Jack Nicholson atormentadísimo" (142). Pedro Juan refers to the film in a scene in which he demonstrates in a conversation with Agneta an intense frustration with life in general and his situation in particular:

—¿Quién inventa las prohibiciones? Alguien las inventa su conveniencia y decide por ti: «Puedes hacer esto, no puedes hacer aquello. Aquello otro hace daño. Lo moral es esto y lo inmoral... ahhh, ya me han jodido demasiado la vida con leyes y prohibiciones y órdenes. Me tienen hasta los cojones con todo eso de la moral y la ética y lo correcto y lo incorrecto. [...]

—¿Estás molesto?

—Sí, lo estoy. Me han amargado con tanta mierda que han tirado sobre mí. (143)

Pedro Juan's tired, frustrated outlook on life could certainly be grouped with that of Jack Nicholson's character, Freddy Gale, in *The Crossing Guard*: the father of a little girl killed in a hit and run accident by a drunk driver. After his daughter's death and during her killer's prison sentence, Gale becomes embittered and sour, obsessed with exacting revenge despite not knowing exactly what he might stand to gain by it. Engulfed in exasperation, Gale reaches the point of insanity as a result of circumstances over which he had no control, not unlike Gutiérrez himself, who harbors a deep fear of losing control and includes a dread of insanity on the part of his protagonist in nearly all of his works (see chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis of Gutiérrez's preoccupation with insanity). The film is also notable within the context of the novel because of the jaded sadness exhibited by the other chief character, the driver responsible for Gale's daughter's death, who seems tormented more by his own guilt than by his prison sentence. After his release, he is asked in one scene if he was raped while serving his sentence, to which he apathetically responds: "It only hurts the first time." At another point after his release, the man comments that "Freedom is overrated," another remark that reflects his world-weary outlook on life, not entirely dissimilar from Pedro Juan's frustration at his situation in Cuba.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> It is important to note here that, although Pedro Juan may be frustrated, he is watching this film during his lengthy visit to Sweden, and before a shorter trip to Germany, which are privileges that only a few Cubans can enjoy. Even so, one could argue that by visiting other areas where the shortages so common in Cuba are rare, the inconvenience and sense of want when faced with a practically

Although Gutiérrez's references to musical works and films are plentiful, they are far outnumbered by his intertextual allusions to other literary works. His primary creative outlet is literature, after all, so it seems only natural that the influence of other works in the same medium would be greater. Just as the literary references themselves are varied, so are their functions in Gutiérrez's works, perhaps even more so than the other types of intertextualities already discussed, in spite of Pedro Juan's observation in *Carne de perro* that "Cada día hay más libros y menos que leer" (108).

In *El insaciable hombre araña*, Pedro Juan and Julia find themselves at odds in a power struggle, in which Pedro Juan finds that he agrees with his wife, but admits to the reader: "Yo quería joderla un poco. [...] No puedo darle la razón" (119). He tries to take a nap but the intense heat makes sleep impossible, and he discovers Julia with a book, for which he cannot resist giving her a jab:

Julia leía la biografía de *Fouché*, de Stefan Zweig. Le pregunté:

—¿Está bueno ese libro?

—Sí, este tipo era terrible.

—Apréndetelo de memoria, le añades *El príncipe* y vas

directamente pa' arriba y a comer filetes. (119)

The argument that takes place just before this scene has much to do with Julia's frustration at dealing with the inconveniences and shortages imposed by their poverty; for this reason, it is ironic that the subject of Julia's book be Joseph Fouché, the French Statesman known for his vicious enthusiasm during the Reign

---

empty cupboard would only be felt more acutely.

of Terror over the *noblesse* and the *bourgeoisie*. In fact, among Fouché's belligerent obsessions was a battle against money, not merely the possession of it, but the very existence of it (Moore). Julia's reading selection seems an intellectually frivolous one, given that she has been complaining about the inferior quality of the beef that she and Pedro Juan bought that morning.

At other points in his works, Gutiérrez drops titles of works, seemingly unrelated to the circumstances at hand: a woman selling books offers Pedro Juan copies of *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* (*El insaciable hombre araña* 95), both of which he rotundly rejects; he recalls immersing himself in Dicken's *Memorias del Club Pickwick* (*Insaciable* 163) at age 12 or 13; he happens across a 1953 issue of *National Geographic* magazine among keepsakes in his apartment and reads "un párrafo cualquiera: «Gold! Gold! Gold! Sixty eight klondikers bring back a ton of gold!»" (*Insaciable* 54). The one element that all of these situations share, though is that very sense of disconnection. The reality depicted in *Ivanhoe* or *The Pickwick Papers* could hardly be more different from Pedro Juan's modern-day Havana, and *National Geographic* has been used by generations of people all over the world as an escape mechanism. Similarly, in *Animal tropical*, Pedro Juan lists at random (supposedly) titles from his bookshelves: "las opiniones de Lunacharski sobre cultura, arte y literature, *La fortaleza de Brest*, *Así se forjó el acero*, Engels acerca del arte, *Un hombre de verdad*, de Borís Plevói, folletos de discursos, arengas a favor de esto y en contra de lo otro, *Crisis y cambio en la izquierda*, *La espiral de la traición de fulanito*, *Estética y revolución*, *La revolución traicionada*, de Trotski" (68). Although he mentions nothing more

about the works than the titles (and occasionally a brief reference to context), the simple fact that these works make up part of his library is a significant part of his identity and self-image, since writers and other intellectuals could feasibly define or identify themselves by their reading material. In this case, it is evident that Pedro Juan's mindset has been shaped by many great intellectuals, most of them (in this list, at least) Soviets, all foreign to Cuba, and all male. Thus, by providing a short list of some titles, Pedro Juan has in fact given a detailed (and possibly unwitting) description of his own character and background.

Gutiérrez uses the same technique to characterize Pedro Juan's 15 year old son, Pedrojoán, who keeps a record of copious notes and quotations on his recent reading materials: "libros de Herman Hesse, García Márquez, Grace Paley, Saint-Exúpery, Bukowski y Thor Heyerdahl. Buena mezcla" (*Trilogía* 37). It is evident that Pedro Juan is pleased with his son's eclectic tastes, and this list is the reader's only glimpse of the boy, since Pedrojoán does not appear directly, but only via anecdotes recounted by his father, including the proud comments about his uncommon reading selections.

Pedro Juan even makes sporadic references to Gutiérrez's other works, hinting at his other existence, whether fiction or real-life: "Hacía unos días había terminado una novela terrible. Una animalada tropical que me dejó agotado, nervioso, totalmente insomne, con remordimientos y cargos de conciencia" (*Insaciable* 33). It is apparent that the Pedro Juan in *El insaciable hombre araña* is referring to the Pedro Juan in *Animal tropical* as well as to his creator,

Gutiérrez, thus blurring not only the differences between the works, but also the line between fiction and reality: on which side does Pedro Juan fall?

Whether the intertextual references make use of musical compositions, films, magazines, or literary works, they often contribute additional facets of meaning to the overall work by augmenting character development or providing an analogous episode from which the reader can draw his/her own conclusions. In either case, by employing this literary technique, Gutiérrez furthers his style, which he defines as “periodístico”<sup>58</sup> — using minimal wording to demonstrate the most meaning. For the reader who overlooks the underlying functions of Gutiérrez’s intertextualities, they neither enhance nor subtract from the story line; rather, those readers could view them as simple descriptive adornment, eccentric though that adornment may be. For Gutiérrez’s intended reader, though, the intertextualities mentioned in this chapter fulfill a valuable purpose.

---

<sup>58</sup> In my interview with Gutiérrez (Appendix A), he mentions the importance of minimalist writing: “Yo, con mi educación periodística, ¿no? de tac-tac-tac-tac, al grano y quitar adjetivos. [...] Yo ya he ido depurando muchísimo mi lenguaje.”

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

As I outlined in chapter 1, the purpose of this dissertation has been to present and analyze utopian, heterotopian, and dystopian spaces as they appear in Cuban narrative of the Special Period, specifically in the semi-autobiographical works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's *Ciclo de Centro Habana: Trilogía sucia de La Habana, Animal tropical, El insaciable hombre araña* and *Carne de perro*. These distinct –topian spaces all exist separately in the Cuba presented by Gutiérrez, but at the same time, they do coexist and overlap. The simultaneous existence of various such dimensions demonstrates one of Foucault's claims about spaces and the present epoch: that juxtaposition is one of the defining characteristics of the modern world, and I hold that this is clearest in Cuba, or at least in the Cuba that Gutiérrez depicts in these works.

Before reviewing some of the major points of this dissertation, I would like to acknowledge two observations that I made while conducting this analysis that, when combined, are simultaneously redundant and contradictory:

- *The –topian spaces utilized throughout Gutiérrez's narrative are repeated incessantly.* Immediately after beginning to organize my study of Gutiérrez's works, I realized that there was such frequent repetition—of setting, theme, action, even of language—that it would be a challenge to

present any of these topics as they appear in the various works without repeating my own observations, as well.

Initially, I had planned to devote a section to each of the works analyzed, but the almost constant repetition of erotically charged passages, chaos in the streets, circumstances relating to death, prison-like atmospheres, and other such –topian spaces made a work-by-work analysis implausible. Instead, it soon became clear that, while the works themselves do each possess distinguishing characteristics, it is the concentration of similar (sometimes even identical) thematic elements that is significant. It is for this reason that this study was carried out with a thematic focus and division.

Although in this dissertation I do not focus on the phenomenon of constantly referring to the same elements throughout all the works, it seems as though the repetition itself as a technique could be explored. Does it merely serve to emphasize the points that Gutiérrez considers relevant to his message(s), or does it demonstrate the routine boredom that results from the “day-to-day nothingness” of everyday life in Cuba? In order to investigate this topic, it would be useful to examine the works of other contemporary Cuban writers and to look for such repetition in their writings.

- *Gutiérrez presents the –topian spaces with such different perspectives that, despite their frequent occurrence, they often appear not merely as*

*multifaceted representations of the same space, but as altogether different spaces.* Even with the comments on the previous observation, upon closer examination it became clear that Gutiérrez may refer to the same place or the same circumstances several times, even within the same work, but each time a different characteristic of the space becomes clear. For instance, various descriptions of a similar scene on the streets of Centro Habana may reflect a chaotic dystopian perspective; they may evoke a nostalgic sentiment in the protagonist if recalled from outside of Cuba; they may inspire erotic feelings in the protagonist, who may use these ventures into eroticism as an escape from the dystopian setting; they may conjure images of a prison or a prison-like state of forced isolation; they may represent an important aspect of Cuba's social history by employing references to religion, popular or otherwise; and so on. In this way, the various readings of the repeated spaces confirm Foucault's assertion regarding the juxtaposition of spaces, given that the same space is used to manifest multiple –topias simultaneously. Perhaps this observation could even be used as a justification for Gutiérrez's tactic of repetition: he reifies parallel or identical spaces to demonstrate how seemingly contradictory spaces can and do exist, at least in the Cuba that he depicts in these narratives.

## **6.1 Active vs. passive approach to utopia**

At many points in his narrative, Gutiérrez utilizes what I identify as a two-way approach to having his characters (especially—but not exclusively—Pedro Juan) live among these –topian spaces: either active or passive. By this, I suggest that Pedro Juan either assumes an active role in constructing these spaces for himself with substances, places, companionship, attitudes or actions, or he passively retreats into pre-existing spaces of comfort, already defined by others. In any case, the approach chosen allows the protagonist to evade the alternating (and sometimes coexisting) chaos and nothingness that occupy his life.

With this claim, I assert that Pedro Juan actively searches for his own personal utopia by a number of means. His most frequent strategies for actively creating utopian spaces for himself include submerging himself in alcohol or other substances, distracting himself with constant sex, or even by diverting his own attentions to his literary efforts and escaping into his writing. It is significant to note that the latter practice, that of using writing to escape his own reality, does not ever include the creation of alternative realities, distinct from his own. Instead, Pedro Juan loses himself to the world in which he exists by nearly drowning himself in that very world, in much the same way that Gutiérrez faithfully replicates his own reality, despite the pain it might bring. Both Gutiérrez and Pedro Juan acknowledge (in interviews and conversations with the real life Gutiérrez, and in statements made by the literary Pedro Juan) the importance of other texts—literary, filmic, musical, and otherwise—but it is made clear by both that their preferred tactic of grappling with their own difficult situation(s) is by confronting it (them) head on: both of them recognize and even

flaunt their overt, macho, take-the-bull-by-the-horns approach to life. At some points, however, the protagonist's active approach is foregone in favor of a more involuntary, passive approach: the characters' allowing themselves to drift in the comforting rhetoric of a belief system such as politics or religion, whether recognized and established or popular and unofficial. In other words, one either participates actively in the construction of his own utopias or passively accepts the utopias already built (or already being built) by others. It is interesting to note that the coincidence of spaces throughout the works analyzed does not carry over into this territory: the characters do not divide their approaches to utopia between the two options for achieving it. Rather, each character mentioned in this context (such as the protagonist, Pedro Juan, or Gutiérrez's own self-descriptions) elects one or the other.

Another (and much less frequent) possibility for a similar coping strategy is neither active nor passive; rather, it is better described as uncontrollable or involuntary. That option is mental instability, the mere thought of which strikes fear into the heart of Pedro Juan (and Gutiérrez). Since the circumstance of failing mental capacities is mentioned so infrequently, and since it does not represent a deliberate choice made by Pedro Juan (or any other character, for that matter), I have elected not to include it as an approach to utopia, but instead as a casually occurring circumstance that by sheer chance can lead to the same result. A lack of awareness or comprehension of one's own reality, while never considered ideal, could be deemed utopian, provided one condition: that the

reality in question were unpleasant enough to make a degree of insanity seem desirable by comparison.

## **6.2 Heterotopias (death, prisons, etc.)**

What was, for me, the most unexpected element to arise from my analysis of Gutiérrez's use of spaces was the author's own lack of awareness of the very trend that, for me, characterizes his work. As I cited earlier in the dissertation, Gutiérrez maintains that his inclusion of these heterotopias was unintentional, implying that he, as Author, exercises the function of filter more than creator. The recurring, almost constant references to heterotopian spaces (such as prison), especially given that Gutiérrez was (or claims to have been) ignorant of their strength and presence in his narrative, makes them stand out as a key factor in the spaces that populate the world he describes: Havana. Although I recognize that Gutiérrez writes (from) other spaces, as well, I hold that the world that he chronicles is Havana, since even when his protagonist is absent from his city, Havana is never far from his heart, memories, or dreams. It is for this reason that I regard the "accidental" inclusion of these heterotopian spaces to be particularly significant.

Additionally, another suggestion I make in this dissertation is that of considering death, generally taken to be an event or a state, to be a heterotopian space, at least inasmuch as it is presented by Gutiérrez. "Death as space" flies in the face of more traditional interpretations of "death as event" or "death as state," but in these works the idea of death as a space into which one may enter, or from

which one may leave, functions not only because of the heterotopia implied in such an assertion, but also due to the traditional Cuban views (popular and otherwise) of death as less rigid than in many other cultures. The multiple references to “muertos” and “espíritus” that accompany characters by either trodding along or flitting about in the spaces that appear within Gutiérrez’s narrative serve to reinforce both the heterotopian reference and the social/historical setting.

The inclusion of these references in literature from many other parts of Latin America would almost certainly entreat allusions to magical realism, the literary phenomenon that, many argue, is rooted in Cuban literature, beginning with Alejo Carpentier’s multiple perspectives of the Haitian revolution in *El reino de este mundo* (1948), in which he prefaces the novel’s text with an explanation of “lo real maravilloso,” or the unique blend of European and African (or American) perspectives that permits an honest acceptance of hard-to-explain events that others may find ingenuous (“De lo real maravilloso” 95). Even so, Gutiérrez’s use of “muertos” and “espíritus” does not point to a magical realist perspective of the events at hand; rather, his matter-of-fact journalistic style allows the reader (despite the reader’s origin, I think) to accept these tales as evidence of the beliefs of Pedro Juan or the myriad of other characters who share those beliefs, without obliging the reader to also assume them in order for the narrative to make sense (as is often the case with examples of magical realism). Instead, the heterotopian spaces that Gutiérrez describes in his works serve to lend an air of legitimacy, of credibility, to that which is depicted there, despite the fact

that most of the heterotopias presented represent abstractions that are neither easily duplicated nor easily understood elsewhere.

### **6.3 Unexpected reactions to chaos**

Finally, another significant point that I present in this dissertation is the simultaneous and often contradictory reactions to dystopian conditions—or chaos—that the reader can observe in Pedro Juan's character. While in Cuba, he often expresses dismay at the crowded conditions, maddening bureaucracy, and frustrating shortages that he and his compatriots must endure. However, when Pedro Juan finds himself in Sweden, where refrigerators are well-stocked, television reception via cable is extensive, and peace and quiet prevail, he cannot avoid an overwhelming nostalgia for all that Cuba signifies for him: all of these conditions' binary opposites. Ironically, for Pedro Juan, it is that same chaos about which he has so frequently complained that draws his attention when he experiences the privilege (as some might argue) of a non-chaotic (non-Cuban) lifestyle.

It is significant that Gutiérrez's protagonist's varied responses to the spaces in and between which he moves manage to coexist despite their apparent contradictions, much like the juxtaposed spaces themselves. For this reason, as well as for the other reasons listed here, I believe that Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's narrative, although journalistic in style, does not fail to provide an excellent literary representation of Havana, as well as of Cuba itself. The varied spaces, voices, images, and perspectives that appear, even though the same protagonist

takes center stage in all four of the narrative works studied here, embody the manifold characteristics of the unity and the diversity that exist there, and it is my sincere hope (as well as that of Gutiérrez) that his works will one day be readily available to the people whom he describes with so much verve. When that day comes, then these works will undoubtedly form another example of the literary spaces that simultaneously describe and participate in Cuba's contradictions: dismal and ebullient, flooded but seemingly dry (metaphorically), decaying but very, very alive, chaotic but at the same time comforting, and—perhaps most importantly—distant but suddenly more accessible to all of us, Cuban or not.

### WORKS CITED

- Agüero, Óscar (ed.). *Utopía y Nuestra América*. Quito: Abya-Yala, 1995.
- Ainsa, Fernando. *La reconstrucción de la utopía*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Sol, 1999.
- . "Tensión utópica e imaginario subversivo en Hispanoamérica." *Anales de la literatura hispánica* 13 (1984): 13-36.
- Alkon, Paul Kent. *The Origins of Futuristic Fiction*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1988.
- Althusser, Louis. *Escritos*. Barcelona: Laia, 1974.
- Álvarez IV, José B. *Contestatory Cuban Short Story of the Revolution*. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2002.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington, IN: U of Indiana P, 1984.
- Barnet, Miguel. *Cimarrón: Historia de un esclavo*. Madrid: Siruela, 2002.
- Barr, Marleen, and Nicholas D. Smith, eds. Preface. *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1983. 1-2.
- Bartkowski, Frances. *Feminist Utopias*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1989.
- Bastide, Roger. *African Civilisations in the New World*. Trans. Peter Green. NY: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Bejel, Emilio. *Gay Cuban Nation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.

Belli, Gioconda. *El país bajo mi piel: Memorias de amor y guerra*. NY: Vintage, 2002.

Benjamins, H.S. "Paradisiacal Life: The Story of Paradise in the Early Church." In *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity*. Ed. Gerard P. Luttikhuisen. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1999.

Bernstein, Richard. "It's Hard Work Being a Hedonist in Cuba." *The New York Times* 5 Feb. 2001, late ed.: E7.

Brandon, Robert. *Santeria from Africa to the New World: the Dead Sell Memories*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1993.

Bunck, Julie Marie. *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994.

Carey-Webb, Allen. *Making Subject(s): Literature and the Emergence of National Identity*. NY: Garland, 1998.

Carpentier, Alejo. "De lo real maravilloso americano." In *Tientos y diferencias*. Buenos Aires: Calicanto, 1976. 83-99.

---. *El reino de este mundo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1997.

Casamayor, Odette. "La Habana en la narrativa de Pedro Juan Gutiérrez o la ciudad como mapa de cierto itinerario existencial." *Todo sobre Pedro Juan*. 20 April 2006  
<[http://www.pedrojuangutierrez.com/Ensayos\\_ensayos\\_Odette%20Casamayor.htm](http://www.pedrojuangutierrez.com/Ensayos_ensayos_Odette%20Casamayor.htm)>

Chang-Rodríguez, Raquel, and Malva E. Filer, eds. *Voces de Hispanoamérica*.

Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1996.

Chappell, Robert. "Cuba: Before and After the 'Wall' Came Down." *The Sport*

*Journal* 7:1 (Winter 2004). 16 May 2006

<<http://www.thesportjournal.org/2004journal/vol7-no1/chappellCuba.asp>>

Chaudhuri, Hilary. "Religious Movements Homepage: Spiritualism." 11 Sept

2006 <<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Spiritism.html>>

Claeys, Gregory, and Lyman Tower Sargent, Eds. *The Utopia Reader*. NY:

NYUP, 1999.

DeVries, Sonja. *Gay Cuba*. San Francisco: Frameline, 1995.

Drew, William. "D.W. Griffith (1875-1948)." *Gilda's Blue Book of the Screen*. 1

July 2006 <<http://www.gildasattic.com/dwgriffith.html>>

"Dystopia." *Dystopia – George Orwell links*. 18 Jan 2006,

<<http://www.netcharles.com/orwell>>.

Feinstein, Howard. "In Havana: Contradiction Reigns." *Indiewire*. 3 Dec. 2006.

<[http://www.indiewire.com/ots/onthescene\\_021220hava.html](http://www.indiewire.com/ots/onthescene_021220hava.html)>.

Fernández-Olmos, Margarite, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. *Creole Religions*

*of the Caribbean*. NY: NY UP, 2003.

---. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. New

Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997.

Fornet, Jorge. "La narrativa cubana entre la utopía y el desencanto." *Hispanamérica*

95 (agosto 2003): (3-20).

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16.1 (Spring, 1986): 22-27.

Freibert, Lucy M. "World Views in Utopian Novels by Women." In *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*. Eds. Marleen Barr and Nicholas D. Smith. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1983. 67-84.

Gutiérrez, Pedro Juan. *Animal tropical*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000.

---. *Carne de perro*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2003.

---. *El insaciable hombre araña*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2002.

---. Interview with Lori Oxford. 22 Dec 2005.

---. Interview with Lori Oxford . 11 Jun 2006.

---. *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1998.

---. "Verdad y mentira en la literatura." *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* 25 (2002): 276-281.

"Happenings." *jeffBuckley.com*. 25 Nov. 2006.

<[www.jeffbuckley.com/news.asp?id=86](http://www.jeffbuckley.com/news.asp?id=86)>.

Henaff, Marcel. "Utopía latina, *American Dream*." In *Utopía y la experiencia en la idea americana: colectivo de autores franceses y cubanos*. La Habana: Imagen Contemporánea, 1999. 1-19

Hendrix, Jimi. "Red House." 24 June 2006.

<<http://www.seeklyrics.com/lyrics/Jimi-Hendrix/Red-House.html>>.

Hetherington, Kevin. *The Badlands of Social Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. London: Routledge, 1997.

“Inkpot Classical Music Reviews: Sibelius Karelia Suite. Luonnotar. Andante Festivo. The Oceanides. King Christian II Suite. Finlandia. Gothenburg SO/Järvi (DG).” *Inkpot Classical Music Review*. 16 June 2006.

<<http://inkpot.com/classical/sibjarvi.html>>.

Kardec, Allan. *Spiritualist Philosophy: The Spirits' Book*. Trans. Anna Blackwell. NY: Arno, 1976.

“Know Your Enemy — Not So Great Minds Quotes.” *The Atheist Empire*. 18 Jul 2006. <<http://atheistempire.com/kye.html>>.

Kristeva, Julia. “Word, Dialogue, and the Novel.” In *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. T. Moi. NY: Columbia UP. 35-61.

Kutzinski, Vera M. *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*. Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 1993.

McDannell, Colleen, and Bernhard Lang. *Heaven: A History*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1988.

McGrath, Alister E. *A Brief History of Heaven*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.

Marcoux, Jon. “Cultural Materialism.” 10 Mar. 2007.

<<http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/Faculty/murphy/cultmat.htm>>.

Marks, Morton. “Exploring *El monte*: Ethnobotany and the Afro-Cuban Science of the Concrete.” In *En torno a Lydia Cabrera*. Ed. Isabel Castellanos and Josefina Inclán. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1987.

Matibag, Eugenio. *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1996.

- Matthews, Thomas. "Brave Old World: An Ambitious Renovation of Havana's Old City Tries to Reconcile Grit and Glory, Squalor and Splendor." *Cigar Aficionado*. May/June 1999. 10 Dec. 2006.  
<[http://www.cigaraficionado.com/Cigar/CA\\_Features/CA\\_Feature\\_Basic\\_Template/0,2344,426,00.html](http://www.cigaraficionado.com/Cigar/CA_Features/CA_Feature_Basic_Template/0,2344,426,00.html)>.
- Miró, Ramón. "The Cuban Economy: Background Information." 25 Mar. 2006.  
<<http://www.cubafacts.com/Economy/econmain.htm>>.
- Mizrach, Steve. "The Symbolic Invention of America-as-Utopia." *Utopian American Communities*. 23 Jul 2006.  
<<http://www.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/utopo-amer.html>>.
- Moore, Richard. "Napoleonic Characters: Joseph Fouché." *Napoleonic Guide*. 20 Aug. 2007. <<http://www.napoleonguide.com/fouches.htm>>.
- More, Thomas. *Utopia*. NY: Washington Square P, 1965.
- Murphy, Joseph M. *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*. Boston: Beacon P, 1994.
- Nandy, Ashis. *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Neely, Carol Thomas. "WOMEN/UTOPIA/FETISH: Disavowal and Satisfied Desire in Margaret Cavendish's *New Blazing World* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*." In *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic*. Ed. Tobin Siebers. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995.
- Neumann, Erich. *Anatomy of the Psyche: Alchemical solution in psychotherapy*. La Salle, Indiana: Open Court P, 1985.

- Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. NY: Basic Books, 1974.
- Ocasio, Rafael. *Cuba's Political and Sexual Outlaw: Reinaldo Arenas*.  
Gainesville, FL: U of Florida P, 2003.
- Padilla, Heberto. *Self-Portrait of the Other*. NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990.
- Pedraza, Silvia. "The Impact of Pope John Paul II's Visit to Cuba." In *Cuba in Transition: Volume 8. Papers and Proceedings of the 8th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)*. Miami, FL. Aug 6-8, 1998. 482-485. 11 Sept 2006  
<[http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/asce/cuba8/48pedraza.pdf#search=%22religion %20%22special%20period%22%22](http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/asce/cuba8/48pedraza.pdf#search=%22religion%20%22special%20period%22%22)>
- Pérez, Louis. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. NY: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Piñera, Virgilio. "La isla en peso." *Virgilio Piñera* 01 April 2007  
<<http://usuarios.lycos.es/callelacosta/virgilio.htm>>
- Prasad, Madhava. "On the Question of a Theory of (Third World) Literature." *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 57-83.
- Rivero, Raul. "Daily Life in Cuba." *Le Monde* 2 Feb. 1999. 20 May 2006  
<<http://www.cartadecuba.org/Life%20in%20Red.htm>>
- Robinson, B.A. "Santería, La Regla Lucumí and Lukumí." *Religious Tolerance* 09 May 2005. 20 Sept 2006  
<<http://www.religioustolerance.org/santeri.htm>>
- Román, Reinaldo. Class lecture. History 6211: Cuba from Emancipation to Revolution. U of Georgia, Athens, GA. 16 Mar. 2004.

- Rubiera Castillo, Daisy. *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century*. Trans. Anne McLean. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower. "Authority & Utopia: Utopianism in Political Thought." *Polity* 14.4 (1982): 565-84.
- Schmidt, Bettina E. "A Critique Against Syncretism." *Transformation* 23.4 (Oct 2006): 236-243.
- Scott, John Anthony. Introduction. *Utopia*. By Thomas More. NY: Washington Square P, 1965. v-xxxii.
- Shaw, Donald. "The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction." *STCL* 19.1 (Winter, 1995): 11-28.  
<<http://www2.ups.edu/faculty/jlago/fl380/postboom.htm>> 3 Jan. 2006.
- St. John, Graham. "Alternative Cultural Heterotopia: ConFest as Australia's Marginal Centre." Diss. La Trobe U, Bundoora, Australia, 1999.
- Tarver, Ron. "Artist Statement." 10 Dec. 2006.  
<<http://www.rontarverphotographs.com/havana/index.htm>>.
- "Technorealism." 24 Jan. 2006. <<http://www.technorealism.org/faq.html#1.1>>.
- Valdés, Zoé. "Heberto Padilla: delito del poeta." *El Mundo*. 29 Sept. 2000. 1 Oct. 2006. <<http://www.elmundo.es/2000/09/29/opinion/29N0031.html>>.
- . *La nada cotidiana*. Barcelona: Emecé, 1995.
- Vattimo, Gianni. *The Transparent Society*. Trans. David Webb. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
- Visvader, John. "The use of paradox in uroboric philosophies." *Philosophy East and West* 28.4 (Oct 1978): 455-467.

- Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. NY: Routledge, 1989.
- Wedel, Johan. *Santería Healing: A Journey into the Afro-Cuban World of Divinities, Spirits, and Sorcery*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2004.
- Wegner, Phillip E. *Imaginary Communities*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002.
- Whitfield, Esther. "Autobiografía sucia: The Body Impolitic of *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*." *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 36.2 (May 2002): 329-351.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. London: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Young, Sherman. "Of Cyber Spaces: The Internet & Heterotopias." *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture* 1.4 (1998). 20 Jul 2006  
<<http://www.uq.edu.au/mc/9811/hetero.php>>.
- Yronwode, Catherine. "Spiritualism in African Diaspora Religions." Online posting. 28 Aug. 2000. Lucky Mojo. 24 Oct. 2006.  
<<http://www.luckymojo.com/esoteric/religion/spiritualism>>.

**APPENDIX A****INTERVIEW WITH PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ, Dec. 2005**

Madrid, December 22, 2005

**PJG:** Déjame explicarte cómo ha sido el proceso porque creo que merece la pena explicarte cómo fue el proceso del ciclo de Centro Habana. En realidad, el ciclo de Centro Habana obedece a una situación caótica en que se mete mi vida, se sumerge mi vida, a partir del año 90, 91. Y todo viene a partir de la realidad, a partir de mi vida. Es decir, yo en el año 90, 91, mi matrimonio cae en crisis, yo era un periodista. Por 25 años era un periodista normal, común y corriente en Cuba. Estaba casado, tenía dos hijos. De pronto me divorcio, un divorcio muy traumático, muy esquizofrénico, y junto con eso se cae el socialismo en Europa, en la Unión Soviética. Entonces, es como que se me desploman los dos pilares de mi vida, ¿no?, mi familia por un lado, tengo que separarme de mis hijos, todo eso, y al mismo tiempo se desploma el socialismo, se desploma todo lo que yo había dedicado mi vida.

Yo me quedo sin asideros, me quedo en una situación económica difícilísima, muy deprimido. Me sentía muy mal. De pronto veo que la ideología, a lo que había dedicado toda mi vida, defendiéndola con las uñas, era una falsedad que no funcionaba, sencillamente. Me habían engañado, me habían vendido un producto vacío. Y de pronto mi vida cae en un vacío terrible. Mi respuesta, ya te

cuento, tenía 41, 42, 43 años... yo siempre había sido muy machista. En Cuba — bueno, muy machista, no, ya estaba en la etapa esa de transición. Mi padre había sido más machista que yo, mi abuelo mucho más. Mi respuesta fue dedicarme a un alcoholismo desenfrenado, un tabaquismo desenfrenado. Fumaba tabacos, puros. Y una promiscuidad sexual horrible. Yo siempre había sido muy promiscuo. Había tenido siempre muchas mujeres. Eso es lo que origina precisamente el divorcio, mis infidelidades permanentes de macho, macho macho macho macho macho, "macho verde" decimos en Cuba. Entonces, en medio de esa situación, de toda esta promiscuidad terrible, de todo este alcoholismo, de todo este desenfreno, como respuesta para no suicidarme, porque en realidad yo tenía idea del suicidio.

En medio de todo esto, en el año 94, por ahí, me voy a Málaga, con una malagueña, un amor de esos así de pronto. Me fui a Málaga. Trabajé allá dos o tres meses como un locutor de una emisora de radio, de qué se yo qué. Busqué un dinerito, regresé a Cuba. Y, regreso, y nada, todo seguía igual o peor. Por ejemplo, el edificio donde yo vivo, había a veces 15 días sin agua, sin una gota de agua. Te imaginarás la mierda en los baños. Recordándose: no había gas para cocinar. En todo aquel barrio de Centro Habana. No había gas para cocinar. Simple y sencillamente. Entonces se cocinaba con carbón. Te estoy dando un *background* de todo lo que me lleva a mí escribir todos estos libros. Una situación desesperante, como nadie se la puede imaginar. Tú sabes que una ciudad tan grande como La Habana es muy vulnerable. Puede tener tres millones de habitantes. Y es muy vulnerable, si no hay gas y no hay... no había recogida de

basura. Naturalmente empiezan las ratas y las cucarachas y todo tipo de enfermedades. Y esta situación se acumulaba, 91, 92, 93, 94, el 5 de agosto del 94 explota el pueblo por el Malecón, pidiendo libertad y al día siguiente la respuesta del gobierno es abrir las fronteras. Y las balsas, los balseros famosos, que comienzan el 6 o el 7 de agosto del 94 como respuesta a esta manifestación de la gente desesperada por el Malecón. Cinco de agosto del 94. Esto es importante, ¿no? Ir planteando estas fechas. Cinco de agosto 94 es el "Maleconazo" como se le llama, y a lo largo de agosto del 94 los balseros. Yo empiezo a escribir la *Trilogía sucia* en septiembre del 94.

**LO:** Un mes después.

**PJG:** Ya estaba hasta los cojones. Pero como yo no me iba a encarnar una balsa para irme, como yo tenía mis hijos, que tengo sentido de responsabilidad paternal y familiar muy grande. Soy así, esto forma parte del macho también, ¿no? De ser el suministrador, tengo un sentido de responsabilidad familiar. Y yo no me iba a ir. Además no me gusta dar la espalda a los problemas, ¿no? No creo que eso sea algo bueno. Entonces mi respuesta es en septiembre del 94 empezar a escribir estos cuentos desesperados pero sin saber lo que estaba haciendo. No responde la *Trilogía sucia* y los demás libros a un proyecto intelectual premeditado, sino que fue un escape del dolor.

Yo venía ya escribiendo cuentos, poesía, todo esto, desde que tenía 14, 15 años. A partir de los 18 años, mucho más todavía. Haciendo periodismo,

periodismo profesional, desde que tenía 21, 22 años. Con 22 años ya estaba escribiendo profesionalmente, periodismo, y escribiendo poesía desde que tenía 13 o 14, escribiendo cuentos desde que tenía 18 años. Escondiéndolo todo, porque yo soy muy autoexigente. A veces mandaba a algun concurso pero al final no me gustaba, lo escondía todo. Pero sin darme cuenta yo iba ganándome un oficio. Es como un carpintero que hace una mesa, le queda medio jorobada, y la esconde. Hasta que al fin, te sale una mesa y entonces la sacas para venderla, ¿no? Pero entonces ya tienes escondidas ocho mesas que te salieron mal. Y cuando empiezas a hacer sillas, lo mismo, después de 25 sillas, la número 26 te sale bien y entonces ésa la pones ahí para venderla.

**LO:** Lo que estás describiendo es un proceso autodidáctico. Normalmente un carpintero tiene a alguien ahí que le está diciendo: "Mira, esto lo puedes mejorar..."

**PJG:** Muy interesante que me digas eso porque mira, yo decidí también con 18 años. Yo dije: "Yo quiero ser escritor. A mí no me interesa tener una preparación teórica de literatura. Yo no quiero saber cómo se escribió *La odisea* ni *La iliada*". Porque me parecía a mí que ese conocimiento excesivo podía aplastarme mi creatividad. Y yo quería ser un creador. Quizás uno de mis modelos en ese momento era Hemingway. Otro de mis modelos a partir de los 16, 17 años fue Truman Capote. Yo me leí *Desayuno en Tiffany's*, en una edición de aquí de Bruguera, que hacía ediciones muy baratas que se distribuían en toda

América Latina. *Desayuno en Tiffany's*. Y cuando yo lo leo, digo: "Coño, esto es lo perfecto". Porque yo ya había leído mucho, había estado leyendo desde los siete u ocho años, desesperadamente.

**LO:** Te gustaba el periodismo nuevo, de Capote.

**PJG:** Exacto. Entonces cuando yo leí *Desayuno en Tiffany's*, yo digo esto es lo perfecto porque esto no parece literatura. Esto parece como si fuera un chisme de él y el bartender, de ahí del barrio que estaban hablando de una muchacha del barrio que vivía ahí. Entonces, estaba como... "esto esta perfecto" porque parecía un cuento, un cuentecito. Digo: "Esto no parece literatura. Si algún día yo soy escritor, me gustaría escribir de esta manera. Engañar al lector, que el lector no sepa nada, ¿no? Sino engañarlo y que no parezca literatura. Entonces eso es importante también. Yo me hago ese planteamiento, a partir de ahí, yo me hago casi un programa de acción, o sea, leer mucho, leer mucho. Por ejemplo, yo cogía a un autor y lo agotaba. Si era William Faulker, tacatacatataca, y en libretas de apuntes, iba llevando apuntes de cada libro de Faulkner. Cogía a Erskine Caldwell, del sur también, que me encantaba. Tantantantán. Así con cada uno. Truman Capote, leí todo lo que podía. Alejo Carpentier, todo. Metí un año entero leyendo a Alejo Carpentier, estudiándolo. García Márquez, igual, tantantantán y después ponía a todos los libros ahí, y yo muy disciplinado. Yo soy un alemán. Cuando quiero, soy un alemán. Estoy hablando de escritores, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann.

**LO:** ¿Y escritoras?

**PJG:** Escritoras, son muy pocas. Hay una en Vancouver que me fascinó desde siempre: Grace Paley, ¿sabes quien es Grace Paley?

**LO:** La poeta, ¿no?

**PJG:** Sí, poeta y hace cuentos, también. Tiene tres libros de cuentos. A ésa la conocí yo después con ya 30 y pico de años. Grace Paley. Bueno (suspira) mujeres en realidad son pocas las que conozco. Ahora es cuando estoy... (como si estuviera disculpándose) más bien, escritores hombres. Si, no hay ninguna a mano que yo recuerde ahora. Clarice Lispector. Es más difícil conseguir los libros de ella.

Entonces, lo que te quiero decir es que llega el año 94 y empiezo a escribir la *Trilogía sucia* con mucha rabia, con mucha furia, pero al mismo tiempo como un oficio, un control del lenguaje. Yo sabía que a mí no me interesaba, porque además, y esto es importantísimo, yo había sufrido muchísimo con el Siglo de Oro, con Góngora y todos los demás del Siglo de Oro en la universidad. Yo había hecho una licenciatura en periodismo, en la Universidad de La Habana, entre el año 72 a 77, creo. Un curso para trabajadores. Yo trabajaba en una emisora de radio y los miércoles me los dejaban libre. Yo iba a la universidad, recibía clases todo el día y después yo estudiaba el resto de la semana yo solo. Y yo sufrí mucho

con el Siglo de Oro porque había que examinar a todo el mundo: a Góngora, a Quevedo, al otro, al otro, al otro, al Siglo de Oro completo. Y me parecía tan absurdo utilizar el idioma de esa manera, tan barroca, tan... no sé, un problema de gusto, de educación, ¿no? Te digo, yo con mi educación periodística, ¿no?, de tac-tac-tac-tac, al grano y quitar adjetivos. Un adjetivo hay que pensarlo tres o cuatro veces, y al final quizás lo borras. Lo tachas y no pasa nada. La frase funciona sin el adjetivo perfectamente. Y entonces yo ya he ido depurando muchísimo mi lenguaje. Tenía un oficio, había escrito miles de poemas, incluso haikús. Haikús japoneses, bueno, en este caso, haikús habaneros, ¿no? A mí me gusta mucho el haiku. Yo lo disfruto tanto, tanto, tanto. Tengo muchos libros de haikú y leo muchos haikús.

**LO:** Supongo que será por lo mismo, por lo escueto.

**PJG:** Sí. Es tan sugerente, es tan magistral, ¿no? Tac-tac-tac, son tres golpes así, y ya. Hay mucha gente moderna que ha escrito haikús. Pero a mí me fascinaban los haikús, yo escribía haikús para mí también. Con mucho respeto, porque el haikú es otra cosa.

Entonces de esa manera empiezo a escribir la *Trilogía sucia*. La *Trilogía* en realidad no era una trilogía. Era un libro de cuentos, que me pasé todo un año escribiéndolos. Ya tenía 22, 23 cuentos. Excesivamente autobiográfico. Yo lo que hacía era: lo que me sucedía, sin darme cuenta, pasaba 15 días y decía: "Coño, me pasó esto-esto-y-esto y pan-pan-pan-pan, aquello es un cuento". Y lo

cogía y lo escribía. Muchas veces borracho, por la noche, escribía un poco. Después me pasaba una semana, 10 días, mejorando eso, perfeccionando.

**LO:** En este momento, ¿todavía estabas trabajando como periodista?

**PJG:** Sí, pero tenía mucho tiempo porque la revista donde yo trabajaba, la revista *Bohemia*, que había sido semanal, había pasado a ser mensual. Y era pequeñita así. Entonces si antes me pedían mucho trabajo y yo no tenía tiempo para... tú sabes que la literatura es ocio. Si no tienes tiempo, no puedes pensar ni sentir nada. Entonces en la revista me pedían dos paginitas al mes. Eso lo escribía en dos días, un día y pico o dos días, yo escribía las dos paginitas, buscaba dos fotos, lo entregaba y ya. Y me quedaban 28 días libres del mes. Esos días eran para templarme todas las negras del barrio, para beberme una botella de ron al día, acabar con mi hígado, como está acabado, fumar desesperadamente. Y en fin, esa locura, esas cosas. Moverme, hacer mis pequeños negocios para buscar dinero porque tenía que buscar un poco de dinero de algún modo. Y entonces escribir. Lo que me pasaba, lo escribía, lo escribía, lo escribía, lo escribía, lo escribía. Estuve en eso tres años. Te repito que, inconscientemente, yo escribía y lo escondía. Escribía y no se lo enseñaba a nadie. Yo llevaba una doble vida, ¿no? Una vida como periodista, otra vida en el barrio, ahí, normal, y después yo escribía. Una triple vida, si se quiere, ¿no? Escribía esto, iba y lo escondía. Y esto durante tres años, al final eran tres libros de cuentos. Cuando vi que ya había en total 60 cuentos, paré y dije: "No, ya, esto ya no va más. Llevo tres años en

esto". Además eso a uno lo desmoraliza mucho, te desmoraliza porque es muy fuerte, estar escribiendo de toda esa degradación ética y moral. Es muy degradante. Es como estar escarbando la mierda, ¿no? Otros dejan la mierda ahí, dejan que se seque y se desaparezca. Tú sigues escarbando en ella.

**LO:** Y eso es una imagen que usas mucho, lo de revolcar la mierda.

**PJG:** Sí, incluso hay un cuento ahí que se llama "El revolcador de mierda". ¿Qué sucede? Terminó de escribir la *Trilogía*. Eso se encaminó. Yo se lo mandé a una editorial en Santiago de Cuba, que no la aceptaron. Y se encaminó con una francesa que pasó por La Habana. Cuando esto pasó, ya estaba listo para publicarse aquí en Barcelona, en Anagrama. Yo termino de escribir la *Trilogía*, y cuando pasan tres o cuatro meses, me quedaban dos personajes en la cabeza, dando vueltas, que no se me quitaban de la cabeza. Un poco obsesivo, también: "Tengo que escribir los cuentos estos". Cuando me pongo a tomar notas y a organizar, veo que no es un cuento, que los dos personajes se mezclan, y en realidad, es una novela. Que es *El rey de La Habana*. Entonces escribo *El rey de La Habana*, creo que fue julio, agosto del 97, en dos meses, menos. En 50 y pico días, escribo desesperadamente *El rey de La Habana*. Desesperadamente y de una manera inconsciente, irracional, ilógica. Yo me levantaba por la mañana, y no sabía qué iba a pasar a ese infeliz. Era como algo espiritual, era una cosa muy rara, porque yo estaba como siguiéndolo. Yo lo veía, caminando por ahí. Y yo lo que hacía, escribía lo que pasaba, y cogía para allá y cogía para acá, y hacía esto,

y hacía lo otro, y yo escribía, escribía, escribía. Después descansaba un poco al mediodía, y por las tardes me ponía a... yo escribo a mano y a máquina. Por la tarde, taca-taca-taca-taca-tac, escribía, pasaba a máquina todo eso. Y así, de esa manera agobiante. Hice eso en julio, agosto del 98. Porque yo en septiembre lo pasé en limpio, en definitivo, y vine para Madrid. Vine para Madrid en octubre a presentar la *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*, que yo le había dicho al editor: "Mira, la *Trilogía sucia* tiene una lectura política muy evidente, y no quiero que me manipulen en ese sentido. Yo no quiero ponerme ni a favor ni en contra de Fidel Castro. Es literatura lo que estoy haciendo. Yo no quiero hacer manipulación política. Y quiero estar yo presente para controlar la situación". Entonces me mandó un pasaje —entre paréntesis, llegué aquí a Madrid por primera vez en octubre del 98 (yo había estado en Málaga en el 94) con el pasaje de ida y vuelta, con 70 dólares en el bolsillo, que era toda mi fortuna. Después, cuando llegué aquí, empiezo a sacar mis cuentas y qué sé yo qué.. yo había vendido la *Trilogía sucia* en mil y pico dólares, en nada. Los editores, eso es otro mundo. No te metas en ese mundo porque son piratas con un cuchillo aquí (señalando a la garganta). Yo había vendido los derechos de la *Trilogía sucia* por mil y pico dólares. Pero eso es una cosa aparte.

**LO:** Habías vendido tus derechos.

**PJG:** No me quedó más remedio que aceptar eso. Porque si lo contrario, no se publicaba, y era Anagrama, que es Anagrama. El que paga aquí no tiene

prestigio. El que tiene prestigio no paga. Pero bueno, eso es “*off the record*”. Ay, me da lo mismo en definitiva. Pero bueno. Llegué a Madrid en esas circunstancias y ya traía *El rey de La Habana* bajo el brazo. Inmediatamente se presenta la *Trilogía sucia*. Yo trato de controlar la cosa de la prensa. Pero no lo pude controlar. Me hicieron enfoques políticos, y qué sé yo qué, porque tuvo muchísima prensa. Entonces contraté *El rey de La Habana*, de manera más o menos igual, no sé, 200 dólares más si acaso. Pero no, no hubo nada. Contrato *El rey de La Habana* también y la dejo ya aquí. Se publicó en Italia, también, un pedazo de la *Trilogía sucia*. El primer libro, o el segundo, no sé. La *Trilogía sucia* salió también en Italia. Fui a Roma a promocionarlo, vine para acá, regresé a La Habana. Y cuando regreso a La Habana, me habían botado del periodismo. Nunca me explicaron por qué.

**LO:** Eso te lo iba a preguntar.

**PJG:** No, no, nunca tuvieron la osadía de decirme, la educación de decirme: "Mira, el libro...". No, no: "ya es una decisión tomada y ya. Aquí está tu expediente" y nada, a la calle. Eso fue así. Te estoy hablando de enero del 99. Entonces yo me fui a la UNEAC, porque cuando me botaron del trabajo, ya automáticamente quedaba fuera de la Unión de Periodistas de Cuba también. Y en Cuba, ¿cómo puedes vivir completamente al margen? Bueno, puedes vivir pero...

Entonces fui a la Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, la UNEAC, y ahí tuve el apoyo. Ahí me dijeron: "Tu eres un artista". Un proceso de varios días. No te voy a contar en detalle porque no merece la pena pero bueno, un proceso de varios días, me dijeron que me apoyaban, que no me preocupara. Y yo les dije: "Mira, yo no tengo nada que ver con la política..." Y ellos: "no, pero es que han dicho los periodistas..." "Pero yo no sé qué han dicho los periodistas, cada cual es libre de decir lo que le dé la gana, ¿no?" Yo sé lo que yo escribo, y yo creo que estoy haciendo cuentos, estoy haciendo novelas... sí, pueden tener un enfoque político, pero también pueden tener un enfoque pornográfico, si tú eres muy traumatizado sexualmente, puedes ver pornografía. Si eres muy traumatizado políticamente, sólo ves política. Si eres un antropólogo, lo que ves es un estudio antropológico de una situación determinada. Si eres un sociólogo... yo tengo una prima que es psicóloga, y lo que le fascina de mis libros es la psicología de los personajes. Así que cada cual hace su propia lectura. Así que a mí, como dicen aquí en España, no me toquen los cojones, y déjame tranquilo que yo voy a seguir escribiendo.

Igual, te repito, ya había dejado *El rey de La Habana* contratado. Y entonces por ahí sigo escribiendo. *Animal tropical* obedece ya a una voluntad de escribir una novela... porque *El rey de La Habana* es muy apocalíptico. Terrible, ¿no? Entonces digo, bueno, vamos a escribir algo un poco más... entonces *Animal tropical* es una novela completamente autobiográfica. Todo lo que se dice ahí, absolutamente todo lo que se dice ahí es —fue— real. Fue así.

**LO:** A pesar de que en el principio dice, al menos en la edición de Anagrama, que todos los personajes que aparecen en esta novela son ficticios.

**PJG:** Sí, yo lo pongo. En muchos libros, yo lo pongo como un resguardo legal. Si el día de mañana, la sueca se le ocurre reclamarme algo, (hace un chasquido) el libro dice que esto es ficción. Aunque el lector sabe lo que tú estás escribiendo. Pero ante la ley, si mañana hay una reclamación, (otro chasquido) "mira lo que está puesto en la primera página del libro".

**LO:** Por alguna razón, lo interpreté como una especie de "si pero no", de "yo digo esto, pero bueno..." ¿Sabes lo que quiero decir? Que parece que es intencional. Es intencional desde el punto de vista legal pero pensaba que había algo más ahí. Parece ser un juego.

**PJG:** Sí, como un juego con el lector. Puede haber esa lectura. Pero en realidad es un resguardo legal mío, porque yo utilizo siempre gente real, que después siempre me quedo muy mal. Me queda un complejo de culpabilidad un tiempo, ¿no? Un prejuicio. "Ahora utilicé a Lori en un cuento. Ay, ¡qué pena! Lori y su novio aparecen en este cuento. Bueno, no importa". ¿Te das cuenta? Uno se queda siempre con eso.

          Escribí *Animal tropical* ya con la voluntad de que hubiera un poco de amor, que no hubiera muertos, asesinatos, problemas. Y después vienen los otros dos, *El insaciable hombre araña* y *Carne de perro*, que obedecen a una etapa mía

mucho más melancólica, mucho más depresiva. No se si percibes eso en esos dos libros. Hay como un distanciamiento que yo estoy agotado. Yo como persona, y el personaje Pedro Juan. Los dos. Estamos agotados después de vivir toda la *Trilogía sucia*, después de vivir *El Rey de La Habana*, después de vivir *Animal tropical*, ya estamos que no podemos más. Y lo que necesitamos es un poco de silencio y soledad. Para no volvernos locos. Para alejarnos un poco del alcohol, alejarnos un poco del tabaco, alejarnos un poco de las negras. Las negras son insoportables, porque siempre andan detras de uno. Bueno, horrible, deliciosamente horrible. Terrible, terrible. Y entonces esos dos libros obedecen a esa melancolía, esa necesidad de tomar distancia, y de quedarme un poco tranquilo. Siempre en las Playas del Este, o donde supuestamente vive la madre de Pedro Juan, que es en un barrio al sur de La Habana. Entonces él lo que quiere es alejarse de Centro Habana. El ciclo yo decidí completarlo ahí para evitar posibles repeticiones porque creo que me estaba repitiendo en ambientes, en escenarios, en personajes, en temas, en atmósferas. Entonces decidí con *Carne de perro* cortar. Es un ciclo de cinco libros, y a partir de aquí, a ver qué es lo que yo hago. Después viene *Nuestro GG en La Habana*, una novela que juega con la cosa policiaca. En realidad no es exactamente policiaca, pero juega más o menos con las reglas del policiaco, pero en un policiaco se sabe quiénes son los asesinos, los motivos, todo eso vas sabiéndolo a lo largo.

Y ahora presento en enero *El nido de la serpiente*, con un tema que a mí me apasiona mucho, pero que es muy peligroso, que son los años sesenta en Cuba. ¿Qué pasó, realmente, en los años 60 en Cuba? Los años 60 fueron el Che

Guevara, la época heroica, que pasaba por debajo de todo eso. Entonces, en *El nido de la serpiente*, aparece el Pedro Juan jovencito entre 16, 21 años de edad, más o menos. Y de algún modo explica al Pedro Juan de la *Trilogía sucia*. ¿Por qué el Pedro Juan de cuarenta o cuarenta y pico años era tan violento, tan agresivo, tan sexual, tan loco, tan desesperado, tan furioso, tan rabioso?

**LO:** Y ¿esto se ve en *El nido de la serpiente*?

**PJG:** Yo creo que sí, yo creo que en *El nido de la serpiente* hay respuestas para el que ha ido siguiendo todo el ciclo. Creo que en *El nido de la serpiente* hay respuestas. ¿Qué pasa con el Pedro Juan en la época del servicio militar, de toda esa época? Es obvio. Es una novela de unas 200 páginas, más o menos. Se presentó ahora en Brasil y fue muy bien. En una semana se vendió la primera edición completa, 4000 ejemplares. El editor estaba encantado y en seguida se hizo la segunda edición, estando yo en Brasil. Esto fue en septiembre. Se hizo la segunda edición muy rápido. No sé, en Brasil tengo mucho éxito. Me pasa lo mismo que en Alemania, también. Aquí en España es más atenuado todo.

**LO:** Sin embargo, tienes toda una sección en el FNAC. Y sale en enero aquí tu novela.

**PJG:** Sí, se presenta en Barcelona el 26 de enero. Pero no sé, quizás se pone en circulación antes. Y después el 8 de febrero lo presento aquí en el FNAC que

siempre presento mis libros ahí, me tratan con mucho cariño, son muy afectuosos. Bueno, me tienen, no sé si lo has visto, en el FNAC. Ahí dice: "Gutiérrez, Pedro Juan."

**LO:** Ya has hablado por escritores que te gustan, que te han influido. El cine -- ¿tú consumes cine?

**PJG:** Terriblemente. Las influencias mías mayores de infancia, de adolescencia, fueron los cómics. Yo consumía toneladas de cómics, pero toneladas. Y todo el cine norteamericano de los años 40 y 50. Porque en Cuba se pasaban todas esas películas. Date cuenta de que somos vecinos. Todas esas películas, todo, todo, todo el cine de los años 50, date cuenta de que en Cuba, por una peseta, por 20 centavos, tú podrías entrar a un cine y te pasaban tres películas, tres largometrajes. ¡Tres! Los domingos. Además un noticiero. Yo con 8 años iba al cine. Te ponían una película más seria. Te ponían quizás una de Tarzan y quizás te ponían una de vaqueros, de cowboys. Todas de segunda o tercera categoría pero dentro de esas algunas buenas, buenas también. Había de todo.

Entonces yo veía cientos de películas, cientos, y el principal producto cultural era ése, el cine y los cómics. Y descubrí entonces una biblioteca, muy cerca de mi casa, que era muy rica, una biblioteca donada a la ciudad de Matanzas por una familia millonaria norteamericana, los Holmes, del sur de los Estados Unidos. Habían sido los abuelos de la familia de Guitera Holmes, un patriota de los años 30 en Cuba. Murió ahí cerca de Matanzas. Y entonces ellos donaron a la

biblioteca de Matanzas una biblioteca preciosa, de tres pisos, que tenía una sección infantil, una sección juvenil, y una sección adulta. Y a mí me encantaba la biblioteca en primer lugar porque tenía aire acondicionado, y porque tenía buen olor. Siempre había olor a lavanda, a rosa. Y los libros todos limpiecitos. Entonces a mí me fascinaba esa biblioteca porque era un mundo tan diferente. Tú entrabas ahí y era como dejar la sociedad, el calor, las moscas. Nosotros éramos pobres, vivíamos en una situación... y dejar todo eso afuera y entrar a aquella biblioteca que era otro mundo. Incluso otros libros. Los libros eran deliciosos, eran buenísimos. Todo el mundo hablaba bajito, calladito, educadamente. Y así fui entonces conociendo a todo el mundo, a Verne, ¿no? que se conoce a esa edad. Toda la literatura infantil y juvenil.

**LO:** Entonces el cine para ti no ha sido--

**PJG:** Hoy en día lo que sufro es que el cine, al igual que toda la cultura, pasa igual en la literatura, en la prensa, lo hacen todo cada vez más "lite", cada vez más entretenimiento. Entonces aprovecho cuando vengo aquí a Europa, a España especialmente, que puedo ver buenas películas de los que hacen los franceses, los alemanes. Los españoles son muy "pan con timbas". No son muy buenos en el cine hoy en día. Su etapa buena, creo que ya pasó. Lo que hacen en Estados Unidos, algo del cine independiente de Estados Unidos, que aquí se están pasando siempre, aquí en Madrid por lo menos 8 días, 12 películas nuevas. Buen cine

italiano, y lo mejorcito francés. Entonces aprovecho para nutrirme. El cine es importantísimo.

**LO:** Del cine cubano de los últimos 20 años, ¿hay algo que te gusta?

**PJG:** Sí, de los últimos 20 años, sí. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, completo. La obra de Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, completa. Y después hay cosas como *Cecilia* de Humberto Solás, o *La bella del Alhambra*, de Enrique Pineda Barnet. Hay algunas cosas muy buenas. Y ahora recientemente un fenómeno de hace 10 años para acá, hay unos cuantos cineastas jóvenes, de treinta y pico de años, que están haciendo cortos muy interesantes. Cortos de 20, 27, 30 minutos. Pero de manera muy marginal. Están imponiendo una nueva... es el mismo fenómeno que está pasando en todo el arte cubano. Pasa en la literatura, pasa en las artes plásticas, pasa en la fotografía. Se están haciendo unas fotografías interesantísimas. Ese cine a base de cortos, una experimentación también en teatro. En fin, se está haciendo todo esto pero muy *underground*, muy a los márgenes de la cultura oficial. ¿Cuál es la cultura oficial? Las tonterías: el ballet clásico, el conjunto folclórico nacional de danza y qué sé yo qué cosa, las cosas que no hagan cuestionamiento, que no hagan planteamientos ideológicos, que no hagan planteamientos filosóficos, que no hagan planteamientos conceptuales, en definitiva, que no hagan pensar. Pero *underground* hay mucha gente que se está moviendo, incluso en la literatura.

**LO:** ¿Has visto *Utopía*, el cortometraje de 10 minutos?

**PJG:** No recuerdo.

**LO:** Son tres episodios. En la primera parte, hay un grupo de hombres que están jugando domino—

**PJG:** —ah, si. Están hablando del barroco latinoamericano. Y después la otra que... no se qué ópera, si es de Haydn o...

**LO:** O Verdi. No recuerdo tampoco. Y luego la otra que está declamando un poema de Borges.

**PJG:** Sí, eso es de Molina, de Jorge Molina, que es muy amigo mío. Yo no me acordaba del título. Ese es buenísimo. Están hablando, que si existe el barroco latinoamericano... están jugando dominó. ¿Quién cojones se va a poner a hablar del barroco latinoamericano? “Oye, el barroco latinoamericano sí tenía pinga, chico...” Hay una extrapolación de temas, ¿no? Buenísimo. Entonces las otras dos son dos pelandrujas, incultas, hablando de la ópera. Pero que son dos pelandrujas, con sus collares de santería, que se ponen a hablar de unos temas. ¿Qué cosa es esto?

**LO:** Y la tercera que es una chica que está declamando un poema de Borges, "El Golem", que debe ser un poema muy serio, y la niña siempre se equivoca y habla de los "jodíos" y la "jodería". Es muy gracioso. Y el otro que he visto es *Monte Rouge*.

**PJG:** *Monte Rouge*, muy bonita, también. Muy bonita. Es de Luis Alberto García, que es mi amigo, también. Somos muy amigos. Cuando lo vi a Luis Alberto, yo lo vi como un mes después, y le dije: "Luis Alberto, ¿qué te hicieron con eso? Ustedes están locos". Dice: "No, no estamos locos. Lo único es que metieron un circular, y no tenemos trabajo ni en la televisión ni en la radio ni en el teatro ni en ningún lugar. Entonces ahora estamos luchando porque nos tienen que dar trabajo, y hay que respetar". Entonces Luis Alberto tenía... Luis Alberto es un tipo muy, él es así, muy loco. Le hablo ahora y dice: "Ellos se relajan, ¿tú crees que ellos se relajan? Vamos a hacer otro". Es un tipo cojonudo.

**LO:** ¿Esos cortos se circulan dentro de Cuba?

**PJG:** Están circulando por internet. *Utopía* y eso. La gente se los pasa, y yo creo que son 4 gatos los que podemos verlos. Pero bueno, se está haciendo y eso va quedando ahí, y de algún modo hay como una respuesta a una cultura que es cada día más oficial, más absurdamente oficial y tonta.

**LO:** Pregunté eso porque acabo de terminar de dar una clase de cine cubano, yo con el profesor mío que ya te mencioné, y por eso no sabía qué comentarios tenías sobre el cine cubano. Pero me interesa que te gusten esos cortos porque esos dos en particular me interesan mucho.

**PJG:** Es una respuesta, creo yo, de la gente más joven, de la gente más vital, más dinámica. Porque hay un engrisamiento de la cultura cubana. La cultura cubana en los últimos años, han tratado de hacerla lo más gris posible. La décima, elevar la décima. Dime tú que aquí se pongan a elevar la zarzuela, ¿no? Por favor. Entonces, elevar la décima o elevar el teatro infantil. Cosas que, bueno, lo que hace siempre este tipo de gobierno, ¿no? De tratar de eliminar todo lo que sea idea, todo lo que sea concepto, todo lo que pueda ayudar a pensar a la gente, ¿no? Entonces la respuesta es ésa. Hay mucha gente escribiendo también y guardando en la gaveta porque es difícil publicar. Yo tuve mucha suerte. Creo que yo realmente tuve suerte publicando, y más publicando en Anagrama. Y después me han publicado todos los libros, uno detrás del otro, mejorando un poquito económicamente también, porque si no, no pudiera tener ni el abrigo éste puesto. Y entonces creo que ha sido... bueno, yo también he sido muy disciplinado en trabajar, ir sacándome todo lo que tengo adentro.

**LO:** Creo que no puedes darle todo el crédito a la suerte, si has trabajado.

**PJG:** Sí, yo creo que sí. He trabajado. He trabajado mucho, soy muy disciplinado para trabajar. Porque tú tienes que vivir. Pero dentro de eso también puedes sacar tiempo para eso, para trabajar. Si no, puedes ir acumulando apuntes y apuntes y apuntes, cuando vienes a ver, te ahogas en los apuntes. Ahora que estuve en Viena, desde el año 98 yo no iba a Viena, y ahora descubro a Viena por segunda vez. Me pasé una semana ahí con una amiga mía fotógrafa que es una persona muy intensa, muy loca. Y de pronto me doy cuenta de que yo tengo una novela en la cabeza, hace años, de cubanos que viven en Alemania. Me interesa mucho el tema éste de los cubanos que viven en el exterior, ¿no? Pero que incluso la puedo ubicar mejor en los escenarios de Viena. Dondequiera que estoy, siempre estoy tomando... dondequiera, no, pero llego a lugares o me encuentro con gente que me alimenta mucho. Después tienes que decir: "Ahora voy a escribir, porque si ya tengo todo el boceto de una novela". Yo tengo un problema fuerte, y es que a mí me gusta mucho escribir cuentos. Entonces me tengo que estar reprimiendo. Ahora, poco antes de salir para acá, yo vine el 20 de noviembre, tenía dos cuentos en la cabeza, hechos, completos, dos cuentos.

No se si conoces a Raymond Carver. Tienes que conocerlo. Es fenomenal, es importantísimo. Tiene cuatro libros de cuentos y un libro de poesía. Bueno, un volumen, mucha poesía. Pero tienes que leerlo porque es importantísimo. Y se publica muchísimo en Estados Unidos hoy en día. Murió hace ya como 10, 12, 14 años. Un tipo importantísimo. Y me ha influenciado mucho. Yo lo conozco desde hace 4 o 5 años, porque lo publican aquí Anagrama. En español, lo publica Anagrama. Y es importante. Y entonces he descubierto,

como una nueva forma de hacer cuentos, leyendo a Carver. Me tengo que estar reprimiendo porque si no, sigo escribiendo cuentos un poco al estilo de la *Trilogía sucia*, un poco al estilo de *Carne de perro*, algo así. Esos cuentos más bien de situación, de atmósfera, en que casi todo pega *underground*. Tengo que estar aguantándome porque no quiero... ahora me gustaría mucho a mí alejarme en mi próximo libro de La Habana. Escribir algo quizás aquí de Europa, entre Viena, Madrid.

**LO:** Bueno, ese tema de los exiliados, de los cubanos que viven en el exterior.

**PJG:** Sí, me gustaría mucho. Lo que pasa es que en Cuba no puedo. Yo soy un escritor muy emocional. Y entonces en Cuba yo no puedo escribir una novela que se desarrolla en Viena, con frío... "y entonces estabas mirando por ahí y empezó a nevar..." eso si estás ahí, si lo puedo escribir. Pero en La Habana no puedo. Yo sudando... ¿escribiendo que está nevando? No. No puedo. De verdad que no puedo. En eso soy un desastre. No soy nada profesional. Lo que sería es tomar todos los apuntes, irme tranquilamente a mi casa, y pasarme cuatro o cinco meses escribiendo mi novela, pam-pam-pam. No sale.

**LO:** Otra cosa que te quería preguntar. Uno de los epígrafes de *Animal tropical*, de Umberto Eco, dice que sólo algunos conocen la verdad, pero a veces decirlo significa acabar en la hoguera. Aparte de lo que ya me has contado, lo de perder el trabajo del periodismo, ¿cuáles son las consecuencias personales o

profesionales que ha tenido decir esas verdades, o tus verdades, si es que podemos asumir que son verdades?

**PJG:** Era previsible que la gente más oficial del gobierno, los ministros, hicieran una lectura muy política de mis libros. Eso era previsible por completo y yo lo sabía. Pero creo que tengo moral suficiente para hablar y para criticar y para analizar la situación de mi país. Quizás no tengo moral para venir aquí a España y estar enjuiciando a los españoles o ir a Colombia o ir a Estados Unidos, pero en mi país, sí. Y yo defendiendo ese espacio mío de libertad de pensamiento. Que es lo mismo que está haciendo toda esta gente, los que hicieron *Monte Rouge*, o esta gente que hizo *Utopía*. Yo tengo moral. Soy cubano, vivo en Cuba, yo no vivo en Miami.

Entonces a partir de ahí, yo defendiendo mi espacio de libertad de pensamiento, ¿te das cuenta? Hay consecuencias. Me botaron del periodismo pero en definitiva eso fue perfecto, porque no tenía interés en seguir siendo periodista. Ya me sentía incómodo, muchos años en el periodismo. El periodista siempre es un manipulador. Da igual si es en Cuba, como sea en España, como sea en Chile o en Japón. Dondequiera que sea, siempre es un manipulador que está tratando de llevar a la gente a determinadas... entonces, no me interesaba más ese mundo. Así que a la larga fue bien. Una de las consecuencias más graves es que mis libros no los publican en Cuba. Se publicó una pequeña edición de *Animal tropical*, que se perdió, se desapareció, no se sabe qué pasó, si es que eran 2000 ejemplares y se vendió muy rápido o... no se sabe. Se supone que mis libros

no están clasificados en la biblioteca nacional. Están clasificados en una computadora que está en no sé dónde, en un departamento de no sé qué, pero el público normal llega ahí y busca "Pedro Juan Gutiérrez" y creo que lo que aparece es un libro mío periodístico sobre el espacio cósmico. Supongo que esa edición cubana de *Animal tropical* si está clasificada. Entonces eso es muy triste, que en tu propio país no te publiquen. Me consideran como un fantasma.

**LO:** Cuando estábamos en La Habana, yo bajaba de la universidad en la calle Neptuno. Por la calle Neptuno, hacia abajo, se me ocurrió parar en una librería y entré y dos personas estaban hablando sobre *El rey de La Habana*.

**PJG:** Dos cubanos?

**LO:** Dos cubanos. Me pareció increíble porque yo estaba leyendo el libro en ese momento. Estaban hablando sobre *El rey de La Habana* y estaban diciendo: "Eso que dice ahí es lo que pasaba en La Habana en el 94". Te lo estoy diciendo tal como lo dijeron: "Eso es así" o "eso lo he visto yo". O sea, es una cosa en plan boca a oreja. No encontramos ningún libro tuyo en ningún sitio. Los buscamos, pero no. Estamos hablando de dos personas en una ciudad de millones, o sea, no es un gran círculo, pero no deja de resultar significativo el hecho de que hay dos personas en una librería, comentando un libro, y más cuando te estás leyendo ese libro en ese momento.

**PJG:** No, pero ¿sabes lo que pasa? Hay muchos, sobre todo españoles, que llevan mis libros a La Habana y se los regalan a la gente. Entonces yo calculo que puede haber, no sé, por lo menos 300, 400 *Trilogías*, 300, 400 ejemplares de *El rey de La Habana*. *Animal tropical* ha circulado mucho. Pero así, entre la gente, pasándose los libros de mano en mano. Si me quieren ayudar, cuando vuelvan a Cuba, hagan esto. Lleven ejemplares para regalárselo a algún amigo, alguien así que realmente le interese la lectura, que esté vinculado al mundo literario, a la Casa de las Américas.

Quiero que sepas que al principio, *Trilogía sucia* salió en el 98, por ahí, el 99, me confiscaron dos veces paquetes de *Trilogía sucia*. Una vez un editor de aquí de Barcelona me mandó como siete ejemplares de *Trilogía sucia*. Me los confiscaron y me mandaron 45 días después una carta, diciendo: "7 ejemplares de *Trilogía sucia* confiscados. Motivo: literatura contrarrevolucionaria." Había pasado 45 días ya y yo no tenía reclamación porque decía que "dentro de 45 días desde la fecha de confiscación" pero ellos inteligentemente... y después me lo hicieron con *El rey de La Habana*. Era igual, 6, 7 ejemplares de *El rey de La Habana* confiscados. Motivo: literatura contrarrevolucionaria. Esas actas de confiscación las tengo guardadas en mi casa. No había reclamación. Entonces yo se lo agradezco mucho, porque están ayudando un poco la libertad de decisión de los cubanos.

**LO:** Eso me lleva a otra pregunta que te quería hacer. ¿A cuál público te diriges a la hora de escribir? ¿A quién tienes en mente?

**PJG:** A nadie. Yo cuando estoy escribiendo no pienso en nadie. Yo no pienso en nadie. Estoy con mis personajes. Ya te digo, soy un escritor muy emocional. Me agoto mucho escribiendo. Ahora terminé una novela —perdóneme la digresión— ahora terminé una novela que se llama *Pobre diablo*. La traje ahora. Es una novela terrible que no estaba en mis planes escribirla. Yo estoy pensando en tres o cuatro libros, estoy tomando notas para tres o cuatro novelas, quizás un libro de cuentos. Y en el año 2004, en marzo, abril de 2004, mi madre comienza a morir. Se descubre un cáncer de pulmones y bronquios. Ella fumaba mucho, toda la vida. Se le descubre un cáncer y mi madre empieza el proceso de morir. Ella vivía en Pinar del Río. Y llega un momento, junio del 2004, que yo tenía que ir a vivir prácticamente con ella para Pinar del Río. Y sin darme cuenta, yo empiezo a tomar notas, a tomar notas, a tomar notas, notas de lo que estaba pasando, porque es un poco morboso. Los detalles de esa enfermedad son muy desagradables. Y además a mí no me interesaba hablar de eso.

Entonces yo empiezo a estructurar toda una ficción de cosas que me habían pasado en Pinar del Río, en otros años anteriores, porque como mis padres siempre vivieron ahí, yo iba. Tenía muchas aventuras sexuales con muchas mujeres de allí, y qué sé yo qué, me habían pasado cosas. Y cuando vengo a darme cuenta, estoy escribiendo una novela sin darme cuenta, que es el personaje Pedro Juan con su madre, que se está muriendo realmente. Él la está cuidando y le están pasando cosas por la noche, que si se puede escapar, que si se escapa dos horas, tres horas, le van sucediendo cosas al personaje. Y entonces todo eso va

incorporándose en el libro. Al final, mi madre murió ahora en mayo de 2005. Y yo regresé a La Habana y estuve escribiendo, escribiendo y llorando, por supuesto. Terminando de escribir la novela. Estuve el resto de mayo, junio, julio, agosto, cuatro meses. En septiembre se la di a una muchacha que me la pasara en computadora, para ponerle musiquita y todo eso. Ya hoy en día no puedes presentar una novela en papel. Tienes que aparecerte con un CD, elegante. Y entonces en septiembre la terminé. Y ahora estoy como convaleciente, ya me he recuperado. Por suerte, tengo mucha capacidad de recuperación.

Pero yo, ¿por qué coño escribí eso? Por que es un masoquismo. Es inexplicable. Lo mismo que me pasó con *El rey de La Habana*, porque *Animal tropical* obedece a una intencionalidad mucho más... como estos libros de cuentos, *El insaciable hombre araña*, *Carne de perro*, obedecen a una intencionalidad un poco más intelectual, más analítica. Pero... ¿Pobre diablo? Me pasó lo mismo con *El rey de La Habana*, que no puedo explicar por qué escribí eso. Así fue lo que pasó. No lo puedo explicar. Volviendo a la pregunta anterior: a veces me pasan cosas muy simpáticas, como con la gente en La Habana, con esto de los libros. Hay una muchacha que vive en un barrio en las afueras de La Habana, un barrio muy feo. Pero hay muchos artistas muy jóvenes, muy experimentalistas, muy locos, muy de la vanguardia. Entonces se me aparece esa muchacha. Quiere ser escritora. Se me aparece un día con *Trilogía sucia* para que yo se lo firme y se lo dedique. Entonces me dice: "Estoy a punto de conseguir *El rey de La Habana*. Si lo consigo, ¿puedo venir por aquí para que tú me lo firmes?" Y yo le digo: "Sí, como no. Vienes. ¿Cómo tu lo vas a

conseguir?" Dice: "Lo voy a cambiar por siete de Isabel Allende". Digo yo: "Como?" Y dice: "Isabel Allende me gustaba mucho pero ahora me parece que lo de Isabel Allende es muy empalagoso. No la soporto. Tengo siete de Isabel Allende que yo las he ido coleccionando, y hay uno por ahí que me lo cambia por *El rey de La Habana*. Si lo convenzo..."

**LO:** Halagador, no?

**PJG:** Si, que halagador, no? Pasan cosas muy simpáticas.

**LO:** También quería saber si te identificabas con una generación de escritores.

**PJG:** No. Yo creo que no tengo nada que ver con la literatura cubana. A veces soy un poco pesado, brutal y crudo. Pero yo si me identifico con alguien, con un escritor cubano, puede ser Carlos Montenegro, que quizás no lo conoces.

**LO:** *Hombres sin mujer*.

**PJG:** ¿Conoces *Hombres sin mujer*? Creo que me identifico con Carlos Montenegro, y creo que me identifico con alguien que quizás no conoces, que ya murió, que se llama Guillermo Rosales, se llamaba Guillermo Rosales. *Boarding Home*. Tienes que conocer la novela esa. Si te gusta la literatura mía, tienes que conocer *Boarding Home*. *Boarding Home* se publicó aquí con Siruela, como *La*

*casa de los náufragos*. Pero en Miami hay un editorial pequeña, que publica más bien a cubanos, como Reinaldo Arenas, que se llama Editorial Universal. Es una editorial que ya tiene 20 años pero es pequeña, muy local, y publicó una edición de *Boarding Home* de Guillermo Rosales, que es una excelente novela. Pero con el resto de la gente, creo que no tengo nada que ver. Bueno, quizás con Cabrera Infante, de *Tres tristes tigres*, quizás. Y no veo más puntos de contacto, incluso ni con la literatura hispanoamericana. Yo detesto a Gabriel García Márquez. Alguna vez lo adoré pero hoy en día yo detesto a Gabriel García Márquez. Detesto a muchos escritores así, muy barrocos, que no me dicen nada.

**LO:** Es por eso que los detestas, porque no te dicen nada?

**PJG:** No me dicen nada. Me parece que es escribir demasiado para decir muy poco. Y yo prefiero todo lo contrario. Yo prefiero decir lo menos posible — quizás esto viene de la poesía, de escribir mucha poesía— escribir lo menos posible y dirigirme a un lector inteligente. A mí me gusta el lector que haga complicidad conmigo, que yo le pueda estar diciendo cosas, y por debajo, quedan varias capas de entendimiento entre nosotros. Varias capas. Tú eliges la que tu quieras. La sexualidad, la política, la pornografía, la antropología, la simple historia, la filosofía humana que puede haber. Hay varias capas de entendimiento por debajo de la superficie del relato. Si es un cuento o si es una novela o lo que sea. Si es un poema.

**LO:** Y esto lo haces también con la poesía visual?

**PJG:** Si, la poesía visual es eso. Es básicamente eso. Es una mezcla de códigos pero la percepción es visual. Ahora mismo, aquí en Madrid, en Carabanchel, estoy trabajando. Ayer estuve todo el día trabajando con la poesía visual en base a *collage*. Voy recortando cosas de revistas, de periódicos, añadiendo escritos míos. Hago pequeños, pero pequeñitos, así, hago cositas muy experimentales. A mí me interesa eso. A mí me interesa hacer eso para un lector inteligente. A mí no me gusta ser obvio. Todo lo que sea obvio, todo lo que pueda ser pedagógico, incluso todo lo que puede ser político, yo lo voy tachando. Yo reviso mucho. Escribo así de un tirón porque me preparo muy bien para escribir. Eso me parece estúpido, lo que dicen del temor a la página en blanco. Eso es cosa de gente imbécil. Tienes que pensar muy bien lo que vas a escribir, y ya finalmente cuando vas a escribir, ¡ya! Ya está todo ahí. Y lo haces así.

Quiero escribir una crónica que me pidieron en una revista. Llevo 15 días pensando en esa crónica que me pidieron. Hoy por la mañana, me desperté, me senté a escribir, y en 2 horas, una hora y pico. Lo escribí a mano. Y ya la tengo ahí. Ahora la paso en computadora. Hay que pensar mucho. Lo importante no es la escritura. La escritura es como el acto sexual, ¿no? que el orgasmo dura cuatro segundos. Lo importante son los juegos preliminares. Puedes estar una hora jugando, dos horas jugando, media hora jugando, ya cuando llegas al orgasmo, se acabó. La escritura es lo mismo. Es como un orgasmo después del proceso de pensamiento. Aprovecho para decirte que en esencia eso es lo que es la literatura,

o por lo menos como yo la veo. La literatura es un ejercicio de reflexión, de pensamiento. Cualquier gran escritor, como Charles Dickens.

Acabo de ver la película *Oliver Twist*, que aparentemente es una película de entretenimiento de Roman Polanski. Pero aparte de la película, si vas a la novela, que es mucho más amplia, es un ejercicio de pensamiento, de reflexión. O lees cualquier cosa, Balzac, bueno, Chejov no porque Chejov, todos sabemos que fue maravilloso. Pero estos otros escritores, sobre todo realistas, Dostoyevsky, lo que te estás planteando a través de la historia, que tú pienses, que tú analices, que reflexiones un poco. Lo que pasa es que lo hacen con gracia, ¿no? Si tú no eres un antropólogo, no eres un sociólogo, no eres un filósofo, pero eres todo eso. Un escritor es todo eso al mismo tiempo. Por eso es tan complicado llegar a escribir con efectividad, porque tienes que hacer todo eso con gracia y ante todo tener gracia para contar.

Yo, cuando era joven y estaba en el servicio militar y todo eso, reconozco que yo tenía mucha gracia para hacer cuentos. A mí siempre me buscaban por la tarde —hice un servicio militar de cuatro años y medio, te imaginarás, un servicio militar muy largo— y cuando por la tarde no teníamos nada que hacer, siempre me buscaba a mí porque yo hacía cuentos, pero por naturaleza propia. Había un viejo en la unidad militar donde yo estaba. Era el chofer de la ambulancia. Este hombre estaba medio loco y hacía cuentos fascinantes de sus aventuras por la selva africana, cosas increíbles, cosas fascinantes. Parece que los leía. Y yo le decía: "Naval, me hace falta que me consigas unas cajetillas de cigarros" (no había cigarros, estamos hablando de los años 70), y él: "yo mañana te traigo".

Entonces llegaba el otro día con la caja de cigarros y me decía, "te voy a contar la historia de cómo, porque éstos son unos cigarrillos que Fidel Castro se los mandaba al presidente de México. Entonces yo llegué, ya cuando el avión se estaba despegando. Le hice señas al piloto, que es mi amigo. Él paró el avión y le dije que me diera una caja de cigarros, y por la ventanilla del avión, me tiró la caja. Esta caja era para el presidente de Mexico."

Entonces a los muchachos les gustaba empatarnos, que Naval y yo nos viéramos por la tarde, y entonces empezábamos a hacer cuentos. Él empezaba a hacer cuentos de los años que él estuvo explorando en la selva africana. Era fascinante. Era completamente loco. Así de ir por un camino en medio de la selva, en coche, mucha gente en un camión. Y de pronto hay una muralla enorme, brillante, atravesando el camino. De pronto se dan cuenta de que esa muralla se mueve, pero es enorme, enorme, un poco redonda, hasta que al fin se dan cuenta de que es una boa, pero una boa tan gigantesca que atravesaba el camino. Y ahí estuvieron horas y horas y horas y horas esperando, hasta que al fin la serpiente terminó de pasar. Pasó el rabito y siguieron. Entonces yo le metía una mentira más grande todavía, y nos divertíamos muchísimo. De algún modo, es como una vocación, la de hacer cuentos y divertir a la gente. Pero se mezcla además de esa vocación de diversión, de entretenimiento, una vocación de analizar y estudiar a la gente. Quizás por eso yo disfrutaba tanto de mi trabajo como periodista. El trabajo de periodista me permitía hablar con todo el mundo, conocer a todo tipo de gente. Yo tenía derecho, lo mismo de entrevistar a un rey que entrevistar a un barrendero, que entrevistar a un mendigo. Tú puedes esperar

tranquilamente y luego ir y entrevistarlo, porque tú haces esto y la gente te dice cosas. Cuando eres periodista eres un privilegiado. Pero tienes que tener vocación para eso. Y después saber contar todo eso. Esto es muy importante. En el periodismo yo aprendí que tienes que ganarte al lector. Tú estas trabajando dentro de una revista, un periódico, donde hay mucho material, de todo. Entonces para lograr captar al lector tú tienes que tener un párrafo fuerte, un párrafo inicial fuerte, un título fuerte, una foto inicial fuerte, y eso me lo metí en la cabeza. Por eso yo trato en la literatura también de escribir de esta manera, de ir agarrando al lector.

**LO:** Esto lo recuerdo como si fuera ayer. Estábamos en la casa donde nos estábamos quedando y estaba leyendo un libro y de repente leo "la calle Águila entre Neptuno y San Miguel" y digo, coño, si esto es donde nos estamos quedando, si esto esta aquí al lado. El bar, uno de los bares que hay ahí en la esquina, El mundo—

**PJG:** El mundo, Águila y Virtudes. Yo voy mucho ahí. Yo lo hago con toda idea. Si tú vas mezclando ficción con realidad y lo haces bien, puedes citar esta taberna donde estamos ahora. Luego, después en esta taberna, pasaron cosas que a lo mejor no son exactamente pero ya, tú estás dando un local, un escenario, que alguien puede venir con un plano de Madrid y venir aquí y decir, "Aquí fue donde Pedro Juan se hizo una paja en el baño con la rubia aquella, con Cristina que decía que era el ángel de él en Madrid". A mí me han pasado cosas en Madrid, ¡tápate!

Como dicen aquí, "tela", ¿no? "Tela". En Cuba decimos "tápate". Tápate las cosas que me han pasado a mí aquí. ¡Por favor! Que si saliera en mis libros, incluso los que son muy eróticos. Aquí hay una rubia deliciosa, encantadora. Es casi una estrella porno. Ella es oficinista. La fascinación de ella es hacer *striptease* pero en los baños de los bares. A ella le encanta desnudarse para que la gente se masturbe. A mí me ha pasado cada cosa aquí en Madrid. Increíble. Por eso digo que estoy ya en condiciones de escribir una novela muy sabrosa. No del *underground* de Madrid, porque yo no me meto, no me meto con los gitanos ni nada, pero hay un determinado ambiente en Madrid que yo lo conozco. Llevo muchos años viniendo aquí y me han pasado cosas increíbles. Una noche, una borrachera tremenda con esta muchacha, con Cristina. Éramos varios. Estábamos tomando una copita aquí, una copita allá, una copita en otro lado, que es una costumbre en Madrid, ir de bar en bar, tomando copitas. Y ya ella me había hecho... y yo no le basté, y se llevó al camarero para el bar a encuerarse. Yo estaba borracho ya. Y después el tipo viene y me saca una cuenta. Y yo le digo: “¿Tú me vas a cobrar?” —me había tomado un whisky— “¿Tú me vas a cobrar? Te acabas de hacer una paja con la estrella porno más linda de Madrid y ¿todavía nos vas a cobrar esto?” Lo cogí por aquí. No más que de cogerlo así —mi locura de la borrachera— y empecé a pegarle golpes detrás de la barra. Había unos gorilas en la puerta del local, por supuesto. Yo no más sentí que me cogieron así y me levantaron. ¡A mí, con lo que yo peso! Me cogieron así y me levantaron. ¡Había un frío! Y menos mal que no me entraron a golpes porque tú sabes lo que

es darle golpes... claro, el tipo tenía que cobrarse. Bueno, yo en mis borracheras, me pasan cosas tremendas.

Y como ésa, te puedo seguir contando miles de cosas. En Alemania, ni hay que decir. Allí hay infinidad de cubanos que me cuentan toda su vida sexual, de todo tipo. El cubano sufre mucho cuando está en otra parte, porque nosotros somos un poco naïve, quizá. Yo pienso que somos un poco naïve, somos un pueblo muy sencillo. Entonces, cuando estamos en otros lugares y hay que portarse de una manera más civilizada, pues nos sentimos como muy amarrados, muy apretados. Yo voy a Alemania. Hace muchos años que estoy visitando Alemania. Ahora en enero voy. Entonces mis amistades me cuentan todas sus historias allí. Yo tengo para escribir una novela deliciosa de cubanos en Alemania. Nada político. El tema político es muy circunstancial. Es muy coyuntural. Lo que hoy funciona, dentro de dos años ya no tiene sentido. A mí no me interesa hacer un reportaje político. Lo que me interesa más bien es contar el lado humano que la gente habitualmente esconde. ¿Cuál es la parte que la gente esconde? Ahí se revela el verdadero ser humano, con lo que tú estás escondiendo, lo que tú no quieres que los demás sepan de ti.

**LO:** Dijiste una vez que la literatura para ti es algo sagrado. ¿Cuáles son las otras cosas sagradas para ti?

**PJG:** (sin dudar) Mis hijos. Tengo cuatro hijos. Tengo uno de 28 años que ahora está en China porque es músico de salsa y los chinos quieren bailar salsa.

Entonces está en China desde hace ya como 6 meses. Va a seguir quizás un año. Vive en La Habana también. Tengo otra de 26 años, que es fisioterapeuta. Tengo otra de 22 años que vive aquí en Madrid. Está estudiando estomatología. Y una chiquitica de 4 años. Mis hijos son sagrados. Sagrados al extremo que no los toco. Tú nunca vas a ver en mis libros referencias a mis hijos. Puede haber una referencia, sí, pero normalmente no la hay. Mis padres son sagrados, y los he utilizado. He utilizado mucho a mi madre en la literatura. Aparece en *El insaciable hombre araña*, en *Carne de perro*, ahora en *Pobre diablo*. Pero son las cosas más sagradas. Para mí, la familia, la gente más cercana a mí es sagrada. Trato de separar la literatura de ese mundo. A mí no me gusta —es más, no lo permito— cuando yo estoy escribiendo, nadie puede leer lo que estoy escribiendo. Por ejemplo, *Pobre diablo*, que la terminé ahora. La traje en papel. Entonces a mi hija, la que vive aquí, en Carabanchel, se la di. Se puso a leer, me dio su opinión, pero la novela ya está escrita. Dime las opiniones que tú quieras pero eso ya está escrito. Yo creo que la literatura es sagrada en ese sentido, ¿no? Es un trabajo mío, es algo muy íntimo. Y no permito que nadie me esté dando opiniones durante el proceso de elaboración de un libro. "Oye, esto está muy fuerte". "Esto me parece, me suena muy grosero". No. Entonces para evitar esas opiniones, yo lo que hago es que yo escribo escondido. Yo tengo mi casa, tengo mi mujer, tengo mi niña chiquita, y ella sabe que no puede registrarme los papeles. Eso que está ahí es sagrado. No lo toques porque la bronca puede ser grande. Ya cuando el libro ya está publicado, entonces sí. El libro ya está.

Creo que vivimos en un mundo tan opresivo, un mundo que manipula tanto, un mundo que trata de controlar tanto, en todas partes. Trata de controlar tanto las mentes de los demás, que yo creo que la literatura es uno de los pequeñísimos espacios de libertad de pensamiento que nos queda. La literatura, porque la escribes tú solo, la escribes tu solo. Y ya el cine es otra cosa. El cine no creo que tenga tanta libertad de pensamiento. El cine está mucho más condicionado por una producción, por un dinero, por un equipo de trabajo. Yo detesto tener que trabajar en equipo. A mí me hacen muchas ofertas para cine, y yo nunca he aceptado escribir guiones de cine. No me interesa hacer cine, guiones y eso. Ahora hay varias solicitudes de derechos sobre mis libros. Eso sí, puedo vender el derecho y después de algún modo participo en la elaboración del guión, revisión de los diálogos, locaciones. Pero implicarme en un trabajo original para el cine no me interesa.

Yo de momento tengo cuatro o cinco libros en proyecto. Entonces me gusta mucho trabajar yo solo. Cuando era periodista, yo tenía que hacer muchas concesiones, constantemente. Viviendo en Cuba, son excesivas las concesiones que tienes que hacer. Incluso si vives en otro país, también. En Estados Unidos, tienes que hacer concesiones al órgano en el que tú trabajas, hay uno más de izquierda, más de derecha. En cualquier lugar. Entonces parece que como tuve que sufrir tanto eso, porque siempre estaba tratando de buscar temas frescos, temas originales, decir lo que nadie decía, y no me dejaban. Me limitaban mucho. Una vez estuve en la frontera México-Estados Unidos y escribí ocho crónicas. Me pasé 45 días por allá, e hice fotos muy buenas.

**LO:** Sí, lei que no te publicaron todas, verdad?

**PJG:** Me publicaron dos. Y a la segunda, me dijo la directora de la revista: "Es que Mexico va a protestar. El gobierno de Mexico va a protestar porque esto es muy fuerte. Así que ya no se puede publicar más". No lo pude creer. Se me iban a quedar seis crónicas sin publicar. Entonces al mes y pico, logré publicar una más. Total publiqué tres. Las otras se quedaron por ahí. Ahora yo lo cuento fácil pero es muy pesado, ¿no? Un trabajo serio que yo hice de indagación, de análisis, y que te dicen que México va a protestar. Dije: "que protesten, a mí no me importa".

**LO:** No tendrían por qué ofenderse porque la frontera no es ni Estados Unidos ni Mexico. Es—

**PJG:** Aztlan. Es Aztlan. Es otra cosa. Pero bueno, es así. Así es el sufrimiento de un periodista. Entonces quizás por eso ahora me estoy vengando, estoy disfrutando. Ahora soy yo solo. Yo soy el responsable de lo que yo escribo, y ya. Y el editor que me quiera publicar en Holanda, o donde sea... eso.

**LO:** Entonces, hasta cierto punto eso es algo sagrado para ti, la libertad.

**PJG:** Totalmente. Hasta cierto punto no. Totalmente. Yo creo que lo más sagrado que tiene el ser humano es la libertad de pensamiento, de acción, de opinión. Eso es sagradísimo. Tienes que tener eso. Hay que garantizar al ciudadano, en el país que sea, hay que garantizarle inmunidad para poder decir lo que piensa, lo que opina. Eso es fundamental. Y por lo que veo, en el mundo de hoy, se está logrando en muy pocos países. En Estados Unidos, en Canadá, en algunos países europeos, y en algunos países en América Latina. Porque la violencia es muy fuerte. Analiza los reportes de reporteros sin fronteras, 70 periodistas muertos, asesinados todos los años. Lo que pasa es que en esos países, cuando tienes la posibilidad, cuando eres lector, tienes la posibilidad de leer diferentes órganos. Puedes leer de izquierda, de derecha. Lo que pasa aquí en España, te lees *El país*, te lees *El mundo*, ves la televisión, consultas internet, y vas llegando a tus propias conclusiones, ¿no? Porque en internet además es la democracia absoluta. Puedes consultar lo que te da la gana, desde el *website* de Fidel Castro hasta el *website* de Bush.

**LO:** Consultar y publicar, también.

**PJG:** Publicar y hacer lo que te da la gana. Pones un blog. Eso es fundamental, por lo menos para la literatura. Es un ejercicio de reflexión, de pensamiento, de análisis. Hecho con gracia. Yo creo que mis libros ayudan a reflexionar sobre una situación determinada en Cuba. Por algo no los quieren publicar en Cuba.

**APPENDIX B****INTERVIEW WITH PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ, June 2006**

Via email, June 11, 2006

**LO:** Me dijiste hace tiempo que pensabas escribir una novela sobre los cubanos en otro ambiente, como Austria o Alemana. ¿Por qué esos sitios en particular y no España, donde (me imagino) habrá una población cubana más grande? ¿Es simplemente porque existe un contraste cultural más grande ahí?

**PJG:** Sobre la novela en Alemania y Austria es que domino bien esos escenarios, los tengo ya en mi mente, y hay cubanos increíbles que viven allí en medio de la nieve. Es muy fuerte el contraste en todos los sentidos. España es un poco más familiar para nosotros.

**LO:** Muchas veces mencionas títulos y nombres específicos de lo que tú estás leyendo o escuchando (y digo “tú” porque me has aclarado que el Pedro Juan protagonista que aparece en tus obras es básicamente el mismo Pedro Juan persona al que conocí, ¿no?), como Lou Reed, Jeff Buckley, Sibelius, Handel... o Goethe, Zweig, Dickens... o *Blade Runner*, *The Struggle*, *Todo sobre mi madre*, etc. Al nombrar a esta gente (o estas obras), ¿quieres crear cierto ambiente o

cierta actitud de parte del lector? O ¿es simplemente lo que estabas leyendo/escuchando/mirando en ese momento?

**PJG:** Sí, es cierto que menciono determinados escritores, libros, música. Porque de algún modo doy la psicología, la atmósfera del momento y del personaje sin tener que explicar mucho al lector. Respeto la inteligencia del que me lee si le digo que el personaje escucha en ese momento a Lou Reed y se lee a Herman Hesse. Creo que eso es muy sugerente. Y si le digo que se lee *Cumbres borrascosas*, escucha a Mozart y bebe una taza de té, es otra cosa ¿no? En fin, trato de no ser demasiado explícito y sugerir todo lo posible.

**LO:** ¿Tienes miedo a enloquecer? Puede que parezca una pregunta poco delicada, pero te la hago porque la locura (o el miedo de la misma) aparece como otro motivo en lo que escribes.

**PJG:** Sí, muchas veces en mi vida he tenido miedo de enloquecer, de perder la cordura totalmente y también miedo al suicidio. Por eso ahora estoy en una etapa de autocontrol a ver si no sigo avanzando hacia el caos total. He controlado muchísimo el alcohol, dejé de fumar hace más de un año y en el sexo me concentro mucho en mi mujer porque coger un sida a estas alturas es un poco ridículo. En fin, que es preferible durar unos años más con salud y no seguir en medio de tanta confusión.

**LO:** ¿Puedes comentar algo sobre el negro y el indio que siempre acompañan a Pedro Juan? Quiero decir, lo que significan para ti en particular. La santería y el espiritismo son cosas difíciles de comprender para alguien que viene de la (cínica) realidad norteamericana, pero no tan difíciles para alguien que viene de la (ultra-religiosa) realidad sureña (como yo, como Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, etc.). Sólo me gustaría saber cuáles son tus pensamientos sobre la santería/el espiritismo.

**PJG:** Sobre el negro y el indio: me lo han dicho varias veces algunas santeras y barajeras en Cuba. Que tengo un espíritu de un indio muy inteligente y astuto, que no se deja ver y se esconde atrás de mí y un negro un poco más bruto pero fuerte y salvaje, un negro cimarrón, que sólo usa un taparrabos y un trapo colorao en la cabeza, un negro de monte que le gustan las mujeres y el aguardiente y el monte. Nada de música ni fiestas ni flores. Eso a veces yo lo presiento pero lo veo más como algo muy poético y especial de hablar de mi personalidad que como una realidad total. He tenido experiencias espirituales muy fuertes y continuas, pero podemos hablar de eso personalmente algún día, no por aquí. Creo que por eso entiendes tan bien lo que escribo, porque al ser sureña eres un poco subjetiva y latina.